

REFORMATION TODAY



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Front cover:

A rural house church in China. Phenomenal increase in the number of Christians has taken place in various parts of China. Baptismal services in which about 200 believers are baptised are common. Little wonder that persecution from the Communist authorities is fierce. See News for further details.

Featured on the right is Pastor Lin Xiang (Pastor Lamb) who leads a house church attended by 1,300.



Bob Sheehan

It is with sorrow that we report to our readers that Bob Sheehan suffered a brain haemorrhage on May 3rd. Following emergency surgery he has been in a coma since May 8th. Bob Sheehan is the pastor of Welwyn Evangelical Church. He teaches in the European Missionary Fellowship training ministers. He was due to be the main speaker at the Carey Family Conference at Cloverley Hall in Shropshire, August 18-23, 1997. David Ellis, formerly pastor of Cuckfield Baptist Church, Sussex and now pastor of Bethesda Strict Baptist Church, Stowmarket, Suffolk, has agreed to fulfil that role.

Carey Conferences

For details of the Carey Family Conference, August 18-23, 1997 please write to David Jarrett, Penglais, 6a Soar Close, Croesyceiliog, Cwmbran, Gwent NP44 2PD, (tel 01633 866214). Prof Michael Haykin has agreed to speak on the subject 'Carey and His Friends' on the Tuesday evening and on Andrew Fuller on Wednesday evening.

Principal visiting speakers at the Carey Ministers Conference, Jan 7-9, 1998 are Martin Holdt of South Africa, John Campbell of Australia and Dr Gaius Davies of London, UK.

Contributors to this issue

John M. Frame is Associate Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary West, Escondido, California. The two articles 'Where did Denominations come from?' and 'Reformation in our Personal Attitudes' have been extracted from his book *Evangelical Reunion - Denominations and the Body of Christ*. Baker Book House, 185 pp, now out of print. Gratitude is expressed to Prof Frame and to Baker Book House.

Dennis E Johnson is Associate Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary West. We are grateful for his permission to reprint his sermon 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' which appeared as an appendix in the above book.

Michael Haykin is Professor of Church History at Heritage Baptist College and Theological Seminary in London, Ontario, Canada.

Bill James is pastor of the Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa, UK.

Editorial

Unity is the theme of this issue. Unfortunately some think that Christian unity is the province of the Ecumenical Movement (the WCC). For others appeals for unity can ring alarm bells that unity involves compromise. Wrong thinking must be rejected as we consider four reasons why unity is paramount.

First, there is the unity of believers in the local church. Local church divisions are common yet they seldom have anything to do with doctrine. If there are quarrels in a local church this destroys the testimony of that church. The appeal of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1-3 is always relevant. Bill James portrays the blessedness of unity and John Frame applies the Scriptures to eradicate sinful attitudes.

Second, there is the need to commend the great legacies of truth we have inherited to those ignorant of them. The history of this journal is wedded to the recovery of the Reformed Faith. In the early days we were won to this position by the patience and forbearance of brothers who spoke the truth in love (Eph 4:15) *and persevered with us*. We must not be construed as compromisers when we show a friendly rather than a fierce attitude to those who hold different views. We need to exercise a generous spirit of love and concern for the universal Body of Christ. We have much to contribute to that Body and should exercise more faith in the power of the truth and in the power of the Holy Spirit to apply the truth. Let us evidence the same passion as our Lord for unity (John 17:20-23).

Third, there are new initiatives today to re-evaluate lines of evangelical unity and co-operation. Who are our friends? With whom can we safely co-operate? Where are the lines to be drawn? Just how far and where does the New Testament constrain unity? Loyalty and obedience to the Word of God is a governing factor. Is Scripture supreme? Is it really the final arbiter? Liberalism subverts the Word as do those charismatics who raise their own experiences above the Word. It is impossible to accommodate that mentality. There is no alternative but to distance ourselves from fanatics who give Christianity a bad name.

However there are many other matters which should not preclude unity. The regulative principle for public worship is sometimes used to criticise other churches. We cannot prove from Scripture any one form of service to be exclusively superior to every other. We can only test each aspect or part of

worship by Scripture. Often issues divide in which conclusions have to be drawn by skilful inference rather than direct biblical statements. Another source of needless division is church government. For instance we can commend the plurality of elders but cannot make that principle mandatory. Indeed to do so in some instances has proved disastrous. These and other topics receive *relatively little direct emphasis in Scripture*. It is sad when leaders give much of their lives to defending precisely the minor doctrinal points that make their churches different from others. Is such effort really motivated by a desire to bring unity of understanding to the Church, or might it stem in some measure from human pride, a desire to retain power over others, and an attempt at self-justification, which is displeasing to God and ultimately unifying to the Church?

Fourth, there is the complex reality of denominations. John Frame provides us with an excellent perspective on the development of denominations. These need not be bad. Indeed it is by them that Christianity organises practical work at home and abroad. Take away denominations and what will be left? There is a very tiny segment of Brethren that disavows denominationalism but that grouping is more denominationally distinctive in their disavowals and their practice than most others! It is vital that we look seriously at the way in which denominations hurt Christianity.

Denominationalism has greatly weakened church discipline. When there is no inter-denominational co-operation, people who are disciplined (especially adulterers and con-people who cheat on money), just hop from one church to another where they repeat the damage.

Denominationalism has brought about an imbalance of gifts. Some denominations stress academic excellence and doctrine, others evangelism and missions. The dangers of imbalance should be obvious.

Denominations tend to compete with each other and this hardens rather than heals existing divisions. It is much easier to divide than it is to heal. Divisions seldom escape the attention of the media whose reports further the cynicism of the world about the validity of Christianity. The unity prayed for by our Lord was a visible unity 'that the world might believe'. Often denominationalism leads to pride and a competitive spirit as well as a fierce feeling of loyalty which is intolerant of others and thus injurious. This can apply among Reformed Baptists as a grouping of churches (denomination). Martin Holdt of South Africa claims that 'we have done ourselves endless harm by our tunnel vision. If I cannot accommodate someone who has a zeal for truth but may have erred (without consciously sinning), I reveal a narrow-mindedness which Scripture does not sanction.'

The Blessedness of Unity

Bill James

Psalm 133 is a celebration of unity amongst God's people. We need to be reminded of how precious is the gift of peace and love amongst believers. All of us know the pain and grief which is caused by division. How easily the devil sows seeds of distrust and animosity between those who are members of the same family! How we grieve over those brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow workers in the gospel, who for a time might be alienated from us by some breach of fellowship.

So, as we grieve at the absence of unity, we should also celebrate and enjoy the blessings of peace and harmony. 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!' Surely this is how it should be. For Christ has broken down the wall of partition; we are all one in him. We are all sons and daughters of the same Father; we are all brothers of the same Saviour (and if Christ is not ashamed to call us his brothers we should not be ashamed to recognise our family bonds); we are all indwelt by the same Spirit. And when we are gathered before the throne of the Lamb in eternity we shall stand as one single throng. All the elect of God will be together forever.

It is the characteristic of the world to be ever at enmity and strife. Hatred and murder are not the fruits of the Spirit but of the flesh. We bear the image of Christ who loved the Church and gave himself up for her. We self-sacrificially put the interests of others ahead of our own. We are concerned to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

For David unity amongst God's people was a high priority; it was a great and glorious blessing. And his testimony in Psalm 133 is not mere empty words; it is borne out in the example of his life. He was a man who made great sacrifices for the sake of peace and unity in Israel. David knew something of the reality of strife amongst the people of God. In the court of

Saul he was the object of hatred; on one occasion the king tried to pin him to the wall with his spear. Later Saul was to pursue him relentlessly through the wilderness. Even when Saul died, David's troubles were not at an end. He was to be crowned king of Judah, but there was division amongst the tribes of Israel and war between the tribes of Saul and David.

It would have been so easy for David to become bitter and resentful towards Saul and his family. In a sense he had every right to feel outraged at the animosity and injustice which had been shown towards him. Yet David was a man who loved unity and pursued peace. When on the run from Saul he declined opportunities to kill his enemy. He desired reconciliation, not vengeance. When Saul was finally killed by the Philistines we might have expected a shout of joy from David, or at least a sigh of relief. But instead we find him tearing his clothes and mourning, weeping and fasting. David honoured the men of Jabesh Gilead for giving Saul a decent burial.

Here is a man who is remarkably free from the taint of bitterness. How we are tempted to vow vengeance when we suffer far smaller wrongs either within the sphere of the local church, or in the wider Christian scene. We divide into factions of 'them' and 'us'. There are those who are for us and those who are against us. The differences may be matters of doctrine or practice; there may have been things said or done which have hurt us. And our dream is for our opponents to be routed and our cause to be vindicated. Yet none of us has been pinned to the wall with a spear! None of us has been pursued through the desert! David is an example of exceptional forbearance and forgiveness. His desire is for reconciliation; there is no bitterness, but only love.

Remember how Shimei cursed David, hurling abuse and stones at him and his men. We might have relished the prospect of revenge; but when David returns to Jerusalem he showed a more generous spirit (2 Sam 19:21-23). If this was not remarkable enough, David demonstrates yet more grace. Not only does he spare his enemies and grieve at their downfall, but he positively shows them grace and mercy. Remember the kindness shown to Mephibosheth. The antidote to hatred is not mere restraint, but love. It is repaying good for evil; showing grace to our enemies (Rom 12:21; Matt 5:43-48).

If David had chosen to do so, doubtless he could have united Israel by subjugating his enemies by military might. He was a mighty warrior,



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capable of inflicting terrible defeats on his opponents. He does not hesitate to do so when called upon to fight the enemies of Israel. Yet clearly his view of his own people is different. He is not like the modern-day tyrant who imposes his will upon the people with a regime of terror, secret police and intimidation. He is not like the authoritarian leader who deals ruthlessly with the disaffected and will not brook the slightest criticism. He does not use his influence to impoverish or harm his opponents.

There are times of course when rebels must be punished. There seems no alternative but that Sheba be put to death. And David acts with military efficiency against foreign armies. But he recognises the members of the tribes of Israel as his 'brethren'. He celebrates peace and unity. He will use all means to effect reconciliation.

David then proceeds to give two striking illustrations of the beauty of unity. The first is of the fragrant anointing oil being poured onto Aaron's head, dripping down onto his beard and from there onto the collar of his robe.

There is a specific requirement in the law that the oil should anoint both Aaron and his robes so that both would be holy (Ex 29:21). It is as if the anointing oil, symbolising the consecration and blessing of God, should reach his whole person. So the blessings of God's people are to flow to every part (cf 1Cor 12:13). There is to be no factionalism or rivalry. Rather, the blessings are to be shared amongst all. We belong together, just as Aaron belongs with his priestly garments. The oil flows freely and the fragrance rises up richly in a demonstration of abundance and a generous anointing of blessing. So the same spirit of generous abundance pervades brethren who live in unity. There is no small-mindedness or mean-spiritedness which grasps tightly our blessings so that they might be denied to others. There is no narrow outlook which views with suspicion all who do not dot our i's and cross our t's.

This same spirit of blessing being universally shared and enjoyed extends to the illustration of the dew of Hermon (proverbial for its heaviness) falling on Mount Zion. There is the sense of the abundant supply of blessing given to the greater mountain (Hermon) flowing to the lesser (Zion), so that all share in God's provision. The dew would bring refreshment and fruitfulness to the dry ground. The application is clear: if there are areas in which we feel that we have been blessed in greater measure than other sections of the Church, this is not to be a cause for self-righteousness or proud boasting. Rather it implies a responsibility to share our blessings with those who lack them. In return we are open to others who may have blessings to share with us. If we are grateful for the Lord's work amongst us, we will also acknowledge that his blessing might have fallen in other circles, too. We are after all members of the same family. The blessings which touch every part of God's work come from the one Spirit.

The illustrations of oil and dew remind us that it is the Holy Spirit himself who is the author and giver of unity. This theme is taken up in the New Testament where our Christian unity is associated so often with the third person of the Trinity: it is the unity of the Spirit. And where such unity is enjoyed, there the blessing of the Spirit rests.

We are called to celebrate the unity which we enjoy with God's people, and to strive to extend and strengthen the bonds of fellowship with all those who are our brethren in Christ.

The Collection for the Saints

Michael A G Haykin

When some Corinthian believers, ‘restless experientialists’,¹ had become overly impressed with one of the more spectacular spiritual gifts, namely, speaking in tongues, and were in danger of despising those who did not manifest this gift, the apostle was quick to remind them that every believer in the Body of Christ is a gifted individual whom the Body needs to function properly. ‘By one Spirit,’ he declares in 1 Corinthians 12:13, all believers ‘were baptised into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.’ The fundamental unity of Christians, regardless of their religious heritage, their economic standing, and in this context, their spiritual giftedness, is for Paul absolutely foundational.

The struggle for unity between Jewish and Gentile believers is seen, for instance, in the life of the apostle Peter, who, as a believer of some years’ standing, was still clearly wrestling with whether or not it was right to eat with Gentile believers (see Gal 2:11-13).

Paul worked on a project that he hoped would concretely demonstrate to Jewish believers once and for all their fundamental solidarity with their Gentile brothers and sisters. Paul mentions this project in three of his five earliest letters. One recent discussion of it has gone so far as to describe it as ‘Paul’s *obsession* for nearly two decades’.² While this is probably something of an exaggeration, it clearly was of great importance to the apostle. The nature of this project? A collection of money for the poor saints in Jerusalem.³

First of all, this collection involved the making of elaborate plans to gather together what was a substantial amount of money from the various churches that Paul had planted among the Gentiles.⁴ Then, once the money had been gathered, it was to be delivered to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem to help provide succour and aid for the poorest of them there. But, as we shall see, Paul had more in mind than provision for the poor, though that was very important.

This collection of money became for Paul a marvellous opportunity to demonstrate to the Jerusalem church and Jewish believers everywhere that even as there was one Lord and one gospel, so also there was one people of God.⁵

The Historical Background to the Collection

Now, in the letter to the Romans, mention of the collection comes in the midst of Paul's informing the Roman believers of his travel plans. Before he came to them on his way to Spain, he told them, 'I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain' (Rom 15:25-28).⁶

This collection of money, Paul tells us here, was for 'the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem'. But who were these poor saints and how did they come to be poor? What were the historical circumstances that prompted Paul to begin making such a collection as this in the first place?

To answer these questions we have to go back to the earliest days of the Jerusalem church when, soon after Pentecost, the first Christian community exuberantly sold their real estate and their personal possessions, 'had all things in common', and sought to ensure that there were no poor among them (Acts 2:44-45). In doing this, these believers were not seeking to obey any explicit commandment from Christ. Rather, they were simply motivated by a desire to make manifest and plain for all to see that in Christ they had 'one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32).⁷

In disposing of their financial reserves in this way, however, the community placed itself in a highly vulnerable position. Persecution – such as that described in Hebrews 10:33-34, where the loss of material possessions and goods is involved – would only have aggravated this situation. Moreover, during the 40s there were a series of food shortages in Palestine and then a particularly severe famine in AD 48 which appears to have made the bad financial situation of the Jerusalem church even worse.⁸ Thus, when the apostle Paul

went up to Jerusalem in the very year that this famine struck he was specifically asked by the leaders there to 'remember the poor' (Gal 2:10). In making this suggestion they little knew how it would become a major part of Paul's life and ministry for nearly a decade.

Support from the churches in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia

As Paul planted churches in the north-eastern region of the Mediterranean, especially in Galatia, Macedonia and in the province of Achaia, where Corinth was located, he encouraged these fledgling congregations to embrace his vision of the collection as their own. Thus we read, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2: 'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, so that there be no collections when I come.' Money was to be put aside in the church treasury for the 'saints', that is, for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Moreover, this collecting was to be done in an orderly fashion once a week on the Lord's Day, when the church met for worship.

From this passage in 1 Corinthians we also learn that money was not only being collected at Corinth but also among the Galatians. And in 2 Corinthians 8:9 we find that the churches in Macedonia, which would have included the believers at Philippi and Thessalonica, were also deeply involved in giving to this collection. In fact, so eager were they to help the poor in Jerusalem that they were willing to impoverish themselves.

'And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints' (2 Cor 8:1-4 NIV).

The Macedonian believers had fully embraced Paul's vision of the collection and made it their own. They 'were freely willing' to contribute money, he tells the Corinthians.

The Collection: A Demonstration of Christian Unity

In Romans 15:27 the apostle indicates succinctly what his view of the collection was: it is nothing less than a concrete and visible expression of the unity that Jewish and Gentile believers had in Christ. It was from the Jewish believers in Palestine that Paul and other missionaries to the Gentiles had been sent out to bring the light of the gospel to those who were imprisoned in the dark dungeon of paganism. In so doing the Gentiles had been 'partakers of their spiritual things'. Through the witness of Jewish believers these Gentiles had been taught the things of the Spirit. Having such unity in spiritual things, it was only proper that the Gentiles minister to their Jewish brothers and sisters in material things.

The collection had become for Paul far more than a gift to relieve poverty and physical suffering. It was nothing less than a tangible symbol of the unity of God's people which had been brought into being by the preaching of the gospel. The one gospel preached to different people groups had produced one people of God.

Among the final statements that Paul had made about the collection was this one in Romans 15:29: 'I know that when I come to you [i.e. the Roman Christians], I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.' Arriving in chains, a prisoner, facing possible execution: was this the 'fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ'? Yes, it was, for Christ's favour rests on all who love the unity of the Church for which he died. 'Be eager', Paul would write during this same time of imprisonment, 'to preserve the unity created by the Spirit' (Eph 4:3). And why such concern for the Church's unity? Because Paul rightly believed it to be, in those marvellous words of Timothy Dwight, 'The Church our blest Redeemer saved, with his own precious blood'.

References

- 1 This apt description is that of J I Packer, *A Quest for Godliness. The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990, p30.
- 2 S. McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints' in Gerald F Hawthorne and Ralph P Martin, with Daniel G Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* Downers Grove, Illinois/Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, p143.
- 3 For especially helpful studies of this Pauline project, see Keith F Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* Geneva, Alabama: Allenson, 1966 and McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', pp143-147.
- 4 The reference in 2 Corinthians 8:20 to this collection being a 'lavish gift' points to the substantial amount of money involved.
- 5 McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', p145.
- 6 All quotations in this article are from the NKJV except where otherwise stated.
- 7 Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, ed. L A Coser and trans. W W Holdheim, New York: Schocken Books, 1972, pp111-112.
- 8 Nickle, *Collection*, 24, 29-32; McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', p144.

Where did Denominations come from?

John M Frame

In the New Testament period there was one true Church. Sharply contrasting with that is our situation today, in which the Church is divided into thousands of denominations. What has happened – and why?

Even during Bible times there were tendencies toward denominationalism. Remember the sin-inspired separations beginning in the earliest days after the fall of Adam. Remember Jeroboam, the first denominationalist, who ‘made Israel to sin’. We have seen also that the New Testament rebukes attitudes and actions leading to division: unwillingness to submit to authority. Often divisions take place because of factionalism, lust for power, rejection of reconciliation, failures of church discipline or disputes over doctrinal and practical purity. The New Testament writers emphasise that there should be no ‘schism’ in the body. This was the major problem vexing the church at Corinth and is the first issue to be addressed in detail in the opening three chapters of the first letter. Even in the first century the essential sources of denomination-ism were present. Beyond this, there were also people who left the one true Church.

Some left involuntarily, as the result of proper discipline (1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2:5-11). Others whom John calls ‘antichrists’ left at their own initiative (1 John 2:18f; 4:3-6). Still others fell away from their initial profession of faith, the texts being inexplicit as to whether these left the Church voluntarily or under discipline (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31). Did some of these, perhaps, form sects of their own, claiming to be the true disciples of Christ? We simply don’t know.

A Brief History of Denominationalism

In the early centuries following the New Testament period, heresy and schism were more or less synonymous. Heretics, teachers of false doctrine, were church-dividers, schismatics. They sought to attract followers to themselves, either by forming factions in the existing Church or by drawing people to leave the Church and follow them. The heretic Marcion (approx. 80-160), rejected the Old Testament and much of the New. He established many churches

dedicated to his philosophy. In the late second century, Montanus, who claimed (but failed to convince the Church as a whole) that he brought new revelations from God, attracted many churches to his teaching.

In the mid-third century, however, an event occurred that led to a distinction between heresy and schism. During the Decian persecution, many believers renounced the faith. Afterward, Novatian, a learned priest and theologian, opposed any readmission of these people into the Church. The Church, however, held that reconciliation could be granted upon repentance. A Roman synod excommunicated Novatian, who then set up his own church, which lasted to the eighth century. The status of the Novatianist Church was a matter of some discussion in those days. Those in the Catholic Church agreed that schism-departure from the one true Church and establishing a rival church was a serious sin. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, went so far as to deny the validity of Novatianist baptisms, but his principle was not upheld by the Church in later years.

Novatian was not considered a heretic, though he did hold a view with which the Church did not concur. In general, he was recognised as orthodox in theology, indeed a very competent exponent of Christian truth. He was therefore an 'orthodox schismatic'. 'Heresy' and 'schism' were no longer virtually synonymous. Heresy was considered a sin against truth, schism a sin against unity and love. Persecution in AD 303 gave rise to another schism. As in the earlier case, certain people believed that those who denied the faith under persecution were being treated too leniently by the Church. Led by Donatus, these people formed a schismatic denomination that claimed to be, in fact, the one true Church. They rebaptised those who came from the Catholic Church. The Donatist Church existed until around 700. In the original Church, this group, like the Novatianist group, was considered generally orthodox though schismatic.

Another schism developed in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which declared Christ to be one person in two natures, fully God and fully man. The Council's statement was unacceptable to the Egyptian and Syrian Churches, and eventually fellowship was broken. That division continues to exist today.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches, under the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Roman Catholic Church, under the Pope of Rome, broke fellowship in 1054 over the claims of papal authority and the Western insertion into the

Nicene Creed of the statement maintaining that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (Latin, *filioque*.) Patriarch and Pope excommunicated one another. That division also continues to the present.

The excommunication of Martin Luther (1521) marked the beginning of a proliferation of divisions: Protestant from Catholic, Protestant from Protestant, sectarian from sectarian. Bucer, Melancthon, Oecolampadius, and Calvin sought unity among the Reformation churches, but without success.

Additional denominations came into existence when the denominations from which they came were thought in some measure to be compromising the true doctrine. Hence the many Reformed denominations of the Netherlands, the many Presbyterian churches of Scotland, the many Baptist denominations of the United States. Still others appeared when people carried their distinctive traditions from one country to another. Often these immigrants wanted to worship with others of the same language and nationality. Thus, in the United States there is an Evangelical Covenant Church (Swedish), an Evangelical Free Church (Norwegian, Danish), a Christian Reformed Church (Dutch), a Russian Orthodox Church, a Korean-American Presbyterian Church, a Church of God in Christ (African-American), a German Reformed Church (the Reformed Church in the United States).

A survey for America was made in 1989 with the following results: The Presbyterians, after 284 years, have divided into a present total of 7 denominations. The Reformed (Dutch and German) after 360 years into a total of 5 denominations. The Methodists, after 205 years, have divided into 11 denominational groups. The Baptists, after 350 years, have divided into 14 different denominations. The Pentecostals after 103 years split into 24 denominations.¹

Evaluating the Divisions

How shall we evaluate this complex chain of events? It is not an easy matter. Some evaluations, to be sure, are fairly simple. I do not hesitate to join the ancient Church in condemning the schisms of Marcion and Montanus. These men certainly were heretics, and they had no justification whatever for forming their own 'churches'. On both counts they violated scriptural principles. The same applied to Novatian and Donatus, though these were relatively much more orthodox than Marcion and Montanus. The Church was right to reject the 'rigorist' position of these men. Novatian and Donatus should have remained in the Church, conforming their views to Scripture and/or accepting the Church's discipline for their errors.

The post-Chalcedonian schism, however, is a more difficult issue. I do believe that the Council of Chalcedon was expressing an important biblical truth. At the same time, its operative language was philosophical rather than scriptural. In my view, although philosophical language is not necessarily a wrong means of expressing theological truth, it tends to raise as many questions as it answers. The Council said that Jesus is ‘one person in two natures’ – but what, precisely, is a ‘person’? What is a ‘nature’? How should we interpret the ‘one person’ so as not to compromise the ‘two natures’, and vice versa? The answers are not obvious. Lutherans and Calvinists later accused one another of different sorts of failure to do justice to Chalcedon, and that debate continues to the present, with intelligent, learned and godly thinkers on both sides. Is this issue really designed by God to be a test of orthodoxy?

In my Protestant bliss, I can say fairly complacently that the 1054 split between East and West was due to papal arrogance. I think I can defend the Western position, but I cannot see why it should be made a test of orthodoxy. Certainly one can be a knowledgeable and effective minister of God’s Word whichever position he takes.

Where is the One True Church?

The problem of evaluating these events means that today it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate the ‘one true Church’ that Jesus founded in the first century. It would be so nice if we could pick out one denomination today and say, ‘This is *the* one.’ No, there is no such entity. All denominations, so far as I can tell, are guilty in some measure, at some point in their history, of schism or of provoking at least a degree of schism.

The one true Church does, however, still exist. Jesus promised that he would build his Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. But the true Church exists today within many denominations rather than one. How can we ever be comfortable with the bewildering array of denominations? The least we can do is to be humble and mindful of our need of unity and of our Lord’s prayer for the unity of his people.

Reference

- 1 The Presbyterian Magazine [in England] Sept 1989. This magazine ceased in 1991.

The unity prayed for by our Lord

Editor

Our Lord prayed that we might be brought to complete unity that the world might believe. It is perfectly clear that the kind of unity he prayed for was a visible unity, a genuine unity which would convince the watching world and act as a means for the conversion of that watching world (John 17:20-23).

This unity is not formal or institutional as though the world would be impressed by outward show or pomp. It is a unity of spiritual dimensions as we see in verse 23. Our Lord prays for the following:

- 1 *That the world may know that he has been sent by the Father.*
2. *That the world may know that the Father loves those who are his disciples.*
3. *That the world may know that the disciples are loved in the same way as our Lord is loved by the Father.*

For the world to appreciate so much detail is surprising. In his commentary on John, Don Carson comments, 'The thought is breathtakingly extravagant.' This prayer suggests that a loving unity of superlative quality is possible. Has it ever been attained? Not surprisingly it has been attained mostly in scenes of persecution and suffering. It was so during the early persecution of the Christians by the Roman Emperors, with the pre-Reformation Waldensians and with the Swiss Anabaptists. Through great revivals to come the prayer may yet be answered.

Our Lord himself has an interest in the answer to this prayer. Will it be answered?

The Trinitarian Nature of the Unity shared by all Believers

Christian unity is analogous to the unity of the three Persons and hence is sublime and inexpressibly wonderful (John 17:20-23). It is a unity of love because God is love (1 John 4:7-12). It is a unity in which we observe the love

of God the Father for his Son and conversely the love of the Son for the Father. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that we are brought into union with the Father and the Son (John 14:15-17; 2 Cor 1:21).

The union of the three Persons is a union of divine love, wisdom and purpose which is utterly sublime. That glorious unity should be expressed in our Christian unity, person to person, church to church, group of churches to group of churches.

The three Persons dwell beside each other and work in perfect unity and harmony and concurrence so that it is appropriate when Jesus prays, 'Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... May they also be in us' (John 17:21,22). How close is our unity with Christ? Paul's favourite description of the Christian is a person 'in Christ', an expression he uses about 160 times. Our union with Christ is illustrated by a number of analogies: marriage, the vine, the unity of the human body and the unity of stones fitly joined together in a building. The union is a spiritual union: living and experiential, comprehensive and indissoluble.¹

The believer's union with Christ and the Trinity is expressed in baptism. The disciples were to baptise 'them [all nations] in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:19) 'The name' in Scripture stands for everything represented by a person. To be baptised into 'the name' of the Father is to be united to him completely and without reservation. Likewise to be baptised into 'the name' of the Holy Spirit is to be one with the Holy Spirit in such a way as to share with him in his person and work fully.

In the early Church theologians used the Greek word *perichoresis*, literally meaning 'aroundness'. It refers to the unity of the three Persons of the Godhead. Each Person is beside, with and toward the others. We catch a glimpse of this in John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was face to face (*pros ton Theon*) with God.' This unity of love and purpose is the model of unity between individual believers and believing churches.

Does Christian Unity apply to Inter-Church Relationships?

But does the unity prayed for by our Lord apply to churches as well as individuals? We accept that we are to love one another and keep the unity given to us but does this unity apply on an inter-church basis? I suggest that it applies equally to inter-church relationships. The apostles always acted con-

sistently with the idea that there was only one Church of Christ as Paul said, 'There is one body' (Eph 4:4). Thus we observe the apostles showing the same prayerful and practical concern for all the churches irrespective of secondary doctrinal issues. For instance Paul said, 'I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches' (2 Cor 11:28). Titus was chosen not by one church but by the churches (plural) to accompany Paul (2 Cor 8:19) to distribute gifts gathered by churches to alleviate the needs of other churches (1 Cor 16:1-4). Paul's letter to the Colossians applied equally to the church at Laodicea to whom they were required to send it (Col 4:16). When there was a problem of doctrinal interpretation which affected all the churches, a Council was convened at Jerusalem and the consequent commendation was sent to and recommended to all the churches (Acts 15). This confirms that the early Christians esteemed the Church to be one.

This unity prayed for by our Lord applies only to Christians who have a credible profession of faith. For the subject of 'What is an Evangelical?' I recommend the book with that title by Martyn Lloyd-Jones.² The doctor was correct in his warnings about the Ecumenical Movement. With its minimal truth base the Ecumenical Movement has become increasingly 'inter-faith' in character. By inter-faith is meant the equality of religions. The idea is that in a mysterious inexplicable way salvation is inclusive. That is, even though people do not know it, the merits of Christ apply to them. The Ecumenical Movement is illustrated by the building inspector who discovers that the floor rafters are riddled with dry or wet rot. Wherever he probes with his pencil he finds no resistance. The structure is rotten and dangerous. The Ecumenical Movement is doctrinally rotten because it seeks to organise unity without truth. We have noted Ephesians 4:4-6. It is impossible to have fellowship with nominal Christians who do not know what it is to pray and who have no spiritual life. You cannot mix light and darkness. Herbert J Pollitt's book *The Inter-Faith Movement – the New Age enters the Church* illustrates the utter chaos that results when the doctrinal foundations of Christianity are abandoned.³

At every turn we are compelled to discern between true Christianity and false. When the evidence is sufficiently positive, either in individuals or churches, let us make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.

References

- 1 For exposition of the subject of union with Christ, and thereby implicitly with the Trinity, see *Reformation Today* 118 and 144.
- 2 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* Banner of Truth, 1992.
- 3 Herbert J Pollitt, *The Inter-Faith Movement*, 206 page paperback, Banner of Truth, 1996.

The Nature of Christian Unity

Editor

When we study Ephesians 4:4-6 it is evident that the context requires emphasis on the *one body*, not two, or three, or thousands. It is also clear that every member without exception is united to the Trinity, has been baptised spiritually into the Trinity and shares the same hope.

Ephesians 4:1 represents a crucial point in Paul's letter for here he begins his application with regard to the unity of the Church of Christ. The apostle has shown that the great wall of division has been broken down once for all. 'There is one body' is the opening declaration in Ephesians 4:4-6. These verses provide a unique manifesto describing the nature of the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Nature of Christian Unity

Each of the seven features is definitive and each implies a constraint to maintain unity.

There is one body. The analogy of the human is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; it is impossible with the human body for a limb to survive on its own so we ought to think in a corporate way. The reality of union of all believers without exception into one Body underlines the importance of thinking of the Church in the way our Lord does. We tend to think of our local church and our denomination of churches. We tend to think of our group of churches as deserving but other denominations as less deserving. Our Lord supports and cares for his universal Church, that is all his people equally irrespective of race or denomination. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). There are differences in gifts, in office, in functions, but with regard to value and care every member of the body is equal in Christ.

There is one Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer without exception. If a person does not have the Spirit he cannot be a Christian. All believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:14; 4:30). Every believer without exception says, 'He anointed us, set his seal of ownership upon us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come' (2 Cor 1:22). Every

Christian has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to understand the Scriptures and discern the truth about Christ (1 John 2:20 and 27). Perhaps the greatest source of division today is about the Holy Spirit. One huge sector seeks to make exceptional experience mandatory and speaks the language of '*You Must*', while the other sector makes no allowance for power experience or exceptional experiences and tends to talk the language of '*You Cannot!*'

There is one hope. 'Just as you were called to one hope when you were called.' The fact that all believers will soon be sharing the same inheritance should be a major motive for unity. What each one of us is striving for is not something private to be defended but something which is to be shared by us all. Together we look forward to a new earth of heightened splendour to this one, one in which the destructive forces of sin are removed. Every particle of the new earth will be permeated with the glory of Christ, will be shared, and will be for the praise of our Redeemer. With Jonathan Edwards I believe that there will be diversity in responsibilities and diversity in rewards (Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor 3:10-15) which enhance the new earth. Since everything we receive is by grace there will be no possibility of boasting or pride. The anticipation of a glorified new earth (Rom 8:22-25) is an added powerful constraint to share in and enrich the unity we already possess, but which will be perfect in the new earth.

There is one Lord. Here we are reminded of our common personal relationship and unity to him who is the Lord of glory. He is the source of our common salvation. We are all united to him and from him we derive ongoing spiritual life and by his intercession we are sustained. We all submit to him as Lord. If any person says he is a Christian but does not submit to the Lordship of Christ and shows no obedience to Christ we reject that profession as hypocritical and empty. We have no obligation of unity with that person.

There is one faith. Since each feature must apply to all believers, the faith here must be that faith which saves and by which we adhere to the one Lord. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved, the answer was, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.' Faith, which unites to Christ, saves because Christ's righteousness is imputed and Christ's life is given (Gal 3:2). Some are guilty of divisiveness by suggesting that only those who believe in their system of doctrine will be saved. Paul did not say to the jailer, 'Believe in Jesus and in TULIP and you will be saved!'

There is one baptism. Again since this applies to all believers without exception it must refer to the baptism of the Spirit referred to in Romans 6:4, Galatians 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 where it says, 'For we were all baptised by one spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.' The latter reminds us of the experiential dimension of our faith. We have no right to set a special experience or to set levels of experience but if a person shows no experience of the Holy

Spirit whatsoever how can that person's profession be credible? The NIV Study Bible on Ephesians 4:5 suggests that those to whom the letter was addressed would think of water baptism; 'Paul would naturally refer to that Church ordinance in which every new convert participated publicly. At that time it was a more obvious mark of identification of Christians than it is now when it is celebrated in different ways and often only seen by those in the Church.'

There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. This passage builds up to describe our unity as the family privilege we share in our adoption. We are all brothers and sisters in the same family. The supreme transcendence of our Father is in focus together with his pervasive immanence – *through all and in all*. This climax in Ephesians is reminiscent of that in Romans 11:36: *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.* All that Christ has achieved comes ultimately under the sovereignty of the Father (1 Cor 15:24) to whom be glory forever. We are the subjects which bring glory to the Father. Any breach of this unity is a breach in the family which is always hurtful and harmful.

The Practical Application of Ephesians 4:1-3

The amazing unity of Christians has been created by the Holy Spirit. The NIV translation of Ephesians 4:2 is compelling. 'Be completely humble and gentle.' Most ruptures of unity have nothing to do with doctrine but arise out of disaffection and personal antagonism. How many awful divisions do we know which have nothing to do with doctrinal differences?

Much division has to do with vying for power or leadership which always seems to be going on in the realm of politics. Calvin comments: 'For he that loves to exalt himself has to abase his fellows to make himself the superior.'

Occasionally we see personal ambition expressed in a campaign against some error or another. The only right to fame that some individuals have is their crusade against heresy. Our stand against heresy is mandatory (Gal 1) but that is a side issue compared with the obligation we have to evangelise and build up strong churches and promote missions.

A parallel passage to Ephesians 4:1-3 is Colossians 3:12-14:

Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in unity.

Reformation in our Personal Attitudes

John M Frame

At the root of the problem of Church division lies our own cussedness, our sinful attitudes. Wrong attitudes cause division, and they are also fed by it.

Embracing all other sinful attitudes is lack of love, love for God and for one another (Matt 22:37-40). Our lack of love for God keeps us from hearing his Word and from being willing to make radical changes in our values and practices. We would rather keep the fleeting benefits of denominationalism than claim by faith the far greater blessings that come from doing things God's way.

The Symptoms

Our lack of love for one another, which derives from lovelessness toward God, manifests itself in a number of ways:

1. Pride, boastfulness, arrogance.¹ We need to remember that all the pride of man will be brought low (Is 23:9). There is a tendency to look on what God has done in our denominational fellowships as if it were our own achievement and the unique property of our own group. Somehow these accomplishments seem to reflect better on ourselves when there



Prof John M Frame

are fewer people to share them with. Conversely, just as it is difficult to admit our own errors and faults, it is very difficult for us to admit such errors and faults in our denominations.

2. Contentiousness, discord, strife.² 'Pride only breeds quarrels' (Prov 13:10a). Because we want glory for ourselves, we seek to find fault in others. Contentious people are constantly looking for something to argue about, some way to start controversy and disrupt the peace.

Contentiousness can be difficult to identify, for one man's contentiousness is another man's 'zeal for the truth'. Zeal for the truth is certainly a virtue. But one's energetic efforts deserve that title only when they are

grounded in a realistic biblical understanding of what the truth really is, including Scripture's teachings about unity and about priorities. A constant insistence that we achieve perfection in some one area of church life before doing anything else is not a proper zeal for the truth; rather, it is contentiousness. Dwelling on the faults of other denominations out of proportion to their importance is contentiousness.

Contentious people believe the worst about others, frequently taking the statements of others in the worst possible sense, rather than giving others the benefit of the doubt ('innocent until proven guilty'). Surely that has had much to do with the animosities underlying the Church's divisions.

Contentiousness is related to oversensitivity; when someone says an even slightly critical word about a contentious person, the latter will rush to defend himself. He cannot abide the idea of being wrong or of being thought wrong by others. Yet there is little consideration for the feelings of those whom he wishes to criticise. Although he considers himself free to interpret their words and deeds in the worst possible sense, others are supposed to make all sorts of allowances and excuses for his excesses. Of such people it is often said, 'He can dish it out, but he can't take it.' Such a person will often have a double standard when evaluating denominations: one standard for his own, another for the others. He will

tend to defend his denomination as he defends himself, while, without justification, finding all sorts of fault with those outside. It can be difficult to identify contentiousness in others, at least to identify it well enough to make them accountable to formal discipline. But I am confident that Christians can usually recognise it in themselves if they call on the indwelling Spirit to open their eyes. The trouble is that our pride often keeps us from even considering that we might be guilty of such a seriously sinful attitude. Let us heed the Scriptures such as Peter's exhortation, 'Seek peace and pursue it.'³

3. Envy, jealousy.⁴ Envy is not just a desire to take unjustly what belongs to others, but it is also what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*, or hatred of others for their accomplishments and success. It is the reverse side of pride. We wish to glorify ourselves, so we hate those achievements that allow others to glorify themselves, perhaps at our expense. Thus, churches that are strong in teaching but weak in evangelism will often feel constrained to find some fault in those to whom God has given some evangelistic success. The reverse is also true, though in my experience to a lesser degree.

4. Harshness, the opposite of gentleness.⁵ Harshness exaggerates the faults and errors of others, both as to the degree of evil and as to the measures we should take against it.

5. Xenophobia (fear of, or hatred of foreigners), snobbery, rather than welcoming hospitality to other Christians (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8; 1 Pet 4:9). Frankly, we all have a great desire to stay with what is familiar, with our own people, our own ways of doing things. We don't want to have to deal with other ethnic or socio-economic groups in the fellowship of our churches. We don't want to have to deal with the priority concerns of those in other theological traditions. We don't want to have to endure challenges from them or to be answerable to them.

6. Party spirit (1 Cor 1-3). The partisan mentality ignores our responsibility to love all in the body. It prefers to give allegiance only to its own particular faction, which may be united by respect for a particular leader or leadership style or by preference for some doctrinal or practical emphasis.

7. Superficiality, immaturity.⁶ We need to grow in our understanding of what God's Word says about these issues, willing to be taught and not taking for granted what we have heard in the past

8. Anger, wrath, bitterness, vengeance.⁷ There is godly anger, like the zeal of Christ for the holiness of God's temple. But Scripture usually presents human anger as a sinful or even murderous lack of love. Anger seeks to replace God's vengeance with our own. It holds grudges,

refusing to forgive (Matt 18:21). There is much of this, I believe, in the movement to perpetuate division in the Church. God says in his Word that anger should be dealt with quickly. 'Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry' (Eph 4:26; cf Matt 5:23-26; 18:15-20). Reconciliation is a high priority in God's kingdom. Instead, the nature of unrighteous anger is to indulge itself, to put off reconciliation, to harbor a grudge.

9. Ambition, avarice (Titus 1:7; 2 Peter 2:10). Those who are interested in personal power or advancement often reinforce denominational divisions. It is easier to achieve prominence (by worldly means) in a small group than in a large one, easier in a human denomination than in God's trans-denominational church. Rather than risk the end of their prominence in the uncertainty inherent in church merger, influential denominational bureaucrat types often stand in the way of biblical reunion. This is a large part of the problem; for these are the types of people most often appointed to ecumenism committees, the ones who most often must be satisfied with any negotiation.

10. Lack of openness, honesty (John 15:15). Too often when representatives of different denominations hold discussions, there is a reticence, an unwillingness to share what it is that really stands in the way of union. We need to remember again that in such cases we are dealing with other

Christian brothers and sisters, with whom we can share family secrets without embarrassment.

Revival and Reunion

In all of the above and other ways we sin against God and against others and thereby violate the law of love. To put it differently, we create adversary relationships between ourselves and other believers, seeing them as enemies to be conquered, rather than as brothers and sisters to be cherished.

How good it is to know that, unlike angry and contentious human beings, our God is a God of love and forgiveness: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). May this gracious God move us to confess and receive forgiveness, the forgiveness bought with the blood of his only Son.

Students of revival have often said that revival begins with taking sin more seriously, with people truly mourning over the blackness of their guilt before God. While I do not believe God authorizes us to go through periods of black despair without a sense of grace, it is certainly true that we will not appreciate the greatness of our salvation until we have seen how

much our sins have offended God, how truly wretched those sins are in his sight.

And I rather think that reunion will not come without revival. Revival does tend to break down denominational barriers between Christians, though often in the end those who break free from the old denominations wind up in a new one! Perhaps true reunion will depend on a revival that does not die, that does not fossilize itself into a new denominational program.

At any rate, Jesus' concern for unity demands that we all take a good look at ourselves, a look that will have beneficial effects in all areas of the Church's ministry.

References

- 1 Ps. 10:2; 59:12; 73:6; Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 14:3; 16:18; 29:23; Isa. 23:9; 25:11; Jer. 48:29; 49:16; Mark 7:22; 1 Tim. 3:6; 6:4; 1 John 2:6.
- 2 Prov. 18:6; 19:13; 21:19; 22:10; 27:15; Hab. 1:3; Rom. 2:8; 1 Cor. 1:11; 11:16; Phil. 1:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9f.
- 3 2 Sam. 20:19; Zech. 8:19; Matt. 5:9; Gal. 6:1; James 3:17; 5:19.
- 4 Ex. 20:17; Prov. 23:17; 27:4; Matt. 27:18; Acts 13:45; 17:5; Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4.
- 5 Isa. 40:11; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Peter 2:18.
- 6 1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:13f; Phil. 3:12; Col. 1:28; 3:16; 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 12:23; 1 3:21; 1 Peter 5:10.
- 7 Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Matt. 5:22; Rom. 12:19; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:26, 31; Col. 3:8, 21; Titus 1:7; James 1:19f.

Peacemakers

Dennis E Johnson

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.’ Christ calls you to a complicated, painful and blessed task: making peace. It is not a task at which leaders in Reformed or Evangelical churches are especially good. I suspect that it is not a top priority in prospective students’ choice of a seminary: ‘I want to become a peacemaker, so I’m going to Westminster.’ For many of us the picture that stirs our imagination is that of Christian soldiers marching into war against the forces of atheism, liberalism, pragmatism, and sometimes anything and anyone that is less than 99 to 100% pure presuppositional, biblical-theological, nouthetic Calvinism.¹ The denominations in which we serve were born out of the trauma of doctrinal conflict over the central truths of God’s Word. Those conflicts were necessary and right. So we know that it’s right to contend valiantly for the truth; but we’re not so sure about whether it’s OK to get along with Christians who don’t see the truth exactly as we do.

1. A Complicated Task

To be a biblical peacemaker, you need to develop a bias toward compromise on unimportant points, rather than insisting on confrontation at every point of disagreement. Be willing to place a priority on the common ground which Christians share, rather than focusing exclusively on our differences. Be willing to place the best interpretation on the motives and actions of others, rather than approaching them suspiciously, assuming the worst about their hidden agendas. You need a lot of patient trust in God, that he will show them where they are wrong-and you where you are wrong!

But here is what makes this job so complicated: Which are the unimportant points of difference on which you can compromise for the present? What if the pragmatic methods that your brother uses in evangelism really are rooted in a man-centered gospel, or motivated by a thirst for power and fame rather than compassion for sinful people and a passion for the glory of God? God’s peace does not peacefully co-exist with falsehood, sham, or injustice; so God’s peacemakers cannot simply ignore peace-destroying sin and error, any more than a surgeon can simply close up an infected wound; an abscess is bound to develop.

And yet, on the other hand, 'love does cover over a multitude of sins' (1 Peter 4:8). What sins or differences of conviction can be covered? Which ones must be confronted in humble love for your brother or sister? It's a complicated task, and because of that it is also

2. A Painful Task

Making peace is not easy. To be a peacemaker you have to become the person that all the other Beatitudes describe. Peacemaking demands that you be poor in spirit, humble enough to admit that you have been wrong and to ask for forgiveness (as Jesus commands later in this sermon, Matthew 5:23-24). It demands meekness, which shows itself in the self-control to hold your tongue, to refuse to use the truth sometimes, even though it would vindicate your cause and blow your opponent out of the water (Matt 5:22). It demands that the stains and the schisms in the Church, the Body of Christ, bother you (a lot!) so that you mourn as you survey the ravages of sin in yourself and your brothers and sisters.

And sometimes peacemaking is painful because the Christians among whom you are trying to make peace will disagree with you on whether compromise or confrontation is the way to peace in a particular situation. They may just think you have poor judgment, that you are naïvely optimistic, theologically undiscerning, etc.: 'If you *really* understood the underlying theological issues, the actual motivations of our opponents, you would know that peace will never come through negotiation or compromise, but only through those opponents' unconditional surrender.' Or they may suspect your motives, too: 'Why aren't you willing to pay the price to contend for the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints?' Peacemakers can look like cowardly 'pleasers of men' when they are compared with bold champions who courageously disregard the opinions and feelings of human beings.

My hunch is that Barnabas was more characteristically a peacemaker than was Paul. Could this be the source of their friction over taking John Mark along on a second trip (Acts 15:36-41)? Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. But from Paul's perspective, perhaps, Barnabas looked naïve when he hoped that Mark had learned his lesson from his first desertion. So they disagreed-sharply! They argued. And biblical peace was fractured. Now, I've heard this passage appealed to to justify denominationalism, but I think you have to say that the Holy Spirit was not smiling in approval as he caused Luke to report this scene. Somebody was in the wrong. Maybe Paul was right and Barnabas was wrong: Mark wasn't ready yet. Maybe Barnabas was right: later Paul did



*Pastor Percy Chisenga of Chipata Calvary Baptist church flanked by four deacons.
For report on Zambia see News*

appreciate Mark's ministry (2 Tim 4:11). In any case, Barnabas the peacemaker looked wrong to Paul, and neither man would budge.

If you set out to be a peacemaker in Christ's Church, you will not always make the right choice about how to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And even when you do make the right choice, it's going to look wrong to lots of people: to some, too tolerant; to others, too rigid. You can't win. . . . Oh, yes, you can.

3. A Blessed Task

The task is blessed because Jesus says so, and he announces the amazing honor which will be bestowed on peacemakers at the last judgment: 'they will be called sons of God.' Or, to make plain the real subject who stands behind this divine passive: 'God will call them his sons.'

In one way or another, all of the promises of the Beatitudes are promises of eternal life and joy in the kingdom of God; but each promise focuses on a particular aspect of that complete salvation. What is the special focus of being called by God as his sons?

a. As sons peacemakers are in tune with the Father's purpose. God's goal is peace, not conflict; unity, not division and hostility. The pastor of the congre-

gation in which I worship was preaching on James's description of heavenly wisdom this past Sunday: 'Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness' (James 3:18). He observed that righteousness does not grow in an environment of strife, competition and hostility. Farming may not be as exciting as the battlefield, but the patient planting and watering of reconciliation, patience, and forgiveness produce the fruit of righteous lives and attitudes which delight our Father. Make it your goal to win over those who differ from you rather than simply to win over them, and you will show that you are pursuing the purpose of the Father.

b. As sons, peacemakers reflect the image of God's Son. If you think that peacemaking is painful for you, look at Jesus. If you are hurting from the criticism which you have had to absorb in your efforts to promote peace in Christ's Church, consider the price he paid for our peace. Christ's purpose 'was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' (Eph 2:15-16). Peacemakers are blessed, despite the pain and the criticism, because in them is reflected the peacemaking grace of the Son of God, who gave himself to reconcile us to God and to each other.

I have a dream. Actually, I have a lot of dreams for Westminster in California, as many of us do. But here is one of mine: That when public awareness surveys about seminaries are taken in future years, knowledgeable Christians will say about Westminster in California: 'That school is committed to the Lordship of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the Reformed faith and high standards of scholarship; and that school is committed to producing peacemakers. That seminary is committed to a loving, patient, gentle, even tolerant pursuit of peace with all kinds of Christians, even those who are not as committed as Westminster is to Christ's Lordship, the Bible, Reformed theology and scholarship.' My hope is that the day will come when, if a church is facing trauma and turmoil and is in need of healing, its leaders will say, 'We need a Westminster in California graduate to lead us by his example and his teaching so that we will learn to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

It is complicated and painful, but it is also a blessed task to be peacemakers, showing the gracious patience of the Son of God, who has made us God's sons. And it is your task as a disciple of Jesus the Son, the Peacemaker.

Notes

- 1 'Presuppositionalism', 'biblical-theological method', 'nouthetic counseling' and 'militant Calvinism' are known to be distinctive emphases of Westminster Seminary in California.

News

China

On March 16 1997 eight top leaders of China's three main independent house-church denominations were arrested in Henan province and are still in detention. Mr Xu Jongze, leader of the 'New Birth' church which claims several million members, had previously been imprisoned in 1988 on his way to see Billy Graham in Beijing. Urgent prayer has been requested for their release.

These arrests highlight a wave of repression affecting many Christians throughout China. In Hong Kong more than 5,000 letters have been received from Christians suffering various degrees of persecution and harassment. These include large fines, beatings, confiscation of goods, demolition of churches and imprisonment. In Wenzou, a centre of revival where there are officially estimated to be 600,000 evangelical Christians, authorities dynamited a large unregistered church in June last year. This repression cannot just be dismissed as the activity of local officials. There is mounting evidence of a coordinated campaign by the central government against unregistered evangelical Christians who are seeing large scale conversions not only among peasants, but among students, intellectuals, and even Communist Party members. Last year the Ministry of Public Security singled out Protestants as 'enemy forces' and warned that Christianity had become a serious threat to the Communist Party (*South China Morning Post*, 4 June 1996). This year a long internal document dated 27 February was issued by police in East China calling for a concerted drive against 'underground' Protestants. It mobilises all the forces of the Party and state to 'smash'

unregistered congregations and 'politically re-educate' their followers in chilling terms. The document also sadly contains conclusive evidence that 'patriotic' clergy in the state-run Church are ordered to join in the persecution of their unregistered brethren by announcing the state's repressive policies from their pulpits.

Chinese Christians are urgently seeking prayer support as they weather this new storm. A Mr Huang in Henan province wrote: 'Soon after I became a Christian in February our house-church suffered great persecution. A sister from a home which holds meetings and has evangelists to stay was arrested and jailed. Ordinary believers were fined 200 RMB (on average one month's salary). Our church stopped meeting and was dispersed east and west. Many times I have sought the Lord with tears.'

In some remote areas Christianity itself has been declared illegal. From Inner Mongolia a Mr Jin wrote, 'Here in the Chifeng district it is forbidden to preach Christianity. This year two arrests have been made. They fine people, intimidate them and detain them. However in most cases this repression has not affected the continuing growth of the Church. In Sandong, police issued an order forbidding Christian home meetings. But a believer reported last year, "Thank God, brothers and sisters still meet at night for prayer, singing and fellowship".'

A Christian in Jiangsu sums up the patient spirit of so many Chinese Christians which provides us in the West with food for thought, 'Recently many house-churches have suffered persecution. But we believe that God is in control of

everything. May he strengthen every believer and protect those who have lost their freedom so they may pass through this time of refining.'

Zambia

A report by Pastor Bill James of Emmanuel Church, Leamington Spa, who was invited to minister in Zambia in April.

It has been good to hear reports of the Lord's work in Zambia in recent years. There was blessing on the country particularly through the work of Scripture Union in schools in the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently through the work of Christian Unions in the colleges and two Universities of the country. (ZAFES is the national student group). Those converted through these works came into the churches with an appetite for Bible teaching. Students at the University in Lusaka were especially helped by systematic expository ministry at Lusaka Baptist Church. As these graduates moved to different parts of the country new works were planted, and there is now a group of Reformed Baptist churches in the country. The Church in Zambia in general has been damaged, however, by the entrance of extreme charismatic teaching. Benny Hinn is a personal friend of the Zambian president, and makes weekly TV broadcasts. There is an unhealthy obsession with phenomena and excitement, including the Toronto Blessing.

My first visit was to Kitwe Chapel (in the Copperbelt) which is a Brethren group, but enjoys links of fellowship with the Reformed Baptist churches. The pastor Andrew Muwowo labours to provide biblical teaching ministry, and has profited from the Zambian book fund which provides literature, especially from Banner of Truth. Kitwe Chapel has grown over the past 30 years, and Riverside Chapel has been planted in another part of the town. This church now has its own

building and is calling a full-time pastor. Another fellowship is being planted in Nkana East. The combined membership of the three fellowships is about 400 in a town of 400,000. In the last 6 months of 1996, 37 came into membership of Kitwe and Nkana East Chapels.

In Lusaka, it was encouraging to see something of the work of the three Reformed Baptist churches in the city. Mount Makulu is a relatively young work, but a good group meets on the Lord's Day; there is growth, and commitment amongst the membership. Pastor Happy Ngoma received part of his training from Dr Peter Masters in London, UK. Kabwata Baptist Church was planted out of Lusaka Baptist Church, and is pastored by Conrad Mbewe who was a speaker at this year's Banner of Truth Conference in Leicester, UK. Lusaka Baptist Church is enduring a trying period at present, following the forced resignation of Pastor Alfred Nyirenda. We should pray that this brother will soon be called to another church. The other elders also subsequently resigned, and so there is a lack not only of consistent ministry but also leadership; two men are staying on a 'caretaker' basis. These three Lusaka churches combine together in evangelistic radio ministry, and in running a Preachers' College. Kabwata also provides leadership in publishing 'Grace and Truth' magazine. A new format is planned which will be widely available in secular bookshops and will have a broad appeal. It is hoped to reach many nominal and charismatic believers who are in need of biblical teaching.

My final visit was to Chipata (in the east of the country) where Pastor Percy Chisenga leads a work, with encouragement and support from Lusaka Baptist Church. Around 50 gather on Sunday morning in a small classroom at a local school. Land has been purchased for a church building, but funds are needed for the work to progress. Pastor Chisenga is keen to encourage evangelism amongst



From left to right, Jim and Corinna Dahm who lead the ministry to students at the University of Waikato, Pastor David Marshall of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church and Pastor Peter Kek of Johor Baharu, Malaysia

church members; there is a particular need for workers who are fluent in dialects spoken by local residents.

There is much to hearten us in what the Lord has done in Zambia. Yet these churches are relatively few, and very young; we must continue to remember them in our prayers.

New Zealand

ministry to university students

For several years now, Trinity Reformed Church in Hamilton, New Zealand, has had a ministry to Asian students at the University of Waikato. Several have come to know Christ through this ministry and the Christian students have been built up in their faith. Many have returned to their home countries where they are actively serving the Lord in Reformed Baptist churches in Hong Kong, East and West Malaysia and Singapore.

Recently Pastor Kek of the First Community Church in Johor Baharu, Malaysia, was invited to minister to the students on the subject of 'Living for Christ in a Christless world'. The aim was to prepare them for the world as it really is when they return to their home countries. Using 2 Peter as a basis, he spoke on four needs: to have a true faith in Christ, to attend a continuing ministry of the Word of God, to have clear convictions in a world of confusion, to grow continually in the faith. His ministry was well received and valuable discussions followed the addresses.

On the Sunday he preached very acceptably at Trinity Reformed Baptist Church, in the morning from Leviticus 1 on the burnt offering and its fulfilment in Christ's sacrifice – a marvellous preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the evening he preached at an outreach tea on the rebellion of the human heart reflected in Jesus' parables in Matthew 21.

Only One Way

Review by Bill James

***Only One Way*, Hywel Jones, Day One Publications, 6 Sherman Road, Bromley, Kent BR1 3JH UK, 1996, 144pp, £5.99.**

This is an important and helpful little book, showing that salvation is for those who have faith in Christ. Historically, such 'exclusivism' has been the mainstream evangelical position represented by the great confessions such as *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. However in the last 100 years there has been a downgrade, and now many express views ranging from universalism to a hopeful expectation that those who have never heard of Christ, or fear God through other religions, will be saved. A recent survey of evangelical seminaries showed that a third of students believe neither that the heathen will be lost, nor that they will suffer eternal punishment.

Dr Jones examines Acts 4:12 as the central text on this issue. He clarifies several possible misunderstandings. He refutes a number of inclusivists along the way, but devotes most of his time to Peter Cotterell (former principal of London Bible College), and Clark Pinnock. Cotterell's argument is that it would be unjust for God to condemn those who have never heard the gospel. He claims that God's general revelation may be sufficient to prompt a cry for mercy which God will graciously hear apart from any faith in Christ. Pinnock follows similar arguments, but also makes much of 'pagan saints' who appear in the Bible outside of Israel or the Church but who



Dr Hywel Jones, editorial director of the Banner of Truth

nevertheless demonstrate real and acceptable faith. Examples include Melchizedek, Naaman and the Queen of Sheba. Pinnock sees the Noahic Covenant as providing grounds for redemption in all nations, not simply common grace. Hywel Jones helpfully and carefully refutes these positions, and also deals with Pinnock's view of post-mortem salvation. The arguments of Cotterell and Pinnock are contrasted with the optimism of the historic confessions in difficult cases such as, for example, infants dying in infancy.

Finally, the exclusivist case is presented as the biblical position. We must hold to this teaching if we are to be faithful to the Scriptures in an age of relativism. And as we are reminded of the lostness of the heathen, we are quickened in our urgent concern and mission to take the gospel to those who are perishing without Christ.

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