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■ MAY-JUNE 1988

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*The wife of Dr Poh  
(see 'Overseas  
Ministry') and their  
two younger sons.  
Goody studied in  
Liverpool with Poh  
before returning to  
Malaysia.*

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# Editorial

During my visit to Australia, Don McMurray asked me the question 'What is the most urgent priority for Reformed churches?' My response is that we must encourage church planting. It is possible to show that where believers have taken the initiative and been faithful and persevering in evangelism and exercised faith by advancing into neglected areas, progress has been made. There has been struggle, but also consolidation and increase.

The opportunity to witness first hand growing newly planted churches in Malaysia and the Philippines has a revolutionary effect on one's outlook. Here are churches which sustain a vision for reformation, evangelism and church planting as a vital, living principal; they are truly 'Reformed'. For it is one thing to have a 'Reformed' view of salvation; that is, to believe in sovereign grace. It is another to be engaged in reformation. Many so-called 'Reformed' people have not the remotest interest in reformation but rather are hostile to change. Their priority is to sustain the status quo of traditional practice; they become becalmed in situations in which no change can be expected, and are ultimately lost to the reformation cause.

Reformed vision and practice are not easy to sustain if each church works in isolation. Independency as we know it is fragmented; isolated churches are easily 'potted off' one by one as they face their own problems and pressures. Historically, as the article 'Independency and Interdependency' shows, close association between churches has been instrumental in the planting and nurture of new churches, and helpful in resolution of local problems. We should pray for the emergence of Reformed churches which associate together and work together to plant new churches in every needy area of the world.

*(From March 7th to May 7th, the Editor visited Reformed Baptist Churches in several different countries. This editorial, the item on 'Overseas Ministry', Pastor Siebert's Report and the review on Martin Luther were sent during the tour. D.P.K., Acting Editor.)*

# Overseas Ministry

## Malaysia

Centrally situated in a large upper middle class housing estate with homes considerably more contemporary in design than in the UK, is a taller block, at the top floor of which is situated a spacious meeting place for the Sri Hartemas Reformed Baptist Church. For the second time during our two week visit we had a thunderstorm in which we could feel the lightning strike the building, the current being absorbed by the lightning conductor. The wind blew lustily through the large windows for a while and then suddenly went into a suction reverse action and banged them all closed in a single sudden movement. The meeting continued as if nothing whatever was amiss.

A well taught, bright young believer who holds down a good job lives in a room on the same floor and with a companion seeks to evangelise the homes on the estate, a sensitive business for by the strictly imposed law he can visit the Chinese and Indians only, not the Malays who are Muslim. The above described meeting was the best attended on record for the young church in which the average age is about 25. The appetite for truth is intense. Time and thunderstorms are of little consequence. It is the truth that counts. They love the gospel of free grace.

The pastor at the Sri Serdang Reformed Baptist Church, Dr. Poh continues to fulfil his detention sentence for two years. He regiments his use of time: study of Greek, working on a MS (along the lines of 'An Introduction to the Baptists' *Carey Publications*) so that future generations can know exactly where they have come from historically, and why they believe as they do. Poh has his own physical exercise routine. He spends time with other Christian leaders in prayer, and has met other detainees some of whom are opposition political leaders. I was able to update Poh's MS with descriptions of the Reformed Baptist Movement which is beginning to take on a global character.

In Poh's absence others have been compelled to take on leadership roles. This is drawing out their gifts. It is not expedient to mention names but there is an array of spiritual talent from which must come a future leadership. Sound training is an imperative.

The movement in Malaysia is vibrant. It is difficult to describe what a revival is. To describe what it is *not* is easy. What we have seen is not revival in the sense of the 1859 revival with large numbers regenerated. Yet there is an acute sense of the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit as he comes in an irresistible way to bring souls to Christ. There is a glorious freedom in the worship services and a felt sense of the power of God in which you expect this whole generation to be

harvested, and church planting is the accepted mentality. Hunger and thirst for righteousness includes a hunger to know as much as possible about Christ's kingdom in other lands, a subject which occupied us for about three hours in one of the meetings at Serdang which included slides from Grace Baptist Mission to illustrate how Europe has become one of the most needy mission fields in the world today. Another meeting consisted of over two hours of questions interspersed with hymns and prayers.



*Some of the young men at the first Reformed Conference held at Port Dickson, Malaysia*

### **Singapore**

Our rest day was made memorable by Brother Ban who has many gifts, one of which is to be the perfect tourist guide. We saw and learned much. Singapore is blessed with a Prime Minister who combines imagination with determination. The city is the cleanest in the world. Littering is a criminal offence fined on the spot £250 (about 400 US dollars). We saw only two items of litter and that was at the Singapore Cricket Club where the old British colonial spirit lingers. A game was in progress and I took a photo with the tallest hotel in the world in the background (see cover). Singapore is the world's second largest port, Rotterdam purportedly being the first. The economy for the island state is strong. The Shalom church, which has a 1689 Confession basis, has a substantial membership and at present is being led by Paul Chong whose brother Thomas is studying for the ministry in the UK. David Yan, at present in New Zealand is

the pastor in absentia. The appetite for expository preaching is strong. An hour's preaching was followed by another meeting of question time. The evening service was well attended. Singapore provides an ideal base for missionary organisations, the best known in our circles being the OMF. Sylvia Webb from Newport (pastor Graham Harrison) was at Shalom and we were encouraged to hear from her of her Bible translation work in Sabah.



*Singapore:  
Wendy (centre)  
comes from a  
background of  
spiritualism, in which  
she was used from age  
8-14 to interpret  
demonic tongues  
speaking for a  
medium. The Gospel  
offers glorious  
freedom from such  
bondage.*

### **The Philippines**

As a metropolis, Manila with its 8 to 10 million people has a distinctive personality very different to other great cities. Brightly coloured jeepneys do a roaring trade as they ply the streets in their thousands. These are specially constructed mini-buses which can seat six on each of two seats facing each other plus four if you know how to hold on! In addition there is a tricycle motorbike service which will take you anywhere for a reasonable price; three can be seated and two can hold on.

The central site for gargantuan political rallies is at the time of writing occupied by a five day 'Miracle Rally'. A Singaporean evangelist is the leader of the campaign with the support of well known evangelical and ecumenical leaders. When evangelist Rony Tan made his altar call on the first night over 1,000 'made decisions for Christ'.

We must never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people to salvation in spite of superficiality and absence of the Biblical doctrine of repentance, yet we have to reckon with the fact that where sin is not properly dealt with there presumption will be bred on a large scale and a false sense of assurance inculcated. Salvation was procured for us at infinite cost and is therefore expounded in the Scriptures thoroughly. Sowing, watering and cultivating must be done God's way. That way deals effectively with the disease of sin. Where that disease is by-passed nothing is achieved, even though there may be sensational crowds, much excitement and drama.

In contrast to this spectacular background there is a growing Reformed movement. At a ministers fraternal attended by 35, several pastors expressed gratitude for the book *The Great Invitation* (EP). An extensive and invaluable teaching ministry is being fulfilled by Banner, EP and Carey books spread by Evangelical Outreach. In the absence of Brian and Necy Ellis (at present spending four months in the UK), pastor Steve Hofmaier and his wife Carol introduced us to some of the Reformed churches. Steve comes from a Southern Baptist background and was subject to their form of infant baptism (usually at about the age of 7!). He was converted at the age of 16, and later trained at Trinity Ministerial Academy.



*Ministers at the Fraternal, Cubao, Manila. Among them, Steve Hofmaier (extreme left), Mon Macapagal (extreme right), Arnel Cajayon (left of the group of four on the front step).*

Steve took us for a two hour drive to a town nestling among rice paddy fields beside a mountain range covered with coconut palm trees. The leader of the church was Arnel, aged 23. His greatest asset in life is a carefully selected library of about 200 books. He lives in a single room which is part of the church. About 45 came to the meeting. He asked me to preach on the word *parakletos* from John 14:26. He translated into Tagalog and at the end of the exposition gave a synopsis in Tagalog. The most striking contrast with the UK is the way in which the people gladly come, and also the youthfulness of it all: average age about 20. The form of service was extremely uninhibited, anyone being free to share a prayer request or contribute in prayer.



*Youthfulness is a striking feature of the churches in the Philippines*

A larger church at Cubao (pastor Brian Ellis) began in 1979. It has a substantial membership. Nearby are the offices of Evangelical Outreach from which bulk supplies of books are taken out to the Christian bookshops by Bobot, one of a five member staff. His inward sanctification is displayed by his patience in driving through thick traffic. There is an orchestra of honking and the rule that it is the driver's business not to hit anything in front. This gives the driver the right to swerve in all directions so long as he has the lead! But all inevitably give way to the buses which are driven by Jehus at a furious rate, each with his little picture of Jesus in front of him. (The Philippines is 85 percent RC.) Bobot's countenance is inscrutable as he indulges in warning honks only, not retaliatory ones!

There are infant Reformed Baptist churches scattered in and around Manila and then more sparsely across the 7,000 islands right down to one in Iligan, Mindanao, where the edge of the Muslim world is reached. A pressing need is to train an army of pioneer pastors to go into this cosmos. The Koreans are achieving this and making progress in planting Bible Presbyterian churches.

I preached in one infant church, a room open on two sides, with seats for 24 on the inside and eight outside at the open entrance. Adjacent back yards were full of people coming and going, and some sitting listening. The cocks were particularly vocal in loud volume rejoicing in a raucous range of notes in their

crowding. There was activity to prepare for a wedding the next day. In the middle of my sermon a pig was seized for slaughter; its squeals filled earth and heaven too! You soon learn here to have an iron grip on your concentration. Doctrine mixed with colour and illustration grips these young congregations, their visible enjoyment being the preacher's mandate to glorify Christ in his Word. This baby church was situated in Santa Rosa, Laguna, Laguna being the province but also referring to a large lake which supports a vast fishing industry.

Another young church visited at San Pablo had a larger congregation. Half way through the sermon we were overcome by smoke from a fire kindled next door, but this minor distraction was soon overcome. This church hopes to call a pastor in April, a young man aged about 24 who has been studying hard. Among many questions he asked me to describe my Greek library in detail. He would like to get married but for the next four years or so would prefer to continue to invest all he can earn in his theological library. The economy in the Philippines is poor, very similar to many of the African countries. Wise subsidy for books and magazines is needed. Without subsidy most bound books are out of reach. I noticed everywhere how well worn library books are.

The hot humid climate saps the energy and everyone slows down. Joggers, and there are few of them, do their running before sunrise. Steve has mapped out a three and a half mile course. This passes a foul smelling stream where a sprint is called for! The dogs are too listless to take any notice of joggers. Basketball is the national sport and crowds gather to cheer their teams under arched lights during the evenings.

The good quality bindings of the Banner books are a boon in a land where the books are shared by so many. For some mysterious reason jumbo-size cockroaches adore the substance placed on cloth bindings of the Banner books. Perhaps the staff in Edinburgh might consult the wisdom of Rentokil and so reduce the cockroach army in Reformed libraries in these Asian nations!



*Bobot Santos, in the  
book store of  
Evangelical Outreach*

# A Time of Refreshing in Australia

by Fred Siebert

The second annual Sovereign Grace Family Conference held over the Easter Holiday weekend provided much reason for thankfulness and rejoicing for Australian Reformed Baptists.

Over 200 came from 22 different churches in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania to the conference arranged by the Grinsell Street Baptist Church (pastors Don McMurray and Jack Nattrass) in conjunction with the Warners Bay Baptist Reformed Church where I am the pastor. The teaching programme provided a fine balance between sound theology and doctrine, and much down to earth practical application in family living; as well as making provision for obtaining an historical perspective.

Reformed Baptists in Australia have experienced a difficult history with much fragmentation and many setbacks. This conference provided a marvelous opportunity for reviewing the past and contemplating future possibilities. Pastor Julian Bull from the Newtown Baptist Church (near Sydney) presented two excellent papers on the history of Baptist work in New South Wales. He challenged us to learn from history the importance of mutual support between the churches without compromising the doctrinal truths on which we take our stand.

John Paterson, from the Tamworth Reformed Church, focused on the challenge of true Christian living in the family. With clear Biblical insight he spoke plainly and with forthrightness on the issues which threaten the family. In

a society where 40% of all marriages end in divorce, pastors have a sacred duty to bring the principles of God's Word to bear on their own generation with renewed vigour. John also made special mention of the role of singles in the life of the church and further challenged us to view both marriage and singleness as charismatic gifts of God for the upbuilding of the church.

Erroll Hulse took the subject of assurance and expounded powerfully from the Scriptures its relationship to salvation, prayer, service and evangelism. Beginning with the covenanting God, who having bound himself to his people would have to cease to be God before he could break his covenant — he emphasised the importance of assurance of salvation and the resulting Christian joy. From biblical examples and by reference to saints of the past we were warmly exhorted to 'make our calling and election sure' especially in the light of the ever present danger of backsliding and apostasy.

A talented young musician John Spence, spoke on 'Music in Public Worship'. He was warm in his commendation of *The Book of Praises* (70 Psalms for singing today, Carey Publications).

A direct result of the conference was the forging of closer links between churches and their leaders. I was able to discuss with Erroll the possibility of producing at least one issue of *R.T.* with a distinctly Australian focus. Julian Bull is preparing an article on the history of Reformed Baptists; Murray Adamthwaite  
(Continued on page 9)

# A Note to Readers

by David Kingdon

By the time this issue of *Reformation Today* is published, many readers will have heard that Erroll Hulse was dismissed from the Pastorate of Belvidere Baptist Church, Liverpool on 8th February. There was no charge of heresy or scandal.

In the March 1988 issue of *The Free Church Record*, Professor Donald Macleod wrote strongly about the vulnerability of Independent ministers, who take the risk of giving up secure secular employment and then face the trauma of being 'hired and fired' without any means of appeal or redress. He wrote:

'Few men are more highly regarded in the Reformed churches than Erroll Hulse. He has exercised a far-flung ministry of inspiration and encouragement and in his own hour of trial he and his wife Lyn are assured of the prayers of believers all over the world. He emerges from this sad episode with his reputation untarnished, assured of the highest esteem of his brethren. . . . We ventured the opinion

some years ago that an Independent minister has no more security than a pub pianist. Not in our wildest nightmares did we anticipate such a terrible confirmation. . . . This calamity presents the Independent churches with an urgent agenda. How can their pastors be given some security? What is the relation of elders to the pastor? What is the relation of elders to the church-meeting? And is it really a breach of any fundamental principle to provide some apparatus whereby the kind of problems which emerged at Belvidere can be referred to the wider church?'

Are Reformed Baptists now going to face up to this agenda? The autonomy of the local church is a doctrine much prized by Baptist churches. When properly understood and implemented it brings into the foreground the privilege of a particular body of believers to be free for Christ, the great head of the church. Positively understood it encourages each local church to be open to doing the known

*(Continued on page 10)*

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*Continued from page 8*

(Grinsell Street Baptist) will be sharing valuable information gathered from his archaeological work in Israel. Of particular interest to Baptists is the ever increasing unearthing of baptistries dating back to the apostolic period, and the clear evidences of the abundant supply of water. I am working on the

whole question of 'association' between churches as this relates to Australia.

Australians are very 'denomination' oriented in their church life. The strong independence which seems to be a feature of American churches, is viewed with suspicion by most Australians. This must surely be taken into account in any future planning for the Reformed Baptist work in Australia.

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will of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, like any other doctrine it can be misunderstood and abused. It can be seen as sanctioning the right of a church to do what is right in its own eyes without what would be termed 'interference' from outside. When understood in this way the door is open to all kinds of abuse.

Today, independent churches can live to themselves and be a law unto themselves. Autonomy can then become autocracy. The sooner a system which permits an individual pastor to be dismissed without even an inquiry into the circumstances of dismissal, let alone the possibility of redress, is changed the better. The dismissal of Erroll Hulse is not an isolated incident; it is a situation which recurs with alarming frequency in Independent churches today. Is it not altogether unjust that honoured servants of God can be dismissed if neither their doctrine or manner of

life can be censured?

My article 'Independency and Interdependency' provides scriptural and historical guidelines which point the way to a more balanced view of the responsibility of churches to each other.

On 28th February, Erroll and Lyn Hulse were welcomed into membership of Leeds Reformed Baptist Church. The church formally recognised Erroll as a minister of the Gospel with a worldwide pastoral ministry, and will be co-ordinating their support. The elders and members of the Leeds church will be backing the work of *Reformation Today*, Carey Publications, and Erroll's conference and preaching work.

*Finally, let me place on record that I have written this statement on my own initiative, Erroll Hulse being abroad at the time of writing and going to print.*

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<sup>10</sup> White, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> White, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Ilston Church Book, MS 25, quoted White, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> White, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Association Records . . . Part 3, The Abingdon Association*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, see pp. 146-148 for the counsel given.

<sup>17</sup> *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, ed. B. R. White, Part I (South Wales and the Midlands Baptist Historical Society, 1971), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, Part III, pp. 194-5.

<sup>19</sup> Crosby, op. cit., Vol. II, Appendix 2, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> For readers interested in researching the associational life of the early Particular Baptists, see two important articles by Dr B. R. White not cited in this article: 'The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644-1660' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, Oct. 1966, pp. 209-226. 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1664' *Journal of Theological Studies*, No. 5, Vol. XIX, Pt. 2, October 1968, pp. 570-590.

# Independency and Interdependency of the Churches

by David Kingdon

During the last thirty or so years there has been a most remarkable recovery of the Reformed faith not only in this country but overseas as well. So far as this country is concerned the doctrines of grace are now professed by an increasing number of ministers and churches. Perhaps nowhere have the doctrines of grace been more influential in recent times than among persons and churches of Baptist conviction. The republication in the late fifties and several reprintings of the *1689 Particular Baptist Confession of Faith*, the reissue of *Spurgeon's Catechism*, and the appearance of *The Catechism for Boys and Girls* by Paul Cook and Erroll Hulse have all been factors in the spread of Reformed doctrine among Baptists, as have the contemporary Confession *We Believe*, produced under Strict Baptist auspices, and *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Iain Murray.

Another significant influence has been the Carey Conference, the first of which was held at Waddington, near Birmingham, in 1970 and from which came the magazine *Reformation Today* with its emphasis on the reformation of the local church and the book entitled *Children of Abraham*.

The formation of the Grace Baptist Assembly should also be noticed because it represents an opening up of a considerable number of Strict Baptist churches to a wider fellowship with Calvinistic Baptist churches which have significantly different origins. However it is I think fair to say that the Assembly has not succeeded yet in drawing Calvinistic Baptist churches as a whole into its orbit and from the perspective of the northern parts of this country it appears very much as a southern body.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments has been the restructuring and renaming of the Strict Baptist Mission now called Grace Baptist Mission. Now no longer a one country mission but committed in much closer more biblical fellowship with local churches to send missionaries into the whole world as the Lord shall direct, Grace Baptist Mission provides a vital focus for church based missionary enterprise not only for historic Strict Baptist churches but for many others as well.

Looking back over the last thirty or so years we can see that there have been some significant changes.

1. There has been a return to a confessional theology. Many Baptists long taught that Baptists reject creeds, have discovered that their forebears produced numerous confessions of which the *1689 Confession* is the most well known today.

2. There has been a drawing together of church leaders in bodies such as the Grace Assembly and the Carey Conference.

3. In certain areas of the country new churches are being planted, although other parts have no free grace Baptist witness at all.

If we are clear sighted we shall, I believe, see that there are alongside these significant changes for the better some matters which should cause us considerable concern. I shall state these as two propositions.

**Proposition 1**

**Though there has been a rediscovery of Calvinistic Baptist theology in general in the last thirty years or so, this has not been matched by a rediscovery of the ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church, of the Particular Baptists of the formative period 1640-1660.**

I can most easily demonstrate this by quoting from the foundational principles drawn up at the inaugural meeting (October 1652) of what is now known as the Abingdon Association.

1. That Particular churches of Christ ought to hold a firm communion each with other in point of advice, in doubtful matters and controversies (Acts 15:1f, 6, 24, 28; 16:4f). Which scriptures compared together show that the church at Jerusalem held communion with the church at Antioch, offering help to them as they could.

2. In giving and receiving in the case of want and poverty (1 Cor 16:3).

3. In consulting and consenting to the carrying on of the work of God as choosing messengers, etc. (2 Cor 8:19) and in all things else wherein particular members of one and the same particular church stand bound to hold communion each with other for which conclusion we render these Scripture readings.

i. Because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members of one church. For the churches of Christ do all make up one body or church in general under Christ their head as Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:24, Ephesians 5:23, 2 Corinthians 12:13. As particular members make up one particular church under the same head — Christ, and all particular assemblies are one Mount Zion (Is 4:5; S of S 6:9). . . . Wherefore we conclude that every church ought to manifest its care over other churches, as fellow members of the same body of Christ in general do rejoice and mourn with them according to the law of their near relation in Christ.

ii. From that which is a main ground for particular church communion, v.12 to keep each other pure and to clear the profession of the Gospel from scandal which cannot be done (1 Cor 5:5) unless orderly walking churches be owned

orderly and disorderly churches be orderly disowned. Even as [just as] disorderly walking members of a Particular church [would be disowned], yea the reason is more full in respect of the greater scandal by not witnessing against the defection (2 Cor 7:11) of a church or churches.

iii. For the proof of their love to all saints, particular church communion being never appointed as a restraint of our love which should be manifest itself to all the churches.

iv. The work of God wherein all the churches are concerned together, may be the more easily and prosperously carried on by a combination of prayers and endeavours.

v. From need they have or may have one of another to quicken them when luke-warm, to help when in want, assist in counsel in doubtful matters and prevent prejudices in each against other.

vi. To convince the world, for by this shall men know by one mark that we are true churches of Christ. In order thereunto we unanimously agree at our next meeting to declare the principles of the constitutions of the respective churches to which we belong. These things to be offered to the churches to be approved.<sup>1</sup>

Now what is significant, compared with the way in which we tend to view inter-church fellowship today, is the linking of the reason for an individual Christian believer being in fellowship with a particular assembly with the reason why particular assemblies should be in association with each other. The reason is one and the same in each case: the relation of a believer to a particular assembly and the relation of particular assemblies of like faith and order to each other: 'because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members of one church . . .'

Given this understanding of the first reason for interchurch fellowship, it is obvious why so much importance was attached to it by the early Particular Baptists. *Inter-church fellowship is no more an option than is church membership for the individual believer in a local church.* It is a law of the believer's near relation to Christ that he or she be a member of a local church. So it is a similar law that particular churches ought to manifest their care for each other as fellow members of the same body of Christ.

If one contrasts this understanding of the theology of interchurch fellowship with what happens today it is surely evident that our understanding of inter-church relations is somewhat different. We tend to emphasise the independency of the local church, its autonomy under Christ, its right to order its own affairs without outside interference. But since it is obvious that one local church cannot as effectively do some things as a group of local churches co-operating together we develop a theory of what I might call *optional co-operation if desirable*. That is to say we argue that we should do co-operatively what we would find it hard or impossible to do separately. For example the support of missions overseas, the translation of the Scriptures, the setting up of Christian schools and so on.

Now our particular Baptist forebears did not deny the independency of the local church, as article 36 of the *1644 London Confession* makes clear. 'Being thus joined, every church has power given them by Christ for their well-being, to choose among themselves meet persons for elders and deacons, being qualified according to the word as those which Christ has appointed in his testament for the feeding, governing, serving and building up of his church and that none have any power to impose on them either these or any other.'<sup>2</sup> But unlike today, the independency of the local church was not seen as permitting only at best an optional co-operation with other local churches. Rather each local church's relation with the local churches of the same faith and order was to be governed, as we have seen, by the same care as was to be exercised towards its members.

Here, I suggest, we are in a different world of theological thinking. Not pragmatic co-operation but that *care* which is of the essence of Christian love is to be the motivating principle of inter-church association. Such care is not optional. It is the law, the principle of our near relation in Christ. That is to say it flows from and is an expression of our union with Christ, the head of the Church.

The second reason given by the founders of the Abingdon Association for inter-church communion shows how the law of love is seen as applying both within the local church and the churches in association. As a main ground for communion within the local church 'is to keep each other pure and clear the profession of the gospel from scandal which cannot be done unless orderly walking churches be owned orderly and disorderly churches be orderly disowned, even as [just as] disorderly walking members of a particular church [would be disowned], yea, the reason is more full in respect of the greater scandal by not witnessing against the defection of a church or churches.' In other words, as it is the loving thing to do to watch over each other in a local church, so churches in association should and must watch over each other in order to keep each other pure and to clear the profession of the gospel from scandal.

Again we are, I suggest, today in another world for we commonly understand the independency of the local church as precluding any interference in the affairs of an associated church, however scandalous its state may have become. 'You cannot interfere' is the standard recipe for doing nothing when the honour of Christ and love of the brethren demand that something should be done! But our Particular Baptist fathers did not reason like this, rather the reverse: '*For the proof of their love to all saints, particular church communion being never appointed as a restraint of our love which should be manifest itself to all the churches.*'

Interestingly, it is only with the fourth of the six scripture reasons advanced by the founders of the Abingdon Association that we arrive at anything like our modern co-operative principle for association. 'The work of God wherein all the churches are concerned together may be the more easily and prosperously carried on by a combination of prayers and endeavours.' But there is this

significant difference, namely that co-operation is viewed as co-operation in the work of God in which *all* the churches are concerned together. In other words, co-operation was not seen in terms of doing together what we cannot do separately but in terms of co-operation in the work of God in which all the churches are concerned together already. (How this understanding of inter-church relations was worked out we shall see later.)

I trust that I have advanced sufficient evidence in support of my first proposition to demonstrate its truth. While we have in general rediscovered Calvinistic Baptist theology we have not yet rediscovered the ecclesiology of Particular Baptists in the formative years 1640-1660, when Particular Baptist churches were first founded in considerable numbers. It seems to me that there are a number of reasons why this is so.

**1. We are the heirs of the 19th century concept of voluntary association.** Voluntary associations became the order of the day in the 19th century. Membership was open to those who shared the same enthusiasm, whether for Christian missions or the Temperance movement. This voluntarism has affected church life to a profound extent, with the result that we tend to think of association in voluntaristic terms: desirable but *not* an obligatory outworking of our doctrine of the church.

**2. We are bedevilled by individualism.** Many of us bemoan it at local church level for we are plagued by those who in the name of Christian liberty do what is right in their own eyes. But few of us are willing to recognise that the same plague afflicts our churches in their relationships with other churches: every church doing what is right in its own eyes without regard to the communion of the churches.

**3. We fear the power of denominationalism.** Many of our members and a not inconsiderable number of our churches have come out of doctrinally mixed denominations, sometimes at great personal or corporate cost. We are understandably suspicious of associating with other churches for fear of landing back into a situation from which we are glad to be free. So in the autonomy of the local church, often understood in isolationistic terms, we see our salvation. Yet meanwhile many of our churches suffer divisions and experience failure of leadership with sad results for the cause of Christ generally.

**4. Many of us are the victims of 'reaction theology'.** We rightly react against unbiblical error as we see it but do we ask ourselves often enough whether our reaction always and inevitably leads to a firmer grasp of biblical truth? For example, our reaction against doctrinal error in mixed denominations may very well lead us into an unbiblical isolation in none. And so we become part of the tragic pattern of fragmentation which is so much a feature of the present day.

## **Proposition 2**

**Until we rediscover the ecclesiology of the early Particular Baptists we are unlikely to experience the vitality and richness of their associational life.**

The early Particular Baptists had a distinctive ecclesiology which meant that at the very beginning of their emergence as a group of churches in the British Isles they were able to develop associations of churches in various parts of the United Kingdom.

We need then to examine the ways in which associations functioned and the matters with which they were concerned in order to appreciate the outworking of their theology in practice.

**1. The functioning of associations.** The associations were not, except in the case of Ireland, national bodies. They began as regional associations within reasonably circumscribed geographical areas. Within Berkshire in the case of the Abingdon Association 1652, South Wales 1650, the Midlands 1655. They began small. The Abingdon Association was initiated by three churches – Henley, Reading and Abingdon, the South Wales by three churches – Ilston, Hay and Llanharan, and the Midland Association by six.

Each church in an association was required to send messengers to each general meeting. These took place at two or three month intervals, which was remarkable given the difficulties of travel. Failure to send messengers earned a collective rebuke from the associated churches. For example the twentieth general meeting of the Abingdon Association which met on the 14th of July, 1658 sent a 'loving epistle' to the Oxford church, as their messenger had three times arrived excessively late. Scriptures appealed to included Romans 12:11 and Titus 2:14.<sup>3</sup>

The decisions of the messengers were communicated to each church in the association by the messenger or messengers of the particular sending church and also by correspondence. Great care was taken to explain any position arrived at and to give scriptural reasons for that position. When positions were explained and agreed to in each church this fact was communicated to the next general meeting of the Association. For example the fourth general meeting of the Abingdon Association meeting on the 16th and 17th of January 1653 recorded the agreement of (the by now five) churches in the Association to this arrangement.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that the intention was that each church should be actively involved and that the voice of each church should be heard and weighed.

Between meetings of the Association contact was maintained by correspondence. Arrangements were also made with the approval of the associated

churches for gifted brethren to visit the churches between each general meeting. For example, at an association meeting at Tatsworth, several churches agreed to delegate two gifted men to visit the various churches. It was also resolved that churches able to release men to help elsewhere should do so.<sup>5</sup> In this way the life of the association was strengthened and the weaker churches especially were encouraged and helped.

Each associated church was required to send an account of its spiritual state to each general meeting of the association. This was with a view to promoting prayer, and to enable the associated messengers to discern where help was needed. As early as the fifth general meeting of the Abingdon Association in April, 1653, it was agreed that 'such churches as want [lacked] gifted brethren to hold forth the Word among them should make the same known to the rest of the churches or, at least to [such] church or churches as in probability may be most able to help them that help might be afforded them accordingly'.<sup>6</sup> An example of the help provided to weaker churches is the case of the church at Newbury. This church applied to join the Abingdon Association at its twentieth general meeting, the 14th of July, 1658. The church's letter not only signified the desire of that church to be received into association but also 'the great need and earnest desire of that church to be better supplied by gifted brethren for the holding forth of the Word'.<sup>7</sup> The messengers of the churches responded to this plea by appealing to the church at Andover to help out. To facilitate this they commissioned a certain Mr Weden to help at the Andover church in order to release a preacher there. They also wrote letters to other nearby churches appealing for help.<sup>8</sup>

**2. Church Planting.** The clearest evidence of this is to be seen in the action of the London Particular Baptists in sending John Miles and Thomas Proud to Wales in 1649. When in the high summer of 1649 Miles and his friend had encountered the Calvinistic Baptists meeting at the Glazier's Hall, Broad Street, London, as they later recorded, they found that they had arrived 'immediately after our brethren there had kept a day to seek the Lord that he would send labourers into the dark corners and parts of the land'.<sup>9</sup> Having presumably been baptised as believers by immersion on this visit, Miles and Proud were commissioned to return to Glamorgan to gather 'a company or society of people holding forth and practising the doctrine, worship, order and discipline of the gospel according to the primitive institution'.<sup>10</sup>

For Miles, as for the London Particular Baptists, the order of the church demanded, according to their understanding of the New Testament the practice of believer's baptism and the restriction of the membership of the local church to baptised believers. As a result of his labours and those of his associates four congregations came into being in South and West Wales. The organisation of the mother church at Ilston in the Gower peninsula reflected Miles' concern to build a united fellowship from a widely scattered congregation which numbered 43 by October 1650. Every third Sunday the whole congregation met together at Ilston. On other Sundays they met in three separate district house groups. Each

group had a week-day meeting. As Dr B. R. White observes 'Each week-day meeting was intended to build a close knit fellowship with high standards of discipleship where the brethren "shall constantly enquire concerning the condition and conversation of every of the brethren and sisters and take special care to counsel, admonish, exhort and faithfully to reprove one another".'<sup>11</sup>

A full church meeting was held at Ilston every third Wednesday when in addition to business two or three brethren should preach or 'exercise their gifts in private before the church' to train those gifted for preaching. They had to do that before they were allowed to go forth to preach. (This exercise was frequently termed prophesying on the basis of 1 Cor 14:3-4.) Freedom was given at this private meeting of the church not only to recognised preachers but also to others 'that no brethren be hindered to speak when the Lord shall immediately be moved thereunto'.<sup>12</sup>

As the church grew in numbers various changes were made in its organisation which show that when groups of believers came into being in different districts over a widely scattered area such as this, they were not quickly hived off to form small struggling independent churches without the gifts needed to maintain proper church state, i.e. an orderly functioning church life.<sup>13</sup> It was recognised that since distance prevented many members from meeting at Ilston every Lord's Day they should meet in their respective districts, but these groups were part of a larger whole, and benefited thereby. Dr White has fully documented the work of John Miles in promoting fellowship within and between the churches in South and West Wales.<sup>14</sup>

**3. Church Order.** The leaders of the Particular Baptist Associations were concerned as we have seen to maintain an orderly walking of the churches by the same rule of the Word of God and to encourage the development and support of spiritually gifted pastors. We must ask how this worked out in practice.

Through their messengers the churches took and shared counsel together. For example, at the 13th general meeting of the Abingdon Association, 11th of January 1656, the messengers answered two questions proposed by the church at Reading, concerning how to discern genuine conversions, and what to do about mixed marriages.<sup>15</sup> Other questions raised and dealt with concerned the laying on of hands at baptism, the day on which the Sabbath was to be observed, pre-marital sexual intercourse by an engaged couple, the recognition and appointment of elders, the paying of tithes to ministers of the established church, the swearing of oaths and so on. When the Scriptures had been searched and a common mind on the issue had been arrived at the result was communicated in writing to the various churches in the association for discussion in church meetings. Sometimes a church would raise points in connection with the counsel received. Then, if necessary, at the next general meeting of the Association the counsel was either amplified or otherwise amended. Since general meetings were frequent there was a constant sharing of

counsel between the churches with the result that a common mind was achieved on many an issue which could be divisive if left untouched.

Counsel was also asked and given as to the wisdom or otherwise of forming a new church from an existing one. For example, ‘The messengers of the church at Kensworth did by the appointment of that church desire the advice of the rest of the messengers touching their standing still as one church or dividing by consent and to that end gave them information of the state of that church so far as concerned that matter.’<sup>16</sup>

The messengers were also sometimes asked to arbitrate when a dispute arose in a local church, for example when there were personal disputes,<sup>17</sup> or actual division.<sup>18</sup> It was assumed that membership in the association committed a church to orderly walking and that where this was lacking it was incumbent on the churches acting collectively through their messengers to attempt to bring that church back to a settled and peaceful state. Should this ultimately fail to take place then disorderly churches could by the association be ‘orderly disowned’ – that is excommunicated from the association.

### Conclusions

It is plain that today we are far removed from this kind of inter-church relationship. We do not find it though we might look for it. So we need to ask how reading the same Bible as we do, the early Particular Baptist churches arrived at such a radically different ecclesiology. To what particular text or passages did they make their appeal? The 1646 printing of the *1644 Confession of Faith*, article 47 when describing each particular congregation as a compact and knit city in itself, went on to state: ‘Yet they are all to walk by one and the same rule and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.’<sup>19</sup> Among the Scriptures cited were 1 Cor 4:17; 14:33,36; Eph 2:12,19; 1 Tim 3:15; 6:13-14; Acts 15:2-3; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1,4.

An analysis of these passages shows that they bear on a dispute regarding the terms of church communion involving the church at Jerusalem and the church at Antioch, the Spirit led outcome of which was communicated to the churches as a whole (Acts 15:22-35). They also show the financial commitment of the churches of Asia Minor and Europe proper to the relief of the poor saints of Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1,4). Other texts cited were understood as meaning that there was a common teaching among the churches which centred upon both doctrine and ethics (1 Cor 4:17; 14:33,36). 2 Thess 2:15 and 3:6 could also have been appealed to but were not.

We should ask ourselves this question. Do we want to recover today the genius of the associational life of the early Particular Baptists? And if we do not we need to ask ourselves another question – why not? If, however, we do how

should we go about doing so? Let me make some suggestions. First within an area where there is a reasonable proximity of several churches to each other, let there be a coming together to search the Scriptures on the subject of interdependency. Let this be undertaken seriously, in the fear of the Lord, and with a view to walking by the same rule in love for each other.

Secondly, let there be a sharing of concerns, the state of the individual churches, issues which arise in the life of our churches, the seeking of God's face for a reviving work of his Spirit.

Thirdly, let there be the showing of practical love by the stronger churches, strengthening the weak and the weaker being willing to admit weakness and to receive help.

Fourthly, let there be a sustained effort to plant churches in areas in which as yet there is no gospel witness by the sending forth of gifted men properly and adequately trained and supported.

Fifthly, let the life of associations if they are to come into being, begin small rather than concentrating on organising a national body which in practice is often remote and felt to be removed from the ongoing life of the local church.<sup>20</sup>

Sixthly, let there be a giving of attention to the best ways of encouraging the development and providing for the training of ministerial gift.

It is my deep conviction that we cannot continue as we are — fragmented, lacking a truly common purpose and so often shackled by an isolationism which I am personally convinced is not to be found in the New Testament. Every church doing what is right in its own eyes without loving concern for the life of the churches is as reprehensible as an individual believer doing his own thing. Our present situation is I believe a disgrace and a positive hindrance to the furtherance of the gospel. May God guide us then. If we love the churches, and Christ loves them, surely he will give us the wisdom that we need in these difficult and confusing days.

The substance of this paper was presented at the Carey Ministers Conference, January 1988. The cassette is available from Carey Recordings, 361 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 0BD. (88 CMC 05 £1.95 including postage.)

<sup>1</sup> B. R. White (ed.), *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*. Part 3. The Abingdon Association (Baptist Historical Society, London, 1974), pp. 126-127. (Spellings in this and the following quotations have been modernised.)

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Crosby, *History of the English Baptists* (London, 1738), Vol. 1, Appendix 2, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> White, *op. cit.* p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Ilston Church Book, quoted B. R. White 'John Miles and the Structures of the Calvinistic Baptist Mission to South Wales, 1649-1660' in J. Mansel John (ed.) *Welsh Baptist Studies* (Cardiff, 1976), p. 36.

(Continued on p. 10)

# Testings, Temptations and Tribulations

## Welcome Friends!

by Gary Phillips

If you ever use the J. B. Phillips' version of Scripture in your study of the New Testament, you cannot help but be struck by his graphic 'translation' of the Epistles. His excellent paraphrase of James 1:2, from which my subtitle is pirated, is particularly striking. The verse reads in full 'When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your life my brother don't resent them as intruders but welcome them as friends'. It will be my purpose in this brief article to examine the subject of Christian trials, and in developing my theme I propose to take the general and generic term 'trials' and to break it down into what I see as its three component parts. It may perhaps help to schematise (but obviously not dogmatise) this in the following way;

Category	Origin	Purpose
Testings	God	To prove our faith
Temptations	Devil	To destroy our faith
Tribulations	World	To overthrow our faith

Of course, I am well aware that the subject is far more complex than our table suggests, and at times it is extremely difficult linguistically (both in English and Greek) to maintain such a neat distinction. But for the sake of convenience, and at the risk of oversimplification I will use this framework as a basis for this present study.

### 1 Testings

Before we tackle this rather difficult subject we should perhaps pause for a moment and say something about Triumphalism, with its theology of glory without suffering and its 'gospel' of problem-free Christianity.

Triumphalism teaches that happiness, success, health and wealth are evidences of the 'abundant life', and these should be the right of all Christians. On the other hand, failure to obtain these benefits is indicative of some spiritual malady. I think this fairly expresses the Triumphalistic position popularised by the fringe elements of Pentecostalism and dug from the ground of non-Christian philosophies. This doctrine, if that is the right name to give it, is arrived at by the random relevance selection method of interpreting scripture.

That is, by arbitrarily taking texts from their biblical contexts to prove or support a particular viewpoint, thus making the Bible say what they want it to say.

This section is written as a corrective to this devious and deviant teaching.

The Bible clearly establishes the fact that God (whether directly or indirectly) tests the believer. We could easily support our case with a long list of scriptures but the following three will serve to prove the point.

Eliphaz urges Job to 'despise not the chastenings of the Almighty. For he wounds but he binds up, he smites, but his hands heal' (Job 5:17,18). Hosea tells the people 'come let us return to the Lord for he has torn, that he may heal us, he has stricken, and he will bind up' (Hos 6:1). Isaiah tells us of 'the day when the Lord binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow' (Is 30:26).

I am sure that we can all draw from our many personal experiences to bear out the truth of these scriptures.

For instance, how many of us have at some time or other known what it is for God to withdraw his face (not his grace) from us? (Ps 30:7; 69:17), or who is there among us who has not felt God's hand heavy upon them? (Ps 32:4; 38:2), or what believer is there who has not been tried by fire? (1 Pet 1:7).

To my mind, there are two possible attitudes to these rather dark and strange providences. They will either cause us to cry Why? (response) or Why me? (reaction). The latter is, strictly speaking, sub-Christian, for it arises out of rebellion and resentment. It is to charge God with being unfair and unreasonable in his treatment of us. It is to question his rule and government in our lives. It is to deny his wisdom and love in the exercise of his providence. It is a failure to see that 'Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face' (William Cowper).

On the other hand, the former is the voice of request and reflection. It is to ask oneself; what is God trying to teach me through this unpleasant experience? To what is he drawing my attention? Is there a warning to heed? a sin to forsake? a command to obey? a direction to follow?

What is the purpose of God in testings? Testings are an integral and inescapable part of our calling as children of God. They are specifically designed to prove, reprove and improve, to train, restrain and constrain in order to promote spirituality, maturity and humility, in a word to make us Christlike. They should be seen as 'means of grace' and helps brought in alongside the believer to challenge his faith, develop his character and deepen his commitment. Testings can take many forms including infirmities, afflictions, adversity and hardship. But there may be some who, on reading this will say to themselves 'Surely, this cannot be consistent with a loving and caring Father'. My answer is simple: it is because he loves and cares for us so much that he will use any means whatsoever to shape us into the image of his Son. Such is the testimony of a shrewd and perceptive old Puritan when he wrote 'I have gained more by my sickness than by many a sermon'. It is a truth that caused Horatius Bonar to pen:

Choose Thou for me my friends,  
My sickness or my health  
Choose Thou my cares for me  
My poverty or wealth.

and one which constrained Faber to write:

Ill that he blesses is most good  
And unblest good is ill  
And all is right that seems most wrong  
If it be his sweet will.

Our lives oftentimes resemble that of a tapestry. The backside of the cloth consists of what seems to be a mass of tangled and purposeless threads. But on the picture side a glorious picture is taken shape, perfectly designed and fashioned by a loving, wise and all-knowing Father (Rom 8:29).

Before we go on to the next section it remains for us to note the difference between discipline and punishment. God does not punish the believer, he disciplines him. The difference is important. Punishment is the pronouncement of a merciless judge, whereas discipline is the action of a tender father. The latter is punitive, the former is corrective. The one is provoked by love, the other by wrath.

## **2 Temptation**

Temptation has its origins in Satan (the tempter Matt 4:3), and he appeals to two stimuli in his attempt to seduce and induce the believer to sin. The one is external, the other internal. Internally there is the old nature (Jas 1:14, Mark 7:21-23, 1 Jn 2:16). Externally, the direct attacks of Satan (1 Thess 3:5), and his forces (Eph 6:12). However, temptation itself is not sinful. Sin is succumbing to temptation. As a line of a hymn puts it 'Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin'. Neither does God tempt us (Jas 1:13), he tests us (Gen 22:1 RSV). The difference is precisely this, the devil tempts us to sin, God tests us that we might not. Testing is 'for our good' (Heb 12:10), temptation, 'for our ruin' (1 Tim 6:9).

Although we have said that God does not tempt anyone, we should make it clear that even temptation is included in the sovereign, decretive will of God. This is a tremendous truth for us to grasp. God in his wise and providential dealings with his people superintends the details of every temptation. He determines their purpose, appoints their occasion, governs their duration and limits their severity (1 Cor 10:13). He delivers the godly out of temptation (2 Pet 2:9).

A fuller description of the divine purpose that lies behind temptation is to be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith; 'The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover to them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled, and to raise them to a

more close and consistent dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends' (Section V, 2-6).

Let me draw this section to a close with brief reference to the mechanics of temptation.

We cannot possibly come through temptation, without it affecting us in some way or other, whether it be for good or bad. The man who resists temptation not only preserves his former purity, but also adds to it by the very act of resisting sin, and by so doing *should* make the next temptation a little easier to deal with. Conversely, to yield to temptation makes the next sin easier to give in to, since it weakens the will, deadens the conscience and subtracts from the believer's purity.

### 3 Tribulations

'Tribulum' from which comes our English word tribulation is a Latin word used of a threshing instrument which separated the grain from the husks.

Tribulation is employed in scripture as an umbrella word to describe the whole range of experiences the Christian must expect in the world (2 Tim 3:12), and to which he is destined (1 Thess 3:3). It includes among other things scorn, insult, persecution, ridicule, mockery, contempt, offence, reproach and even martyrdom. The purpose of tribulations is to overthrow and nullify our faith and originates in a world that is hostile to God and his people (Gal 4:29).

Can our faith be overthrown by these experiences? Is defeat a possibility for the Christian? What does God's Word say? 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us' (Rom 8:37). Another New Testament writer states 'everyone (not just some) born of God overcomes the world' (1 Jn 5:4). Consider too, what Paul has to say in 2 Cor 4:8,9 (notice the four 'but not's').

'hard pressed on every side, but not crushed,  
perplexed, but not in despair,  
persecuted, but not abandoned  
struck down, but not destroyed' (NIV)

This is what it means to 'triumph in Christ' (2 Cor 2:14). This is true and biblical Triumphalism. Going through problems, and coming out the other side victorious, with our faith intact, not leap-frogging them, by-passing them or pretending they have gone or are not there at all.

### Conclusion

We began our study by identifying three kinds of Christian trials. Let me now draw these three strands together and with scripture as our guide, offer some practical and positive advice on how we should respond to these distressing, perplexing and often traumatic experiences.

The first strategy I would wish to put forward is this; In order for the Christian to deal effectively with trials he will need to have a working knowledge of Holy

Scripture. This is absolutely crucial and I cannot stress it enough. The believer must know his way around the Bible so that he will be able to apply the relevant scriptures to the everyday issues of the Christian life. Jesus himself clearly employed this method on the occasion of his temptation by Satan (see Luke 4:1-13 where three times, verses 4, 8, 12 he countered the devil with 'It is written').

Let me digress for a moment to make a number of recommendations to the person who sees himself as lacking in his knowledge of Scripture.

Firstly, I would recommend that he seeks out and places himself under a pastor who exercises a regular expository preaching ministry, in other words, preaching that is systematic, instructional, persuasive and applicatory in its form and presentation.

Secondly, I would encourage him to obtain a translation that is user-friendly. By user-friendly, I mean one that is readable, understandable and easy to memorise.

Thirdly, I would recommend that he uses Robert Murray M'Cheyne's excellent daily Bible reading plan in his personal and devotional study of scripture. M'Cheyne's calendar of daily readings will take him through the whole Bible once a year and the Psalms and the New Testament twice.

The second strategy is this; to deal effectively with trials the believer will need to know an ongoing supply (filling) of the Holy Spirit. Scripture commands us to be 'filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18). The reason is of course obvious. He is the one who sustains and strengthens us in times of conflict. He is the one who empowers us to resist temptation and overcome sin. He is the one who wars against the flesh (Gal 5:17). He is the Spirit of holiness, creating holiness in those whom he indwells. He is the one who enables us to keep God's laws (Ez 36:27). But let us note that 'the filling of the Holy Spirit' is not merely an experience (or for that matter a bookful of experiences), but a lifestyle lived in submission to the laws, commands and precepts of God as they are found in Holy Scripture.

The third strategy is this: if the believer is to be able to deal effectively with trials, it is essential that he lives an ordered and disciplined Christian life. The Christian is called to a life of prayer (Luke 18:1; 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18), vigilance (Mt 26:41; 1 Pet 5:8) and resistance (1 Pet 5:9; Jas 4:7). He is warned to be on his guard, and is encouraged to stand firm in the faith, be courageous and strong (1 Cor 16:13).

A word of encouragement from Charles Wesley is appropriate for my conclusion:

*(Concluded on page 26)*

# Directions for public prayer

by Earl Blackburn

Public prayer is a vital part of our meetings for worship. It is just as much a part of worship as singing, reading of Scripture and preaching. In one sense it may be more important because we are addressing Almighty God directly; we are coming before his throne and speaking to him 'face-to-face'. When any man prays publicly, he is leading the entire congregation before God. This is a gracious privilege and a solemn responsibility. Public prayer also is a means to be a blessing to God's people; therefore in order to make each of you a blessing to the entire congregation and to aid in public worship I am submitting these directions for public prayer. I am indebted to Spurgeon, Dabney and others for help in these instructions.

## *1. Let the Lord alone be the object of your prayers*

Remember you are coming into the presence of God the Lord himself. We do not pray to be seen or heard of men! Spurgeon whom I will quote frequently said:

We may aim at exciting the yearnings and aspirations of those who hear us in prayer; but every word and thought must be Godward, and only so far touching upon the people as may be needful to bring them and their wants before the Lord. Remember the people in your prayers, but do not mould your supplications to win their esteem: look up, look up with both eyes.

## *2. It goes almost without saying, seek the divine aid of the Holy Spirit because we do not know how to pray as we ought*

This does not mean we should ask the Holy Spirit audibly as we start our praying, though this would not be out of place, but rather it means we in the heart of our hearts acknowledge our need for his holy aid and we rely upon his divine assistance. This is part of what Jude meant when he said 'praying in the Spirit'. Do not trust in your fleshly ability.

## *3. Pray from your heart*

Spurgeon suggests,

If ever your whole manhood was engaged in anything, let it be in drawing near

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*continued from page 25*

From strength to strength go on;  
Wrestle and fight and pray;  
Tread all the powers of darkness down,  
And win the well fought day;  
That, having all things done,  
And all your conflicts past,  
Ye may O'ercome through Christ alone,  
And stand complete at last.

unto God in public. So pray, that by a divine attraction, you draw the whole congregation with you up to the throne of God. So pray, that by the power of the Holy Spirit resting on you, you express the desires and thoughts of every one present, and stand as the one voice for the hundreds of beating hearts which are glowing with fervour before the throne of God.

And again:

Pray as your heart dictates, under the leading of the Spirit of God, and if you are dull and heavy tell the Lord so. It will be no ill thing to confess your deadness, and bewail it, and cry for quickening; it will be real and acceptable prayer; but simulated ardour is a shameful form of lying. Never imitate those who are earnest. You know a good man who groans, and another whose voice grows shrill when he is carried away with zeal, but do not therefore moan or squeak in order to appear as zealous as they are. Just be natural the whole way through, and ask of God to be guided in it all.

*4. Come before God with praise to him and thanksgiving*

Praise him for who he is, for what he has done, is doing and shall continue to do. As the Psalmist said, 'Praise him for his mighty acts; Praise him according to his excellent greatness' (Ps 150:2). In this there are a host of things that could be said.

*5. Use Scripture frequently in your praying*

Just as the Word of God is the strength of our Christian life; so it is the strength of our praying, both public and private. Bring before God his many promises in making supplication before him. This does not mean you must string together numerous texts and make your prayer one whole reciting of the Word of God.

*6. Avoid preaching, instruction and teaching in your praying*

A place for everything and everything in its place. While there may very well be teaching, instruction etc. in our praying, because of our learning, we do *not* pray to teach, preach or vent our frustrations to the congregation. We pray to worship our God through our Lord Jesus Christ and to seek his help and blessing upon us and others.

*7. Avoid using 'cant phrases' and our pet sayings*

Praying must be more than a dozen or so clichés intermingled with several familiar and pet phrases. I was once a member of a church where a certain man, when he prayed publicly, constantly used the phrase '... move on the scene'. After a period of time you came to know what he would say and as a result hearing him pray publicly, in carrying the church before God, it became a drudgery and not a blessing.

*8. Another fault equally to be avoided in prayer is an unhallowed and sickening superabundance of endearing words*

This advice is referring to words such as 'Dear Lord', 'Blessed Lord', 'Sweet

Jesus', 'Dear God' etc. used over and over in a prayer. These and other terms of devotion must not be used as a filler when we can not think of other words to say. Charles Haddon Spurgeon puts it aptly:

The words, 'O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!' grieve us when we hear them so perpetually repeated. 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,' is a great commandment, and although the law may be broken unwittingly, yet its breach is still a sin and a very solemn one. God's name is not to be a stop-gap to make up for our want of words. Take care to use most reverently the name of the infinite Jehovah.

#### *9. Be careful about the length of your prayers*

Usually the length of our private prayers are such that we need to lengthen them. Yet *sometimes* it is so that in our public praying we may need to shorten them. In leading the entire congregation before the throne of grace, we do not want to speak a few words and sentences and stop. Nor do we want to go on and on as if we are trying to catch up on our own prayer life. If the Spirit is giving you utterance and unction, continue on as long as there is power and blessing. Be sensitive to the working of the Holy Ghost in your heart and in the congregation. Again Spurgeon has given a good word of instruction: Long prayers either consist of repetitions, or else of unnecessary explanations which God does not require; or else they degenerate into downright preachings, so that there is no difference between the praying and the preaching.

#### *10. Make an integral part of your prayer intercession and intercede specifically* Again C.H.S. hits the mark:

In downright earnestness, address yourself to intercession, and set your face towards the Lord. Plead for the supply of the great and constant needs of the church, and do not fail to urge, with devout fervour, the special requirements of the present time and audience. Let the sick, the poor, the dying, the heathen, the Jew, and all forgotten classes of people, be mentioned as they press upon your heart. Pray for your people as saints and sinners – not as if they were all saints. Mention the young and the aged; the impressed and the careless; the devout and the backsliding. Never turn to the right hand or to the left, but plough on in the furrow of real prayer. Let your confessions of sin and your thanksgivings be truthful and to the point; and let your petitions be presented as if you believed in God and had no doubt as to the efficacy of prayer:

He gives clarification and added insight to the above as follows:

There are many topics which require your attention; the church in its weakness, its backslidings, its sorrows, and its comforts; the outside world, the neighbourhood, unconverted hearers, the young people, the nation. Do not pray for all these every time, or otherwise your prayers will be long and probably uninteresting. Whatever topic shall come uppermost to your heart, let that be uppermost in your supplications.

The Greek word translated in Philippians 4:6 'requests' means 'certain and specific requests'. When we call upon our great God, we must not speak in generalities but specifically and let our 'requests be made known'.

## 11. 'Prepare your prayer'

Spurgeon gives these guidelines:

You say with astonishment, 'Whatever can you mean by that?' Well, I mean what some do not mean. The question was once discussed in a society of ministers, 'Was it right for the minister to prepare his prayer beforehand?' It was earnestly asserted by some that it was wrong; and very properly so. It was with equal earnestness maintained by others that it was right; and they were not to be gainsayed. I believe both parties to have been right. The first brethren understood by preparing the prayer, the studying of expressions, and the putting together of a train of thought, which they all said was altogether opposed to spiritual worship, in which we ought to leave ourselves in the hand of God's Spirit to be taught of him both as to matter and words. In these remarks we altogether agree; for if a man writes his prayers and studies his petitions, let him use a liturgy at once. But the brethren in opposition meant by preparation quite another thing, not the preparation of the head, but of the heart, which consists in the solemn consideration beforehand of the importance of prayer, meditation upon the needs of men's souls, and a remembrance of the promises which we are to plead; and thus coming before the Lord with a petition written upon the fleshy tables of the heart. This is surely better than coming to God at random, rushing before the throne at haphazard, without a definite errand or desire.

'I never am tired of praying,' said one man, 'because I always have a definite errand when I pray.' Brethren, are your prayers of this sort? Do you strive to be in a fit frame to lead the supplications of your people? Do you order your cause in coming before the Lord? I feel, my brethren, that we ought to prepare ourselves by private prayer for public praying. By living near to God we ought to maintain prayerfulness of spirit, and then we shall not fail in our vocal pleadings. If anything beyond this is to be tolerated, it would be the commitment to memory of the Psalms and parts of Scripture containing promises, supplications, praises, and confessions, such as may be helpful in the act of prayer.

It is said of Chrysostom, that he had learned his Bible by heart, so as to be able to repeat it at his pleasure: no wonder that he was called golden-mouthed. Now, in our converse with God, no speech can be more appropriate than the words of the Holy Ghost — 'Do as thou hast said,' will always prevail with the Most High. We counsel, therefore, the committing to memory of the inspired devotional exercises of the word of truth, and then your continued reading of the Scriptures will keep you always furnished with fresh supplications, which will be as ointment poured forth, filling the whole house of God with its fragrance, when you present your petitions in public before the Lord. Seeds of prayer thus sown in the memory will yield a constant golden harvest, as the Spirit shall warm your soul with hallowed fire in the hour of congregational prayer.

The quotations from Spurgeon and the one which follows were written primarily for men preparing for the ministry. I did not prepare this to make you self-conscious, fearful or conscientious to the point that you would not want to pray publicly. You were made as the Lord God saw fit and you must be yourself especially as you pray publicly! This was not prepared to put you in a straight-jacket or to quench the Spirit of God in you, but rather to aid you and the

congregation in coming before God in prayer in our public worship. May the Spirit of the living God continue to bless as you lead the church in public prayer!

R. L. Dabney is outstanding on the subject of public prayer. This extended quotation is taken from the *Presbyterian Church Book of Order*.

I. It seems very proper to begin the public worship of the sanctuary by a short prayer; humbly adoring the infinite majesty of the living God; expressing a sense of our distance from him as creatures, and unworthiness as sinners, and humbly imploring his gracious presence, the assistance of his Holy Spirit in the duties of his worship, and his acceptance of us through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II. Then, after singing a psalm, or hymn, it is proper that, before sermon, there should be a full and comprehensive prayer:

*First.* Adoring the glory and perfections of God as they are made known to us in the works of creation, in the conduct of providence, and in the clear and full revelation he hath made of himself in his written word.

*Second.* Giving thanks to him for all his mercies of every kind, general and particular, spiritual and temporal, common and special; above all, for Christ Jesus, his unspeakable gift, and the hope of eternal life through him.

*Third.* Making humble confession of sin, both original and actual; acknowledging and endeavouring to impress the mind of every worshipper with a deep sense of the evil of all sin, as such; as being a departure from the living God; and also taking a particular and affecting view of the various fruits which proceed from this root of bitterness — as sins against God, our neighbour and ourselves; sins in thought, in word, and in deed; sins secret and presumptuous; sins accidental and habitual. Also, the aggravations of sin, arising from knowledge, or the means of it; from distinguishing mercies; from valuable privileges; from breach of vows, etc.

*Fourth.* Making earnest supplication for the pardon of sin, and peace with God, through the blood of the atonement, with all its important and happy fruits; for the Spirit of sanctification, and abundant supplies of the grace that is necessary to the discharge of our duty; for support and comfort, under all the trials to which we are liable, as we are sinful and mortal; and for all temporal mercies that may be necessary, in our passage through this valley of tears — always remembering to view them as flowing in the channel of covenant love, and intended to be subservient to the preservation and progress of the spiritual life.

*Fifth.* Pleading from every principle warranted in Scripture; from our own necessity; the all-sufficiency of God; the merit and intercession of our Saviour; and the glory of God in the comfort and happiness of his people.

*Sixth.* Intercession for others, including the whole world of mankind; the kingdom of Christ, or his Church universal; the church or churches with which we are more particularly connected; the interest of human society in general, and in that community to which we immediately belong; all that are invested with civil authority; the ministers of the everlasting gospel; and the rising generation: with whatever else, more particular, may seem necessary, or suitable, to the interest of that congregation where divine worship is celebrated.

# Martin Luther and the Nations Today

*A review article by Erroll Hulse*

**Martin Luther, An Introduction to his Life and Work.** Bernhard Lohse. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1987. 280 pages cloth bound and high quality printing.

A permit to preach at the first Reformed conference in Malaysia was granted one day before we arrived in this country and it was only then that I was asked to give three one hour sermons on Luther. Apart from a couple of articles I had nothing with me by way of books. This was going to be a good test of my memory! While in Singapore I tried to find something on Luther but not even the most popular work by Roland Bainton was anywhere to be bought.

However on the verge of giving up I spotted the above described volume by Bernhard Lohse for which I paid 59.80 Singaporean dollars (about £15.00 and well worth the price). Bernhard Lohse is professor of Church history and Historical theology at Hamburg. He is probably ecumenical in his views and he gives away nothing about his own theological position but writes with exceptional clarity, precision, accuracy and authority. The value of Prof. Lohse's work lies also in its layout, in the way in which so much valuable information is compactly packaged under the headings which run on average of one per page.

The major sections run as follows, *Luther's World* in 20 sub-divisions including sections on The Turkish threat; The *devotio moderna* (reform movements which prepared the way for the Reformation stressing the place of devotion and prayer); Huss and the Hussites; The universities; Scholas-

ticism and Humanism.

*Questions related to Luther's life* in 23 sub-divisions including: Luther's spiritual temptations; his early lectures; his time at the Wartburg (1521-22); his marriage; the controversy about the Lord's Supper.

*Luther's Role in the Complicated Controversies of his time* in 45 sections. These include: The 95 Theses; Luther's examination by Cardinal Cajetan; The Bull threatening excommunication (1520); Thomas Muntzer; Can soldiers be saved; The Marburg Colloquy (1529); Tenderness and coarseness in Luther's personality; Luther as Reformer; The uniqueness of Luther's style; Luther as linguist (he could write and speak fluently in Latin and German).

*Luther's Writings* considered in 45 sections. Especially useful is the section surveying the wide range of types of literature used by Luther (pp. 102-109). He wrote with extraordinary versatility: Bible translation, commentaries, sermons, treatises, hymns and prayers, prefaces for other authors, poems and an unusually extensive correspondence addressed to all sorts and conditions of people, from popes and princes to his own Katie and their children, but also and especially to other reformers and pastors. Untypically Lohse is disappointingly too brief on the commentaries. Altogether in his whole career as professor in the University of Wittenburg (1512-1546), Luther expounded 13 books of scripture. A review of these would be esteemed

from someone thoroughly conversant with the whole.

*Aspects and Problems of Luther's Theology* discussed in nine sections. Especially valuable are the sections on the Authority of Scripture; Ecclesiology; Church and State; and Luther's view of History. The section on Luther's Reformation Breakthrough is disappointing.

*The History of the Interpretation of Luther.* What others have made of Luther is set before the reader, among many there are Zinzendorf, Leopold Ranke (who provided dynamic stimulus to scholarly Luther research during the last century beginning as a young student), Albrecht Ritschl, Harnack (who recognised the vital place of *The Bondage of the Will* and that alongside the love of God stands the wrath of God), Karl Holl (1866-1926) who brought Luther research to a higher plane and thus into a new era, although he had his own definite limitations, Barth and Ebeling.

Most interesting is the description of the Roman Catholic scholar Joseph Lortz who was liberated by the conflict with the Nazis to adopt a completely new and well researched image of Luther which has led to a revolution in Roman Catholic circles with regard to the Reformer. Luther can no longer be dismissed as an uncouth drunken lout. Lortz was merciless in his criticism of the late medieval church. We should not jump to the conclusion that Catholics are falling over backwards to become Lutherans or that the Curia views the new trend with anything but distaste. We can be sure however that any serious study of Luther is likely to result in much good.

Finally Lohse brings us right up to date with regard to the availability today of Luther's writings (in 55 volumes),

available indices, and current journals devoted to Luther research.

My choice of themes for the three sessions at the first Reformed Conference in Malaysia was: 1. Luther the man and what God accomplished through him; 2. Luther's conversion as the dynamic touchstone of the Reformation; and 3. Luther as Reformer from 1517-1521.

Such was the power of the work of the Holy Spirit in Luther that he is an immense source of spiritual invigoration for those who study his life. For instance his writing style reveals a man enlivened by the truth: a very great humour, a marvellous imagination, a capacity to ridicule the ludicrous, an ironic view of himself, a complete absence of pride, a beautiful rhythm and timbre of language, rich imagery and relevant illustrations. All are so original and free from the artificial stylistic devices that were common among the 16th century Humanist writers.

We should be cautious in the use of the word 'Reformed' today and apply it sparingly since it is possible to be orthodox like set concrete, stolidly and lovelessly traditional; a million light years away from this man who without intending it, or desiring it, in a short space of time fell out cataclysmically with the Curia of his day as did his Lord in about the same length of time with the Sanhedrin. For our sake Jesus did not survive the storm. The excommunicated Luther never expected that he would survive since Huss had not. Yet through the Princes of Germany Jesus protected him, and then increasingly ensured his survival and safety by means of a populace liberated by the momentous rediscovery of the grandeur of the Gospel. Let us pray fervently for a mighty spiritual impulse which will liberate the nations of our day as they were made free by the truth in the days of Martin Luther.

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