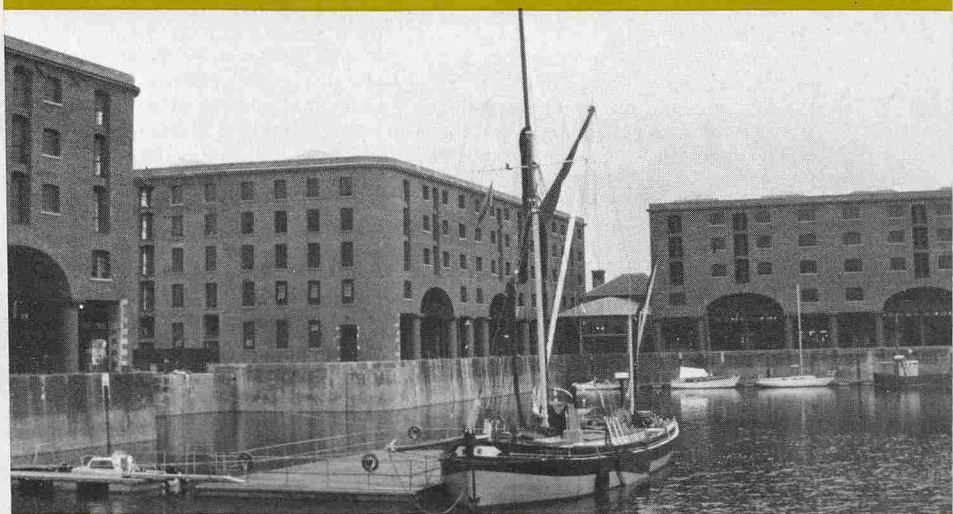


# REFORMATION ATION TODAY'86



TRUTH AND CATHOLICITY *David Kingdon*

2 THE CAREY CONFERENCE

3 PREACHING FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT *Donald MacLeod*

9 THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY WORSHIP *Ronald Mackenzie*

12 HOW DID GERMANY BECOME PROTESTANT? *Editor*

15 THE REFORMATION AND THE ANABAPTISTS *Sharon James*

23 PSALM 8 *David Preston*

24 THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST FOUNDERS' CONFERENCE *Tom Ascol*

27 THE CHARACTER OF PREACHING IN A REVIVAL *John Palmer*

30 THE ASCENDED LORD BLESSING HIS CHURCH *John Blankespoor*

32 THE FAMILY CONFERENCE IN NATAL *Editor*

# Editorial

## The Book of Praises

This is the title of a book of psalms in modern language set for congregational singing. The final proofs are now being read. There are 70 psalms. A great deal of hard work has been expended on perfecting the renderings, especially by Dr David Preston. We are confident that the quality of the work will be recognised and that congregations everywhere will love singing these compositions. The publication is scheduled to appear in mid January 1987 and may even be ready for the Carey conference. Psalm 8 (see p. 23) is an example.

## Where is history going?

Collating details over a distance of 12,000 miles is not easy. John Campell of Perth, W. Australia, has drawn attention to the fact that the second heading of the above named article (see *R.T.* 93) should read 'denigration' not 'designation'. With regard to the new book *The Preacher and Preaching* (462 pp., Pres. and Ref., U.S.A.) I noticed that a whole section at the end of the chapter on *The preacher and piety*, dropped out of the aircraft somewhere along its route across the Atlantic! Otherwise the book seems complete and likely to be a very valuable asset in any preacher's library. It may be worth publishing the missing section in *R.T.*

## A letter from family Lloyd-Jones

In our editorial *R.T.* 92 reference was made to the two books by the Doctor, *Joy Unspeakable* and *Prove All Things*. The motives of the publisher were queried as it seemed that logs were being put on the fires of controversy. Mrs Lloyd-Jones and her daughters Ann and Elizabeth have written to say, 'Soon after Dr Lloyd-Jones' death many people, yourself included, gave, in articles and books what they considered to be his true position with regard to the baptism of the Spirit. We felt it was right, therefore, that the doctor should be allowed to speak for himself on the subject. We were helped in this by the fact that he himself had said that these sermons on John 1 were his definitive statement on the

subject (though of course he had preached and published in similar vein in both his Romans and Ephesians series) so those were our motives in publishing them.'

## Reviews of books on prophecy by Victor Budgen

It was our intention to publish Victor Budgen's reviews of Wayne Grudem's book *Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* and David Hill's *New Testament Prophecy* in this issue. However due to the technical nature of the work we have agreed with Pastor Budgen that it is better to publish the items separately in a booklet available on request at 70 pence including postage. The material extends to about 10 pages and those who have the books in question will be able to follow the page references, whereas for those who have not procured the books it is difficult to follow. Needless to say I agree with Victor Budgen's careful research and conclusion that Wayne Grudem has attempted the impossible. The attempt to establish two categories of prophecy is hopeless. In his conclusions Victor says, 'Grudem admits that "a failure on the part of the church to distinguish between these two types of prophecy might have been the cause of a total loss of prophecy in the church" (112). But if the early church standing so near to events could not make the distinction how could we hope to do it more successfully and accurately?'

## Advertising in 'E.T.'

The availability of the above material has been advertised in *Evangelical Times* which paper continues to maintain an excellent standard. In the advert an article for *R.T.* 94 is promised, namely, *George Fox and Early Quakerism*, by Christopher Rule, which in fact we are holding over for *R.T.* 95. The attempt is always made to keep a balance of expository, historical and biographical, practical and topical articles. To have added more historical material to this issue would have been imbalanced. What the Quakers attempted is basically the same thing as Grudem seeks to find a warrant for, namely direct authoritative communications of the Spirit, but that is only one feature in the fascinating story and you should be able to judge the issues for yourself when you see the material.

# Truth and Catholicity

David Kingdon

Tom Nettles spoke plainly at the opening session of the Southern Baptist Founders' Conference (see report) of the need for a catholic spirit. His message has its application to evangelicalism in the United Kingdom at the present time, for twenty years after Dr. Lloyd-Jones' stirring call to evangelicals to come together in visible fellowship on the basis of the gospel the sad fact has to be faced that they are more divided than ever. It is not our purpose to analyse the reasons for this grievous state of affairs. Instead we want to ask a very practical question: 'What can be done to maintain a catholic spirit whilst contending for the faith?'

These two things must be linked together otherwise catholicity of spirit is at the expense of faithfulness to the gospel or faithfulness to the gospel can lead to an uncharitableness of outlook which makes catholicity seem an impossible dream. The following considerations seem to bear on the question that we wish to address. *First, we must realise that we belong to the same family.* By grace all believers are adopted into God's family. And we do not choose who our brothers and sisters are! God does. It follows that he wants us to treat each other as brothers and sisters should, accepting each other as God in Christ has accepted us. We therefore ought to strive to settle differences between us in brotherly love. 'This should be the great arbiter to end quarrels between Christians,' wrote Thomas Watson, 'to call to mind that they are brethren.'

*Next we need to appreciate that we shall share eternity together in the new Jerusalem.* We are one people bound for one city. There will be no names, sects or parties — only Christians! That being so we must be learning to love, here and now, those with whom we shall live hereafter.

*In the third place we preach the same gospel of Christ crucified, risen, ascended and returning.* We unite in proclaiming that it is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that sinners are saved. It is this glorious gospel that unites us, not the context in which that gospel is preached. Some are faithfully preaching that gospel in denominations so doctrinally mixed that some of us may find it hard to understand how they can remain. Yet God owns their labours — souls are saved and congregations transformed. Others preach to separatist churches without compromising associations (as they see them) yet often with much heartache.

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Front cover — *The Albert docks, Liverpool, have been restored on a grand scale. The complex includes a museum, waterways and general facilities which make it ideal for family outings. This reconstruction is all part of a scheme to restore Liverpool to her pristine glory when she was regarded as the second city of the realm. The Albert docks restoration includes shopping arcades where ministers attending the annual Conference for ministers will be able to buy presents to take home to their wives.*

Can those within and those without mixed denominations not agree to pray for one another without questioning motives or scorning the dissidence of dissent?

There is another consideration to be borne in mind and it is this. *There can be considerable differences in degree of light, in judgment and in understanding of the Scriptures within an overall commitment to the gospel of grace.* For example, brethren who preach the same gospel differ over the doctrine of the church, baptism and the interpretation of prophecy. Should these differences outweigh their common loyalty to the gospel? Surely not.

One thing is certain. There is urgent need to recover that catholicity which has characterised evangelicalism in its best periods. We urgently need to practice both the orthodoxy of truth and the orthodoxy of love, as the late Francis Schaeffer so powerfully urged. And to demonstrate the point this Reformed Baptist cannot forebear quoting a Methodist!

*Love, like death, hath all destroyed,  
Rendered all distinctions void;  
Names and sects and parties fall,  
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.*

(Charles Wesley)



## **The Carey Conference for Ministers 1987**

Liverpool University 6th-8th January, 1987

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**The challenge of pastoral theology** — Erroll Hulse

**Praying under the sovereignty of God** — Don Carson

**Justification — a truth for our times** — Donald MacLeod



# Preaching from the Old Testament

*Donald MacLeod*

If a young preacher wants to preach from the New Testament he can easily find models. He has only to read the published expositions of Dr. Lloyd-Jones and John Stott to see master craftsmen at work in a contemporary idiom. The situation with regard to the Old Testament is quite different. It is often difficult to find even competent commentaries on the Old Testament. For any given part of the New Testament, one can easily find three or four masterpieces of insight and scholarship. By contrast, there are many books of the Old Testament for which not one single good commentary exists.

Underlying this there is something deeper. The hermeneutical barriers which separate us from the world of the Old Testament are enormous. Everything is on a grander scale than the difficulties of New Testament exposition. The time is more remote. The language is more alien. The culture is more unfamiliar.

## **Absolute authority**

Can we find any general principles to guide us?

First of all, we can plant our feet firmly on the rock of the absolute authority of the Old Testament. It was precisely these holy scriptures that Paul described as 'inspired'. Curiously, he does not say that the writers were inspired. He says that the books were inspired. They were breathed out by God. Nor is this true merely of some portions of the Old Testament. It was *all* inspired. Some parts may be less interesting, less majestic and even less useful than others. But every single part is inspired. What any Old Testament scripture says, God says.

This means at once that the entire Old Testament must be handled with reverence. It is all 'holy'. It also means that the preacher has to interpret it harmonistically. He cannot set one part against another. Nor can he contrast any part of it with the truth. As a word from God, it must hang together coherently and harmonize with all that we know from other sources.

For the same reason the preacher knows that the whole Old Testament is profitable. Its usefulness is co-existent with its inspiration. This applies even to those parts of it which have been superseded, such as the civil law of Israel and the cultic arrangements associated with Tabernacle and Temple. The detailed instructions laid down in these connections are no longer binding on the church. Yet they still serve to illustrate, symbolize and typify important truths, and the statutes of the theocracy can serve as paradigms to indicate how the principles of the Decalogue should be applied in specific political situations.

## **The unity of biblical religion**

The second important general principle is the unity of biblical religion. The whole of Scripture is a revelation of the one God, disclosing one single scheme

of redemption and one covenant of grace. However important the transition from the Old Testament to the New, the parties, the promises and the stipulations of the covenant remain the same. Similarly, the Church of God is one under both dispensations. The New Testament Church is not a new Church — instead, the Gentiles are grafted into the existing people of God, the stock of Abraham. We have Abraham's faith, we are Abraham's seed. It is because of this that the New Testament Church can be described in terms lifted straight out of the Old Testament: we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.

One immediate result of this is that we can take an *exemplarist* approach to preaching the Old Testament. These saints were under the same ethic and subject to the same experiences as ourselves. The criticisms urged against them by God are still relevant today. Their moods are our moods, their perplexities our perplexities, their aspirations our aspirations. God's call to Abraham we can parallel from our own experience. His anguish as God tries his faith we can follow in our own souls. We can understand Moses as he resists God's call and protests, 'I am not eloquent'. We have often sat with Elijah under his juniper tree. We admire the submission of Job as he cries, 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' But we can also follow him, in all the utterances of his impatience and frustration as he struggles, often unsuccessfully, to accept the will of God. What terrible utterances they are! 'If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch and mine own clothes shall abhor me' (Job 9:30).

Of course, our calling is to be content, cheerful and thankful. But how marvellously encouraging it is to know, on those days when we cannot understand and cannot shrug off the pain and cannot hold back our own bitterness, that our complaints do not put us outside the people of God. And how instructive it is, too, to look at the failings of these great Old Testament men of God. Look at what happened to Moses and David and Solomon and Jonah yet God did not cast them off.

The differences in culture, temperament and theological insight which separate us from these men are enormous. Yet the things that unite us are far greater than those which divide us and the record of their struggles is one of the most precious possessions of the New Testament Church.

### **Progressive revelation**

Yet there is a third principle — the progressiveness of revelation — which pulls us in the exactly opposite direction by reminding us of the distinctions between the two administrations of the Covenant. God did not reveal himself all at once. Instead, he gave us a great series of cumulative acts of self-disclosure, speaking 'at sundry times and in divers manners'. This never means that the later revelation contradicts the earlier, but it does mean that some doctrines which are very clear and prominent in the New Testament receive very little emphasis in the Old. For example, the Law and the Prophets contain very little on the resurrec-

tion of the body, the state of the soul between death and judgement or the doctrine of hell. Nor does the earlier revelation contain any overall doctrine of the Person of Christ. All the ingredients for a doctrine are there: the deity of Messiah, the humanity of Messiah, his suffering, his humiliation and his victory. But no one in the Old Testament ever put these strands together to say, 'God will become flesh'. Nor did anybody ever synthesize the concepts of the Suffering Servant and the Son of Man, as our Lord himself did when he said, 'The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many'.

In view of these considerations, the preacher must avoid ascribing to the saints of the Old Testament more light than they actually possessed. Augustine's famous illustration should remain with us. He compared the Old Testament to a room fully furnished but unlit. The occupants cannot see the contents because of the darkness. These become visible only in the light of the New Testament. That light puts nothing there which was not there before. But it does enable us to see adumbrations of the sacrifice of Christ, intimations of a blessed immortality and even hints of the doctrine of the trinity. But those who had only the light of the Old Testament could not see these things and it is anachronistic to read them back into their experiences. David in Psalm 51 had a very clear grasp of the mercy of God, but there is no indication that he saw that that mercy would operate through the blood of One who was God's own Son.

A further important result of the progressiveness of revelation is that we must emphasize much more than we do the superiority of the position of New Testament saints. We seem to have lost sight almost completely of the point made by Paul in Galatians 3:23-4:7. Before Christ came, he says, believers were like children, under the care of a Guardian (the Law) and in many respects no better-off than slaves. Not only did they lack much of the insight of New Testament believers. They lacked much of their comfort. It was much more difficult then to cry, 'Abba! Father' or to come with boldness to the throne of grace! It was difficult — much more difficult — to face death with confidence. Instead of Paul's, 'I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better' we have David's, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol, who can give thee praise?' (Ps 6:5).

Above all, the Old Testament was a time of bondage. The Custodian was everywhere, interfering with what one ate, what one wore, what one sowed, how one ploughed, how one built a house. Life was circumscribed with endless restrictions. Indeed, it was virtually impossible to move without stumbling against an ordinance. From all this, Christ liberated his church, a point which our own Confession brings out admirably: 'Under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.'

This great fact must come out — and come out prominently — in our preaching. We are no longer slaves, but sons: 'Stand fast, therefore, in the freedom with

which Christ has made us free' (Gal 5:1). Even as we thank God for the inspired word of the Old Testament we are called upon to praise him for the fact that we are not Old Testament believers. There are indeed parts of the Old Testament from which the very conclusion to be drawn by the preacher must be, 'Thank God that things are different now'.

### **The nature of prophecy**

It is even more important for the preacher to have a firm grasp of the true nature of prophecy. We have tended to see the prophets too narrowly as fore-tellers and our expositions focus almost exclusively on their predictions. They were, of course, fore-tellers, and we have no wish to minimize this. But they were much more. They were forth-tellers, men who had been summoned into God's presence, told his secret (or 'mystery') and commissioned to be his spokesmen. Sometimes their message was a prediction, but more often it was not. The fact that Moses was the greatest of the prophets should alert us to this. His messages were hardly ever predictive. He came forth from the Presence with great doctrines such as the unity of God (Deut 6:4); and with a massive statement of the Law of God, involving great moral principles, complex cultic ordinances and detailed civil statutes. The same is true of the other prophets. More often than not, they were bearers of weighty doctrinal and ethical messages. Indeed even when they are predictive, their predictions can be traps for the unwary preacher. Much of what they say about the last days does not refer to the end-time at all, but to the New Testament era, marked as the age of fulfilment by the incarnation of the Son and the coming of the Spirit.

But maybe the most important fact for the expositor of the prophets is that the great bulk of Old Testament prophecy consists of God's critical evaluation of the Church. There are vast tracts which contain only indictment and arraignment of the people of God and if we go to them looking for predictions, Christology, and clever allegories, we shall go hopelessly wrong. Even in such a prophet as Hosea, with his matchless portrayal of the love and mercy and faithfulness of God, the judgmental element is uppermost: 'Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you' (Hos 6:4,5). This was the nature of prophecy from the first, a fact upon which the perceptive Ahab laid his finger when he called Elijah 'the troubler of Israel'. Was the same not true of our Lord himself, with his great denunciations of the Pharisees? Indeed, even after his resurrection was it not the same word — the word of judgment — which he sent to the Seven Churches by his servant John? 'I have something against you!'

When we are thinking of doing a series of sermons on one of the prophets, this is something we must ponder carefully. If we are going to be faithful to our text, our sermons are going to be critical and judgmental; and if we are going to expound consecutively, this is the diet our people are going to have for weeks on end. The question is: Do they need it? When John Knox preached on Daniel at the Reformation, the Church needed it. The Abomination of Desolation was



only too obviously active. Similarly, in many main-line churches still, there is unfaithfulness to God on a massive scale. Similarly also, in the society of our own day there is acquisitiveness, disloyalty, exploitation and oppression. In all such situations, the message of the prophets is singularly appropriate, provided a man has the courage to preach it. But before we decide to give our own congregations the same fare, we must be sure that they, too, need, in Hosea's words, to be 'cut and killed'. Are they apostate idolators, guilty of deceit and violence, resting on formal religious observances while at the same time violating all the commandments of God?

We stand, as preachers, between the world and the Word. We must know the world, especially our own particular segment of it. Otherwise we shall find ourselves accusing pious old ladies of 'selling their souls to many lovers'.

### **A primary source**

Two points in conclusion.

First, the Old Testament is our primary source for the knowledge of many doctrines. On such topics as the attributes of God, creation and the nature of man it is far fuller than the New Testament. Indeed, one of the grave dangers in neglecting the Old Testament is that we shall produce a generation of Christians gravely deficient in their knowledge of all these fundamental matters. Nor is the problem confined to doctrine. The great bulk of biblical teaching on the subjective and experiential side of Christianity is also to be found in the Old Testament. It is there — particularly in the Psalms, Job and Jeremiah — that we see reflected the inner moods and struggles of the people of God. To ignore this vein of revelation will lead inevitably either to a superficial religion or to blank incomprehension when we find God trying our faith.

The earlier revelation also contains most of the biblical teaching on the world and our attitude to it. Compared with the New Testament, the Old is earthy, and that earthiness is an indispensable element in revelation. It tells us to subdue and colonize the earth; to be fruitful and multiply; to till the soil and keep our gardens; to name and classify the animals. It shows us men drinking wine, playing their harps and singing songs. It shows us men like Daniel, mastering pagan learning, rising to the top in the world's greatest bureaucracy and eventually becoming the leading politician of a decadent empire — all without defiling himself. It shows us the dignity of the shepherd and the artisan, the legitimacy of the military and the God-giveness of architectural and artistic skill. None of that is rescinded in the New Testament. Indeed, much of it is reiterated. But it was because the Reformed Church was so deeply rooted in the Old Testament that Abraham Kuyper could say of it, 'The avoidance of the world has never been the Calvinistic mark but the shibboleth of the Anabaptist.'

Finally, the danger of a false Christocentrism. It is very well to say that Christ is everywhere in the Old Testament and that what we must take out of every text is the contribution it makes to God's revelation of him. But sometimes those



*Ian Thomas is in the foreground of the picture and then Vernon Light and his wife Heather, and in the distance Vi and Brian Darroll. Vernon Light's work is referred to in the report of the family conference in Natal. In addition to the population at Welkom there are about 150,000 black migrant workers in the employment of the gold mines round Welkom. The majority of these workers come from the homelands*

*and Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Malawi. The triumph of the gospel at Welkom among these miners would have far reaching effects on the countries from which they come. The Baptist church at Welkom forms the base for four fulltime missionaries to the miners. The church is seeking to extend this to five, see report, The Family Conference in Natal.*

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*(Continued from page 7)*

who approach the Old Testament like this are scornful of exemplarist (or as they would call it, *moralizing*) preaching. They would argue that you must not use narrative texts to teach merely ethical lessons. Such stories as David and Goliath, they say, are not there to moralize, but to extend the horizons of salvation history.

The trouble with this is that it does not square with the way the New Testament uses the Old. What are we to make for example, of the Lord's words to his disciples, 'Remember Lot's wife!?' Furthermore, the procedure misconceives Christ's relation to the Old Testament. It is safer to say that he is everywhere *behind* it than to say that he is everywhere *in* it. Every preacher must come to his people with 'the mind of Christ'. But when Paul made that claim for himself, he was not preaching Christology. He was giving elementary directions with regard to the place of women in the church. Yet he was still 'preaching Christ' because he was expressing *his* mind.

The basic principle here must surely be: Every word in the Old Testament is *from* Christ, but not every word is *about* Christ. If so, then we are as surely preaching Christ when we draw inferences from the politics of Solomon as we are when faithfully expounding the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

*Of foremost importance is family worship. That practice is something we must maintain at all costs. Tremendous and relentless pressures come upon families as far as time and commitments are concerned. What we used to call the family altar, the habit of daily family devotions and prayers, is the first to suffer. We ought to read the Scriptures and pray together as families every day, and preferably more than once, and certainly not in a slipshod fashion. We must be very jealous to safeguard this practice. Note how the apostle Peter refers to believing husbands and wives praying together. He expects that to be the case (1 Pet 3:7). He takes it for granted. We can imagine him being very surprised if that were not the case. There are many ways in which we can make sure that our times of prayer together are vital. That comes by experience. It is especially important that times of family prayer with young children should be interesting and relevant. The exposition which follows emphasizes the importance for family piety and concentrates on several aspects. Note the evangelical flavour of the exposition and the uninhibited way in which those who do not believe are exhorted to call on the Holy Spirit for help. This emphasis is heartily appreciated.*

## The importance of family worship

by Ronald Mackenzie

*Choose you this day whom you will serve: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*  
(Joshua 24:15).

Many years had passed since Israel had crossed the Jordan and conquered the greater part of the Promised Land. For some time those wars of conquest had ceased and the victorious tribes of Israel enjoyed peace. Joshua, we are told, was now 'old and stricken in age'. He knew that very soon he must bid farewell to the world. Had he been an old worldling, unconsecrated and unreconciled to God such a prospect of imminent dissolution would make him despondent and sad. What has the Christian soul when he or she faces eternity? All the hopes and all the temporal comforts of the ungodly perish with them. If Christ is our portion when we leave this world, we will take that portion with us; if he is not we will take nothing.

But Joshua was a gracious man. An Israelite indeed, without guile, he had followed the LORD fully. His heart was 'circumcized to love the LORD'. In him as a true believer, the obedience of faith

shone. The Word of God describes him not only as 'the servant of Moses', but what is of greater significance, 'the servant of the LORD'. Let us remember that it is not just ministers of the Gospel who are God's servants. They indeed are accredited public servants of God called to devote their whole time and energies to the work of the Gospel and to live by the Gospel which they preach. But *all* true believers are God's servants. My friend, if you are not the servant of the LORD, you are the servant of sin. And if you be the servant of sin, then, whether you realize it or not, you are the servant of the devil. You cannot avoid this solemn conclusion if you are honest with yourself and with your Bible.

You who are old, would you not wish to be like old Joshua? And like him would you not like to be able to point with confidence to your family as a household of believers?

### *The need for family piety*

Why does Joshua remind them of that with which they were already familiar?

The answer lies in the words of our text. It was to challenge them with their responsibility for personal and family piety. It is a challenge which confronts Christian parents today.

There is firstly, the *Need for family piety*.

At the annual celebration of the Passover, the fathers in Israel reminded their children of Jehovah's deliverance from Egypt and his redemptive love. But that was not the only occasion when young people heard of God's Covenant Mercies to his People. In the domestic sphere, on numerous less formal occasions, pious fathers when rising up or sitting down in their homes or walking with their children would tell them of the Lord's goodness and instruct them in his holy precepts. Here we have the Old Testament example of family religion. How this should shame professedly Christian parents of our own day! Today in the visible Church we have a variety of activities ostensibly with the laudable aim of bringing the young to Christ. But none of these can ever supply the place of regular *Family Worship* and consistent Christian living by the parents. Careless parents make careless children. A lifetime of experience had convinced Joshua of the deceitfulness of men's hearts. He realized how unreliable and unstable men are and how soon duty may be neglected and careless parents succeeded by a godless unbelieving generation. Like our New Testament Joshua, he knew what was in man.

#### *Neglecting family piety*

In the second place Joshua saw the *danger and evil of neglecting family piety*.

While good Joshua was spared, his authority and influence among the tribes was such as to hold in check any tendency to depart from God. But he clearly foresaw the dangers of apathy in

the rising generation. Joshua was concerned to honour God. He knew full well the awful depths of ingratitude and wickedness in the human heart. In the wilderness he had seen what 'an evil heart of unbelief,' had done for his contemporaries, Caleb excepted. They had perished under the divine displeasure. A holy God is justly displeased with sin wherever he sees it; especially when he sees it in his own family. Neither Eli in the Old, nor the Corinthians in the New Testament, escaped divine chastisement for sin, and shall we fare any better?

#### *The value of family piety*

In the third place, Joshua saw the *excellences and value of family piety*.

He saw that for a living steadfast piety to be maintained, whether in the individual or in the family, repentance was necessary. Repentance unto life is a *saving grace*, and this habit, the disposition of a gracious soul, is continuously in exercise and needs to be renewed or we shall secretly decline in watchfulness, love and conscientious obedience; and then, if the Lord does not mercifully arrest us, we shall openly backslide and disgrace our profession. Joshua's recital of God's mighty acts and his great goodness to Israel had this in view: their renewed repentance before God. Oh how little we are affected by the goodness of God to ourselves: my friends, this goodness will either serve as an arrow of conviction to us now in time or as an arrow of sorrow in a lost eternity. The longsuffering and forbearance of God toward sinners now will only add to their torment hereafter. Remember what Paul tells us: 'The goodness of God lead you to repentance'. Was this not the application of all that Joshua had told them? *'Now therefore, fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth . . . (v. 14) . . . 'and serve ye the LORD'.*



But Joshua was not content merely to tell them their duty and expect them to perform it. He went on to place the *responsibility for their actions squarely upon their own heads*. The Word of God applied to their conscience convinced them of past guilt and negligence. It also *confronted them with a present choice*. A decision was being called for — a decision for which they would be held accountable by God. It was their own choice. They were not being cajoled, forced or threatened into this or that course of action. However much they might wish, they cannot evade or excuse themselves from Joshua's faithful challenge: '*Choose you this day whom ye will serve.*' Neither can we evade our own responsibility to repent and obey the Gospel. We cannot escape our responsibility by imagining that we can shelter ourselves under the umbrella of God's Eternal Predestination. The Decree of God will afford us no excuse on the Day of Judgment. Our wilful disobedience to his revealed will shall suffice to condemn us.

Far be it from me to play upon your emotions or put pressure upon your will. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the understanding and renew the will of the elect sinner. By this decision to serve the LORD you make your calling and election *certain*. You may reply 'I am not making any choice; I refuse to be cornered by you; I refuse to consider.' Ah! friend, such an attitude means that *you have already made your choice*. You choose *to remain as you are* — unconverted, unholy. You prefer your lusts, your covetousness, your worldly idols and pleasures to Christ. What determines your choice? The state of your heart. Carnal affections and an unrenewed will determine that dreadful choice — to love sin rather than God and to serve Satan rather than Christ. Oh the folly of sin and the foolishness of the unregenerate heart! Oh! Pray that the Holy Spirit by his

almighty grace would wash your heart that it might be purified by faith in Jesus! Then, and only then, will you make this wise and happy choice.

#### *How are we to serve?*

But *how* are we to serve the living God? Joshua tells us! that it is *to fear God*. '*Fear the LORD* and serve him in *sincerity and in truth*.' This is the essence of all true saving religion! 'Fear God and keep his commandments.' Unless we fear him we shall never serve him in sincerity and in truth. To pretend otherwise is to reveal either our ignorance or hypocrisy, or both. What is this fear? In the first place, it is a *holy* fear: produced by the *Holy Spirit* in the hearts of his people. Today we meet with ignorant people who object to the idea of *fearing God*. This is the fruit of false unbiblical teaching, and ignorance, of God, of themselves, and of the Holy Scriptures. Sinful man has every reason to be afraid of a holy God. Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples, 'Fear that which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell'. But the fear of God's children is interwoven with love for their Father. Behold, says the psalmist, 'the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy' (Ps 33).

Finally, note *Joshua's example*. 'But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.' Whatever others might do, Joshua was decided and resolute. He had nailed his colours to the mast, that all might see who was *his* Commander, and *his* Master. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ and neither should we. The contempt of the proud and the reproach of the world are part of the affliction of the Gospel which the servants of Jesus must expect. Joshua was an old soldier. Neither the frowns nor the flatteries of men could move him from his convictions. He was determined to do what was well-pleasing in God's sight. Like his forefather Abraham,

*(continued on page 14)*

# How did Germany become Protestant?

Those who have travelled in Roman Catholic countries like Italy (94% R.C.) or Spain (99%), Peru (97%) or Colombia (96%), or Ireland (Eire, 93%), sometimes wonder how it would be possible for such countries to turn from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. On the face of it it seems utterly impossible. Yet Germany was at one time 100% Roman Catholic and changed completely.

It is important to remember that there were political and religious reasons why so great a change was possible in a country like Germany. The nation was divided into different States, each led by Princes or Governors. A number of these deeply resented the way in which money was gathered to enrich Rome and Italy.

One of the classes of society were the knights. In Germany one of their well known leaders was Ulrich von Hutten. He wholeheartedly opposed the corruption of the Church and in a tract called *The Roman Trinity* he catalogued, in a crescendo of triplets, all the sins of Rome:

*Three things are sold in Rome: Christ, the Priesthood, and women. Three things are hateful to Rome: a General Council, the Reformation of the Church, and the opening of German eyes. Three ills I pray for Rome: pestilence, famine and war. This be my trinity!*

At first, Hutten was cautious about Luther, but when he knew that Luther loathed the fleecing of Germany and opposed Italian chicanery, he gave him his full support.

In Germany, the sympathy of the political leaders for Luther, his teaching, and for the principles of the Reformation, was essential as a protection against the

dominance of Rome and the Papacy which as a religious system was like a giant octopus clutching onto its prey. It required the secular power of the princes to hack away the tentacles of Rome. We need to appreciate this because while Luther was well able to see the ideal of the gathered church principle, that is believers being gathered into self-governing churches or assemblies, he could not see this as viable or practical. We will return to that presently but in the meantime we need to appreciate that it is enormously difficult to change the views of an entire nation. We must remember too, that the idea of religious freedom as we now know and enjoy it, was not the case before the Reformation. If stability was to be maintained (so it was universally believed) then society had to be monolithic in religious belief. This explains why heretics were executed publicly. That was done in order to discourage disunity in the ranks of a nation. When Reformation swept Northern Germany, the Lutherans opted for banishment of the remaining Roman Catholics, as it was hardly expedient to burn them.

We must now examine how it was possible for a whole nation to change so dramatically from one set of beliefs to something quite different. In answer to this, we must remember first of all, that between 1513 and 1517 (which is rightly regarded as the commencement of the Reformation), Luther was instrumental in converting the entire Wittenburg University faculty to Justification by Faith. There were twenty-two professors. The faculty was enormously industrious in Luther's lifetime. It is estimated that 20,000 men, endowed with the principles of the Reformation, were sent out by 1546. Luther himself maintained a daily routine of lecturing in the University to the end of his life.

The affixing of the ninety-five theses, condemning indulgences, to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenburg in 1517 marked the commencement of the controversy which swept like a forest-fire not only over Germany, but Christendom. The excommunication of Luther by the pope of Rome followed. Luther's response was to publicly burn the Papal Bull. These events were of intensive interest to the Germans. They increasingly saw in Luther their champion. Such was the support for Luther by the populace that by the time John Eck attempted to apply the terms of the excommunication to the people at Erfurt he had to hide for his life. Luther's public burning of the Bull of excommunication served to strengthen the resolution of his followers. This act helped to confirm and clarify the vastness of the gulf lying between Luther's biblical teaching and the accumulated traditions of Rome.

From 1521 to 1524 the Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in North Germany. This was the result of a tremendous activity of missionary outreach. The success of the work was largely due to an enormous volume of tracts and cartoons. Luther himself took the lead. He was assisted by an army of helpers, including many printers who risked their lives and businesses in undertaking such a controversial work. It is noteworthy that between 1521 and 1524, the volume of evangelical literature by proportion of population exceeded in quantity anything published in Germany to this day. This was an all-time record, which points to the fervency of the work of that time.

The popularity of Luther, by 1521, when he appeared before the Emperor, Charles V, is seen in the fact that in the city of Worms, Luther's books and pictures were everywhere displayed. When the Papal envoy, Aleander, arrived, he found it difficult to find anyone willing

to give him lodging. He was ridiculed and many people openly showed their hostility to him. It was at that time that he wrote to the Pope: 'Nine tenths of the people are shouting "Luther" and the other tenth shouts: "Down with Rome!"'

With regard to tracts and cartoons it is hard to think of such being successful or effective today. We tend to frown on cartoons, and anything that is too aggressive. Judge for yourself the tenor of the descriptions used in the Lutheran movement by the following caption in which Christ in a skit is made to say,

*'I have not whereon to lay my head.'* The Pope: *'Sicity is mine. Corsica is mine. Assissi is mine. Perugia is mine.'* Christ: *'He who believes and is baptised will be saved.'* Pope: *'He who contributes and receives indulgences will be absolved.'* Christ: *'Feed my sheep.'* Pope: *'I shear mine.'* Christ: *'Put up your sword.'* Pope: *'Pope Julius killed sixteen hundred in one day.'*

During these years, Luther conceived of the Church as 'the Called'. He thought of Christ's body as small, hidden, persecuted and often scattered; being united only by the bonding of the Spirit. In 1522, Luther came close to following the idea of reformation along the lines of gathered believers forming churches in various localities. However, he was not prepared to forsake the larger community and for practical reasons opted for a church which embraced the communion of the State. As we have already seen the practical difficulties of following the idea of establishing churches of believers were insuperable, and in 1526 Luther declared that such an ideal, good though it was, was impossible. It was momentous that Luther opted for the Church Territorial. In contrast, the Anabaptists broke completely with the idea of Sacralism, and have proved ever since, the practical viability

of the biblical principle of believers being gathered together within society, to form churches. So it is in the two largest countries in the world—one free, and one under Communist domination: the U.S.A. and Russia. In both countries, the largest evangelical denominations are Baptist.

When Luther faced up to the difficulty of transition, or change from Roman Catholicism to Evangelicalism, he had not only the problem of Roman Catholicism to contend with, but also the considerable influence of Zwinglianism and Anabaptism. There was a lot of strife. This added to Luther's problems. Many of the bishops had not embraced the Evangelical Faith and so could not be depended upon as the means of enforcing a change. To whom could he turn, apart from the Prince who represented the secular State? Of course, the Prince would not act as a magistrate, but as a Christian who was situated advantageously to apply the principles of the Reformation. And so it came to be that all church property was vested in the Prince, so that he might direct support for the ministers and also adjudicate finances for the poor. The elector appointed a commission to survey thirty-eight parishes in Saxony, enquiring into finance, forms of worship, morals and faith. Visitors were appointed to traverse systematically the parishes. Many changes were instituted, and by 1527, the whole of electoral Saxony was predominantly evangelical by constitution and form.

We have examined one particular constituency. When we turn to other nations, such as Norway and Sweden, we observe that the Reformation took place from the top to the bottom, that is, from the rulers at the top, with their power, down to the common people. However, such change could not have taken place without a very widespread change of belief. The story of Scotland is different from the others, because there the change came about in spite of the opposition from the throne.

We should always remember with gratitude and admiration that the vast change that came about in Northern Europe was only possible by widespread enlightenment. Today, Northern Europe is in a deplorable spiritual state, while Southern Europe remains a mixture of superstitious Roman Catholicism and atheistic secularism. At the time of the Reformation it was a matter of false religion giving way to the truth of the Bible. If we are to contemplate change today, it will be a matter of extraordinary revival. The vast majority today have no religion. The people are materialistic. They believe in evolution and regard the Bible as a book of bedtime stories for children. It is no longer a question of conflict between corrupt Christianity and the evangelical faith, but rather the evangelical faith versus a colossal constituency of indifference in which is found many religions, all of which are hostile to the uniqueness of the Gospel and the total commitment required by Jesus Christ, God's Son.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY WORSHIP** *(continued from page 11)*

he would command his children and his household after him. Whatever his neighbours would do, Joshua would keep up the worship of God in his home. He enforced his own precept by example. Parental example has a profound influence for good or evil. A godly life bears a more eloquent testimony to the power of divine grace and

carries greater conviction to the consciences of the careless than all the eloquent sermons and pious platitudes of inconsistent professing Christians.

Gratitude is expressed to *The Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland for permission to print this exposition.



# The Reformation and the Anabaptists

## Part 1

It is extremely difficult to be dispassionate about the conflict that took place during the 16th century Reformation between the Reformers and the Anabaptists. The prefix ‘ana’ simply means ‘re’, according to those who disagreed with their practice, they re-baptized. They were the Baptists of that age who as the historian G. H. Williams has demonstrated constituted an enormous movement both numerically and in diversity.

The outstanding achievements and benefits gained for us all by the Reformers have often been the subject of exposition or comment in the pages of *Reformation Today*. The purpose of the material which follows is to view the characteristics of the Anabaptists in order to evaluate and profit from their strengths. This will need to be done in two parts because of the length involved, and also because it is essential to view the movement against the perspective of history. It is necessary to go back to Constantine and observe the establishment of the ‘Church State’ and observe too the early appearance of dissenters. It is also necessary to see the way in which the Reformers viewed infant baptism. All that is necessary if there is to be a sympathetic appreciation of what was involved and why it was that the Reformers were so fierce in their opposition to the Anabaptists.

Concerning the background which is essential to an appreciation of the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Anabaptists it is needful to focus on Zurich where two fundamental principles were asserted. Also a little more knowledge concerning diversity among the Anabaptists is needed. Then the main characteristics will be examined as follows, the first six in this issue as part one, and the following six as shown in the right hand column in the next issue as part two, when conclusions will be made.

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 The nature of the Church    | 7 Discipleship and suffering for Christ                |
| 2 Restitution not Reformation | 8 The priesthood of all believers and sharing of goods |
| 3 Regeneration                | 9 Missionary vision                                    |
| 4 Believer’s Baptism          | 10 Eschatology   |
| 5 Church discipline           | 11 Religious freedom                                   |
| 6 The Lord’s supper           | 12 The State and pacifism                              |

As explained above we turn now to the history which preceded the Reformation.

### **The Establishment of the 'Church-State'**

The New Testament portrays the Church as a gathered out, holy community, separate from the world. For the first two hundred or so years of the Church's life, it was never identified with the State or with the surrounding culture. Under Constantine (c287-337) persecution of Christians ceased in 313 with the Edict of Milan, Christianity later being declared the official religion of the empire. Refusal to be baptized was punishable by death. Conquest of new territory was followed by forced baptisms. From being the voluntary mark of discipleship, baptism had been transformed into the 'badge' of belonging to a territorial unit. The assumption was that to be born into an area meant to be a member of the Christian religion. This assumption was inherited by the sixteenth century reformers.

### **Early 'Dissenters'**

From the time of Constantine onwards there were small groups who challenged the concept of the 'State-Church' and its various outworkings. During the fourteenth century, for example, the Waldensians objected to the Constantinian overtones of 'christening', and practised rebaptism, and the baptism of children of believing parents. But such groups were always in a small minority and always fiercely persecuted. Attempts to *prove* a direct line between early dissenters and the Anabaptists have failed, although there are several shared emphases.

### **The Reformers and Infant Baptism**

The sixteenth century saw a magnificent rediscovery of the biblical doctrines regarding salvation (soteriology); Luther expounding the Bondage of the Human Will, and Justification by Faith, and Calvin clarifying the doctrines regarding the Sovereignty of God. These men and others restated the truths concerning God's free grace. Through their teachings many were liberated from a system which held people in the bondage of striving to attain salvation by good works. Unfortunately they did not liberate the Church from state control. However magnificent their contribution in the realm of soteriology, we have to reject their doctrine of the Church (ecclesiology).

We have seen that the Reformers inherited the assumptions of a 'sacral society'. Thus when they taught the need for individual, personal repentance and faith they were plunged into a dilemma, one that is well summarized by Verduin:

'The Reformers were torn between two loyalties. On the one hand was a loyalty to the New Testament Scriptures, which knew no church other than the believer's church. . . . On the other hand was a loyalty to what the Dutch call "het historisch gewardene" (that which has come about by the passing of time), in which the church was construed so as to include all in a given locality. Only by *repudiating* history, twelve whole centuries of it, could one escape from the dilemma — unless he were prepared to repudiate the New Testament.'<sup>1</sup>

In the heady early days of rebellion against Rome, both Luther and Zwingli expressed doubt about the biblical warrant for infant baptism, both 'toyed' with the idea of a 'believers' Church. Zwingli admitted, 'Nothing grieves me more than that at the present I have to baptize children, for I know it ought not to be done. If however I were to terminate the practice then I fear that I would lose my prebend.'<sup>2</sup> Or again, 'If we were to baptize as Christ instituted it then we would not baptize any person until he has reached the years of discretion, for I find it nowhere written that infant baptism is to be practised. . . . However one must practise infant baptism so as not to offend our fellowmen.'<sup>3</sup> Expediency rather than 'sola scriptura' seems to be the justification. Luther, astonishingly, seeks justification in tradition: 'There is not sufficient evidence from Scripture that one might justify the introduction of infant baptism at the time of the early Christians after the apostolic period. . . . But so much is evident, that none may venture with a good conscience to reject or abandon infant baptism, which has for so long a time been practised.'

Not only did the Reformers uphold infant baptism themselves, they endorsed the death penalty for those who in all conscience practised believer's baptism and refused to baptize infants.<sup>4</sup> In 1525 the City of Zurich published an edict threatening banishment for any parent who did not have their children baptized within a week. Zwingli himself later said harshly, 'Let him who talks about "going under" go under!' — drowning often being thought of as the most appropriate punishment for the 'crime' of 'ana-baptizing' or 're-baptizing'. In 1529 the Imperial Diet (or Council) at Speier decreed death by fire or by the sword or by some other means 'for every rebaptized person of either sex'. Both Catholics and Protestants concurred with this. From 1525 to 1530 most of the early leaders of the 'Anabaptist' movement were killed and by 1535 over 5,000 believers had been executed.<sup>5</sup> Magistrates in both Catholic and Protestant areas forcibly baptized children against the wishes of their parents, a practice not halted finally in some places until the nineteenth century.

Why were the Reformers so bitterly opposed to those who rejected infant baptism? The Lutherans and 'Reformed' believers never broke with the sacral idea of a society bound together with a common religion. The *means* of maintaining sacralism had to be infant baptism. They drew the parallel with circumcision in the Old Testament, whereby the unity of the children of Israel in nation and religion had been symbolized. They could not conceive of a society remaining stable unless bound by a common faith. Practically they believed that it was not possible to successfully establish churches without the help of secular authorities. Luther turned to the princes for propagation of reformation; Zwingli to the Zurich City Council. We will see that Anabaptists rejected infant baptism as an expression of their more fundamental rejection of the concept of the sacral state; they believed that 'Christendom' or a 'territorial' church was no true church at all. The Reformers perceived them as a threat to 'Christian sacralism' and their 'believer's baptism' as introducing division into society. The possibility of 'division' was repugnant to them, whereas to the 'Brethren' separation from the world was an integral part of their biblical witness. Indeed

the Anabaptists objected more than anything else to the Reformers' coalition with the 'secular' power, a coalition which betrayed the independence of the Church and its liberty to follow biblical principles.

### **The Anabaptists in Zurich. Two fundamental principles asserted**

It was in Zurich that the two fundamental principles of Baptist ecclesiology were first proclaimed.

(i) *The Bible, rather than the magistrate must order church practice.* Zwingli had converted to an evangelical faith through his own study of Scripture. He was a powerful preacher, a leading scholar and in 1522 influenced the City Council of the Canton of Zurich to repudiate Catholic rule and establish an independent reformed Church. Zwingli depended on the Council to implement reform and was prepared to proceed on a gradual basis. A keen group of evangelical scholars gathered around Zwingli, some of whom became convinced that the Bible should be the only authority for doctrine and church practice. Their impatience with Zwingli's dependence on the city council was shown in the second Zurich disputation in October 1523 when he accepted that the matter of images and the mass should be left in the hands of the Council. This was a serious compromise and a shift from his earlier position. In January 1523 he had declared, 'in matters concerning divine wisdom and truth I would accept no-one as witness and judge except the living Scriptures and the Spirit of God which speaks out of the Scriptures.'<sup>6</sup> Conrad Grebel and others refused to submit to the jurisdiction of the secular Council over the Church. This question of AUTHORITY: Scripture or Council, lay at the heart of the division between Zwingli and the 'Brethren'. Bender calls their stand 'one of the high moments of history . . . it marked the beginning of the modern "free church" movement. It was an historical action which in effect, demanded the separation of Church and State.'<sup>7</sup> Grebel and a few other evangelical friends of Zwingli continued to try to persuade the Reformer to proceed independently of the Council. They proposed reforms including introduction of church discipline. When it became clear that Zwingli was committed to moving only as fast as the Council would allow, and that this body was not going to introduce the desired reforms, Grebel and his friends began meeting in a private home. Zwingli's opposition to this group deepened when they began advocating believer's baptism.

(ii) *Rejection of Infant Baptism.* We have seen that Zwingli had himself questioned the scriptural mandate for infant baptism. However at a public disputation in Zurich in January 1525 he upheld infant baptism and endorsed the Council's rule that any who refused to baptize their children should be banished. A few days later about a dozen men met at the home of Felix Manz, where an eye witness recorded the agonizing decision they committed themselves to:

'And it came to pass that they were together until anxiety came upon them, yes, they were so pressed within their hearts. Thereupon they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and they prayed that he would give to



them his divine will and that he would show his mercy unto them. For flesh and blood and human forwardness did not drive them, since they well knew what they would have to suffer on account of it. After the prayer, George of the House of Jacob stood up and besought Conrad Grebel for God's sake to baptize him with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with such a request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained minister to perform such work.'<sup>8</sup> George of the House of Jacob was George Blaurock, a converted priest. After his own baptism he baptized the others present. The introduction of believer's baptism was indeed revolutionary. These 'Swiss Brethren' or 'Anabaptists' were fiercely opposed by Zwingli but gained a considerable number of converts. Thirty-five were baptized at Zollikon and then five hundred were baptized at St. Gall. Grebel was forced into hiding. In October 1525, Grebel, Manz and Blaurock were imprisoned, receiving a sentence of life-imprisonment in March 1526. During the same month the three prisoners escaped; the authorities now declaring the death sentence by drowning for all who insisted on rebaptism. Grebel died of the plague in the summer of 1526. Manz and his wife were executed by drowning in the same year. Blaurock was burned at the stake in 1529.

Those who had first been baptized as believers at that meeting in January 1525 had committed themselves to live for Christ, to spread the gospel and to separate from worldliness. Tragically they were allowed such a short time in which to fulfil their pledge. Despite fierce persecution the Anabaptists continued to multiply in Switzerland and the Tyrol.

Believer's baptism was regarded as a 'first' baptism, not a 're' baptism, and those who practised it never called themselves 'Anabaptists'. They referred to each other as 'Brethren'.

### **Diversity among the Anabaptists**

Before we examine the ideas of the 'mainstream' of evangelical Anabaptists, it should be noted that a very broad spectrum of ideas went under the label 'Anabaptist'. Indeed the term was normally hurled as a word of abuse at any radical who happened to question infant baptism. William Estep points out that two major groupings which he calls the 'Inspirationists' and the 'Rationalists' rejected paedobaptism and are thus commonly grouped together with the 'Anabaptists'. However they had a fundamentally different view of authority. For the 'Inspirationists' their main authority was the Holy Spirit which took precedence over the Bible. For example the so-called 'Zwickau prophets' Nicholas Storch and Thomas Munzer claimed special inspiration. These prophets began teaching in Wittenberg in 1521 and caused considerable unrest. Ever afterwards Luther mentally projected the extremes of this group upon all who wanted believer's baptism. Some 'Inspirationists' became taken up with expectation of Christ's imminent second coming and then advocated the need to take violent steps to inaugurate the coming kingdom. Among them were a

group of desperate men who had escaped persecution in the Low Countries. They attempted to set up the 'Kingdom' in the city of Munster in 1536 and barricaded themselves in. All manner of abuses occurred in the city until the Protestant Princes besieged the city and massacred the inhabitants. This tragic drama has been emphasized out of all proportion and for many years served to blacken the name of all 'Anabaptists'. In contrast to the 'Inspirationists' the main body of Anabaptists took Scripture to be their sole authority. And most of them practised a thoroughgoing pacifism in contrast to the violence advocated by some of the more 'apocalyptic' Inspirationists.

At the other end of the spectrum were those described by Estep as 'Rationalists'. They took *reason* as their chief authority, which often ended up in the holding of anti-trinitarian views. This group included men such as Michael Servetus, Juan de Valdes, Sebastian Castellio and Faustus Socinus. The errors of this group also have sometimes been unfairly imputed to the main body of Anabaptists, who were orthodox in all the central areas of Christian doctrine.<sup>9</sup> Even without the two extremes of 'Inspirationists' and 'Rationalists' there was considerable diversity among the Anabaptists. It is also difficult to construct a systematic body of beliefs as historians face all the usual problems encountered when studying a persecuted, underground movement. Fugitives and refugees are not in a situation conducive to writing systematic theology texts. Much written material was destroyed by the authorities. Weird and wonderful 'beliefs' could be extracted under torture, as the authorities were always keen to prove the doctrinal heterodoxy of this group. Tragically the leaders of the movement were usually killed before they were able to develop mature works of theology.

Despite all these problems we are able to reconstruct the major principles advocated by the mainstream of Anabaptists.

## THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ANABAPTIST BELIEF

In all major aspects of the faith the Anabaptists were orthodox. We concentrate here on the *distinctive* characteristics of their belief.

### 1. The Nature of the Church

The greatest strength of the Anabaptists was to perceive with utmost clarity the nature of the Church as 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God'.<sup>10</sup> They were bold enough to break with twelve centuries of tradition which dictated a Church-State. They objected to this on the grounds that it inevitably involved the use of violence in maintaining the one religion and also an inevitably low standard of conduct among church members.

The Reformers along with all proponents of the sacral system, objected to the idea of 'dividing society'. The Anabaptists in contrast saw themselves as called to separate from the world and form true biblical churches.

## **2. Restitution — not Reformation**

To Luther and Zwingli, the restoration of the New Testament pattern of Church life while possibly desirable, was clearly impractical. The Reformers certainly believed that the Church had ‘fallen’, normally dating this with the taking of *secular* power by the Pope. The Church needed to be cleansed of additions and errors (reformed) but they wanted a *continuity* with the old Roman Church as a sacral institution and they regarded Constantine’s introduction of a ‘Christian State’ as a triumph.

The Anabaptists in contrast held that in accepting the ‘poisoned embrace’ of Constantine, the Church ceased to be a true Church. From then on it was a territorial institution, using force to ensure conformity, rather than a gathering of the regenerate. Like the ‘Restorationists’ of today they regarded all since the Apostolic age as false; they denounced the Reformed Churches as irretrievably compromised, and they aimed to build anew on the original foundation. The foundation was Christ and his Word. Unlike the ‘Inspirationists’ of their day and the ‘Restorationists’ of our own, the Anabaptists did not seek new revelation as a mandate. ‘The Great Commission’ was their commission. They were to gather the Church through ‘preaching, baptizing and teaching.’<sup>11</sup> The *mark* distinguishing their churches from what they believed to be all other compromised churches, was believer’s baptism (for the Restorationists of our day the mark is the supernatural gifts).

## **3. Regeneration**

According to Hubmaier the first mark of a true church is regeneration. The New Birth must precede church membership. This was in stark contrast to the protestant territorial churches where infant baptism was insisted upon by the power of the magistrate. The Anabaptists stressed that regeneration was a radical work of the Holy Spirit in a person bringing about repentance, faith, and a life of disciplined discipleship. Such regeneration, wrote Menno Simons ‘can only originate in the Word of the Lord, rightly taught and rightly understood and received in the heart by faith through the Holy Ghost’.<sup>12</sup>

## **4. Believer’s Baptism**

This was to follow regeneration as the mark of separation from the world and entering the gathered church. It was to be voluntary. The 1st article of the 1527 Schleitheim Confession stated that baptism was only for those ‘who have been taught repentance and a change of life and in truth believe their sins to have been blotted out through Christ and who wholly wish to be buried with him into death that they may be able to rise again in him’.<sup>13</sup>

Balthasar Hubmaier gave the most clear and detailed defence of believer’s baptism. From the Great Commission he deduced the biblical sequence of preaching, faith, then baptism. ‘From this it follows that no-one can be so blind or lame that he cannot see and grasp the fact that baptism by water should never be administered without previous profession of faith.’<sup>14</sup> Hubmaier refuted the

charge that Anabaptists attached saving significance to baptism, and he also refuted the Zwinglian charge that Anabaptists maintained they could sin no longer after baptism. He *did* argue that baptism is obligatory for the believer, firstly because Christ commanded it, secondly because it is a necessary act of personal discipleship, and thirdly it is the symbol of corporate discipleship of the visible church.<sup>15</sup> The third, especially, is *vital* to the understanding of the Anabaptist concept of the Church. Baptism was *not* merely an individual act of witness but rather, as Hubmaier wrote, it was an 'outward sign of testimony by which brothers and sisters can know one another, though faith be in the heart alone. By receiving baptism, the candidate testifies publicly that . . . he has submitted himself to his brothers and sisters — that is to the Church.'<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Church Discipline

An inevitable result of a territorial Church is what Verduin terms, 'conductural averagism'. A whole population cannot possibly be expected to achieve the ideal of holiness demanded by a gathered church — and there is nothing for them to 'separate from'! A cause of offence to many sincere Lutheran and Reformed Christians was the way in which open 'scoundrels' could attend the Lord's Supper. Calvin defended the 'inclusive' Church by use of the parable of the wheat and the tares and although Luther early on admitted the drawbacks of an 'all-embracing' Church, he also attacked the church discipline practised by the Anabaptists, ultimately holding that the Lord's Supper ought to be open to everybody. 'Repeatedly, when the Anabaptists were questioned by the State Church leaders as to the reason for their separation from the official Church, they cited the lack of discipline. The State Church could not be the true Church of Christ because it tolerated in its midst all kinds of sin.'<sup>17</sup> Menno Simons set out the Anabaptist doctrine of 'banning', 'shunning' or excommunication ('A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline' 1541). Discipline was always to follow the Matthew 18 procedure, was to be undertaken in love, with restoration as the aim.

## 6. The Lord's Supper

All Anabaptist writers stress the close relationship between the Lord's Supper and discipline. The qualifications for partaking were baptism, right conduct, and fraternal relation with all the members of the congregation. Verduin argues in 'The Reformers and their Stepchildren' that in some regards the 'Magisterial' reformers remained 'sacramentalist' (i.e. the sacraments conveyed grace) while their 'stepchildren' (the Anabaptists) were accused of being 'sacramentarian' (i.e. deny that sacraments convey grace). In the mainstream of Reformed Churches lay people could not administer the Lord's Supper. It remained a sacrament. The Anabaptists revived the primitive New Testament idea of the 'Agape' or love feast; a time of fellowship between true believers as they *remembered* the death of the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

*Next time we will consider the further six characteristics and come to some conclusions.*



# Psalm 8

Tunes: CORNWALL (8 8 6.8 8 6)  
HULL

- 1 O LORD, our Lord, how far your name  
Transcends all else our hearts acclaim,  
In heaven or here below!  
And yet you have your praises sung  
By voices of the frail and young  
To silence every foe.
- 2 When in the heavens your work I scan,  
The moon and stars, what then is man,  
That you should give him thought?  
So godlike he, so high his worth,  
Created to be lord on earth  
Of all your hands have wrought.
- 3 You set him over beasts and birds,  
The teeming seas, the flocks and herds  
Which still his mastery know.  
O LORD, our Lord, how far your name  
Transcends all else our hearts acclaim,  
In heaven or here below!

*This inspired vision of mankind in utter glory strikes a strong note of approval in the human heart, though it is very different from the reality we see around us. The Letter to the Hebrews explains that this ideal is fulfilled now in Jesus Christ, and in the age to come will be fulfilled in his people whom he died to redeem (Hebrews 2:5-10).*

*See editorial for comment.*

## References

- <sup>1</sup> *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*. Leonard Verduin. Paternoster 1964. p. 19.
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pp. 198-9.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 199.
- <sup>4</sup> Luther assented to the death penalty for Anabaptists in March 1530.
- <sup>5</sup> *Mennonites and their Heritage*. Bender and Smith. p. 47. Quoted by James M. Shantz in B.R.R. vol. 7, No. 3, p. 36.
- <sup>6</sup> *Conrad Grebel: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren sometimes called Anabaptists*. Bender. p. 94. Quoted by James M. Shantz in B.R.R. vol. 7, No. 3, p. 33.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 100. Quoted in B.R.R. vol. 7, No. 3, p. 34.
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 61. Quoted in Estep. pp. 10-11.
- <sup>9</sup> Estep. pp. 15-16.
- <sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.
- <sup>11</sup> Estep. p. 184.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 186.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 153.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 156.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 157.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 158.
- <sup>17</sup> 'Church' The Mennonite Encyclopaedia, I. p. 595. Harold Bender. p. 595. Quoted by M. McCulley *Studies in History and Ethics* p. 41.
- <sup>18</sup> Verduin. Chapter 4. p. 132ff.

# Southern Baptist Founders' Conference Report

The 1986 Southern Baptist Conference on the Faith of the Founders convened at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee July 29th through August 1st. Among the 150 conferees who gathered were representatives from 78 Southern Baptist churches. These churches are scattered across 21 different states and vary greatly with regard to size and theological understanding. The majority of them, however, are being pastored by men who stand in the great tradition of those whose labours were instrumental in the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. Men like James P. Boyce, John L. Dagg, John A. Broadus, and P. H. Mell, faithful servants whose lives and legacies have been largely neglected in this generation, would have blended well with the participants. The theological convictions which undergirded their ministries in the last century provided the underpinnings for the messages brought by the conference speakers. That 'exalted system of Pauline truth which is technically called Calvinism' (Broadus) was the foundation upon which this year's theme, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, was set forth.

The conference took place in the midst of a record-setting heat wave in the central United States. This resulted in some discomfort when the air conditioning unit for the main meeting hall malfunctioned. Despite the fact that a few of the sessions had to be conducted in these less than desirable conditions,

there was great agreement that this year's meeting was especially beneficial.

The tone of the conference was set by the opening remarks made by Dr. Tom Nettles of Mid-America Seminary. He reminded those assembled of the conference's purpose and nature. It is catholic in spirit, recognizing that fellowship in the gospel of Christ transcends denominational borders. The conference is, however, consciously Southern Baptist. Those who have planned and organized it affirm the theological heritage of the Southern Baptist Convention, and desire to recapture it. It is not a part of any denominational political movement. Rather, it exists for the personal edification of officers and members of local churches. Consequently (according to the 'Statement of Principles'), it is designed 'to be a balanced conference in respect to doctrine and devotion expressed in the doctrines of grace and their experimental application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness'.

The messages which directly addressed the central theme contributed largely to the conference's success this year. Southern Baptists have not been immune to the contemporary controversies over the person and work of the Holy Spirit which have divided many evangelicals. Everything from charismatic myopia to near binitarianism has plagued churches within S.B.C. borders. The exegetical treatments of the role of the Spirit were both timely and helpful. Dr. Richard Belcher, professor of Bible and Preaching at Columbia Bible College, took two sessions to address the relationship of the Holy Spirit to prayer and revival. The sovereignty of the Spirit in bringing about revival was shown to be no barrier to the hearty engagement of fervent prayer for revival. Dr. Jimmy Millikin addressed the issue of the gift of tongues in the New Testament. The professor of



From left to right, Tom Ascol who has provided the report of the Founders' conference, Mark Dever of Louisville, Kentucky, who trained under Roger Nicole at Gordon-Conwell and is writing a thesis on Richard Sibbes for a Ph.D. Many should recognise Ernie Reisinger who, because of the crucial role he plays, was nicknamed Rex Reisinger at the conference. We are all kings and priests but Ernie especially so as he fulfils the dual role of pastor to pastors and also administrator and organiser, assisted by Mrs. Reisinger and able helpers.



Jim Carnes (left) who has specialised in the study of the life and work of Benjamin Keach, and Bill Ascol brother of Tom, who has written the report of the Southern Baptist Founders' conference.

theology from Mid-America Baptist Seminary argued that the nature of tongue-speaking in the New Testament should be understood as the divinely-given ability to speak in an intelligible foreign language which was previously unknown to the recipient. Concerning the permanence of this gift, Dr. Millikin's conclusions were drawn along three lines: Historically, it is easily demonstrated that it has ceased. Theologically, it may be argued that this gift is no longer necessary. On the basis of exegesis alone, however, it is difficult to conclude that the gift of tongues has ceased for all time and cannot be sovereignly bestowed again. Once again this year, Pastor Jim Gables brought to bear insights from *Pilgrim's Progress* on the conference theme. Taking us into Interpreter's House, he expounded Bunyan's representation of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. By uncovering the biblical foundations of Bunyan's

images, Pastor Gables very effectively set forth the practical dimensions of the Spirit's role in the Christian's life. Mr. R. F. Gates, a full time itinerant evangelist, closed the week with a stirring message on the work of the Spirit in evangelism. Taking John 6 as his text and Ezekiel 37 as his illustration, Mr. Gates emphasized the Spirit's role as life-giver. It is the evangelist's task to preach the Word of the Lord. Only the Spirit, however, can own that Word to the salvation of the hearers. Is it not interesting, he noted, that one of our Lord's greatest sermons (John 6) was directed to people whom he knew would not believe? What clearer example could we have for preaching an unfettered gospel and offering it freely to all sinners?

The remaining messages were very complementary to the thematic addresses. Pastor Ron Rumburg of Dominion Street Baptist Church in

Hueytown, Alabama delivered an exposition of Psalm 57 in which David's experiences in the midst of difficulties were considered as the ground for encouragement to modern ministers of the gospel. Fred Malone, Pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas examined the controversial subject of the man in Romans 7. Through well reasoned arguments Pastor Malone demonstrated that in verses 7:7-8:4 Paul enlarges his previously announced topics. Verses 7:7-13 are an expansion of the relationship which the unbeliever has to the law — a subject introduced in verse 5. Verse 6 introduces the relationship of the believer to the law. It is this relationship which Paul further develops in verses 7:14-8:4. With warm, pastoral applications Pastor Malone exhorted us to recognize that the spiritual health of our people depends upon a right apprehension of the lessons from this passage.

Dr. Nettles gave us a sense of what it must have been like to sit in Jonathan Edwards' congregation two centuries ago by preaching the great revival leader's 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' during an afternoon session. On Wednesday night the conference met at the Covington Pike Baptist Church. It is estimated that over 220 people attended this public meeting. Mr. David Miller, an Associational Missions Director from Arkansas, addressed the topic 'Preaching the Sovereignty of God' by considering Jeremiah's call and commission. As past experiences have taught us to anticipate, Mr. Miller's message was full of penetrating insight and practical application. Pastor Ernest Reisinger brought a message on 'Reforming the Church', marking his first appearance on the agenda since the initial gathering of the conference four years ago. Fully convinced that we are living in the midst of real spiritual reformation, he passionately exhorted us to pattern ourselves

after those men whom God has used in seasons of revival and reformation. By citing the experiences of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and others who waited up to seven years before seeing the first visible results of their labours, Pastor Reisinger issued a call for patient faithfulness in the work of reformation.

The special guest speaker this year was the editor of *Reformation Today*, Pastor Erroll Hulse of Liverpool, England. Along with receiving great benefit from the two sessions which he led, many had their horizons broadened by Pastor Hulse's interests in the advancement of the gospel around the world. He presented two historical papers in which he drew out lessons from the life and ministry of C. H. Spurgeon. Spurgeon, he said, stands as a witness against the charismatic movement in that he is an example that preaching works. The pervasive claim that a new age of apostles, miracles, signs, and wonders is needed to revive lethargic churches today loses its force in the light of Spurgeon's ministry. Likewise, the modern fear that the doctrines of grace militate against evangelism and will ultimately kill churches must dissipate upon a careful consideration of the work of the Metropolitan Tabernacle under Spurgeon's leadership. He saw untold thousands converted throughout the course of his ministry. It should be noted, moreover, that never once did he employ that which has become the *sine qua non* of much modern church evangelism: the altar call.

In all, the conference was very encouraging. From the testimonies and conversations of the participants it is obvious that the revival of interest in the doctrines of grace continues to grow. Next year's meeting, which will take up the issue of the modern invitation system, is scheduled to meet again at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee July 28th-31st.

Tom Ascol, Cape Coral, Florida.



*The Banner of Truth produce so many fine books that we must be careful not to take them for granted. One of these is a 450 page reprint with the title THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION. Our greatest need is revival. If we did experience a spiritual awakening the value of this book would soar immediately. For instance one of the addresses is concerned with errors to be guarded against during a revival. Another is most relevant because it deals with hindrances to a revival, and yet another deals with the subject of the necessity of revival. Are you expecting a revival in your church? Is the preaching in your church the kind of preaching that awakens souls to their lost state? The subject is extremely relevant and practical.*

## The character of preaching in a revival

A most valuable book published by Banner of Truth is *The Revival of Religion*.<sup>1</sup> It consists of a series of addresses given in Glasgow during 1840 — and thus during times of revival. This article concentrates on just part of one lecture, given by R. S. Candlish, in which he seeks to deal with the question, 'What is the type of preaching which is found in revival?'<sup>2</sup>

Such a question is not merely of academic interest to us, who do not live in such times. Preaching is the 'normal' means by which God brings about regeneration: that is, the means which we are usually to expect him to use (Rom 10:14; Jas 1:8). Not only so, but I would argue that what we call revival is in fact the 'normal' state of the church; all else is sub-normal. If preaching, however, is God's normal means of salvation, and revival is the condition of the church which is to be our norm, our plumbline, does it not follow that the sort of preaching which characterises revival is the type we should seek? This is not in any way to suggest that, by preaching in a certain way, we can produce revival; simply that we can learn from revival preaching, what

preaching ought to be like. This knowledge can then be turned into prayer, for such preaching; and those who are called to preach the gospel, it can be used to help us in remedying our own manifold deficiencies, by the grace of God.

This article does not look in detail at sermons preached in revival (although this, done competently, would surely be of real value to the Church). We simply consider and apply the characteristics which Candlish deduced; of which there are four.

1. Preaching needs to be addressed to the *reason* — the mind, the understanding. This is not to say that preaching is to be dry, or coldly logical — light without heat. It ought, however, to be logical, simple, and, in a word, understandable. Not only so; the gospel, correctly preached, ought to grip the mind. It is possible, even easy, to proclaim the truth in a way such that, although most of the congregation understand what is being said, none feel that it is being said to them, personally. Such a theoretical discourse would perhaps be in place in a lecture room. In the pulpit it is a God-

dishonouring waste of time. The true gospel sermon leaves the non-Christian who hears it feeling that, if he cannot break the logic of what was said, he is going to have to seriously consider his own standing before God.

Many sermons today lack the 'common touch' which is found in all revival preaching. It is too easy to make up in eloquence what is lacking in reality. Was this not the difference between Spurgeon and Irving? The former preached as he would have to Water-beach farmers, even when addressing the vast congregations in the Tabernacle; whilst the latter aimed his rhetorical discourses at the Cabinet ministers present. The former type of preaching can be understood by the latter group of people; but not vice-versa.

Some of the blame for the lack of reality in preaching today must be placed on the tape-recorder — not its use, but its abuse. It leads to the preacher having, at the back (or the front!) of his mind, the necessity for sounding good on tape. In the exposition of the word to Christians, this is not a handicap. But in the one-off event which preaching the gospel ought to be — a spiritual encounter between the forces of light and darkness — it must be so. It is the unsaved in front of him whose minds the preacher of the gospel is striving to reach — not the Christians who might here the tape afterwards.

2. Preaching also has to attack the *conscience*. Here there is a simple test which can be applied, to show whether or not the preacher has grasped the necessity of this; or rather, whether it has grasped him. Does he address the congregation as 'you' or 'we'? In speaking to Christians in the way of teaching or exhortation, 'we' can be correct. But when a man is preaching the gospel to sinners, it cannot. It betrays an attitude of the speaker and the hearers having some-

thing in common. 'What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?' asks the apostle. The gospel is a dividing line between the preacher and his non-Christian hearers: that is the whole point of his preaching it. He has what they do not. The use of 'we' blurs the very distinction which he is trying to emphasise; his words contradict his message. A survey of Acts reveals that the apostles' preaching was almost totally devoid of 'we'; but it is full of 'you'.

So much for what the preacher says; what of its effect on the hearers? It always saddens me when I hear an unsaved person describe a gospel sermon — including my own — as 'good' or 'interesting'. If a preacher is flattered by such comments, he should take to heart Luke 6:26 and Ezekiel 33:30-34. The false prophet, and those who follow in his steps, will not reach the conscience; nor, always, will the faithful messenger of God. Such a situation is to be lamented and prayed over. For it is only the sovereign God who can convict a sinner. If the sinner remains unchanged while enjoying the message, clearly he has not done so. Is this not because of the preacher's unwillingness to confront the conscience of his hearers? It was not so in Ezekiel's case: but what about yours and mine? Isaiah surely describes a more positive result, with the preacher provoking demands to change his message (Isa 30:10-11). Nowadays, people would simply leave off hearing the preacher. Is not the fact that the unsaved can sit under the gospel week by week, without either being saved or ceasing to attend, an indication that we are not reaching the conscience? It is not a situation with which any preacher ought to be happy.

The conscience has been called 'God's deputy in man'. In our situation of widespread open unbelief in even the most basic spiritual facts, such as the exis-

tence of God, or of sin, we are not to forget that God has a witness within each unregenerate man, as Paul teaches in Romans 1. All attempts to eradicate gospel Christianity, and gospel Christians, spring from this; from the most violent persecution, to the most subtle ridicule of the media. These attitudes are evidences, not only of the truth of Christianity, but of the subconscious awareness of that truth in the sinner. Indeed, nothing else can adequately explain the evident hatred felt by many toward the God of the Bible — a God they deny exists — and towards his people who, on their terms, they ought to regard as pitifully deluded.

Our Lord said that the Holy Spirit *will* convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. We are to expect preaching therefore to be used by God to bring about conviction of the conscience, as we preach that men are sinners, that God is righteous, and that the righteous God is the Judge of sinful men. As Paul preached on these truths, Felix became afraid (Acts 24:25). He was afraid as he began to see the moral gulf between God and himself. If our preaching does not generate such fear, it is not reaching the conscience, as it should; and we need to ask why not.

3. Preaching should also be directed at the *heart*. To be so, it must come from the heart of the preacher. He must feel that what he is telling his hearers is the most important thing that he can say; that he can always answer in the affirmative the question 'If I knew that these lost sinners would never hear another sermon, is this what I would preach to them today?' It must be a felt Christ that is preached; a living Saviour, not merely a set of doctrines. Christ's grace, humility, and love, in coming to die for lost sinners, are truths which are calculated by God to be used by him in changing the heart. We need to remember that our preaching of them is God's inten-

ded instrument in bringing about that great change from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh.

It is not therefore emotional appeals that we need, bypassing the mind. The heart is to be reached through the mind; but it is to be reached. Sinners need to be made to feel — to loathe their sin, to fear God, to desire Christ and his salvation, to long for cleansing and forgiveness. Surely we should seek that men are at once awed, both by the depth of their sin and the overwhelming greatness of God's provision for it. Only through the heart can the will of man be truly reached. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost stung his hearers hearts (Acts 2:37): so they cried out 'What shall we do?' The Romans, said Paul, having understood the gospel, obeyed it 'from the heart' (Rom 6:17). Preaching which enlightens the understanding and awakens the conscience cannot affect the will, unless the heart is reached.

4. Lastly, preaching must be aimed at the *will*. The unregenerate will is bound; but it is in God's power to free it through the gospel, and turn it to himself. We are to urge men to repent and trust in Christ, and these are acts of the will. Paul did not answer the Philippian jailer's *crie de coeur* with a discussion on why it was wrong for him to think in terms of 'doing something' to be saved; he told him what to do. The first recorded word of Jesus in the gospels is 'repent' (Mt 4:17). Paul says that God '*commands* all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

So, again, we must talk in terms of appealing to sinners to be saved. To do so truly, we must truly desire that they will be. Our work is not done if we declare the truth, and yet do not press home on our hearers the urgency of responding to it. Surely those who heard Paul, or Luther, or Whitefield, or

# The ascended Lord blessing his church

*John Blankespoor*

*And he led them out as far as Bethany and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

Luke 24:50-52.

Some experiences we never forget. God did not want the disciples to forget what they saw and experienced when Jesus left them. And he wants it, through their account, to be just as real for us who are still living on this earth.

With outstretched arms Jesus blessed the disciples and while he was doing so he left them and ascended into heaven. God wanted Luke to tell that to the Church of all the ages — including ours.

Forty days had passed since Jesus arose from the grave and conquered death. During this period he showed himself at least ten times to the disciples and other believers. Nowhere do we read that unbelievers ever saw the risen Lord. Unbelief never comes to the resurrection. But now Jesus' work on earth was

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*(continued from page 29)*

Spurgeon felt that the preacher would, if it were in his power, come down amongst them — indeed, inside them — and *make* them accept his message.

If our hearers are going to feel it is so, then it must be so. Preachers who are not truly compassionate for souls with Christ's compassion have no right to expect that God will use their efforts (although in his mercy he often does). Such compassion only comes from the hours spent in intercession before God for sinners. In a real sense, the secret of revival preaching — which is normal preaching — is nothing to do with how the Word is preached, but why it is preached. If we truly believe that all who do not receive the gospel are a step nearer to an eternal hell; if we would do anything that is in our power to rescue them from such an end; then our preaching will contain true, sincere appeals to them, to flee from the wrath that is to come. Such appeals will not be 'tacked on' to the end of an exposition of the gospel; they will be an integral part of it. Acts 2:40 can be interpreted as

meaning that exhortation, pleading, was the main part of Peter's sermon. The note of loving urgency is an essential part of true preaching.

In conclusion, one more fact must be spelt out, which Candlish, speaking during a revival, did not need to mention. Revival preaching is confident preaching. Not self-confident, but springing from the knowledge, truly believed, that preaching is one of God's weapons 'mighty to the overthrowing of strongholds'. We simply must believe that God can, and will, save multitudes through his word, faithfully proclaimed. Preaching which reaches the mind, the conscience, the heart, the will, is that which the Lord will assuredly use; for such preaching only he can bring about. Let us have faith in the greatness of our God, and of his grace.

## References

<sup>1</sup> *The Revival of Religion: Addresses by Scottish Evangelical Leaders Delivered in Glasgow in 1840.* Banner of Truth Trust, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 111-124.



finished. It was time to go to heaven and to continue his work from the heavenly 'headquarters'. The work of Calvary was history. The atonement had been made for his people. It would be of infinite value to all of his people for eternity. He had also risen from the grave and broken the bars of death. That too was part of his great work on earth. But he would do still more. (We must be careful that we do not become unbalanced, as some Christians appear to be, emphasizing almost exclusively his work on Calvary.) He would continue working in the great programme of his Father, the salvation of sinners, working in the history of the world through the entire New Testament age which would culminate in his return and renewal of heaven and earth.

When the time came for him to leave bodily this earthly sphere of labour he took the disciples with him to the well-known Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Does it perhaps have some symbolic significance that he ascended, not from a valley, but from a mountain which was pointing heavenward? Having spoken a few words to the disciples, he suddenly began to go up into the air. Who had ever seen anything like this before? There was no launching pad for a take-off or mechanical rocket-boosters with thousands of pounds of thrust power. It was a miracle. The disciples must have watched in utter amazement. Slowly he ascended, higher and higher. What particularly interests us now is that *while* he was going up his hands were outstretched, and he was blessing those who were left behind. Why did he do it? What does it mean for us?

Recall the work of the priests in the Old Testament. Among their many tasks, no doubt the main one was the bringing of sacrifices to God for the people. Following the sacrifices and offering of incense in connection with them, the high priests regularly blessed the

people. Remember that when people waited for Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, to bless them, he was not able to speak because of his unbelief.

It was important that the pronouncing of the blessing followed the sacrifices. Sinners can be blessed only when their sins have been forgiven by way of the sacrifices.

What did the high priest say in the blessing with his outstretched arms? In Numbers 6 the Lord had told Aaron what the high priest must say:

The LORD (Jehovah) bless you and keep you,

The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Jehovah, the faithful covenant God, was making these great promises. He assured the people of his blessing and protection. This did not mean that no adversity would trouble their lives. It meant that at all times he would protect them. The 'face' of God is the 'personality' of God, expressing his love. As the smiling face of a mother can show her love to her child the Lord says to us in this benediction, 'I love you, you are mine, and I am going to give you peace.' These words are apparently a repetition of thought to emphasize the faithful promises of God to his people. They cover every experience in their lives, at all times and in all circumstances. Believing and enjoying those promises, we have the peace which Paul later describes as surpassing all understanding. This was the benediction, spoken by high priests thousands of times through many centuries.

Jesus is the great High Priest — 'Our Only High Priest,' says the Heidelberg

*(continued on page 32)*

# Evangelical and Reformed Conference, Natal, South Africa

The annual multiracial and interdenominational family conference held at Skogheim, near Port Shepstone, Natal, South Africa, has been fully subscribed for the last two years. According to the speckled map of South Africa a large part of Natal is Kwazulu (those areas set apart for the Zulu people and which if the same policy is pursued as in the Transkei and Boputethswana will become Zululand). Skogheim falls inside that boundary. At the conclusion of the conference it is the custom for the staff to render items of song for the visitors. That part as well as the environment is Zulu in character.

Besides Ds Flip Buys of the Dutch Reformed Church and Martin Holdt of Pretoria, the speakers came from Scotland (Prof. Douglas MacMillan), New Zealand (John Leevers) and the editor from Liverpool. The subjects were all presented in a popular rather than an academic way. Douglas MacMillan concentrated on the theme of grace and illustrated this from both testaments. He is gifted in being able to make history come to life but is happiest as a preacher. At Skogheim he fulfilled the role of preacher admirably.

Martin Holdt preached on justification by faith, John Leevers on the resurrection and Glen

Schenkte of the Kimberly Presbyterian Church on the subject of 'spiritual maturity', all top rate. Clive Tyler who usually takes a historical subject was unable to participate due to illness. It is important to keep ourselves within the perspective of church history. The life of Jonathan Edwards was chosen as a subject from which we can learn lessons for our time. After an amazing ministry which involved Edwards in times of revival, he was voted out of his church at Northampton. Edwards sought to reform the church with regard to the communion table. He maintained that the ordinance was for those who maintained a credible profession of faith and not for those who were merely nominal in their belief. The subject is most relevant in many present situations where we have inherited harmful and unbiblical traditions. We should aim to learn as much as we can from the experiences of men like Edwards whose behaviour during a most intense time of bitter controversy was blameless. Even his opponents conceded that. As a theologian it was shown that he is a key figure today. Modern evangelicalism generally follows a theology diametrically opposite to that of Edwards, who deservedly is regarded as the theologian of revival. Everything in Edwards' thinking is based on the sovereignty of God. The idea which he was developing into a

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*(Continued from page 31)*

Catechism. He had paid for sin, once and for all, for his people. And he had conquered death. As a result, blessings will be poured out upon the church, the body of believing sinners.

The disciples must have sensed something, perhaps much, of the meaning of this event. Previously when he had at times left them they were somewhat lost, lonely and depressed. Now they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They did not feel left behind as if the Lord had forgotten them or left them to themselves.

Christ ascending into heaven was our forerunner, going ahead to prepare a place for us. As our ascended Lord he says, in effect,

*The Lord blesses you and keeps you  
The Lord causes his face to shine  
upon you and is gracious unto you,  
The Lord is lifting up his countenance  
upon you and giving you peace.*

*This article first appeared in the American magazine OUTLOOK with which we have reciprocal arrangements for which we are thankful.*



*The Presbyterian manse, Oudtshoorn, Cape, home of the Bartholomew family.*

treatise at the time of his death was that all history has an ultimate goal which is the glory of God. It is one thing to assent to that idea; it is another to expound it in detail.

Every gathering of this kind should constantly be appraised by the organisers. An improvement would be to allow for a greater proportion of free time. The temptation is to cram too many sessions into the programme. There is much profit in concentrating on teaching, but it is vital to preserve the balance so that there is adequate opportunity for folk to share. It should be possible to have meaningful fellowship with three or four families each day, renewing old friendships and making new ones.

Of several situations new to me I will describe two.

Bill Bartholomew has recently become the minister of the Presbyterian church in Oudtshoorn in the Cape, an area famous for ostrich farms (sheep farmers are buying ostriches to use as effective guards against sheepstealers). The Presbyterian church at Oudtshoorn is very small in its membership. However young men in military training come in considerable numbers being sent by their officers. Although a captive audience this presents a great challenge.

Bill was called to the ministry at the time his son contemplated training at the Kalk Bay Bible

Institute. This led him to leave a lucrative career to go to Kalk Bay himself to study. Not far away from Oudtshoorn is a very large assembly of almost 2,000 believers. This group is non-white and is the outcome of spiritual awakening. They stand in desperate need of a trained ministry. Is this disparity, a tiny group with a pastor, and a very large assembly without leadership, typical? My impression first hand, and by reading about Africa generally, is that it is. There are very capable experienced ministers in Britain without pastorates who would be ideal teachers in Africa. How do we get the two to meet?

Vernon Light, his wife Heather (see photo p. 8), and his two girls aged 5 and 8 were at Skogheim. He is the pastor of the Welkom Baptist Church. He is fairly new to the church but is well into a thorough teaching programme which is expository and doctrinal. He encourages all the members to visit each other and also to visit the homes of those not committed to the Gospel. Two very recent dramatic conversions of people in middle life have been significant because they have been an example of vitality and activity to all the others. One of the members is a mine captain leading miners 5,400 feet underground. He testifies to the importance of a life of prayer in the demanding task of supervising men in what is always a hazardous occupation.

The Skogheim conference is unique. Long may it prove a rich source of fellowship and instruction.

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