
REFORMATION TODAY



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CAREY FAMILY CONFERENCE

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27th July to 1st August 1992

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See note page 11.



Front cover: The daughter and grandson of Pastor Domingos Meque, Maputo, Mozambique (see news)

Editorial

Modernism in our seminaries

In the article on theology by Bob Sheehan the important point is made that we are recipients of revelation not its judges. While in South Africa I was given a very well documented thesis published in 1991 by Pretoria Christian Action (PO Box 9167 Pretoria 0001). This work is written in Afrikaans by a student who has been through the Pretoria NG Seminary which is joined to the University of Pretoria. NG means Dutch Reformed and stands for the largest denomination in South Africa. The author illustrates just how far modernism has taken over what has been a great institution, a great institution because we greatly need in-depth training for the ministry. The thesis claims that the arch liberal of the modernist movement is Ferdinand Deist of UNISA who has written a book titled, *Kan ons die Bybel nog glo?* (*Can we still believe the Bible?*). Since his conclusion is that we cannot, and since nobody in the Pretoria faculty seems ready to stand up for the Bible it will be as well to close down the seminary and for the tutors to take up farming. The same can be said of any church that no longer believes the Bible. We have many such empty shells in Britain but happily many full churches, full precisely because the Bible is preached as God's infallible word to mankind. To use the analogy of building we pay handsomely for builders to build our schools, our homes and our places of worship, but whoever heard of then paying demolition experts at the same rate to come and pull these structures down again? Of course the plea is always made that we need to be exposed to different opinions. I remember Bishop

David Sheppard telling me that when I asked him about Bishop David Jenkins who denies the physical resurrection of Christ.

When modernism destroyed the Baptist Union in England the voice of Spurgeon was raised in protest. The saddest commentary of all in South Africa is the muteness of those from whom we would expect a response. The Southern Baptist Convention has fought for and continues to strive to purge their seminaries of anti-Christian infidelity that parades in the name of scholarship. When I have enquired from those within the primary and largest denomination in South Africa why there is no resistance to modernism the answer is given that the leaders are themselves compromised to various degrees which causes them to be silent. But what is this higher learning?

A legitimate science

The study of how we came to receive the Bible is a legitimate science but in the hands of unbelievers this science can be a disaster for the simple reason that the unbeliever himself is not subject to the authority of the Word of God. Instead he sits in judgement on Scripture. He is naturally prone to follow all kinds of unproven hypotheses and mere assumptions which are not themselves subject to the authority of Christ. The arrogance of unbelieving scholars is quite astounding. They write as if they know far more than the apostles ever did and as though they are superior in every respect to Moses or Paul. They are totally derogatory of the idea that the Bible is the very Word of

God. Their basic presupposition is that we must sit in judgement on the Word, not that we must be subject to that Word.

The document referred to above calls for the establishment of a new seminary in which the Word of God will have the preeminence and which will honour the authority of Scripture which is vital to true Christianity. Also called for is the forming of a new reformed inter-denominational fraternal of ministers to meet annually in the Transvaal, South Africa, to defend and promote confessional standards as represented by the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. If this is not done evangelicals will find themselves surrounded increasingly by spiritual ruins. It is already late in the day.

While in Windhoek, Namibia (see News), I visited a newly forming seminary designed on an inter-denominational basis to provide training for the ministry in Namibia. With that institute as with any other we must ask the question: What safeguards are there to prevent the infiltration of tutors who, instead of building up faith, will systematically destroy it? At Toronto Baptist Seminary I have noted that at the annual day of convocation every tutor is required to reaffirm, in public, his avowed belief in the infallible authority of the Word of God.

The primacy of biblical theology

In the article, Bob Sheehan also describes the order of approaches that there are in theology. For further study along those lines I commend Graeme Goldsworthy's book *According to Plan*, hot off the press, IVP (Lancer Press, Aust.) 320 pp. £5.95. Dr Goldsworthy is vicar of St Stephen's Church, Cooparoo, Queensland, Australia. For

many years we have needed a simplified version of *Biblical Theology* by Gerhardus Vos.

Biblical theology is a study of progressive revelation. Step by step, and stage by stage, God has revealed his redemptive purpose. The OT is the Word of God about Christ. The New Testament interprets the OT. The OT is a progressively revealed word. The NT is also a progressively revealed word. Goldsworthy has chosen 18 events for brief exposition from the fall to the new creation. One chapter has the title, *We begin and end with Christ*. Hopefully this worthy book will be translated into all the major languages.

With regard to Christ being the beginning and end of Scripture I would like to commend highly Gerard Van Groningen's recently published magnum opus *Messianic Revelation in the OT* (1018 pp. Baker Book House). Van Groningen is a Reformed theologian who has taught in seminaries in Australia for 30 years. He wonderfully expounds Christ the Messiah in all the OT. For Isaiah he expounds the Messiah as the Son of a virgin, as the Ruling Son, as the Servant Son, and as the ministering Son. In passing he refers to the conjectures of modernistic writers and firmly rejects their theories in attempting to break up the unity of the book of Isaiah.

Note

Eta Linnemann is one who lost her way spiritually through higher criticism but was then converted. Her book *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology. Reflections of a Bultmannian turned evangelical* (169 pp.) is translated into English by Robert W. Yarbrough and published by Baker Book House, USA. Eta reached the top of the academic ladder. She now works in Indonesia.

Aspects of Theology

by Bob Sheehan

What is theology?

Language is not static, but always developing. Any substantial dictionary reveals this fact. A word is listed and then a series of definitions is given in chronological order demonstrating the variations in its usage. The term 'theology' is no deviant from this rule. It is also defined in a variety of ways.

The earliest use of the terms 'theology' and 'theologian' by the ancient Greeks described any writings and writers about the gods. Every story with the gods as its theme was a theology, every writer about the gods, however fanciful, absurd, obscene or serious was a theologian! There were theologies and theologians by the hundreds, speculating, imagining, mocking, idealising to their hearts' content. It is tempting to think in the modern world that this definition has been re-introduced! We are surrounded by the shifting shadows of human speculation.



Pastor Bob Sheehan

It was inevitable that serious-minded men would not long allow theology to be the property of the tellers of fairy-tales. Aristotle, the philosopher (385-324 BC), with his strong idea of a first cause or prime mover on which the whole process of cosmic development depended, saw theology as the study of being and existence. He rescued 'theology' as a concept for the fevered imaginations of the story-teller and narrowed it to the speculative theories of the philosophers. Theology became intellectually respectable, and irrelevant to the masses.

Theology centred in the person of Christ

The incarnation of the Son of God brought about a Christian interest in theology. To the early church fathers, however, theology was an interest in the Person of Christ, his deity and nature. Hippolytus (AD c170-c236), a keen controversialist over Christology, argued that Christ had been 'theologised' from the earliest days. The interest of John's Gospel and Epistles in the person of Christ gained for John the title 'John the theologian'. Theology was

equivalent to Christology, and the person of Christ in particular, not his redemptive work, and concentrated on his divine nature not his human.

A modern use of the term theology

With Abelard (1079-1143) we enter the modern use of the term theology. For Abelard and succeeding generations theology was the study of the truths of religion in general. Being and existence are included, as is Christology, but far more also. The whole realm of religion became the study of theology.

The definition of theology as the study of religion is, however, inadequate and misleading. Religion is a very wide term. It refers to widely varying views. A study of religion could include all the ancient Greek 'theologies' and those of other nations too, all the speculations of philosophers, all the religions of the world, all the interpretations of men with regard to religious ideas. A study of religion tends to be an investigation into human beliefs, all man's erroneous ideas and speculations as well as any truth which may exist. In the modern world religious studies tend to be comparative religions, philosophical speculations, the study of human ideas of spirituality and religiosity. Most religion is man-made and man-centred and, therefore, not the proper subject for theology which is God-centred.

Later writers have defined theology as the study of faith. However, this definition suffers from the same weakness as the previous one. Faith is subjective. Truth is objective. A study of faith is man-centred, what man believes about God. As there are so many views of God it is evident that most are wrong. Truth is one. Error is multi-form. True theology cannot be a study of what man thinks, otherwise it is no different from philosophy. It would only reveal man not God.

Only one theology

There can only be one theology, one truth about God and his relations to all else. Theology must then be the study of God and his relationship to everything else. Theology is not the study of man's speculations. It is the study of 'God-facts'.

For theology to be possible, three things must be true: Firstly, there must be a God about whom there can be facts. Secondly, this God must have made himself known to man. Revelation must take place. An unrevealed God is an unknown God. What is unrevealed can only be the object of speculation and can never have the certainty to be a fact. Without revelation philosophy, religion and faith are possible but all as unverifiable human activities. No revelation; no theology. No revelation; no 'God-facts'. Thirdly, man must have

the ability to receive this revelation, understand it and use it. Man has to have religious and rational capacities. A revelation which could not be received, understood and applied would be useless and not a revelation but a hiding of God. A man who transmitted a programme without allowing anyone to receive it would be mocking them and himself. In the same way, a God who gives revelation must do so with the intention of enabling man to receive it. Theology is the study of revealed 'God-facts'.

Proper attitudes to theology

For the moment we shall assume that God exists, that he has revealed facts about himself and that man is able to receive and understand these facts. That is, we shall assume the possibility of theology. What attitudes ought we to show to these revealed 'God-facts'?

1. We are recipients of revelation not its judges

A botanist may not like the colour, smell, shape or texture of every flower he studies but he would far exceed his authority as a scientist if he asked for its removal from the catalogue of flora because of his taste and prejudice! The botanist must study the flowers that exist and not decide which he would prefer to be non-existent. Scientific procedure requires the study of the facts not the elimination of facts that are disliked.

In the same way, man must study theology not as a judge, ignoring what he finds distasteful and unacceptable in God's revelation and only accepting what suits his prejudices, but accepting the revelation as it is. He may not change the revelation because he dislikes it. The job of the theologian is to study what God has revealed not to express his own prejudices. When he moves from the revealed facts to his own prejudices he has moved from the proper subject of theology – revealed facts – to his subjective opinions – personal religion.

If we may change the analogy from the botanist to the journalist, we may again see why the theologian may not be a judge but only a reporter of facts. How often we hear the complaint that a journalist, after an interview, printed a report that was not based on the interview at all. When a reporter adds to and subtracts from the interview to make the conversation more sensational and newsworthy, he is looked on with disdain by those who value the truth. The theologian completely exceeds his mandate, and shows a large degree of arrogance in the process, when he listens to what God reveals and decides that it needs to be tampered with by him before it can be passed on. He does not manufacture ideas. He is only to analyse and explain truth.

From botanists and journalists we turn to physicists. Faced with the need to define light, physicists describe it in terms of waves and particles, yet accept these two as irreconcilable descriptions. Physicists then plead antinomy – two

truths, apparently contradictory, yet held together in tension. To deny the presence of antinomy in many areas of knowledge would simply be to turn a blind eye to the facts. In the revelation of God there are antinomies – truths which we cannot see a way of reconciling – but to receive antinomies in the divine revelation is a much more honourable course than to eliminate one side of the antinomy or to accuse God of being irrational. God is three but one. Christ is human and divine. God is sovereign and man is responsible. We know this because God has revealed it. The theologian may not deny it because he cannot explain it!

When man sets himself up as the judge of God's revelation, wanting to act as its editor and to reconstruct it according to his own prejudices, he is merely demonstrating his own arrogance, denying the finitude of his mind and setting himself up in the place of God. Such a man is not a theologian, he is a humanist.

2. Our understanding of revelation is never perfect

It is one thing to have a perfect revelation but entirely another to have a perfect understanding of that revelation. No one does. It ought to be a first principle of every theologian that as God has given the revelation his help should be sought in understanding it. Who would not seek an artist's help in understanding his own paintings, and an author's aid in interpreting his book? Can the revealer's aid be ignored in interpreting his revelation?

However humbly and reverently a man seeks to interpret God's revelation, however much he might try to avoid questionable meanings and sectarian nuances, there is a degree of human subjectivity and frailty in all interpretations of God's revelation. Two principles, therefore, need to guide him which themselves require to be held in tension:

Firstly, he must not come to the revelation bound by the traditions of the past in his interpretation. A traditional interpretation can seem important and correct, but it can be hopelessly wrong. Time-honoured traditions can be traditional errors. The history of Roman Catholicism proves it.

Secondly, he must not come to the revelation with contempt for the interpretations of others. There is a horrible conceit in thinking that only I have properly understood a truth and all others have been ignorant and misled. New ideas in theology are usually wrong. The history of the cults proves it.

Humility requires the theologians to seek the help of God, and the help of others who have sought God's aid in understanding his revelation. Self-sufficiency is disastrous in theology.

3. We must see the revelation for the purposes for which it was given

We are called to be theologians not theoreticians. The theologian is always in danger of studying God's revelation as an academic exercise. There is no benefit at all in knowledge about God that does not lead to knowledge of God. We would find it very strange if someone devoted his life to the study of a man and yet showed no interest in ever meeting him. So with the theologian and God! Theology must not simply be the study of what has come from God but must lead us to him.

While theology must not be confused with religion and faith, it is to result in them. It is obscene that a creature should receive a revelation from his creator and simply show a theoretical, intellectual interest in it. It is as if a child receiving a gift should take off the wrapping paper and simply look at the box but never open it.

There are also theological theoreticians of another sort. They use God's revelation as a 'spring-board' for their own speculations. God, it seems, has not revealed enough for them. They must pry into hidden things and speculate about unknowns. This is a high form of contempt for God's revelation. It is as if a man had taken down a large Bible from a bookshelf, not to read it, but to stand on it to increase his height to look out of a high window!

Theoretical speculation is not theology. It is philosophy. Unapplied revelation is not theology. It is theory. Unless God's revelation sets the bounds for our thinking and the rules for our living, it is misused.

Approaches to theology

As theology is the study of the facts revealed by God about himself and his relations to all else, there are two areas of study related to theology proper. At one end of theological study we have apologetics, the study of the rational arguments by which it is demonstrated that it is reasonable to believe in God and a revelation from him. At the other end we have historical theology, the study of the history of the interpretation of the revelation over the centuries after the revelation was given. Apologetics asks: is it reasonable for man to believe in this revelation? Historical theology asks: how have men interpreted this revelation?

Theology proper has traditionally been divided into four parts. Regrettably they have often been seen as four distinct disciplines. In fact, they are discipline divided into four related parts. No one part is complete without the other. A lack of any part introduces distortion and imbalance.

Firstly, God's revelation must be studied exegetically. Every word, sentence, paragraph, section etc. needs careful study in its nearer and wider contexts. Some of the best theologians began as professors of exegesis. The theology of the revelation can only arise from the form in which it was given. Exegetical theology demands detailed study of the revelation in the form in which it was given.

Secondly, God's revelation must be studied chronologically. Chronological theology (or biblical theology as it is mis-named) takes into account that God did not give his revelation all at once but over a period of time. He gradually made his character and ways known. Chronological theology traces the progress of his divine unveiling.

Thirdly, God's revelation must be studied thematically. Each of God's relations to all else has been in detail and gradually revealed. The sum-total of all that is taught on a particular aspect of God's self-revelation needs to be grasped, and each separate theme needs to be related to each other theme. This whole view of teaching in its parts and its totality is the province of systematic theology.

Fourthly, having discovered what the truth is it needs to be applied to the modern situation. This is practical theology. It is the purpose to which all the other parts of theology are contributing and leading.

All this may be illustrated by reference to a cardigan or jumper. Let us imagine a man is wearing a highly patterned jumper. We may look at details in the pattern (an exegetical study). We may consider how it looked when 10 rows had been knitted, then 50, then 100 (a chronological study). We may look at the finished article in its parts: sleeves, front, back or as a whole (a systematic study). We may put it on to keep warm (a practical study). Together the four studies will give us a whole picture. Any one will give a partial picture.

The tendencies that have existed to make the four parts of theology rivals or distinct disciplines ought to be avoided. Each needs each other if imbalance is to be avoided. In all its parts the one theology which comes from the study of one revelation of the one true and living God has much to teach us that we need to know. While no one has a full understanding of theology no one should decide that theology is not for him. Theology is the study of what God has revealed to us. Theology is the study of 'God-facts'.

Favouritism Condemned

We can be fairly sure that those to whom the epistle of James was originally addressed were guilty of favouritism. 'But you have insulted the poor!' (Jas 2:6). The picture presented is one in which preference was given in the church to the rich. But the poor man in shabby clothes would be shown to a seat at the back out of the way, or alternatively to an inconspicuous place on the floor at the feet of the preacher. The section of the epistle from 2:1 to 2:13 is devoted to the evil of favouritism.

In our times the question of favouritism extends beyond the matter of wealth and poverty. In parts of the United States and South Africa there remains in many evangelical churches a deep prejudice about race and colour. Those with the wrong coloured skin are certainly not favoured, while those with the right status symbols are very much favoured. Not only is there the rich/poor divide, but the black/white divide, and occasionally too there is the servant/master divide. In Britain even now, a class consciousness is perpetuated. Aristocrats are a breed so apart that the issue hardly ever rises though we would think that if one were to arrive at a service it would be much in the minds of the church officers to make doubly sure of a comfortable seat. But the consciousness of belonging to a middle or professional class in contrast to the working class is still very much with us. With a sense of these differences and the temptations bound up with them it is profitable to note well James' reasons against favouritism. I see five reasons cogently presented in the text.

Favouritism contradicts the family bond (2:1)

'My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism.' The term 'brothers' puts the readers in mind of the fact of their standing in God's family as sons and daughters. This they have become by adoption through union with Jesus Christ who is described in this verse in the most remarkable way. The Greek text reads, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ the glory'. To translate it literally would not read so well, but that is what it says. Only he as the God-man can be described as 'the glory'. We might be able to stand an illustrious person being called glorious but not *the* glory. It is by union with him that we are now members of his family. Therefore if a brother is shabbily dressed it is nonsense to say to him, 'sit here in a corner where you will not be seen.' Irrespective of race or colour or income, when we are in Christ, we are in God's family. The objection might be made that in a general congregation we do not know who belongs to the spiritual brotherhood and who does not. That is true but it does not change the fact that we may not discriminate as far as our welcome of strangers is concerned. We must act as the family of God.

Favouritism denies the doctrine of election (2:5)

It is worth noting that there is no shame in the NT concerning the fact of election. This truth is right up front and not tucked away out of sight. See Ephesians 1:4, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:1,2. Very simply, how can we rationalise putting a man with a gold ring up front in the best seat and a shabbily dressed man at the back when the Father has cut right across all disparities by electing so many who are poor? It might be argued that election is favouritism for why should God elect some and not others? The answer to that is grace. God has chosen sinners all of whom elected to go their own sinful way. Therefore if God chooses to call back some from such a desperate course, that is grace and grace alone.

Favouritism is based on generalities which are absurd (2:5-7)

We are living at a time when there is deep concern about the revival of fascism and anti-semitism. This is taking place not only in Germany where we might think the lesson of such evil would have been learned once and for all, but also in Austria and France and even in Britain. Persecution of the Jews is based on the fallacious idea that they are guilty as a race of monopolising power for their own interests against the interests of others. Doubtless there are glaring cases. But if we pause to think, cases of exploitation can be found in every society. It simply will not do to make general judgements. The idea is spread in some areas that black people do not maintain their houses and therefore are a liability. But this too is a generalisation which is most unfair. Every society has bad and good examples. Similarly there is the propaganda that Africa will always be involved in tribal warfare. But what could be more horrendous than the tribal war of Northern Ireland, or Yugoslavia?

James shows the fallacy of basing judgements on generalisations. These rich people for whom some of his readers wished to preserve the best seats, what about *them*? Could we not condemn *them* on the basis of generalisation? We certainly could, because many of them are noted for blasphemy of our Lord's name, and for their exploitation of the poor.

Favouritism is to be guilty of evil thoughts (2:4)

As individuals enter the church we do not have any right whatever to judge them by appearance and assess some as deserving of special favour and others of little favour or perhaps outright negative discrimination on the grounds of their race or colour.

It is impossible by outward appearance to know the worth of people as they stand before God and we cannot be sure of their motives. To show prejudice is to be guilty of evil thoughts.

Carey Family Conference

See front inside cover

After eight years of organising the Carey Family Conference (Leeds 84, 85, 88; Gloucester 86, 87; Ripon 89, 90 and North Wales 91), Leeds Reformed Baptist Church have for two years been pleading for a sabbatical. Many will wish to express their gratitude to LRBC for the tremendous work expended providing many memorable times of spiritual edification, enjoyable fellowship and physical recreation.

At this time, there is in the Church of England, a general protest by the clergy against multi-faith worship. This is surely right since God has revealed himself as the Only Triune God and we may only approach him by way of the perfect work of his Son (Jn 14:6). It is dishonest to pretend that all ways are acceptable when they are not. We are obligated to be very clear about the character of Jehovah and how we are to pray to him. Once that is established we must urge all to repent and believe and receive God's grace in Christ. There must be no discrimination whatsoever on the grounds of favouritism and racism, for the gospel is to be proclaimed to all equally and on that basis we can expect a response from all kinds and conditions of men.

Favouritism is a transgression of the royal law of love (2:8-11)

The text tells us what is meant by the royal law. It is the law of love. The sum of the moral law or decalogue is love to God and my neighbour. This law has been confirmed by the King who has the authority to endorse it and make its new covenant application plain (Matt chapters 5-7). The royal law is the law by which we will all be judged. It is a law which consists not of the letter only but of the spirit. It is not a law by which we are seeking to justify ourselves. We have a righteousness which is perfect, for it is his perfect and complete fulfilment of the law on our behalf (Jer 23:6; 33:15,16). Now we seek in every way to keep and honour that law of love. We break that law of love if we discriminate by showing favour to the rich and putting down the poor. We transgress that royal law if we discriminate and judge others on the basis of race or colour. When we show favouritism we sin and are convicted by the law of love as lawbreakers.

We must not imagine that the law of love is supine or weak. James says that in the great judgement there will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy (2:13). But as Christ has triumphed to make a way of mercy for us so we must exercise mercy toward others, not favouring some and rejecting others, but by showing mercy without favouritism and without racism.

How do we regard those who come to church for the first time? Do we think highly of those who have good jobs and high incomes but little of elderly pensioners? Do we discriminate in our hearts and think less of some nationalities than others? James makes it utterly plain. No favouritism! — which by definition also means no racism.

Check-up for Church Members

This article was extracted from the Works of John Flavel (Vol 6. pp. 586-589), and rewritten in modern language. It appeared in the July 1991 issue of The Protestant Review, Australia. To match the style of writing we have used the New KJV for Scripture quotes. It must be pointed out that the abbreviation of the original may appear simplistic. Clearly many more Scripture passages could be brought to bear concerning the issues raised, but the object of these brief points is to provoke thought and self-examination.

Ten Point Check-up

There are ten sins of which church members are frequently guilty. Each of them is plainly forbidden by the Word of God. Because of this, those who indulge in them merit God's strong displeasure. However, as each member honestly faces these issues, the church will receive the fruits of his favour. The ten sins are:

1. Hypocrisy

How we live before the world is vital. Lack of care and thought about how we live before those outside the church is one of the most common sins of church members. Colossians 4:5 says; 'Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside.' By a careless disregard for this rule, we harden the wicked in their sins, bring guilt upon ourselves, and reproach upon the name and ways of God.

2. Laziness

Idleness or neglecting your duties in your work place is plainly contrary to 2 Thess 3:11,12. 'There are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all. . . . Those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.' Idleness brings poverty (literally) on yourselves and scandal on the name of Christ.

3. Tale-bearing

Tale-bearing and gossiping includes revealing things which should be kept confidential within a family or between persons. This causes much strife, cooling and quenching mutual love. It is expressly forbidden in Leviticus 19:16: 'You shall not go about as a tale-bearer among your own people.' 1 Timothy 5:13 warns about those who are 'not only idle but gossips and busy-bodies, saying things which they ought not'.

4. Receiving gossip

Christians sometimes believe rumours or gossip and take rash action against others on this basis. We ought not to do this against even the lowliest member 'lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings' (2 Cor 12:20). We must especially guard against doing this against church officers. 'Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses' (1 Tim 5:19). This sin strikes at the bond of peace in the family, the church and society.

5. Neglecting worship

Do you neglect God's worship or the Lord's Supper for trivial reasons? That is, reasons other than works of necessity or mercy, contrary to Hebrews 10:25, 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some. . . .' Minor matters should never hinder us from our chief duty – to worship God.

6. Lateness

Arriving late for worship demonstrates a lack of zeal for God's house. It also shows that you are not expecting God's blessing in worship. 'I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD"' (Ps 122:1).

7. Irreverence

Irreverence and lack of seriousness at

worship are common sins. 'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those who are around him' (Ps 89:7). One evidence of this is an excessively casual attitude towards how we dress for worship. Another evidence of this sin is a lazy posture. The pew is not a resting place. Nor is it the place for idle chatter. Ecclesiastes 5:1 admonishes, 'Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools.'

8. *Reproof*

Reproof is universally neglected. We have a duty to prove sin biblically. 'You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him' (Lev 19:17). This is Christ's own rule; 'if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone' (Matt 18:15). We are also to receive reproof from our brothers when it is necessary. 'Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him reprove me; it shall be as excellent oil' (Ps 141:5).

9. *Disunity*

Unresolved strife and friction between members causes division. Differences are to be nipped in the bud prudently and promptly, not allowed to blossom into public scandals. The apostle's rule in 1 Corinthians 6:5-6 is, 'Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you. . . . But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! . . . It is already an utter failure for you. . . . Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded?' Paul was always concerned about disunity (1 Cor 1:10, Phil 4:2).

10. *Self-centredness*

Beware of a self-centred attitude. Preoccupation with our own concerns is expressly condemned in Philippians 2:21. 'All seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.' How different was Paul's attitude to his brothers and sisters in Christ! 'Who is weak, and I am not weak?

Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?' (2 Cor 11:29).

Six blessings flow from faithful self-examination

1. Facing these sins and repenting of them will put a lustre on your Christian witness before the world. It will make it look glorious to many who now despise you. 'Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things' (Tit 2:10). Paul says this to encourage us to take care about how we live as Christians.

2. This will attract and win many of the world to Christ. It will wonderfully prosper the purpose of the gospel. 'That you may be blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation . . . that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain' (Phil 2:15,16).

3. This will powerfully shut the mouths of all who mock or blaspheme the Christian faith. 'For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men' (1 Pet 2:15).

4. This will greatly glorify God which is our chief reason for living. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' (Matt 5:16).

5. This will bring God's blessing of much inward peace to his people, according to Galatians 6:16, 'and as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.'

6. This will ensure the presence of God with us and among us, giving us great joy in worship. It will also give us stability and glory in our churches. Why? Because Christ walks among the golden lampstands. If we defect from the gospel he threatens to 'remove (our) lampstand from its place — unless (we) repent' (Rev 2:5).

News

Following a six-week itinerary by the editor and his wife in Southern Africa during October and November 1991, which included preaching and visiting churches, missions and isolated Christians, much of the news in this issue comes as an up-to-date, first hand report.

Mozambique

The war between FRELIMO, the Marxist governing regime, and RENAMO, the rebel force in opposition, has been going on since 1975. There is a longing for peace and talks to end the conflict have been taking place. With the possibility of a free election in the future RENAMO have been less violent than previously. Over the years the massacre of village populations has led to more than a million refugees fleeing for refuge to Malawi as well as an untold number to South Africa. Over half a million have perished in the war. It is now estimated that the population is about 14 million. Doctor Charles Woodrow and his wife Julie are from a Reformed Baptist church in California. They labour as medical missionaries in Nampula in the north. On the morning of October 12 last, the hospital where they work was attacked, looted and ransacked by RENAMO guerillas. Irrespective of their weakness, patients fled for their lives into the bush. At least one of them died as a result. Amazingly one anaemic elderly man has survived in spite of having undergone major surgery. He scrambled from his bed, ran down the corridor, vaulted over a wall onto the roof below, leapt another fifteen feet to the ground and ran a mile into the bush. Charles Woodrow comments, 'One wonders what might be accomplished for good if only we feared the right things; should we not as



Pastor Domingos Meque

our Lord warned, fear him who has power to cast both body and soul into hell?"

As suggested above, the policy of RENAMO has moderated. In recent times they wantonly massacred anyone who could not flee. In this case no one was shot by them. The need for a peaceful settlement is paramount. For that we should pray earnestly (1 Tim 1:1-4).

Last month Lyn and I visited Maputo which is the capital and also the base for many missionary agencies. Amongst others, we visited the Africa Evangelical Fellowship, the Southern Baptists and the Assemblies of God. We were the guests of an indigenous group, Missao da Igreja Evang. da Nova Alianca de Jesus, and stayed with the leader, Domingos Meque. He is the pioneer and church planter for some hundred churches. It would be difficult from our Western perspective to pigeon-hole an indigenous grouping like this. The work is very young. As in all the situations we witnessed there is a strong emphasis on 2 Timothy 2:2, training men who will train others. All training is especially with evangelism and church planting in mind. Why is there such receptivity now in a land which for four centuries was



Nova Alianca bookshop in Maputo

oppressed by Roman Catholic restrictions similar to the conditions which pertained for ages in Spain? From a natural point of view the desperate uncertainties of life may account for the widespread openness to the gospel. However an experienced missionary said he attributed the rapid increase of believers and churches to the power of the Holy Spirit. It has been and continues to be a time of spiritual awakening. Desperately needed is reliable literature in Portuguese which is the national language.

South Africa

The Reformed Baptist Association of South Africa meets three times a year. We were present at the November meeting held at Constantia Park Baptist Church in Pretoria. It was heartening to learn of the initiatives being taken to reach out to needy areas and especially of the enterprise to encourage and support Zambian pastors to visit places like the Ciskei in the Eastern Cape.

In early times the Cape Province was called the Cape of Good Hope. Good hope is exactly where South Africa is right now. In spite of violence in the townships the overall political atmo-

sphere is much more relaxed than it used to be. We noted the new South Africa emerging in Newcastle, Natal, where Zulu families have moved into a middle class white suburb. They have been visited by members of the Baptist church (pastor Vernon Light), and invited to the church and better still when they have come they have been made to feel welcome. There is also a good unity with the Zulu speaking Baptist church at Madadane not far away (pastor Alpheus Sibiya). Rustenberg in the Northern Transvaal is known as a CP area. The Conservative Party (CP) which of course is a different animal to the party bearing the same name in Britain, is strongly pro-apartheid. Here the new South Africa is more slow in developing. Henri Jooste, the pastor of the Baptist church in Rustenberg, has a great wide open door in training men for evangelism and pastoring in the adjacent independent black state of Bophuthatswana. A rich platinum mining industry provides employment for large numbers. It was encouraging to have a combined service with Bophuthatswanians and to enjoy rich fellowship with them, observing a great desire in them for expository preaching.

Namibia

Namibia covers more than three times the area of the UK but only has a population of 1.3 million. The recent transition to independence has been achieved without violence and there is a relaxed atmosphere. There is a fine road network and infrastructure in the country as a whole, a legacy from South Africa? The infrastructure appears to be well maintained and the capital, Windhoek, is impressive as an apparently thriving city. Certainly the housing areas for the main section of the city's black population compared favourably with what we have seen in other parts of the continent. Christianity has been established over many generations. The evangelicals are earnest about the training of black pastors. Two relatively small denominational Bible Training Colleges are in the process of combining their resources and it was good to see a spirit of co-operation and enthusiasm among the able leaders together with the provision of excellent premises. Joachim Rieck pastors the Eastside Baptist Church. He is a Namibian by birth and was trained in Cape Town where as one of the few believers in Free Grace at college, he was encouraged by the preaching of Douglas MacMillan and myself when we visited in 1987.

Zambia

Mention has been made of inviting Zambian pastors to preach in various parts of South Africa. The indigenous Reformed Baptist movement in Zambia is heartening. Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka have commenced publication of a Reformed Baptist Magazine, *Grace and Truth*. The first issue, April-June 1991 contains 12 pages of vigorous reforming material full of quality and relevance for South Africa. Included is a

fine work by Ferrell Griswold on the world and life views held by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. The editor is Conrad Mbewe, PO Box 50946, Lusaka, Zambia.

It is noted that the new Zambian president, Frederick Chiluba, claims to have been converted to Christ while in prison under the previous president, Kenneth Kaunda. On his first full day in office he attended the Pentecostal Assembly in Lusaka. Politicians, especially in Africa where corruption is rife, come under enormous pressure. Let us pray for political leaders.

Romania and EELAC

5,000 copies of the 1689 Confession in Romanian have been printed and are ready for distribution. In order to facilitate a thorough distribution EELAC has been consulted.

EELAC stands for the Eastern European Literature Advisory Committee. EELAC is a registered charity with five trustees including Ron Davies who is a tutor at the All Nations Christian College and who in earlier years worked for the Banner of Truth Trust. Ron has preached in Romania on a number of occasions.

EELAC has been instrumental in the setting up of evangelical non-denominational publishing houses in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. Careful analysis has been made of the national and church needs. An editorial policy has been defined. This focuses on producing titles to equip leadership and a detailed publishing programme has been set up for the future which includes Bible commentaries, reference works and titles by authors such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J I Packer, A W Tozer, Francis Schaeffer and C S Lewis.

A Better Way: Reformation & Revival

(Part 2)

by Tom Nettles

Revival

Definition

Revival is the application of reformation truth to human experience. It occurs one person at a time and may appear in individuals who thereby become spiritually isolated from the world around them; or it may appear on a relatively massive scale radically altering the spiritual face of an entire church, community, or even nation. Normally therefore, revival involves three things: the presence of reformation doctrine either preached, read, or otherwise known, the experimental application of that doctrine accompanied



Prof Tom Nettles

by loving but careful investigation of that experience; and the extension of such an experience to a large number of people.

Biblical paradigm

Most of the awakenings described in Scripture appear to be a combination of reformation and revival, because as mentioned in the last *RT* (124), it is always difficult to separate them. The reality of them being separated at times, however, is seen in some of the addresses to the churches in Revelation. Thyatira appears to be a church with good experience (Rev 3:19) but with a shallow and imperceptive doctrinal base (v. 20). They were in need of reformation; the Lord, however, condescending to their weakness required only that they hold in purity the truth that they did know (2:24,25). The church at Ephesus, on the other hand (2:1-7), appears to be doctrinally sound but in need of increased affection for the truths known. They were able even to examine and expose those who falsely claimed to be apostles (2:2) and persevere under persecution while affirming the truth about Christ (2:3). The admonition they receive, however, is one for increased love, 'You have left your first love.' Here we see a case of the essential truths being in place and even prompting discretion and courage; yet beyond abiding by the truth of God, they need a resurgence of love for the God of truth.

1 Corinthians 9:23-10:6 contemplates the possibility of understanding and

preaching the gospel, and even manifesting the external gifts of an apostle, or being the beneficiary of the powerful and godly leadership of one like Moses and still falling short of genuine conversion. In 9:23 Paul indicates that his zeal for the gospel is not only that he might win those to whom he witnesses, but that he might partake of its blessings himself. Verses 24-27 are then exegetical of verse 23 and show that Paul consistently pursued personal conformity to the gospel so that he would not prove disapproved, failing the test in the end.

Christian experience, though entirely dependent on the internal, efficacious working of the Spirit of God also is entirely dependent on full involvement of heart, soul, and strength of the sinner. When asked if only a few would be saved, Jesus answered, 'Strive (or agonise) to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able' (Luke 13:24). In a sense the answer is, 'Yes, only a few will be saved; but only because the many desire the glory of the end of salvation and not the cross of the way of salvation.'

Entering and staying in the way of salvation is revival. It is a sovereign work of God utterly dependent on his power and grace that engages, enlivens and expands all the capacities of sinners to embrace Christ's redemptive work and enjoy the glory of the Lord.

The historical framework

It is helpful, in my opinion, to refer here to the first Great Awakening in America. This is not because it was necessarily the purest of all revivals, nor the most powerful; but it had at its heart Jonathan Edwards, preacher, theologian, philosopher, spiritual psychologist, and religious critic. Not only was he one of its major participants but also its most careful analyst. From his first hand observations of the phenomena, his understanding of human spirituality and careful theological application, he developed a body of divinity pertaining specifically to human experience in revival. He was very positive toward revival, but careful to state clearly the distinctives that marked a movement as the work of God. Just as clearly he discussed a number of other factors which often accompanied deep spiritual movements which detractors often used to seek to discredit the entire work. To each of these Edwards responded, 'It is no argument that the work in general is not the work of the Spirit of God. That there are some counterfeits, is no argument that nothing is true.'

Several tensions always are present in interaction in a time of revival. Maintaining the truth in both sides of the tensions is the peculiar stewardship of revival leaders. Edwards, better than but along with his contemporaries, sought to do this on several fronts. First, he preached careful and detailed doctrinal messages on the major themes of the Reformation while carefully crafting pungent application to personal responsibility and experience. Second, Edwards showed great leniency toward a large number of unusual manifestations, but allowed nothing to deter him from ministering on the true distinguishing traits of a work of God's Spirit. Third, he pressed the urgency of a

sinner's obligation to immediate repentance and faith, but would never assist the sinner in gaining comfort too quickly by omitting any truth of the gospel of redemption. Fourth, Edwards and his contemporaries took no measure designed strictly to increase the number of respondents, but were nevertheless interested in growth as an evidence of a genuine and unusually powerful working of God's Spirit.

Doctrinal, experiential preaching

The series of messages under which the first movements of revival began to occur in Northampton were elaborate theological expositions of the doctrine of justification by faith. Determined to defend the biblical teaching from 'Arminian' perversions of the truth, Edwards went into great detail on the relationship between repentance and faith, how faith is best suited to be the means through which Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. He defended this detailed doctrinal preaching as entirely appropriate in light of the nature of the subject and the dangers of the times.

While Edwards preached pure doctrine to the full, he did all he could to persuade the lost to repent. In 'Pressing into the Kingdom', preached in the first wave of awakening in Northampton, he urged sinners to use all the energy they have to seek to take the kingdom of God by storm. A person pressing into the kingdom does not stop at any cross that may be put in his way.

*'They are so set for salvation, that those things by which others are discouraged, and stopped, and turned back do not stop them, but they press through them. The gain is so great and the loss is so immeasurable that if by any means they can obtain, they will obtain.'*¹

Even with all his arousing of sinners to press into the kingdom, Edwards still insisted that 'God is under no manner of obligation to show mercy to any natural man, whose heart is not turned to God'. God has obligated himself to no one either by justice or promise no matter how hard one may strive as long as he has no 'true repentance begun in him'. Edwards believed 'that if I had taught those that came to me under trouble any other doctrine, I should have taken a most direct course utterly to have undone them'. If the extreme of despair appeared, Edwards just as surely reminded the seeker of the 'infinite and all-sufficient mercy of God in Christ'. In this way both fear and hope were duly mixed and 'proportioned to preserve their minds in a just medium between the two extremes of self-flattery and despondence'.²

George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, though not as detailed in their presentations, were just as determined theologically. Whitefield, in 'The Lord our Righteousness' defends the deity of Christ against Arians and Socinians and gives a thorough exposition of the necessity of Christ's righteousness in his human nature, both passive and active obedience, and of that righteousness being imputed to us. He then defends the doctrine of imputation against any

objections and closes with urgent appeals to all classes and ages to receive the Lord as their righteousness.

Equally doctrinal were William and John Tennent as well as Samuel Blair. Messages on the justice of God, divine wisdom, regeneration, predestination, God's sovereignty and human striving, were regularly preached.

Clear doctrine forcefully preached undergirded the fervent appeal and application so characteristic of the first Great Awakening.

The second Great Awakening

The second Great Awakening in New England (1799-1805) was characterised by Edwardsean preaching. There were similar narratives of the events and spiritual state preceding and accompanying the revival. *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* of November 1803 carried a 22 column report on a spiritual awakening in Lebanon, New York. The pastor describes a 15 year decline in the vitality of the church until in September, 1801 'but eleven male members remained' though towns surrounding them were recipients of 'revivals of religion'. A change in the state of mind of the people began, however, after a day on which 'two discourses were preached on the miseries of hell'. Soon several remarkable conversions occurred including some who had been outwardly friendly to religion, some 'leading characters in the town' and some who were energetic enemies of religion. Meetings in the pastor's home swelled beyond his walls until above 500 were meeting in one of the town halls. Several of the schools in the town were 'solemnised' and many students and some teachers were converted. This came about through the use of the same means that had been used for the 15 years of the period of decline.

*'There was no uncommon providence, nor any new means made use of in the beginning of the revival; but the same kind of providence with which the people were before visited, and the same truths which they before heard made a very different impression. None can, therefore, rationally attribute the awakening to anything short of the power of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.'*³

After narrating the events of the two periods of revival and before delineating the specific 'means made use of by the Lord to impress the minds of sinners', the reporter spoke of the number of those converted and their age and relative social condition.

*'One hundred and ten have been added to the church, about thirty more, we hope, have passed from death to life, and seventy-three have been baptised, in the course of the revival. Ninety-nine were received into the church in the compass of one year, sixty-four of which were received in the compass of two months.'*⁴

‘It is visible,’ said the reporter, ‘that God hath acted as a sovereign, having mercy on whom he would have mercy.’ The greatest number of the people converted were between the ages of 15 and 40. The oldest was 55 and the youngest about 11. Most conversions came from families who were accustomed to public worship though some came from those quite apart from former church influences. In one family, believing parents saw 10 children converted.

In describing the means made use of, virtually the whole focuses on the reactions of people to the sermons and the opening of their minds to the reception of different aspects of traditional Protestant theology. Great distress for sin, genuine perceptions of the justness of hell, and deep remorse for wasted time and opportunities, were succeeded by satisfaction that God is sovereign, that he has a purpose, that he will display his mercy in the salvation of as many as he sees proper, and that he will cause all things to advance to his glory. They experience a change of mind in regard to God and his law and begin to love his law because it is holy, and love and adore Christ for his person and the marvellous sufficiency of his work. ‘They are sensible of new views, new aims, new aversions, and new delights.’

‘Numbers who were not only inveterate, but open opposers of the doctrine of election, now not only acknowledge its truth, but say if it were not true, they should not have the least hope of heaven. And I know of none who have obtained hopes in this awakening, who have not embraced the Calvinistic system of doctrines.’⁵

The revival mentioned above, though greatly focused on religious experience, was characterised by ‘remarkable regularity and order’; but the *Magazine* did not hesitate to report meetings in which more physical effects were in evidence. A report from Austinburgh, New Connecticut speaks of those who ‘lost bodily strength’ and others, three, who were ‘fallen down together at the door’.

In the second Great Awakening, theology and experience flourished together. Careful and uncompromising attention to precise doctrinal matters undergirded the inception and continuance of deep religious experience.

During the last century, however, great changes were to come about in doctrine and practice which have radically affected this subject. Reformation and revival must continue to exercise our minds and prayers.

References

¹ Edwards, *Works*, 1:656.

² Edwards, *Faithful Narrative in The Great Awakening*, pp. 167, 168.

³ *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, November 1803, pp. 180, 181. The report is by Silas Churchill and extends from 179-189. It is typical of several that occur in the magazine from July 1800 when it began, through at least 1804.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Theonomy Considered and other Reviews

Invitation to Live. Richard Baxter. A transposition of *A Call to the Unconverted* into contemporary English by John Blanchard. 120 pages paperback, EP.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), whose tercentenary we have just been commemorating, was the most prolific of all the Puritan pastor-preacher writers. He wrote twice as much as John Owen. For sheer quality his *Reformed Pastor* has hardly been equalled. High up the scale for excellence is his *Saint's Everlasting Rest*. When first published Baxter's 'Call' was a best-seller which is not surprising when its worth is measured. Now it has been made available for evangelistic use today. John Blanchard is to be congratulated for a superb work in putting Baxter's style into our idiom without changing the sense.

The power of the book lies in the fact that Baxter speaks right from the Lord's own heart from where he reasons persuasively, especially from the text in Ezekiel, *Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign God. Repent and live!* The arguments are cogent. The invitation is compelling. The print is large. The chapters come in attractive digestible sections, not too long. The cover is obviously designed for young people and is mediocre. It is a pity we cannot have the luxury of two, one noted for its beauty since this is such a fine book to commend to those, not only young people, who are not committed to Christ. We ought to remember just how much effort the Puritans put into making their books

works of art, producing them with such quality that many have survived for centuries.

The Doctrine of Repentance. Thomas Watson. Banner of Truth. 122 pages. Small size paperback. £1.50.

It is surprising how little we have on our shelves pertaining to this subject which, together with faith, forms an absolute necessity on the way to imputed righteousness. Like John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, Thomas Watson is eminently pleasant to read. As we would expect from a minister of his calibre he gets right down to definition and follows that with seven practical chapters. Though small in size this is a gem. Is the racy and meaty style the same as that in Watson's famous *Body of Divinity*? Yes it is, from first to last!

Theonomy, A Reformed Critique. Edited by William S Barker and W Robert Godfrey. 407 pages. Zondervan, USA.

Sixteen tutors associated with Westminster Seminary, as it now exists in both Escondido, CA. and Philadelphia, PA. have contributed studies on various aspects of theonomy which is another way of saying, Christian Reconstruction (see review in RT116). Although the essays are learned they are mostly expository, very informative, edifying, and enjoyable to read. John R Muether, in his chapter 'The Theonomic Attraction' writes, 'while we can learn much from theonomy by sociological analysis, we

readily concede that theonomy is first and foremost a *theological* question.’

The tone of the book throughout is conciliatory rather than aggressive. Wherever possible credit is given to theonomists.

The crux of the matter is whether the Mosaic civil law was for Israel only or whether that law applies for all time to all civil governments.

The next issue which arises out of that is whether Christian preoccupation should be with evangelising the world according to the closing paragraph of Matthew 28 (the great commission) or whether the Church should be seeking to Christianise the world by means of legislation.

In a short review I can only refer to a few contributions in what is an exceptionally high quality volume.

Tremper Longman III in exploring the question of *God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today* shows that Gregg Bahnsen lists the following crimes as worthy of the death penalty: murder, adultery and unchastity, sodomy and bestiality, homosexuality, rape, incest, incorrigibility in children, sabbath breaking, kidnapping, apostasy, sorcery, false pretension to prophecy, and blasphemy.’ He points out that Rushdoony argues that a consistent use of the death penalty will radically reduce crime by eliminating the criminal element from our society and also by providing a deterrent (p. 44).

Robert D Knudson finely contrasts the character of the old order with that of the new. Unlike the Mosaic order where there was precise law and control, now there is freedom: ‘The authority of Christ is preeminent in the Church; it is

unlimited. But the Church itself, as an institution, has limited authority, even over the lives of those who are its communicant members. It may not seek to have authority over the life of the Christian in every respect. It should not overregulate. It should faithfully perform the task that Christ has given to it. Within its sphere, it has the glorious opportunity of exercising spiritual persuasion, seeking to bring men and women to a knowledge of Christ and to the service of Christ with their entire selves. In doing this, the Church will call men and women to obey Christ’s commands. But if the Church falls into legalism, it will constrict rather than expand the lives of its members in their service of Christ’ (p. 37).

Bruce K. Waltke in his study of dispensationalism and covenant theologies concludes: ‘Dispensationalism, by its over-zealous negation of the law and by its radical separation of Church and State, has left the State without the light of the law. On the other hand, theonomy, by its overkill application of the law to the State and by its unholy alliance of Church and State, would ultimately take the light of the Church out of the world and would leave the world in its great darkness just as surely as Judaism did’ (p. 85).

In his exposition of the two covenants’ administrations, John M Frame includes this observation: ‘The temptation for theonomists is to think they have discovered a perfect oneness in the relation between the testaments — a oneness without diversity. In practice, they know that such is impossible; but in their rhetoric, they often talk as if they had achieved that goal. . . . In seeking reconciliation, it is important to admit frankly that such pretensions are sinful in God’s sight. We do not have the final solution to the relation between the

testaments. And we are unlikely to find one that is utterly without difficulty' (p. 99).

Dennis E Johnson in his chapter, *The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions* comes to this conclusion: 'The question whether the penal sanctions should also instruct the State as it is charged to administer justice to persons within and without God's covenant is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament' (p. 191).

Richard B Gaffin in his contribution with the title, *Reflections on Postmillennialism*, makes the excellent point that before the 1920s the term Amill did not exist. Now strictly speaking all who are not Premill are Amill and most Amill have a degree of Postmill since it would be difficult to find any who did not believe in progress. But some are more hopeful of the universal success of the gospel than others and some lay more stress on the place of Romans 11 in that advance than others. However it needs to be made clear, and certainly Richard Gaffin makes it very plain, that the Postmill idea of theonomy is another kind compared to that of Jonathan Edwards. A theonomistic age is different from an age in which redemption spreads on a global scale. Most Postmills believe that it is through the gospel that the truth is to fill the earth, which is the view of many theonomists, only their bombastic rhetoric makes it sound as though their hope is utopian rather than redemptive. Richard Gaffin's essay is a reminder that as far as eschatology is concerned we need the groundsmen to come and mark out the field so that we use names rightly. Also needed is a generous amnesty in the USA for many former Premills who are no longer convinced, but dare not say so!

Three chapters are devoted to history. Robert Godfrey demonstrates that



Robert Godfrey

Calvin held different views to Rushdoony. Sinclair Ferguson explores the convictions held by the Westminster divines concluding with the verdict, 'I conclude that the Confession does not expound, and nor does it prescribe, a theonomic viewpoint' (p. 348). Germane to the subject, Samuel Logan explores the views of the New England Puritans and concludes, 'They did not see themselves as some kind of reincarnation of the nation of Israel, and they did not want to see Israel's code reincarnated in their commonwealth' (p. 384).

D Clair Davis in the concluding chapter says, 'The NT just does not offer guidelines for policies to be pursued by a Christian emperor; rather it tells persecuted believers how to conduct themselves in a pagan state' (p. 390). He helpfully discusses reasons why theonomy appears to threaten (p. 392). He concludes with the concession that theonomists have raised issues that require attention such as the use of imprisonment as the primary punishment for crime (p. 402; cf. p. 54).

This volume is essential reading for all theonomists and others who are perplexed by the claims made by theonomy.

Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth, A Critique of Dispensationalism

by John Gerstner
Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Brentwood,
Tennessee, 1991

A review by Tom Wells



Pastor Tom Wells

The name 'dispensationalism' may not be known to all readers, but the system that goes under that name has been widely influential, especially in the United States. At its heart dispensationalism is a way of looking at the Scriptures that sees a very sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. The distinction does not simply refer to the past where all Bible students must see some distinction between Israel and the body of the redeemed. Dispensationalists look for a time — yet future — when there will be two sets of saved people, one called 'Israel', the other 'the Church'.

Often connected with dispensationalism are two other important issues. One is the 'Lordship controversy'. Many dispensationalists deny that a believer must take Christ both as Saviour and Lord (in the sense of 'boss') in order to be saved. They also often profess a modified Calvinism, modified in ways very unacceptable to Calvinists generally.

The well-known American theologian, John Gerstner, attacks dispensationalism in this 276 page volume. Dr Gerstner looks at all three areas I have mentioned above, as well as others, and vigorously dissents from what he believes dispensationalists teach.

The origins of dispensationalism

He begins with a historical sketch of the origins and development of the system. Within the limits the author sets for himself this section is excellent. We find here that dispensationalism is a variety of premillennialism, that is, the view that Christ will return to earth and set up a thousand-year reign prior to the eternal state. But dispensationalists normally insist that Christ will return for his

Church at the 'rapture', seven years before the establishment of a millennial kingdom. This return is thus 'pretribulational'. Since he will return again after the tribulation period, the system calls for two returns of Christ, one to take his Church to himself and the other to reveal his glory to the world.

Gerstner shows that while premillennialism was known in the early church, the dispensational variety can only trace its roots to the early nineteenth century. Its earliest history is connected with John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. Later it heavily influenced the Bible School movement in America and was spread widely by the Scofield Bible and by the work of such men as Lewis Sperry Chafer and the institution he founded, now known as Dallas Theological Seminary. In all this the author breaks no new ground but clearly outlines a history that has been closely studied in recent years.

Differences of interpretation

In Part 2 Gerstner looks at the 'philosophy and hermeneutics (principles of interpretation)' of dispensationalism. In this section he faults the system for having 'no philosophy of its own' (p. 75). He points out that noted dispensationalists have frankly borrowed their philosophical perspectives from other respected evangelicals, especially from within the Reformed camp.

When he comes to the system's principles of interpretation, Gerstner comes to the heart of differences between dispensationalists and others, as they see it. They often see themselves as literalists in a sea of those who spiritualise the text of Scripture. But as Gerstner points out, 'We all agree that most literature, including the Bible, is usually meant to be understood according to the literal construction of the words which are used. . . . At the point where we differ, there is a tendency for dispensationalists to be literalistic where the non-dispensationalist tends to interpret the Bible figuratively. But to say . . . that the two schools represent fundamentally different approaches is not warranted' (p. 86). Traditional dispensationalists will find this point hard to swallow, but some recognition of this fact can be seen in the dispensational camp in recent years.

Not Calvinists in any sense at all!

In Part 3 Gerstner discusses the theology of dispensationalism, and it's here that he finds a great deal to reject. In seven chapters he blasts the 'spurious' and the 'dubious' points of dispensational theology. It's impossible in a short review to follow him closely. Instead I shall mention a few major issues and comment on his positions.

Gerstner's most surprising chapter, to this writer, is chapter seven, entitled 'Spurious Calvinism'. Taking the 'five points of Calvinism' he seeks to show that dispensationalists have usually rejected all five.

Gerstner is on safe ground discussing two of these points. Dispensationalists themselves have usually rejected 'limited atonement', the idea that Christ died to redeem the elect alone. In addition, they have been frequently shown to have rejected the 'perseverance of the saints'. They do indeed believe that once a man is saved he can never again be lost, but they generally do not agree that the saint's life will necessarily be characterised by righteousness. Hence they prefer to speak of the 'preservation of the saints' or eternal security.

What of the other three points, 'total depravity', 'unconditional election' and 'irresistible grace'? Gerstner's response is, 'Dispensational Total Depravity is Not Total' (p. 107), 'Dispensational Unconditional Election is Not Unconditional' (p. 111) and 'Dispensational Irresistible Grace is Not Irresistible' (p. 131). There's a study in clarity!

What does total depravity mean?

Gerstner tells us rightly that total depravity means that 'man by the Fall became sinful in every aspect of his being' (p. 107). Do dispensationalists disagree? Yes, says Gerstner, they show their disagreement by saying that a natural 'man is nevertheless able to believe' (p. 109). If dispensationalists really hold that view, Gerstner is correct in his criticism of their Calvinism. How does he prove his position? He cites well-known dispensationalist, Dwight Pentecost. Pentecost says, 'Man is as bad off as he can be. There is a vast difference between being as bad as he can be, and being as bad off as he can be' (pp. 109f). Gerstner responds: 'According to Biblical doctrine, fallen man is as bad as he can be at the moment but not as bad as he can and will become' (p. 110).

Language like Pentecost's, however, has often been used by Calvinists to distinguish between total and absolute depravity. Gerstner's response is stimulating, but inconclusive. As it turns out, Pentecost does seem to hold that man has a natural ability to believe. I have read Pentecost in the pages cited by Gerstner and I think he has read Pentecost correctly. Nevertheless, for a reason I will show when we come to irresistible grace, I'm uncertain. In any case, it is wrong to assume that Pentecost speaks for 'all dispensationalists' (p. 110). Gerstner would need to quote dozens to establish the fact, if it is a fact, that even the majority agree with Pentecost.

The doctrine of election

Though Gerstner ranges more widely among dispensationalists in his discussion of 'unconditional election' his treatment still seems unfair. He faults Darby for his view of 'foreknowledge', though he does not quote Darby's view so that we may judge for ourselves (p. 111). He does not like the definition of election in the Scofield Bible which says, 'Election is according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Pet 1:2), and wholly of grace, apart from human merit' (p. 111). Would

any Calvinist, coming upon this statement elsewhere, find fault with it? Yet on the same page Gerstner says, 'One can see by this statement that the Scofield editors view God as foreseeing that the sinner will repent. Because God foresees this repentance and belief of the sinner, he, without any meritorious condition on the sinner's part, chooses him to everlasting life.' For all I know, the Scofield editors may have believed what Gerstner says. But how he got it out of that quotation is unclear to me.

How does L S Chafer, in his *Systematic Theology of Dispensationalism*, view foreknowledge and election? His discussion of foreknowledge (Vol. 7:158-160) is largely a quotation from Caspar Wistar Hodge, a man whose credentials as a Calvinist are impeccable. It includes this on Romans 8:28: 'Now the foreknowledge in this case cannot mean a prescience or foresight of faith (Meyer, Godet) or love (Weiss) in the subjects of salvation, which faith or love is supposed to determine the Divine predestination. This would not only contradict Paul's view of the absolutely sovereign and gracious character of election, but is diametrically opposed to the context of this passage' (7:159). Again, on the same page, Chafer quotes Hodge as saying, 'The divine foreknowledge is simply God's knowledge of his own eternal purpose.'

On page 114 Gerstner attempts to summarise Chafer's views on election as found in Chafer's *Systematic Theology* 1:231. There may be a typographical error here, since I can find nothing that agrees with Gerstner's summary at that point in Chafer. But elsewhere Chafer says about election, God's 'choice is not based on anticipated worthiness. Election is an act of grace apart from works. Neither faith nor good works is the cause of divine election. They are rather the fruit of election' (1:125). And again on the same page, 'The fact that a supposed conditional election is the belief of the majority is due, doubtless, to the reluctance on the part of man to admit that no merit resides in his natural self.' If this is not Calvinistic, what is?

In this same section Gerstner admits that Harry Ironside held to a 'true, unconditional election' (p. 114), but faults dispensationalist Norman Geisler for his Arminianism (p. 115). I am told however, that Norman Geisler, unlike many dispensationalists, does not claim to be a Calvinist.

What about irresistible grace?

Does Gerstner make his case that 'Dispensational Irresistible Grace is Not Irresistible' (p. 131)? I don't think so, although it is clear that many dispensationalists hold a view that is not standard Calvinism. Under the heading 'Irresistible Grace in Contemporary Dispensationalism' Gerstner takes Billy Graham as his first witness. He says of Graham's view, 'This is precisely the Arminian order — divine help, then human faith, followed by regeneration' (p. 137). In saying this he touches on the critical point in dispensational understanding, whether Graham is typical or not.

As Gerstner says, divine help, then human faith, followed by regeneration is indeed the Arminian order. But it may also be a Calvinistic order, if by divine help we understand efficacious or irresistible grace. Let me explain. The central point of Calvinism is monergism, the view that whatever determines the salvation of the sinner is entirely of God. The Arminian scheme defines the 'divine help' as sufficient grace, that is grace sufficient to allow the sinner to choose either for or against God. Sufficient grace determines nothing. It rather restores man's will to the kind of equilibrium that existed in Adam.

But for Chafer, Walvoord (at least in his earlier works) and other dispensationalists, the 'divine help' is efficacious grace, that is grace that guarantees that the sinner will turn to God. Hence God is totally the author of such salvation as Calvinism has always taught. Chafer describes it this way: 'Those thus favoured (by this work of efficacious grace) enter into the riches of divine grace by a faith which God engenders. That faith, it is declared, is 'not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Eph 2:8). Such imparted or inwrought faith leads on to a personal transaction with Christ — that specific commitment without which no adult or accountable person will be saved' (*Systematic Theology*, 3:223). Chafer's 'irresistible grace' really is irresistible.

We seem to have come to a semantic difference here. Gerstner's demand for life before one can believe is quite correct — regeneration, then faith! But whatever we may think of the classical dispensational scheme, it plainly supposes that God introduces a kind of life in the dead sinner, though it does not call it 'regeneration'. The word 'regeneration' does not come into the arrangement until later on, but the life comes in at the same point as it does for other Calvinists. This confusing terminology, however, has no doubt led many away from the Calvinism that it really espouses. Therein lies the tragedy connected with it. The man in the pew, hearing that men must believe in order to be born again, is almost bound to understand it in an Arminian way. And, in fact, that is the understanding that pervades dispensational churches. The pastors often retain their Calvinism, but ordinary members know little or nothing of it.

Different ways of salvation

Gerstner's next chapters discuss dispensationalism's 'Dubious Evangelicalism'. Here he accuses the system of teaching differing ways of salvation in different dispensations. Anyone who has done much reading on dispensationalism knows that this is an oft-repeated objection. The important point to remember there is that many present-day dispensationalists will agree with Gerstner. Scofield, Chafer and others made statements about salvation under the Old Covenant that are admitted on all sides to be indefensible. The remaining debate has to do with how far they were merely careless. On the whole, Gerstner is right in seeing an important problem here.

Israel and the Church

In chapter 10 Gerstner comes to the heart of dispensationalism, its distinction between Israel and the Church. In my judgement it is right here, at its heart, that the system is most vulnerable. Let's see how he handles this point.

Gerstner quotes Scofield who wrote, 'Comparing, then, what is said in Scripture concerning Israel and the Church, we find that in origin, calling, promises, worship, principles of conduct and *future destiny* all is contrast' (p. 85). In Scofield's view, Israel and the Church have almost nothing in common. Even their eternal destinies are distinct. That was the older dispensational view and it is still taught in many churches.

For some time, however, dispensational scholars have been backing away from this kind of strong contrast, especially with reference to eternal destiny. Gerstner notes this change in Charles Ryrie. I myself told another minister that Ryrie held to separate eternal destinies for Israel and the Church, only to be embarrassed when he called Ryrie and found that I was wrong!

Gerstner ranges through a number of NT passages in which dispensationalists have denied that the Church fulfils the promises given to Israel. These include Matthew 21:43; Acts 2:16-40 and Acts 15:13-21. In each of these he is on solid ground. As he says, '... many Old Testament prophecies to Israel are applied to the Church by the New Testament... (including) the fact that the Gentiles were to be included in the worship of God as it was revealed in the Old Testament (Amos 9:12)' (p. 199).

But while Gerstner rightly faults dispensationalism for its radical disjunction between the Church and Israel, he shows no recognition of the problem with which they are wrestling. Paedobaptists often speak of the identity of Israel and the Church and then make the jump to the identity of circumcision and baptism. The fault lies in not seeing the distinctions as well. I cannot discuss baptism in this review, but Gerstner is surely simplistic when he says, 'Paul teaches that Israel and the Church constitute an organic unity. They are the same olive tree with the Gentiles of the Church being grafted into the tree that was Israel (Romans 11:17-21)' (p. 187). Paul's tree was not Israel as she ever existed in the past. Paul's tree is what was left after Israel had been stripped of her unbelieving members. Unless Gerstner envisions that pruning process as having gone on all through Israel's history, there never was a time when OT Israel and Paul's tree were the same. The nation called 'the Church' is a new nation of which Israel is a type. But there is an organic unity between God's elect as individuals in all ages. The fact escaped classical dispensationalism.

Antinomianism and the Lordship controversy

Finally Gerstner takes up the twin topics of 'Dispensational Antinomianism' (p. 209) and 'The Lordship controversy' (p. 251). I'll try to treat these, along with remarks he makes on sanctification, in one section.

Gerstner believes that dispensationalists do not hold that progressive sanctification always goes hand in hand with salvation. A godly life, according to dispensationalism, is highly recommended and commanded, but some men (perhaps many) will get to heaven without it. Some Christians will be 'carnal' all their lives and still spend eternity with Christ.

Sadly, there is no question that many dispensationalists have taught this very thing. That's the source of the Lordship controversy. Gerstner has no trouble marshalling quotations that prove it, from Darby (p. 214), Scofield (p. 215), Walvoord (p. 218), Ryrie (p. 219) and many others. What lies behind their contention? First, they claim that any other view amounts to salvation by works. Gerstner shows the emptiness of this argument by quoting the Reformation formula: 'Faith alone justifies, but faith is not alone' (p. 211). The formula is scriptural as Gerstner shows in discussing James 2 (pp. 228ff).

The 'two-nature' theory

Some dispensationalists have had another reason for defending this cleavage between justification and sanctification, the 'two-nature' theory. Though orthodox Calvinists have in the past spoken of the Christian as having two natures, the particular use that many dispensationalists have made of this phrase has led to its falling into disuse by others recently. Gerstner quotes Darby on this point: 'He that is born of God does not practise sin. The reason is evident; he is made partaker of the nature of God; he derives his life from him. . . . This nature has not the principle of sin, so as to commit it. How could it be that the divine nature could sin?' (p. 240).

The model that this quotation describes goes something like this. When a man is regenerated he gets a new nature, literally, and not simply the renewal of himself as a man. That new nature lives in the believer along with his old nature. So now, like the incarnate Son of God, he is a being with two natures. And what's the consequence of this? Nothing has happened to the old nature in all its corruption; it will simply pass away at death. There is no way to sanctify it or make it godly.

On the other hand, the new 'divine nature', as Darby called it, is perfect and needs no sanctification. And since these two natures make up the man, no improvement is needed in the one, nor is any possible in the other. There is no place, then, for sanctification in the traditional sense. But dispensationalists see the problem with this model and have an answer. All depends, they say, on

which of these two natures the man or woman yields to. So sanctification can go forward or backward at any time or all the time, depending on the yieldedness of the man.

What's wrong with this? This model, as Gerstner shows, needs a 'third nature' that mediates between the old and new natures and somehow makes the crucial choice to yield or not to yield to the new nature' (p. 237). But on everyone's understanding that is one nature too many. Gerstner points up the better way. We need to say, 'with Reformed theology, that the Spirit begins to effect real and positive changes in the (one) human nature of the regenerate person and that, because of this miraculous grace, the Christian is enabled to grow spiritually' (p. 236). The new nature of the Christian is a renewed nature, much like the new world after the flood was a renewed world.

Do dispensationalists today still cling to this strange psychological model? Probably not. They still use the old terminology of two natures, but they struggle to fill those terms with more biblical ideas. Those who want to follow this struggle further should read Walvoord's discussion of what he calls 'The Augustinian-Dispensational Perspective of Sanctification' in *Five Views on Sanctification* (no editor named), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1987, pp. 199ff.

Shooting at a moving target

Throughout this review I have been hard on Dr Gerstner as well as on dispensationalism. The reason is this: though Dr Gerstner has done his homework, he is shooting at a moving target. It's no longer possible to speak of dispensationalism as a unit. In earlier days the system had various varieties and offshoots, but if Darby, Scofield or even Chafer were to return today, they would be bewildered by the various stances of those still called 'dispensationalists'.

In this book we see an unreconstructed classical covenant theologian basically taking on classical dispensationalism. But both systems are changing rapidly today. The reason is the new emphasis on 'biblical theology', a desire to start fresh with the Scriptures and rebuild the categories of systematic theology. Readers of *Reformation Today* may be grateful for this movement. It bodes well for Baptists, especially Calvinistic Baptists.

Postscript by the editor. Readers of this article will be interested to know that I had lunch with Dr Gerstner while in the vicinity of Pittsburg last October. Dr Gerstner is in his mid seventies and does not enjoy good health. Nevertheless he is blessed with extraordinary spiritual energy which enables him to work long hours and produce large quantities of valuable work, especially as he researches and writes on Jonathan Edwards. He gave me a copy of his book *Wrongly Dividing* which I in turn gave to Tom Wells who could hardly put it down even when it was time to eat!

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