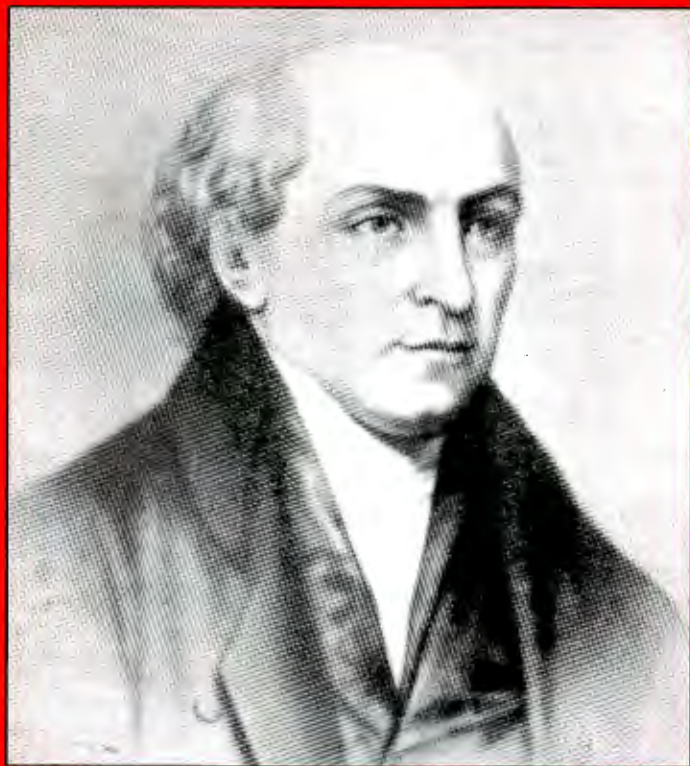

REFORMATION TODAY



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1991

124

Contributors in this issue: Jim van Zyl is an associate editor who teaches in the Kalk Bay Bible Institute, Cape Town, South Africa. D A Carson, whose book, *How Long, O Lord?* is reviewed, is professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois where Tom Nettles, also an associate editor, is teaching Church History. Sir Fred Catherwood is a Member of the European Parliament and Timothy George is dean of Beeson School of Divinity, Birmingham, Alabama and the author of *The Theology of the Reformers* (see RT 122).

The Carey Conference for Ministers

January 8-10, 1992

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire

Theme: An All-Round Ministry

Programme

| | 9.30 a.m. | 11.30 a.m. | 2.30 p.m. | 4.30 p.m. | 8.00 p.m. |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| Wednesday 8th Jan. | | | Registration | Spurgeon – a preacher's progress <i>Geoff Thomas</i> | William Carey and the missionary vision <i>Daniel Webber</i> |
| Thursday 9th Jan. | Hebrews – a better way <i>Richard Gaffin</i> | Spurgeon and his social concern <i>David Kingdon</i> | Seminar <i>The opening doors of Eastern Europe – will we respond as we should?</i> | Prayer & Share | Spurgeon and his gospel invitations <i>Erroll Hulse</i> |
| Friday 10th Jan. | Hebrews – a better way <i>Richard Gaffin</i> | An All-Round Ministry <i>Bill Hughes</i> | | | |

Fee: £49.50 per person (£10 deposit on application).

Write to: Pastor Erroll Hulse, 75 Woodhill Road, LEEDS LS16 7BZ
Telephone enquiries: John Rubens, 0325 380232 (Day); 0325 353634 (Evening)

We are particularly looking forward to the ministry of Prof Richard Gaffin, our guest speaker from America. The year 1792 is very significant in the history of modern missions as we will be reminded by the pioneering labours of William Carey. The subject of responsibility for missionary endeavour is more relevant than ever. 1892 is the year of the passing of C H Spurgeon. Spurgeon's preaching was the hub of an all-round ministry. We anticipate rich inspiration drawn from his life and preaching.

Subscribers please note details on page 32.

Front cover: William Carey

Editorial

The Transcendence of God

Jim van Zyl shows that gods are multiplying rapidly. Any politician, leader or pop singer is free to take out of the Bible nice pieces and, leaving the rest, proclaim his faith. But that faith is no faith at all if it is not faith in the Triune God of Scripture. In his conclusion Jim van Zyl reminds us that all we think or do is shaped by our view of God. Bob Letham was emphasising the same in his article *The God we Proclaim* (see RT 122). If we have a wrong view of God's transcendence we can become cold, clinical and cruel in our attitudes and ultimately in our actions. If we believe that God has no love for lost souls we certainly will not love them either. Don Carson (see review article *The Meaning of Suffering and Evil*) devotes a chapter to the Suffering of God. He acknowledges the danger of over-reaction against the cold prevailing doctrine of the impassibility of God and footnotes titles of books which have gone over the top. Nevertheless Don Carson himself sharply disagrees with the many fine theologians who uphold impassibility.

'The methodological problem with the argument for divine impassibility is that it selects certain texts of Scripture, namely those that insist on God's sovereignty and changelessness, constructs a theological grid on the basis of those selected texts, and then uses this grid to filter out all other texts, in particular those that speak of God's emotions. These latter texts nicely filtered out are then labelled "anthropomorphisms" and are written off.' Of course there is the factor of incomprehensibility but at the same time we have to reckon with what we deeply know and experience from God who is light and who is love.

This subject leads to another which is very well handled in Don Carson's book, namely, what he calls Compatibilism. Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility are compatible. Jim Packer parallels the two using the term *antinomy* to illustrate the issue. Antinomy is illustrated in light, since light consists of rays and particles, but rays and particles are not the same. From discussion with him I could see that Don Carson has reservations about the term antinomy. He prefers the word *tension* and now has developed this further term, *compatibility*. It is a helpful term. The Bible describes God as both transcendent and personal. Both propositions are true. They are wholly compatible. Hence *compatibilism*.

What have we to offer the post-Marxist world?

What should we offer the post-Marxist cosmos of the disintegrating empire of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, especially those countries where we have personal contacts such as Poland, (see RT 123), Yugoslavia, and especially Romania?

A six day conference on evangelism in post-Marxist situations, sponsored by the Lausanne Committee, heard cautious descriptions from 40 Christian leaders. It was reported that when the doors flew open to the Soviet Union, about 200 religious groups (mostly American and European) 'invaded'. By no means were all helpful. Steve Weber, who researched for nine months, said that 70% of those interviewed were less than happy with the help they received from the West. He said, 'Some of the Americans want to hold mass evangelism services that the Soviet Christians think are entertainment shows.' Soviets were made to feel 'inferior'. Now Russian Christians are looking for help from Asia, Africa and Latin America, not financial aid, but for a more effective evangelism which is more culturally relevant. (*Evangelism Today*, 320, Ashley Down Road, Bristol BS7 9BQ, October 91.)

In the light of the above, the approach taken by MERF (see *News*) for Arabic cultures deserves our notice and our prayers.

Our rich theological inheritance

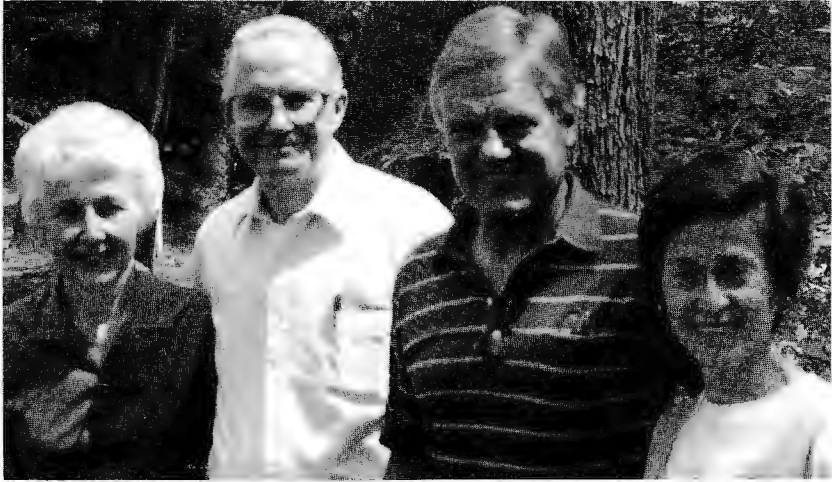
During the last 30 years we have been blessed with a renewal in theology which has taken us back to the confessional standards of the Reformation. It is paramount that the advantages of our rich theological heritage also benefit the churches in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Tom Nettles' article could hardly be more relevant especially his description of the historical framework and the section, *The Axe to the Root*. The truth of the bondage of the will and of justification by faith are still foundational.

We have, they have not, we must

Sir Fred Catherwood describes well the tremendous sociological, economic and political differences between the free world and the Soviet Union which we need to digest. His heading is very thought provoking in another way, which is simply that we have vast resources of Reformed expository literature. The Soviets have nothing. What are we doing to meet the difference? Should we not now be concentrating much more on meeting the needs of other languages rather than multiplying titles in English? I say that as one who dearly loves Puritan books. I greatly prize my library. It is my workshop. I treasure thoughtfully selective reprints of rare old books as well as new books by contemporary authors such as the one reviewed in these pages, but it troubles me intensely that the pastors of Russia and Eastern Europe are so poorly provided for.

Signs of decline in the Western churches

The editorial in the last issue 'Signs of decline in the West,' provoked some correspondence. It was not my purpose to attempt to describe all the signs. Obviously effete evangelism which lacks a robust call to repentance is a bad sign. Timothy George in his article *Carey Today* quotes Billy Graham's five concepts which may be taken as hallmarks for mission. But if evangelism is



On the left are Dr Robert Lescelius and his wife Dolly. Dr Lescelius teaches in the Georgia Baptist College, Atlanta and organises the Maranatha Bible Conferences and camps which have been running for 26 years. The news organ for Maranatha is 'Grace Gazette', PO Box J, Worthington, PA 16262, USA. On the right are Richard Burr and his wife. Robert and Richard have a fervent interest in the subject of revival. From a study of the work on revival of the late Edwin Orr, Richard notes that Orr's researchers observe that every revival begins in a movement of prayer. It was the editor's privilege to minister at the Maranatha camp this year (see RT 123 p.14).

watered down to mere decisionism it is self-defeating. While travelling in America in September I was told of a church to which 62 referrals were made from a Billy Graham crusade. Not one of the 62 even made an attempt at church going. We can never take theology for granted.

One reader has written to say that he believes that a principal sign of decline in evangelical churches is the lack of ability to engage contemporary society in evangelism in a meaningful way. The churches are shut up to themselves in a kind of evangelical monasticism.

Another reader calls for contemporaneity as follows: 'We must note our indebtedness to the past. The Holy Spirit has illuminated his saints in past centuries and there is much for us to learn. To believe that we can create new theological structures today without reference to the past is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit in past ages. Much good has undoubtedly been done by reprinting old classics and recovering the theology of the Reformers and their successors.

There are, however, dangers associated with immersing oneself in the literature of past centuries:

1. To claim that, theologically speaking, there is “nothing new under the sun”, or to make a virtue of having no new ideas is to slur both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

It is a slur to the Scriptures because such an attitude suggests that the message of the Bible is so limited that it has already been exhausted by earlier generations of scholars. The truth is that the Scriptures can never be exhausted or comprehensively apprehended by man. There are always new depths to be plumbed and new perspectives to be explored.

It is a slur to the Holy Spirit because it suggests that he is no longer active in the Church today. The truth is that there is always fresh light breaking out from the Word of God, under the illumination of the Spirit. The Spirit has been at work in the Church in the past and he is still at work today, leading his people into all truth. Today we have more tools and resources for biblical scholarship than ever before. Is this not a God-given gift, to be acknowledged and received with gratitude?

2. If we are immersed largely or exclusively in older Christian literature, there is a danger that we will confuse ancient piety with ancient culture and forms. This can happen very subtly. It is manifested in preachers wearing out-moded clothing, using out-dated language and thinking in ways which are of limited relevance to the modern age. Sermons are preached which could have been preached word for word (including the applications) 200 or more years ago. Is this really faithfulness to orthodox truth, or a form of cultural irrelevance which leads people to dismiss the gospel as an obsolete relic of the past?

We need to be immersed in modern culture and translate eternal and unchanging truths into modern relevant applications. There are fresh challenges to the gospel today in the form of modern culture and lifestyle and modern heresies. Our evangelism and discipleship must address these challenges in a way which is appropriate to the modern day.

Perhaps some searching questions could be asked. “What proportion of the books on your shelves were written in the last fifty years?” Bearing in mind the explosion of biblical scholarship in recent times, one should expect that a significant proportion, particularly of biblical commentaries, will be modern works. “What forms of evangelism and discipleship used in your church are particularly relevant to modern culture and lifestyle? What theological literature (books and journals) do you read to keep abreast of the latest theological developments?” Perhaps most penetrating of all: “Is the Reformed movement producing a new generation of leaders who will go forward into the next century, presenting biblical truth in a powerful and relevant form? Or are the journals, books and leaders of our movement stuck somewhere back in an earlier century? Are they reminiscing on the spirituality of the past without engaging in the far more challenging task of seeking the Spirit’s help to shape the spirituality and church growth of the future?” ’

The Transcendence of God

by Jim van Zyl

Knowing God

1. *The highest knowledge*

When Paul writes to the Colossians, he reassures them that high on his prayer list for them is that they will grow 'in the *knowledge* of God' (Col 1:10). And when another apostle, Peter, writes to fellow Christians, he like Paul, prays that, 'Grace and peace be yours in abundance through *the knowledge of God* and of Jesus our Lord' (2 Pet 1:2).

It is clear therefore, from these and many other passages in Scripture that the knowledge of God is of the very highest priority for the Christian's spiritual growth and restoration to God's image which was so severely damaged when Adam fell into sin.

On January 7, 1855, Charles Haddon Spurgeon started his morning sermon as follows: 'I believe . . . that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.'¹

Why did Spurgeon put it so strongly? Because as he points out, it improves, expands and ennobles the mind and life of the Christian. It is, he says, 'a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity'.² There is indeed no higher study that a Christian, or any man, can undertake.

To understand and grasp something of him, the greatest being, the omnipotent creator of our planet, galaxy and the estimated 100 million more galaxies; to grasp with our intellects as well as with our renewed hearts what God gave us when we became new creatures in Christ; something of his omniscience, his holiness, his nature, his attributes, his love, his fatherly care, is to enrich and to expand our knowledge, awe, love and worship of God immensely.

A cursory examination of the sermons heard and books read by evangelical Christians today, indeed for several decades, reveals the mediocrity of the way the knowledge of God is handled. We have a vast amount of sermons and Christian literature on 'Obedience', on 'Stewardship', 'Victorious Living', 'Full

Surrender', 'The Gifts of the Spirit', 'Fellowship', 'Celebrating Christ', and a range of other similar subjects. This is not a cynical criticism. We do need them.

But we are poverty-stricken in that which ought to be at the very heart of our study and devotions, namely our love for God and our knowledge of God. Can there be anything more important than the cry of the psalmist: 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God' (Ps 42:1,2)?

I would suggest that the shallowness and mediocrity in today's Christian Church, in our sermons, in our worship, in our evangelism, in our daily Christian living is in direct proportion to our knowledge of the living God. As A W Tozer points out: 'The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of him.'³

2. God, the centre of all knowledge

At the centre of all Christian wisdom, theology, holy living and service lies the knowledge of the person of the being of God. All the doctrines and theology of the Christian faith are linked and connected to each other via the central core of the person of God. They are all subsumed in and through him.

So when you examine the doctrine of man you discover that men and women are made in God's image; sin is only evil because of God's holiness and laws; the covenant made with the people of God in both the Old Testament and New Testament only exists because God said, 'I will be your God and you will be my people.'

The Law of God is only absolute, final and authoritative because its origin is God himself; in the Old Testament the people of God had their origin in Abraham, became the 12 tribes, escaped from Egypt, conquered large parts of Canaan, only because God was with them. It was his grace, his power, his protection, his provision, his forgiveness and his guidance that formed and moulded them. It was only because God went before them that they conquered their foes and settled in Canaan.

In the New Testament, Christ's incarnation was directly due to God's so loving the world that he sent his only begotten Son to take on human flesh. In the atonement it is God who is propitiated, it is God who raised Jesus from the dead . . . and so one could go on. The fruit of the Spirit, grace, forgiveness, redemption, election, predestination, glorification, the final judgment, the Church; all are from God, through God and to God's glory.

Herman Bavinck sums it up well: 'Everything is treated with God as centre and starting point. Under him all things are subsumed. To him all things are traced back. It is ever God and God alone whose glory in creation and redemption, in

nature and in grace, in the world and in the church (we) must meditate on and describe. It is the knowledge of him, of him alone, which (we) must display and show forth.'

3. Which God?

This may seem to be a strange question. Surely we have moved beyond stone idols and graven images? However, the answer sadly is not so simple.

Many years ago my wife and I invited some Mormon missionaries into our home. For some time we all used the word 'God' in our discussion. It was only after in-depth discussion and questioning that I realised that while we were all using the same word 'God', the Mormon's definition of God was totally different from the orthodox, evangelical definition and concept of the God of Scripture. But how does this affect us today?

We are faced in this last part of the 20th century with a great deal of confusion over who God is, and what God is like. Perhaps more than you realise. Let me give you a few examples.

Firstly, there are the old and new cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, Theosophy, Christian Science, Baha'ism, Herbert Armstrong's church (have you ever seen a free copy of *The Plain Truth* in your local café or shopping complex?). Then we have The Children of God, the Unification Church of the Rev. Myung Moon (the 'Moonies'), Hare Krishna and others. Each one has a different concept and definition of God. I will refer to the New Age Movement later.

Secondly, not many Evangelicals seem to be aware of the worldwide revival of the Muslim faith. As one reads magazines or watches TV documentaries it is becoming increasingly common to hear the biblical God equated with Allah. 'We both worship the same God', is an increasingly popular slogan when talking to or evangelising Muslims. Such an equation is totally incorrect.

Thirdly, in a recently published book, *The Agony of Deceit* by M Horton (Moody Press, Chicago, 1990), it has been revealed for the first time – carefully, graciously, objectively, but with firm evidence, that a number of so-called evangelical TV evangelists and preachers, who have the audience of some 500 million viewers per week have strayed from the biblical concept of God!

But with reviewers of the calibre of J I Packer, Jay Adams and contributions from men like Dr C Everett Koop (the former Surgeon-General of the United States), and Dr Walter Martin, probably the doyen of evangelical experts on cults, as well as other respected orthodox Evangelicals, they marshal a formidable amount of evidence. It appears, sadly, that their allegations are built on a very strong foundation. Here are a few examples.

Kenneth Copeland: ‘You need to realize that you are not a spiritual schizophrenic – half-God and half-Satan – you are all God. When I read in the Bible where he (Jesus) says, “I Am”, I (Kenneth Copeland) say, “Yes, I Am too.”’⁵⁵

Kenneth E Hagin: Hagin tells of an alleged conversation he had with God that was periodically interrupted by Satan. Hagin asked God to silence the devil, but God said he couldn’t. So Hagin commanded Satan to be quiet. ‘Jesus looked at me,’ Hagin says, ‘and said, “If you hadn’t done anything about that, I couldn’t have.”’⁵⁶

Paul Crouch: ‘At the time of this publication, founder, president and host of Trinity Broadcasting Network, Paul Crouch has resisted frequent attempts at correction. “I AM A LITTLE GOD . . . Critics, be gone!” he says.’⁵⁷

That such alleged concepts of God can emerge from within so-called evangelical circles seems shocking. If true, it displays a pathetic and certainly abysmal ignorance of the biblical doctrine of God. Considering the size of their audience and the enthusiastic support, these men are even more dangerous than the cults because they are already within the bosom of the Christian Church. It also means that there is a grave probability that they will be responsible for leading large numbers of well-meaning, genuine Christians into a heresy which they believe is the truth.

Fourthly, in a book *Hungry for Heaven*, by Steve Turner, W H Allen, et al, (Kingsway Publications Ltd. 1988) the writer explores, among other things, the variety of concepts of God of many Rock musicians such as Paul McCartney, George Harrison and John Lennon of the Beatles; Bob Marley of Reggae music fame; the band of U2; Elvis Presley; Jerry Lee Lewis; Buddy Holly; Tommy Dorsey; Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys; Pete Townsend; John Denver and others. Their views range from Rastafarianism to Hinduism. George Harrison’s *My Sweet Lord*, a song praising the Hindu god Krishna, was a world hit.

The point is that Rock/Folk/Country musicians, such as those mentioned have had and still do have the profoundest and deepest impact on young people from pre-teens right through to the 30-year-olds, more than most other entertainment media. They number their followers in the millions and by way of the lyrics of their songs and through public interviews define their concept of ‘God’ which is then heard or read by their fans. Can you see how the confusion of who God really is is multiplying itself? But, can you also see the crucial necessity of having the biblical and correct concept of God in a constantly shifting, unstable culture?

Fifthly, the film industry is being increasingly infiltrated by Hindu and Buddhist Pantheism, that is, everything is God and God everything. ‘God’ is not an

independent, sovereign and infinite-personal God who as the creator is emphatically separated from his creation – he is the ‘Cosmic Consciousness/Being’ of whom we and all creation are part. The actress Shirley Maclaine has made it her life’s task to spread this Pantheistic ‘gospel’.

Another example is that of one of the most spectacular trilogies in movie history, *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *The Return of the Jedi*. Viewed purely as films and entertainment they are spectacular and entertaining. However, a binding thread runs through all three, namely, ‘The Force’. For a time the catchphrase from the films ‘May The Force be with you’ even entered the public language-domain as a kind of idiom or slogan.

It has now come to light that the concept of ‘The Force’ was derived virtually intact from Eastern Pantheism. For example, the director of *The Empire Strikes Back*, Irvin Kershner, is a confirmed Zen Buddhist who frankly admits that he deliberately introduced Zen ideas into the film.⁸ The films were seen by millions of viewers around the world and are now available on video as well.

Worse still is that the creative genius behind all three films, George Lucas and his concept of The Force ‘. . . was heavily influenced by Carlos Castenedda’s (book) *Tales of Power*. This is an account of a Mexican Indian sorcerer, Don Juan, who uses the phrase “life force”. Lucas’s “religion of the Force” was derived from Castenedda’s writings which were based on Eastern beliefs.’⁹ ‘The Force’ is nothing less than Eastern Pantheism, composed of good and evil, based on the ‘yin/yang’ principle.

Sixthly, there is the increasingly powerful influence of the New Age Movement. Here too the concept and teaching about God is pure Pantheism. Russell Chandler says: ‘The New Age bottom line can be stated in three words: “All in One. . . .” This premise is known as monism (or pantheism), where distinctions of . . . opposites disappear. . . . It is best described in impersonal terms such as Principle, Mind, Power, Unity, and especially, Energy . . . Humanity (too) is All One. . . (Thus) . . . All is One. We are all One. All is God. And we are God.’¹⁰

4. Theistic epistemology: preaching the gospel

We have now examined at least six sources that are responsible for the ever increasing confusion, vagueness and ambiguity in the use, the concept and the definition of the word ‘God’. It is of the utmost importance not only to realise the growing ambiguity of who God is in the minds of people but, more importantly, to apply this in our evangelism and preaching.

What is basically wrong today is that men and women do not have what we might call a correct epistemology of God. Epistemology simply means ‘a knowledge or understanding or concept’ of something. And if a person is vague

or ambiguous or wrong in their epistemology of God, then they are usually wrong in the rest of their religious thinking and living.

For example, if people do not have a clear view about God's holiness, they are unlikely to have a high regard for his law since the strength and absolute authority of God's law are an expression of his holiness. Without God's holiness the laws would be meaningless. And if the laws of God carry little weight, then the Bible's teaching of sin will not be taken seriously. That in turn will mean that our Lord's atonement will be viewed, as Liberalism views it, as an example of God's love, but certainly not as a sacrifice for sin. This, in turn, will affect one's view of salvation and judgment, and so we could go on. Our epistemology of God is therefore crucial.

Thus the cardinal rule in communicating the gospel to non-Christians, as well as the ongoing ministry in a church, is that the Christian evangelist, preacher or layman must never take it for granted that the audience or the individual has the same concept of the God of Scripture that he has! Indeed, we should always presuppose that they do not have the same concept of God – or of any other doctrine such as sin, redemption, repentance, faith, the atonement, justification, the person and work of Christ, etc. – and that it is our task to teach and explain these aspects of the Christian faith over and over again.

A classic example of incessant preaching and teaching is that of Epaphras. When Paul writes to the Colossians he bears witness to this. He says: 'All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, . . . who is a faithful minister of Christ . . .' (Col 1: 6-7). The consequence of this painstaking task of schooling the Colossians in the knowledge of the gospel, or if you like teaching them Christian theistic epistemology, was that they were 'bearing fruit and growing. . .'. Is that not plain commonsense Christianity?

We live in a post-Christian, and in many places a totally secular, even pagan society, no matter how well educated people may be. And if we desire converts then this biblical instruction is the only route. Any other route will more than likely result in mere 'cheap believism', which is not built on the strong foundation of the knowledge of God and his grace, Christ and his atoning work, and the Spirit and his role in the plan of salvation.

The transcendence of God

1. The concept of transcendence

When we speak of the transcendence of God we refer to that characteristic of God which places God above his entire creation. Above and superior to all

space, time, history, man, the created cosmic universe, gravity, energy, nature, man's thinking and actions. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts . . .' (Is 55:8-9).

His transcendence is seen when he distinguishes himself from all creation (Rom 1:25). He exists before all creation (Ps 90:2) and neither the earth nor the highest heavens can contain him (1 Kings 8:27). The fact that he is above and beyond time and space does not mean that God exists in a state of 'nowhereness' nor that he exists outside his own creation.

We can only use anthropomorphic language when speaking of God, because the dimension in which God exists is wholly beyond our understanding. (Anthropomorphic here means that we refer to God in human terms, because linguistically and theologically we are not capable of talking about God in any other language or terms.)

2. *Control and authority*

We must not confuse transcendence with the aloofness and disinterest in his creation that the heresy of Deism teaches. Rather the very opposite, as Prof. John Frame suggests: God is transcendent but still very much in control of and exercising his authority over all creation.

In the case of Israel for example, God brings this covenant nation into existence (Is 41:4; 43:10-13), exercises control over them (Ex 3:8,14) and then delivers them from Egypt (Ex 20:2). If I might use a modern idiom reverently, God in relation to his creation and particularly Israel, is a 'hands on' God.

'Authority is God's right to be obeyed. . . . To say that God's authority is absolute means that his commands may not be questioned (Job 40:11 ff; Rom 4:18-20; Heb 11:4,7,8,17, passim), that divine authority transcends all other loyalties (Ex 20:3; Deut 6:4f; Phil 3:8), and that his authority extends to all areas of human life (the books Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17, 23).'¹¹

3. *Practical application*

In *RT 122* Bob Letham showed that all true knowledge of God is through the incarnate Christ and likewise all true knowledge of God is trinitarian. I fervently believe that a wrong view of God influences *all* our thinking in the *totality* of Christian and reformed theology. By way of conclusion I will refer to two practical issues, namely, meditation and holy awe.

i. Meditation. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind and then of thinking over, dwelling on, pondering in depth, and applying to oneself the knowledge

from Scripture, of God — his nature and person, his various attributes, his holiness and love and care and providence, his works and ways and purposes and promises.

‘It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one’s mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one’s mind and heart. . . Its effect is ever to humble us . . . and to encourage and reassure us — “comfort” us, in the old, strong, Bible sense of the word — as we contemplate the unsearchable riches of divine mercy displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ.’¹²

ii. *Awe*. On this point A W Tozer says: ‘In olden days men of faith were said to “walk in the fear of God” and to “serve the Lord with fear”. However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of religious life was the conception of God as awesome. . .’¹³

When a sinful man meets God, like a Moses at the burning bush, or an Isaiah in his vision of God in Isaiah 6, or a Daniel who saw One with ‘. . . his (God’s) face and appearance like lightning . . .’, or a Paul struck down in a blinding flash of holiness on the road to Damascus, then the sheer transcendence of God, the Holy One, takes all the fight out of a man and he responds meekly, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’

Conversely, says Tozer; ‘. . . the self-assurance of modern Christians, the basic levity present in so many of our religious gatherings, the shocking disrespect shown for the Person of God, are evidence enough of deep blindness of heart. . . “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life”, but this healing fear is today hardly found among Christian men (or women).’¹⁴

References

¹ Quoted by J I Packer, *Knowing God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1973, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*

³ A W Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, James Clarke & Co, 1965, p. 12.

⁴ H Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, Banner of Truth, 1977, p. 13.

⁵ M Horton, Ed, *The Agony of Deceit*, Moody Press, 1990, p. 268. Footnotes 4 and 7. Footnote 4 is a quotation from Kenneth Copeland’s *Believer’s Voice of Victory*, March 1982, p.2. Footnote 7 comes from a sermon preached at a crusade, July 19, 1987 on file with CURE, i.e. an organisation named ‘Christians United for Reformation’ in the USA.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 7, *The TV Gospel* by M Horton, p. 126. Footnote 2 which comes from Kenneth E Hagin’s *Having Faith in your Faith*, Tulsa, Okla., Faith Library, 1980.

⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 6, *Who do Televangelists say that I Am?* by Dr Rod Rosenblatt, p. 119. Footnote 28 which comes in a Paul Crouch TV slot, *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, July 7, 1986.

⁸ N L Geisler and J Y Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, Tyndale House, 1986, p. 17.

⁹ Geisler and Amano, *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. Footnotes 19 and 20.

¹⁰ R Chandler, *Understanding the New Age*, Word Publishing, 1988, pp. 28-29.

¹¹ J Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987, p. 16.

¹² Packer, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹³ Tozer, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁴ Tozer, *ibid.*, p. 78

The Meaning of Suffering and Evil

A review article

How Long, O Lord? D A Carson, IVP, 275 pp., £7.95 (which is a polite way of saying £8.00!).

This large size paperback is sensibly printed with easy to read print.

The volume has a subtitle, 'Reflections on Suffering and Evil'. Its purpose is to provide preventative medicine. It is a vital prophylactic (preventative treatment) for distress of every kind. The author says it is not a comprehensive guide to the subject of suffering and may not necessarily help those suffering intense grief (pp. 10 and 247). Often grieving people simply need our sympathy not our sermons.

The author himself is suffering from 'a rare disease which varies in its power from being quite mild to being lethal' (p. 119). He writes with tender pastoral concern.

The book divides into three parts, the first of which introduces the subject of tragedies which truly shock, instances in which this world can provide no rationale. Then he discusses the problem of evil and false ways of dealing with it from present day worldviews: atheism, pantheism, deism.

The second part forming the main body of the work follows: sin, mostly rebellion the root of the problem; social evils, poverty, war, natural disasters; the suffering of believers and why; the imprecatory passages of the OT, Jesus' teaching on hell; illness, death, bereavement; the question of the

kingdom and the already and the not yet; the example of Job; the suffering God (see editorial). The third part consists of reflections on the mystery of providence in which the author grapples with some very important issues such as compatibilism (see editorial). Each of the 13 chapters concludes with six to eight questions which will test you to see whether you have grasped the exposition and its implications. I found that very helpful and began by reading the questions which sharpened my concentration as I read through each chapter. The volume concludes with an excellent appendix on the subject of AIDS and the moral questions which surround that epidemic. One of many points made is that Romans 1:27 should not be cited as a proof text to prove AIDS to be a judgment of God. Homosexuality itself is the due penalty of judgment. AIDS may happen as a consequence of homosexual practice but AIDS is not what that text is talking about.

I will now select a few samples as a way to commend the book.

When things go badly wrong for us we are not to think in terms of God punishing us for specific sins. This Carson vehemently corrects. 'Most emphatically every bit of suffering is not the immediate consequence of a particular sin. That is a hideous piece of heresy, capable of inflicting untold mental anguish. It would mean that the people who suffer most in this world must be those who have sinned the most in this world; and that is demonstrably untrue, both in the Bible and in experience' (p. 47).

The misconception that the world is populated largely by 'good people' is discussed and the suggestion made that Kushner's famous title *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* is profoundly misleading. It would make more sense to write a book full of wonder under the title *When Good Things Happen to Bad People*.

Frequently leaders are called upon to suffer the most. We serve a crucified Messiah. Think of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, C H Spurgeon (pp. 77ff). Paul agonises far more over the difficult things he had to suffer at the hands of his own converts in Corinth than over his beatings from unbelievers (p. 194).

Concerning hell Carson argues against annihilationism (pp. 101-104). 'Perhaps we should think of hell as a place where people continue to rebel, continue to insist on their own way, continue societal structures of prejudice and hate, continue to defy the living God, so he continues to punish them. And the cycle goes on and on and on.'

With regard to John Wimber and Vineyard teaching, Carson is not a cessationist but he says, 'Wimber has tried to establish a theology of healing and power encounter without an adequate theology of suffering; he has a theology of victory without an adequate theology of the cross; he has a theology of life without a proper reflection on the place of death' (p. 124).

There are several places of excellent exposition. 2 Peter 3:9 is one: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." There are only four principal things the text could mean: 1. God wants everyone to come to repentance, and so therefore everyone will finally be saved, since no one can thwart his will.

2. God wants everyone to come to repentance but for whatever reason he cannot bring this to pass, since some will not be saved. 3. The "everyone" whom God wants to be saved is established by the context to be the elect only. 4. The text establishes God's saving stance toward the entire world' (p. 222). If you are not sure about God's stance read 1 Timothy 2:4 or Acts 17:30.

The overall savour of the book is the assurance that for the Lord's people there may be many things in which they can never see any sense whatsoever, yet there will be ultimate meaning. Joseph was sold into slavery out of the malice of his brothers; their intent was wholly evil, and for years Joseph's ordeal was appalling. 'You intended to harm me,' he told them, 'but God intended it for good.' It took many years before Joseph's bitter experience made sense. The tragedies that beset us are so different. We are not promoted to high office. Our lives are mundane. Yet when the bad things befall us as part of the groaning of this sinful fallen world, we must hold to Romans 8:28 (p. 26).

Finally an example of Don Carson's style of writing: concerning the cross; 'Today the cross adorns our church buildings, graces our bishops, turns up on our lapels, and hangs from gold chains around our necks. In the first century, it was not so. The cross was obscene. To wear a piece of jewelry fashioned to look like a cross would have been grotesque, an odious bit of macabre humour considerably more shocking than, say, wearing a bit of jewelry fashioned like the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb.'

The author is to be thanked for a truly superb book which is full of sound teaching and which contains healing balm throughout.

A Better Way: Reformation and Revival

by Tom Nettles

Introduction: Things that go Together

'This I tell you, brother, you can't have one, you can't have none, you can't have one without the other.' That's what a popular song of the 1950s taught us about love and marriage. Such was the consensus of public morality before a generation arose that feared marriage without love so severely that it pursued love without marriage. Marriage was characterised merely as 'ink stains dried upon some lines'. Clearly, the biblical pattern is that sexual expressions of love appropriately reflect God's design and character only in the marriage relationship; just as clearly, marriage should not be dull, uninteresting, and similar to enduring servanthood, but should be filled with self-sacrifice, commitment, personal development, passion and unity. In man and woman relationships, sexual love and marriage necessarily involve each other; neither is defined totally in terms of the other but the essence of neither is complete without the other.

So it is with revival and reformation; when individuals pursue one without proper appreciation for and attention to the other, the results can be very ugly. Though these two must go together, we must, in my opinion, define them separately and be able to discern their distinctive characteristics. A clear grasp of the tendencies of each when separated from the other can be a great aid in seeing clearly just what kind of illness has invaded the body. With care we can help assure a prescription which does not underdose the thing most needed. The relation of reformation and revival to the power of the church must also concern us.

Reformation

Reformation is the recovery of biblical truth which leads to the purifying of one's theology. It involves a rediscovery of the Bible as the judge of all thought and action, corrects errors in interpretation, gives precision, coherence, and courage to doctrinal confession, and gives form and energy to the corporate worship of the Triune God. Though it should be an ongoing enterprise in all churches and in the body of Christ throughout the world, the most poignant displays of reformation come at times of great theological, moral, spiritual and ecclesiological declension in the Church.

A Biblical Paradigm

The recovery of the ark from the Philistines gave great joy to David and the house of Israel. Their first effort to restore it, however, ended in the disastrous death of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7). The ark had been moved improperly and the

warning of death for such action was carried out (Num 4:15,19,20). The project of moving the ark was abandoned for about three months. Then David moved it as God had instructed (2 Sam 6:13). In addition to David's remarkable exuberance, the ark's recovery led to a series of prominent spiritual advances. David desired to build a house for the ark (7:2). His effort to seek guidance in this from the prophet Nathan prompted one of the most intensely gracious encounters between God and man in all of Scripture. God told David, 'And your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be established forever' (2:16). David's extended response in prayer (2 Sam 7) ended:

27 'O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, "I will build a house for you." So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer.

28 O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.

29 Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever.'

From the standpoint of imminent causative factors, this great promise and these marvellous moments of worship arose from reformation, the recovery of a basic biblical truth.

Under the reign of Josiah, the book of the law was discovered in the house of the Lord. Upon hearing it read, Josiah 'tore his clothes' and inquired of the Lord because it was clear to him that the people had not 'listened to the words of this book'. Josiah learned from the prophetess Huldah that God's wrath was against the people of Judah but that because his 'heart was tender' and he humbled himself before the Lord when he heard what was spoken against them, he would be gathered to his fathers before the day of God's wrath came. From that time Josiah engaged in extensive reforms in accordance with the book of the law. He eliminated the vessels, figures, priests, places and practices of idolatry in Judah and even destroyed the high places in the cities of Samaria. He removed all mediums and spiritists and reinstated the Passover 'as it is written in the Book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord' (v 24).

Josiah had personal reformation and revival and brought reformation to Israel. Before his time there was no king like him who 'turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him' (v 25).

Josiah heard the word of God and responded with personal repentance and a concerted effort to conform to that word, all the areas of Israel's life for which he was responsible.

The Historical Framework

We have mentioned that reformation confronts a situation of moral, spiritual, ecclesiological and theological decline and/or error. How are these problems of reformation to be tackled? Attempts to bring reformation through treating the moral, spiritual, and ecclesiological dimensions while ignoring the theological, always fall short. The Middle Ages saw a number of attempts to reform the Church. Moral reform became the concern of a variety of churchmen and involved a series of monastic reforms and powerful preaching. The Franciscans sought reformation and conversion of heretics through an example of austere morality and fervent preaching. Ximenes de Cisneros (d.1517) banished over 2,000 immoral monks from Spain and used the Spanish inquisition to enforce an ascetic morality on the clergy. In the sixteenth century, members of the Oratory of Divine Love sought moral reforms in their own lives and in the lives of those around them. Their research into the morals of the clergy led to the extensive moral reform that resulted from the Council of Trent. Erasmus, the great humanist, invested his great powers in ridicule of the morals of the clergy and even supported Luther's attack upon the bellies of the monks. None of these served to give the needed reformation to the Church but only made Romanism more prevailing than ever.

The Middle Ages saw several efforts at spiritual reform. The Apocalypticism of Joachim of Fiore promised freedom from the 'bondage' of the external form of the Church. This would be characterised by an 'eternal gospel' that went beyond that introduced by the life and work of Christ. The new age of the Spirit would be ushered in by contemplative monks. Although he advocated no revolutionary tactics, his view of history was condemned because it did not view the Roman Catholic Church as the final perfect form of the city of God. The principle of poverty espoused by the Observant Franciscans highlighted spiritual ministry and eschewed the covetous spirit enhanced by ownership of private property. The principle was declared heretical in a series of bulls by Pope John XXII (1316-1334), officially ending the grasp for God through instituted poverty. Mysticism continued this quest for God. Mystics desired a supra-natural union with God. Their fervour transcended the mechanical operations of the sacramental system and sought participation in the mysterious event of transubstantiation. A quest for deification of the creature inexplicable by normal powers of knowledge and will motivated their intense spiritual exercises. Whether it was a mysticism that pursued absolute conformity of will and desire to Christ, or a mysticism that sought a union of being with God himself, the goal of the various types was to sustain autonomous personal consciousness and to be aware of nothing but the existence and will of God.

While giving extraordinary individuals some sense of transcendence for a few blissful moments, mysticism had very little chance, in fact very little desire, to challenge the prevailing theological structure of the Church. The theology of mystic experience differed generically from orthodox Roman Catholicism and

neither denied nor challenged the basic Roman doctrine of salvation. In fact, its formative doctrinal assumptions were antithetical to the reformation that was needed. It was consistent with the sacramental system in that it was semi-Pelagian in its view of man and taught justification through increasing Godlikeness.

Ecclesiological reform showed its greatest ardour during the periods of the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1309-1378), when the popes resided in Avignon, and the papal schism (1378-1415), when two or three popes ruled at the same time. The churchmen who sought to bring about the reform were known as the conciliarists. They advocated the power of general councils over the pope by appealing to the testimony of Scripture and history. Their actions relieved the embarrassment caused by the Captivity and the schism but also gained a deserved notoriety by burning John Hus. No theological change appeared on their agenda; they were quite sure that none was needed.

The Axe to the Root

When reformation came, however, it came through the substantial alteration of strategic doctrines. Calvin gave credit to Luther 'who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation'. In particular, 'those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion' and the legitimate worship of God and 'those in which the salvation of men are (sic) comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete' when Luther appeared. Luther did not fiddle with mere moral or ecclesiological issues, though he was concerned about both, but he went right to the theological problems that kept sinners curved in on themselves and away from the free mercy and justifying righteousness of Christ.

The doctrine of justification was central. This doctrine was defined by Luther's biblical insistence that faith should not be viewed as meritorious in any sense. Fallen man could only sin. He contributes nothing to a right standing before God, nor can he prepare himself for it. These truths constitute, as Calvin would say, 'the first stage on the way to salvation, when the sinner, overwhelmed and prostrated, despairs of all carnal aid'.² Only when the sinner sees himself in hell is he led to find hope in the completed work of Christ alone. Calvin would call this the 'second stage' and speak of it passionately.

'This he does when, animated by the knowledge of Christ, he again begins to breathe. For to one humbled in the manner in which we have described no other course remains but to turn to Christ, that through his interposition he may be delivered from misery. But the only man who thus seeks salvation in Christ is the man who is aware of the extent of His power; that is, acknowledges Him as the only Priest who reconciles us to the Father, and His death as the only sacrifice by which sin is expiated, and divine justice satisfied, and a true and perfect righteousness acquired; who, in fine, does not divide the work between himself and Christ, but acknowledges it to be by mere gratuitous favour that he is justified in the sight of God.'³

Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will not only was biblical, but gave theological coherence to the necessity of imputed righteousness being the sole source of our just standing before God. In his 1525 debate with Erasmus, Luther named this the 'essential issue. . . the hinge on which all turns'. Calvin spoke in unison with Luther on this issue. If all hinges on something outside of man immediately a controversy arises with reference to 'the freedom and powers of the will'. If one has any ability to serve God acceptably, then he is not saved only by the merit of Christ but will attribute part to himself. Their 'opponents' maintained, in spite of holding the doctrine of original sin, that 'the powers of man are only weakened, not wholly depraved'. The grace of Christ, therefore, aiding him, the sinner has something 'from which he is able to contribute'. The Reformers maintained that the sinner 'possesses no ability to act aright'.⁴

These teachings called for an alteration of the Roman system from its roots; they made Luther at odds with the entire theological world. Had he submitted to the authority of tradition and popes he could have forgotten all about these doctrines. But he had no choice. He found no reason to trust anything but Scripture as the final and infallible authority in these theological issues. His hours of laborious study and contemplation had branded on his conscience these truths and he considered it safer to be killed by the powers of this world than to live by having failed to confess the truth.

All the major Reformers agreed in these essentials. 'The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God', as Zwingli would call it, stood as the formal principle of reformation. The completed work of Christ issuing in absolutely gratuitous salvation through the imputation of his doing and dying was the material principle of reformation. Man's sinful condition made necessary a unilateral omnipotent work of God rendering salvation a reality that is selective, certain and effectual. These truths, under God, brought reformation and resulted in a variety of church forms each seeking to reflect the implications of these truths as clearly as possible.

This Reformation had tremendously significant staying power because it was accompanied by powerful personal experience.

This brings us to the subject of **Revival**.

To be continued.

References

¹ John Calvin, 'The Necessity of Reforming the Church', in *Selected Works of John Calvin* ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge. 7vv. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983 (reprint of Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), p. 125.

² *Ibid.* pp. 133,134.

³ *Ibid.* p. 134.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159.

We have, they have not, we must . . .

Sir Fred Catherwood, MEP

When Boris Yeltsin came to see us (in the European Parliament) in Strasburg in the summer, we asked him why he was trying to break up the Soviet Union when we, at our end of the continent, were trying to get a closer union. He said that there was a fundamental difference. The Soviet Union was held together by tyranny, whereas we were a voluntary union of free countries. Once the tyranny had been broken, then he wanted our kind of union between the former Soviet states.

We thought that was a good answer. His actions since then seem to show he is aiming in that direction. But there are still many hazards on the way.

He has, however, overcome the biggest hazard of all. No one knew, until the August coup failed, whether Moscow would be like Prague or like Peking. Would the Russians come out on the streets for democracy, and, if they did, would the troops fire on the crowd as they did in Peking?

There were a great many who believed that the idea of democracy did not penetrate far into Soviet society and that respect for human rights did not rank high in the army and the KGB. The failure of the coup is a great victory for democracy and respect for human life, both of which are in the mainstream of the attitudes to society which have their roots in Christian teaching. Now that an army and KGB coup is no longer credible, it is hard to see any way back for the hard-liners.

But there are other hazards, before Europe, east of the old iron curtain, is really safe for democracy and religious liberty.

One danger is the kind of nationalism which has broken out in Yugoslavia. There was a nasty moment when Boris Yeltsin questioned the frontiers between Russia and the surrounding republics and when Russian nationalism seemed to rear its head. If there is to be a union without trade frontiers (such as we have in the European Community) with free movement of all former Soviet citizens and equal rights (which is our Western European model), then the frontiers do not matter. But if the frontiers are to be hard then there will be huge ethnic minorities behind them all producing terrible racial tension and, almost certainly, bloodshed.

But, within 24 hours, delegations were sent from Moscow to the Ukraine and to Kazakhstan and treaties were signed with these two republics, committing all three to union. That speed was a measure of the clear understanding all three

republics have that there has to be a union freely made between free republics, not one imposed from above.

Another hazard is the winter. In the economic chaos into which the country seems to have fallen, it is unlikely that there will be enough food or fuel to keep people warm or to keep their industries and transport running. This seems to call for direct aid on a huge scale, which should not be conditional, because nothing can be put right in the shattered economy before winter.

If they survive the winter, they will still face the third danger — the huge problem of their mangled economy. When the presidents of Czechoslovakia and Poland came to see us in the summer, they both said that democracy could not survive unless they had substantial help. I have myself been in Budapest with the Parliament's delegation and we were given the same message.

Such messages made me look at the great Marshall Plan by which a generous America helped the war-shattered countries of Western Europe to their feet in the later 1940s. (They would have helped the rest of Europe too, but the Communists would not accept it.)

The position of the former Communist countries is very much worse in at least seven respects than ours was then. Russia's is far worse than those of Central Europe.

No entrepreneurs

First, we had an entrepreneurial society, with people who knew how to design, make and sell goods which people wanted to buy. Today the people in charge of industry in the east have been brought up to make what they were told and not to ask questions. They need to train a whole new breed of managers.

No capacity

Second, Western Europe, though damaged by the war, had enough industry in being able to start again, but the Eastern plants are almost totally incapable of making products to the kind of specifications needed for export markets.

No distribution

Third, even though it was damaged by bombing, Western Europe had a distribution system which did not take too long to put back into working order. The distribution system in Eastern Europe, especially in the vast spaces of the Soviet Union, is chaotic.

No body of law

Fourth, Western Europe had a full legal system needed for private ownership and commercial contracts. A first priority of Eastern Europe is to allow the

ownership of property and businesses, but there is no equivalent of commercial law to govern normal commercial transactions.

No banks

Fifth, we had an old-established banking system and the financial markets necessary to support enterprise as it restarted. They have state banks, but these are not geared to support enterprises in the internal market.

No planners

Sixth, we had economists, bankers and businessmen who could produce their own plans for the revival of the Western economy. The East has no such experience of those kinds of planners.

No sacrifice

Finally, American help was on a totally different scale. If we in Western Europe gave the same proportion of our income as the Americans gave of theirs in Marshall aid, we would be giving £50 billion a year instead of a billion here and a billion and a half there. Whether democracy and free speech survive may depend in the end on the level of sacrifice for our Eastern neighbours that the Americans made for us. It would be a wise investment.

President Havel of Czechoslovakia told us that if, within four years, democracy had not been able to improve on the Communist economy, then; ‘Some Messiah will arise and tell the people that democracy does not work and you will have to put tanks, troops, missiles and aircraft back on your eastern frontier. Our people went out into the streets and risked their lives to give you this peace dividend. If you do not use it to help us, you will lose it again.’

We, as Christians, have more at stake than that. For the first time ever the Christian Church is free to preach the gospel right across Europe. We need to pray that the free and democratic society which has just been planted will have time to take root.

We do not want to throw money down the black hole of chaotic economies, but we need to put money first into substantial teams of people who can give them the experience they lack and *then* to be as generous with hard cash as the Americans were with us four decades ago.

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News

Malawi

Homecall of pastor Mathias Munyewe

In *RT 116* we described an indigenous work of great potential led by Pastor Mathias Munyewe of Liwonde. We were shocked to learn of the death of this fine young brother in early August this year following a six month illness.

A fitting memorial to Mathias Munyewe is the production by Grace Publications of *Who is in Control?* in Chichewa, (see *RT123*, p.19). Shortly before hearing of Mathias' death, Philip Grist of Grace Publications was notified that a gift had been received for a considerable run on of this title, which had been originally pioneered because of Mathias' desires to reach his fellow countrymen, especially those influenced by Muslim beliefs, with clear biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God.

Besides a fervent concern for literature work, Mathias was a devoted pastor of his own large fellowship, the Evangelical Baptist Church, Liwonde, and an overseer of much church planting work in Southern Malawi. He was also involved in relief work amongst the approximately one million refugees from war stricken Mozambique, who have been given asylum along the common borders with that country.

Our warm sympathy goes out to the church as well as to the Munyewe family. Mrs Munyewe is left with a very young family and her financial situation may well be difficult. It is our desire to send her a gift as a token of our esteem and should others wish to join us by sending a cheque made out to *Reformation Today* and clearly designated for Mrs Munyewe, we will arrange for the total sum to be forwarded.

MERF – Cyprus

At the Middle East Reformed Fellowship Study Centre, PO Box 52, Lanarca, Cyprus, Arab pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers and other church leaders come in groups of 14 to receive two weeks intensive Bible training to take back to share with their home churches.

In July this year MERF reported that two Iraqi families had returned to Baghdad from Lanarca one day before the invasion of Kuwait. At the time of writing, both men still had a positive outlook. Despite the hardships of the war months, they express no regrets for being back home with other believers in their homeland. The tremendous needs of the Christian community in Iraq must not be overlooked due to the needs of others. The churches are still in a state of shock and are overwhelmed by the growing needs. Many continue to fear the Kurdish and Shi'ite militants. Prayers are requested that most will not seek opportunity to escape the country and their obligation to represent Christ amongst their own people.

Also reported by MERF is the powerful, vengeful fanaticism among the Muslim masses in most Arab countries. The rhetorical pronouncements that the 'Christian' West and the State of Israel conspire together against Islam, is bringing growing numbers of young people into the fanatical ranks. Yet, another force is at work amongst the same group of Arabs; it is the 'power of God to salvation', the gospel of grace and truth. Many in recent months have been quickened to seek Christ in response to the Arabic gospel radio broadcasts from Cyprus.

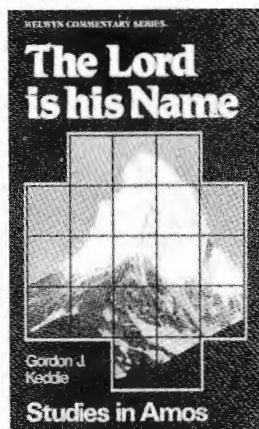
Writing to the editor of *Reformation Africa South*, Victor Atallah, General director of MERF described how he started his minis-

try as part of a team doing outreach to villages outside his home town, Assuit, in Egypt. He is convinced that: 'The work of the gospel in the Middle East is very strategic in the overall outworking of the Lord's plan to gather his people in the Muslim world. The work the Lord has had us establish is an indigenous outreach of evangelism, church extension, biblical training and diaconal aid. The message of the gospel, if properly expounded from the Reformed perspective (as distinct from the overall Western evangelical perspective), constitutes the most challenging alternative to Mohammedanism.

Present events in the Gulf show that the era of foreign missionary outreach has ended. . . ex-patriot missionary outreach is not viable. It is time to train and support national believers to bring the gospel to their own countrymen. It is the local churches which we strongly believe to be God's agencies for bringing about spiritual awakening in the Arab and Muslim worlds. We are thankful to see that the strategy of indigenous outreach is receiving the continued blessing of the Lord. Opportunities for outreach in church extension have arisen in Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. We use the means of radio, training and supporting national workers, publication and distribution of sound Christian literature, diaconal relief, and ministering to Arab refugees in Cyprus, Lebanon and Sudan.

The work continues to need qualified trained nationals as well as increasing support from the believing Reformed community in other parts of the world. A difficulty to be overcome is that Western Christians are used to adopting, praying for and supporting specific missionaries. The Fellowship's (MERF) work with and through nationals needs to be received and adopted for prayerful support as they seek to reach the Arab World.'

(*Reformation Africa South*, 2nd quarter, 1991).



Evangelical Press

The EP whose offices are at 12 Wooler Street, Darlington, Co. Durham, DL1 1RQ, England, have in print a fine large sized 24 page catalogue. EP is a Reformed publishing house producing a wide range of titles on the Christian life, evangelism, history and biography, creation, contemporary issues and also Bible commentaries. The *Welwyn Commentary Series* enjoys considerable success. *The Lord is his Name* (see above) is one title in this series.

Included in the catalogue are lists of book titles in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. The French work has developed so well that it is now independent and self supporting, publishing six new titles a year.

Ultimate Questions by John Blanchard is EP's best selling item and has now topped 1,750,000 copies in many languages. A new edition is due in November which will include Albanian and Tswana (main dialect of Botswana). As a result of an appeal made at the last Carey Ministers' Conference £3,500 was donated for the Albanian edition. Sadly the Zulu edition is held up for lack of finance. EP directors are Prof E H Andrews, S W Clark, E Hulse, J D Legg, and W B Metcalfe.

P and R Publishing Co., Box 817, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865, distribute EP titles in North America.

Carey Today

By Timothy George

Being the final chapter of his forthcoming book,

Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey

Publisher, New Hope, Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

Where would a man like William Carey fit in today? Two centuries after the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society and Carey's mission to India, the Christian world stands again at a critical juncture in the fulfilment of the Great Commission. Mission strategists have called for the evangelisation of the world by the year 2000. Yet there are still 1.3 billion persons on earth who have never heard the name of Jesus for the first time. Hunger, violence, epidemics on a massive scale, racial and ethnic conflicts, debilitating poverty, illiteracy, political repression and social dislocation, all these, together with fragmentation and loss of vision within the Christian world itself, present enormous challenges to the task of missions in tomorrow's world. What can we learn from Carey as we seek to be faithful witnesses in a world like this?

1. The Sovereignty of God

Carey knew that Christian mission was rooted in the gracious, eternal purpose of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to call unto himself a redeemed people out of the fallen race of lost humankind. As a young pastor in England he confronted and overcame the resistance of those hyper-Calvinistic theologians who used the sovereignty of God as a pretext for their do-nothing attitude toward missions. It was not in spite of but rather because of his belief in the greatness of God and his divine purpose in election that Carey was willing 'to venture all' to proclaim the gospel in the far corners of the world.

Time and again Carey was forced to learn the lesson of trusting in God to bring his purpose of love to fulfilment. Carey wanted to go to Tahiti; he was sent to India. He set out alone, accompanied only by John Thomas and his son Felix; he was providentially sent back to take with him his entire family. When the mission needed a new base in India, the governor of Serampore offered a haven. When the printing house was destroyed in a disastrous fire and it seemed that the Bible translations

would come to a halt, Christians all over the world contributed more to missions than ever before. The Serampore Press recovered with an increased schedule of publication! None of this was accomplished without a struggle, fervent prayer, and an earnest seeking of the divine will. But, at the end of the day, it was clear that the gospel had gone forth, in India as in the early church of the New Testament, ‘unhindered’ by the ploys of Satan.

Today, more than a new programme of missionary training or another strategy for world evangelisation, the Church of Jesus Christ needs a fresh vision of a full-sized God: eternal, holy, filled with compassion, sovereignly working by his Holy Spirit to call to himself a people out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and language-group on earth. Only such a vision, born of repentance, prayer, and self-denial, can inspire a Carey-like faith in a new generation of Christian heralds.

2. The Finality of Jesus Christ

William Carey and generations of missionaries who followed in his wake shared a common conviction concerning the message they had been commissioned to proclaim: personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation for all peoples everywhere and those who die without this saving knowledge face eternal damnation. Hudson Taylor reflected this view when he spoke to students in 1894: ‘There is a great Niagara of souls passing into the dark in China,’ he exclaimed. ‘Every day, every week, every month they are passing away! A million a month in China they are dying without God.’¹ In 1920 a Presbyterian statement echoed the same theme: ‘The supreme and controlling aim of foreign missions is to make Jesus Christ known to all men as their Divine Saviour and Lord and to persuade them to become his disciples.’²

More recently, however, the uniquely divine nature of Jesus Christ and the cruciality of Christian conversion have both been called into question. The task of the missionary, it is claimed, is to help adherents of other religions to discover what is best in their own traditions. ‘The aim should not be conversion. The ultimate aim . . . is the emergence of the various religions out of their isolation into a world fellowship in which each will find its appropriate place.’³

As this view has come to dominate more and more in the old-line Protestant denominations, the sending of missionaries from these quarters has dwindled to a trickle. It is estimated that nine out of 10 of today’s career missionaries are evangelicals affiliated with conservative

denominational boards or independent missions agencies.⁴ Had Carey accepted the premise of much contemporary missiological thinking, he would never have gone to India in the first place or, had he done so, he would have embraced there the indigenous Hindu belief that all religions are equally valid paths to the one unknowable god. His life and witness encourage us to resist the seductive power of syncretism and to remain faithful to the only gospel which can deliver lost men and women from the power of sin and death.

3. The Authority of Scripture

Nowhere is Carey's kinship with the Reformation tradition more clearly seen than in his role as a translator, publisher, and distributor of the Bible. Like Wycliffe, Luther and Tyndale before him, Carey believed that everyone should be able to read the Scriptures in their own native language. Thus in an extraordinary labour of love he poured his life into mastering the difficult languages of India and the East until he had either translated or personally supervised the translation of the Bible into some 40 distinct tongues.

There were three bases of Carey's plan to evangelise India: preach the gospel, translate the Bible, and establish schools. Proclamation, translation, education. This three-fold strategy was itself an expression of Carey's confidence in the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Like Paul, Carey preached not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord. The mission schools taught a wide range of subjects but Bible instruction was an integral part of their curriculum. Strange as it may seem, the task of translating the Scriptures into all the languages of the world remains incomplete 200 years after Carey's pioneering labours. Missions researchers find that there are innumerable people groups who have yet to receive the Bible in their own tongue. The Wycliffe Bible Translators among others are dedicated to fulfilling Carey's vision of conveying God's written Word in all of the vernacular languages on earth.

Why was Carey so committed to a Bible-centred approach to missions? Because he knew that the Word of God was full of living power. Time and again he witnessed the transforming effect of the simple reading of the Scriptures on the natives of India, steeped as they were in the fables and false theologies of their culture. Today, no less than then, missionary preaching must be true to the whole scope of the biblical revelation. Like Paul, we are charged to declare all the counsel of God, including the scriptural warnings about divine judgment and the reality of hell as well as the glad tidings of full redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

4. Contextualisation

Carey may be best described as a 'horizontal' figure in the history of Christianity. Like Augustine in the early church, Francis in the Middle Ages, and Luther in the Reformation, Carey lived at the intersection of two epochs. He witnessed the death throes of one age and the birth pangs of another. In three important mission trends, Carey anticipated subsequent developments by a century and more and still remains an important catalyst for contemporary thinking and mission strategy. These are contextualisation, a holistic approach to missions, and the quest for Christian unity.

'Contextualisation' refers to the need to communicate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the total context of the people to whom it is addressed. From the beginning of his ministry in India, and even earlier in the *Enquiry*, Carey knew that he and other missionaries would have to take seriously the strange, non-Western setting of their work in such a faraway land. As a Dissenter in England, he was already sensitive to the counter-cultural posture of true New Testament Christianity. He would have agreed with Lesslie Newbigin, a twentieth-century missionary to India, that at the very heart of the biblical vision 'is not an imperial power but the slain *Lamb*'.⁵

The act of engaging the vernacular language as a vehicle for God's Word was itself a major departure from a kind of cultural imperialism which has shackled many efforts at world evangelisation. For example, until quite recently Roman Catholic missionaries refused to translate the Bible into the language of the peoples they encountered, holding to the near-sacred character of the Latin version approved at the Council of Trent. Carey believed that the miracle of Pentecost meant that the gospel was not limited to any one cultural or linguistic expression. In fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, God's Spirit had been poured out 'on *all* people. . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Acts 2:17,21).

Carey was a pioneer in what we have come to call cross-cultural communication. He was willing to experiment with new methods and to use hitherto untried approaches in reaching for Christ the people to whom he had been sent. The establishment of indigenous churches and the training of native pastors were two key elements in his plan for permeating India with the gospel. Realising that male missionaries would have limited access to female hearers in the Hindu and Muslim cultures, he encouraged the cultivation of 'Bible women' who were often

able to break through the gender barrier to share a positive witness for Christ.

Carey was able to make these adaptations because he had gone to India not merely to convert the natives from one 'religion' to another, much less to import an alien culture or civilisation, but rather to proclaim the life-changing, culture-transforming message of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He did not aim to eradicate the positive values of Indian culture. He had great respect for the antiquity and beauty of the cultural legacy he encountered. Indeed, his translations and critical editions of the ancient Hindu classics contributed to what has been called an 'Indian Renaissance'. At the same time, he was quite sure that devotion to these writings and the religion they had spawned could never lead to eternal life, anymore than being born in England or America automatically made one a Christian. Carey's ability to 'contextualise' the gospel without compromising the non-negotiable essentials of Christian doctrine provides a balanced model for a truly evangelical missiology which seeks to be faithful in an age of social upheaval and cultural dissolution.

5. Holistic Missions

Speaking to the International Congress on World Evangelisation at Lausanne in 1974, Billy Graham outlined five concepts which may be taken as hallmarks of an evangelical approach to missions:

- i. The authority of Scripture.
- ii. The lostness of human beings apart from Jesus Christ.
- iii. Salvation in Jesus Christ alone.
- iv. A witness to the gospel in word and deed.
- v. The necessity of evangelism.⁶

The fourth principle, declaring the good news 'in word and deed', points to the dual necessity of *both* a propositional *and* an incarnational dimension to the life and mission of the church.

As we have seen throughout this study, Carey never shrank from understanding his mission to include both a social and an evangelistic responsibility. If he gave *priority* to the latter over the former, it was because he sensed so keenly the eternal destiny of every person he met and shuddered to think of the dire consequences of spurning Christ's invitation to eternal life.

Still, he refused to divorce conversion from discipleship. He knew that Jesus had given food to hungry people on the same occasion that he presented himself to them as the Bread of Life. He would have agreed with the statement of E Stanley Jones: 'A soul without a body is a ghost; a body without a soul is a corpse.' The gospel is addressed to living persons, soul and body, in all of their broken humanity and need for wholeness.

While Carey never lost sight of the individual, he saw clearly that the Christian message also applied to the sinful social structures of his day. He vigorously opposed slavery and rejoiced when the slave trade was abolished within the British Empire shortly before his death. He urged legislation to curb the inhuman practices of *sati* and infanticide. He detested the wanton destruction wrought by war and prayed for peace among the nations of the world. Without neglecting the transcendent dimension, so often attenuated in contemporary liberation theologies, Carey fully embraced the biblical concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society. He prayed and worked to transform the structure of oppression in the light of the holistic gospel of redemption and deliverance.

6. Christian Unity

The modern quest for Christian unity was born on the mission field. Here again Carey pointed the way by working closely with the non-Baptist Evangelicals in India and by calling for an international conference of missionaries from various denominations around the world.

What would Carey think of contemporary ecumenical efforts today? He would likely be wary of an uncritical ecumenism which would sacrifice the distinctiveness of the gospel in the interests of a bland togetherness. And, in the contest of competing world views, he would doubtless warn us against confusing the fact of plurality with the ideology of pluralism and its corollaries relativism and syncretism. At the same time, he would surely rejoice in the coalescence of 'Great Commission Christians' of evangelical persuasion in the task of world evangelisation. While Carey was intensely loyal to his Baptist identity, to the point of advocating a policy of closed communion, he also knew how to distinguish minor and secondary matters of doctrine, the evangelical essentials to which all Bible-believing Christians are committed.

The burden of Christian unity in his day, as in ours, was not denominational differences among Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans and others, but rather the great divide between those who are committed to the great principles of historic Christian orthodoxy and others whose accommodation to the reigning ideologies of the contemporary world has resulted in a 'God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministries of a Christ without a cross'. Carey is a corrective to this kind of ecumenism by dilution, even as he is a model for another approach to cooperation among Christian believers, one rooted in the Reformation maxim; in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity.

7. Faithfulness

Carey's mission to India was a catalyst for a great missionary awakening throughout the church. During the past two centuries, thousands of individuals and hundreds of denominations, societies, and mission boards have responded to Jesus' command to 'go into all the world, making disciples'. Although his support from the Baptist Missionary Society in England was sometimes tenuous and meagre, Carey knew that he was not lone ranger. He had been called, commissioned, and sent forth by a company of believers who vowed to pray faithfully and give sacrificially that the work of the mission would go forward. Those who 'held the ropes', the Fullers, Rylands, Sutcliffes, Pearces, and many worthy saints of lesser fame, contributed much to the furtherance of the gospel through the life and mission of William Carey. Today, as we stand on the brink of a new millennium with the mandate for world evangelisation still looming before us, the best lesson we can learn from Carey is the principle by which he lived and died: 'The one thing required of Christ's servant is that he be faithful to his master' (1 Cor 4:1-2).

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- ¹ Quoted, Paul A Vard, 'Motives in Protestant Missions, 1890-1917', *Church History* 23 (1954), p. 71.
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