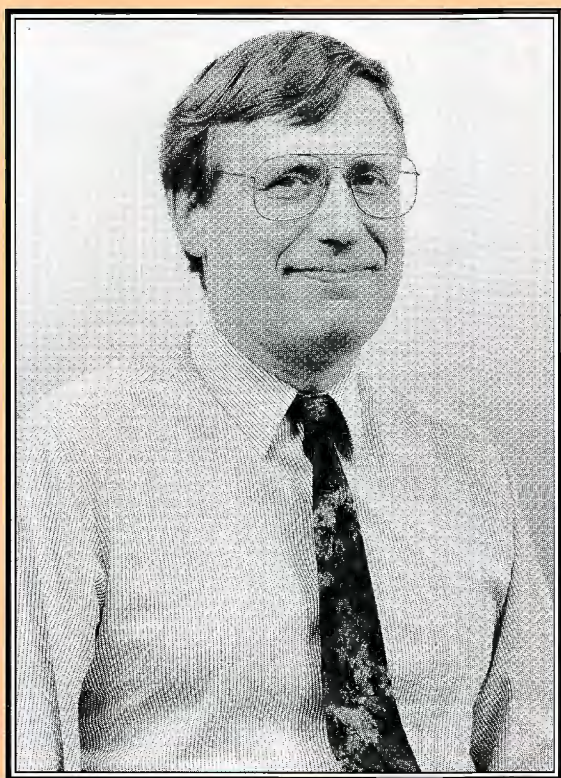


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# REFORMATION TODAY



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1997

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*Contributors to this issue:*

*Tom Wells* is pastor of the King's Chapel, West Chester, Ohio, USA and the author of several books including *A Vision for Missions*, *Christian Take Heart* and *Faith the Gift of God* (Banner of Truth).

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*Bruce Jenkins* practised architecture for 10 years in South Africa after graduating from the University of Natal, Durban. He then studied at the London Theological Seminary, and is now in his first pastorate at the Caversham Evangelical Church in Reading, UK. Bruce and his wife Carolyn maintain strong links with South Africa.

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## CAREY CONFERENCE FOR MINISTERS

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire

7th – 9th January 1998

### Preaching, worship, counselling and testings

Speakers: **Gaius Davies**, two sessions on counselling, from a lifetime of professional experience. **Martin Holdt** of South Africa two sessions: preparing to preach and unction in preaching. **John Campbell** of Brisbane, Australia two sessions: God-centred worship, and suffering in the book of Job. And to be confirmed **Dr John Currid** of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi on the testing of Moses in the Exodus. Opening the Conference, **Geoff Thomas** on George Whitefield the preacher.

Conference secretary: John Rubens, 22 Leith Road, Darlington, Co. Durham DL3 8BQ.

### Subscriptions

We advise our readers that as from the end of the year subscriptions will be raised. The new rates will be listed on the back inside cover of the following issue (*RT160*).

We are always encouraged when readers donate gift subscriptions to those who will benefit from the magazine and we are happy if requested to include a greetings card according to the donor's specification. Orders made before November will be at the current rates (back cover).

Front Cover: *Bob Sheehan*

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# Editorial

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Bill James

Within three days, June 29th and July 1st two leading pastors, Bill Payne of Canada and Bob Sheehan of England were taken from us. Our sense of loss is inexpressible. Nevertheless feebly in this issue we pay tribute to our brothers and give thanks for their example. The best way in which we can honour the Lord whom they served is to continue the works to which they were so completely committed and dedicated. Amongst his activities Bill Payne was the Canadian agent for the International Fellowship of Reformed Baptists. Prof Michael Haykin who is a member of Trinity Baptist Church Burlington and who was very close to Bill Payne has agreed to take over this role.

Bob Sheehan was vitally interested in the need to provide theological education for Reformed Baptists. It is our purpose in a future issue to describe practical progress along those lines.

## Spiritual Disciplines

The Scriptures teach us with great clarity that the Christian life requires effort and discipline. For example: '...train yourself to be godly' (1Tim 4:7b, NIV). The Greek word conveys something of the discipline and intensity of the gymnasium. Or think of Hebrews 12:14 'Make every effort ... to be holy.' Or in 2 Peter 1:5 '...make every effort to add to your faith goodness...' The Christian life is characterised by disciplines, patterns of obedience. We are indebted to Don Whitney for his writings on this subject. Many readers of *RT* will be familiar with his first book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

(NavPress, 1991 – see review in *RT*128). This is a refreshing encouragement to disciplined discipleship. Whitney draws on the resources of our Reformed and Puritan heritage, yet presents his material in a fresh and well-illustrated fashion. In addition to the central disciplines of prayer, Bible study, worship and service, we are encouraged to consider fasting, silence and solitude, and keeping a spiritual journal. Whitney has now produced a companion volume *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* (Moody, 1996, 216pp) which focuses on our responsibilities in the local church setting. The biblical case for church-going, baptism, and church membership is helpfully set out, along with the responsibilities of the church member.

The scope of this issue of *Reformation Today* is more modest, focusing on just three central disciplines: Living by the Word, Family Devotions and Church Membership. We hope to include materials on other disciplines in a future issue.

## Gender-Inclusive Language in the Bible

There has been a controversy in recent months over the launch in the UK of a new edition of the NIV Bible using gender-inclusive language. The changes had been made by the NIV's Committee for Bible Translation (CBT) because it was suggested that the English language has changed and that the use of the masculine form (eg 'man' or 'him') to represent either gender is now unacceptable. It has been claimed that some women feel excluded by



*Alex Faibeshenko breaking bread at the communion table at the Grace and Truth church – see News*

such language. So, for example, in Psalm 1 'Blessed is the man...' was replaced by 'Blessed are they...'

Concern was expressed by evangelical leaders in the UK and USA that such changes were not faithful translations of the Word of God. Changing singulars to plurals, for example, loses the personal sense of the original.

On 27 May a meeting was held in Colorado Springs with representatives of the International Bible Society (IBS), CBT, and delegates who were concerned about gender-inclusive language including R C Sproul, Vern Poythress, representatives of 'Focus on the Family' and the 'Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood'. The meeting was pre-empted by a statement by the IBS stating that it was abandoning all plans for gender-related changes in the NIV, and negotiating with Hodder and Stoughton to cease publication of the 'inclusive language' edition in the UK.

At the meeting John Piper and Wayne Grudem outlined some problems in gender changes in Bible translation. At the conclusion of the meeting a joint statement was issued by all parties agreeing translation guidelines for gender-related language in Scripture.

We are grateful that this controversy has issued in a positive result, namely agreed principles for the faithful translation of God's Word and increased clarity on the issue of gender-related language. An information packet on the Inclusive Language Bible is available from 'The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood' PO Box 7337, Libertyville, IL 60048, USA, Tel: 847 573 8210, email: cbmwoffice@aol.com. This organisation also supplies other fine resources which deal with the issue of gender roles in the church and the world.

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# Living by the Word

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*Tom Wells*

The title of this article is taken from a word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:4: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' In saying this he was quoting the Old Testament where Moses told Israel the reason for the hunger they and their fathers suffered in passing through the wilderness (Deut 8:3). Their hunger was a test to see if they would keep God's commands. They failed the test by grumbling against the Lord. They should have determined, instead, to live on 'every word that comes from the mouth of God'.

The command amounts to this: men and women must do whatever God tells them to do. As it stands it is applicable to the man without God, the very kind of men the fathers of Israel proved to be. But the Lord Jesus quotes it to show what a godly man and a godly woman must do to demonstrate submission to their Creator and Redeemer. And, oddly enough, he quotes it to himself.

The scene is the temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. There he is undergoing the same kinds of tests that the exodus generation faced (Matt 4:1-11). We find a dialogue of sorts between the Lord Jesus and Satan, but it

is clear that Jesus is not telling Satan how to act. The statements are for 'man', that is, humanity, and Jesus was the only 'man' present. In the passage the temptations largely reproduce Israel's temptations. The first is hunger. Jesus, also hungry, reminds himself to live by the Word of God rather than the directions of Satan. The second is the desire to tempt God. Jesus, offered such a temptation by Satan, rejects it with more Scripture, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test' (4:7; cf Deut 6:16). The third is following false gods, in this case Satan. Jesus rejects this temptation as well with the command, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only' (4:10; cf Deut. 6:13). The result? Satan was routed, at least for the moment.

All of this is packed with meaning for those who serve Jesus Christ. First, we find typology here. Jesus is the faithful Son of God, as Israel was God's faithless son. He is, in fact, the embodiment of all that old Israel was meant to be and do. The second thing, however, is what concerns us now. He sets before us the whole-hearted devotion with which we must serve God and the source from which we must get our direction, the Word of God. As Israel needed bread for their



bodies in the desert, so do we for our souls. God provided them manna to feed their bodies. He provides us his written Word to feed our souls. Jesus devoured that Word; so must we! Embedded in the Word of God are three things that are important to us: God himself, his promises and his commands. These are matters of life and death.

### **The Revelation of God Himself**

The Bible is, from beginning to end, about God. All else in Scripture takes its cue from this. Are there promises in Scripture? Of course! But their value lies in the attributes and character of God. What a pity, then, not to know what the Bible teaches about God! His faithfulness, his love, his wisdom, his power – these are the things that make the promises certain. Ask yourself this question: ‘Will I be likely to cling to his promises in the hour of trial?’ The answer will depend very much on how far you have learned from the Bible what he is like. Are there commands in the Bible? Indeed! But the possibility of our carrying them out lies in the character of God. His grace to sinners bestows more than forgiveness. It gives power as well, power for godliness. Without that, what hope would we have of obedience?

All of this is well illustrated in the life of our Lord Jesus. Though he himself displayed the character of God, his

words betray another fact: in his humanity he often thought on the character of his Father. In Matthew 5:43-48, for example, he tells us how we must display love by imitating the loving activity of our heavenly Father. In his hour of trial before Pilate he consoled himself and instructed Pilate from the sovereignty of God (John 19:11). In this he is our example. We too must use the Word of God to teach us the character of our Father. And we must think on these things. (That, after all, is the meaning of that mysterious and paralysing word ‘meditation’.)

### **The Presentation of God’s Promises**

The Bible also sets forth God’s promises for us to live by. How important is this? Immensely important. Among the various motivations and incentives for Christian living, the promises of God stand in the first rank. Paul tells us we live in hope. And what is hope? It is faith for the future, based on the promises of God (Rom 8:22-25). How do we know these promises? They come to us out of God’s Word.

Even our present life rests on God’s promises. Are your sins forgiven? How do you know? Have you seen them blotted out of the heavenly book? No, of course not. What you rest on is God’s promise given to all who believe in Christ. You can anticipate the judgment day without fear because of such promises as these: ‘Believe in the Lord

Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31), and, 'In Christ God forgave you' (Eph. 4:32). The hymn writer reflected the truth of Scripture when he wrote of 'standing on the promises of God!'

## **The Presentation of God's Commands**

When the Lord Jesus said that man shall live 'on every word that comes from the mouth of God', he had God's commands especially in mind. Though we have seen that 'living by the Word' includes more than that, we want to follow the Lord's emphasis in the rest of this article. We want to concentrate on God's commands as they are given to godly men and women.

These commands are given to us in two ways, in summary form and as individual demands. The summary comes from the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 (quoting the OT):

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

At their heart, the commands of God deal with attitudes. Love to God and man is central. Are these two commands enough for us? They would be if we were already glorified, but just now they are a bit short on details. That

is evident even if we concentrate only on the commands of the New Testament, as we will do in the rest of this article.

What does love for God demand of us? It demands that we seek to make our lives conform to the character of the Lord Jesus. Note carefully: in saying that, I am not leaving the character of God behind. Not at all! The best and brightest reflection of what God is like is found in Jesus. He once said to a startled Philip, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). So our job is to conform to Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul says God has predestined us to be like him (Rom 8:29).

Someone may ask, 'Do we really need to work at this? After all, if God has predestined it, what is there to do?' The answer of Scripture is clear: we must 'continue to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling' based on the fact that 'God works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose' (Phil 2:12-13). Two things require comment here. First is the meaning of 'work out'. Paul does not mean that we're to let something already in us work out of us so that others can see it, however true that may be. Rather he means what we mean when we 'work out a problem' or 'work out a puzzle'. In those cases a challenge is before us and 'working it out' means to apply as much effort as is necessary to complete it.

Second, Paul here gives us the answer to the relation between our work and

God's. Does God do all of the work while we do nothing? Obviously not! Do we do all the work while God cheers us on and hopes for the best? No! Do we split the work, then? Not that either! What is taught here is what we may call 'concurrency'. God does all the work and we do all the work. That is almost the whole explanation but not quite. The rest is found in that little word 'for' in the phrase 'for it is God who works in you' (2:13). There Paul asserts the priority of God. In Paul's mind God's work comes first logically. Somehow our effort, real and necessary as it is, rests on the work of God. That means we can trust God to make us obedient while we labour for obedience with all our might. And obedience is labour. It is nothing less than putting our sinful self to death (Rom 8:12-13).

If all this seems like heavy theology, let me see if I can make it simpler. A few weeks before I wrote this I took the funeral service for a man named Ernest Grey. I had known Ernie for many years as a simple soul who loved the Lord Jesus. His very simplicity, however, meant that in the world's eyes there was little to say about him. Since it had been decades since I had last seen Ernie, his family had to prompt me with a few of their own memories. One stood out: Ernie used to talk to himself in a special way that I will reveal in a moment. I learned this when his son, Tom, told me that his father had had a bad temper, but that his temper would come as a

surprise to the grandchildren who had never seen it.

How could that be? Very simply, his son explained. His father had learned the verses of Scripture that spoke to his problem. More than that, he repeated them often to himself, not as an exercise in Scripture memory but as an exercise in godliness. Long since he had learned the lesson of James 1:22-24:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Ernie knew what he looked like and he was determined to do something about it. So he addressed the Word of God to himself with a godly longing to conform to it. And God worked 'his good purpose' in Ernie Grey.

Some Christians have a little container called a 'Precious Promise Box'. Good for them: may their tribe increase! It is time, however, for some enterprising publisher to produce a 'Precious Command Box', and follow it up with a 'Precious Attributes Box'. God himself, his promises and his commands, these are the food for the Christian's life. If we have whole-hearted devotion to these, we will be 'living by the Word'.



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## Family Devotions

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*Keith Holdt*

‘But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord’ Joshua 24:15. Some time ago while I was leading a group of young adults on the need for reading and studying Scripture, a girl from a non-Christian home mentioned that she was almost envious of those of us who had been brought up on the meat and milk of the Word of God. Certain things that we who have been blessed in this manner almost take for granted were unknown to her, and she felt she really had a lot of catching up to do. It struck me at the time how much I had to praise God for in putting me in a home where daily family devotions were the norm, and how much I had actually taken for granted in terms of Bible knowledge and understanding.

When I think back to those times, I remember times to my own shame when my thoughts were on anything but the subject in hand, and I would far rather have been doing other things, but I also remember times where I sat with rapt attention, sometimes with a great conviction of sin and my need for God, other times held spellbound by the great and wonderful stories found in the Word, stories of great men of God, and the like! As I look back and realise the huge debt I owe to my parents in this regard, it saddens me to think that this daily habit is being practised in fewer and fewer homes. Sometimes this is purely through neglect, sometimes through the immense pressures and demands society has brought on our family lives. Fathers are kept at work for longer hours, while wives and mothers who spend time raising children are somehow considered inferior. Many of the biblical values and standards that were previously taken for granted are challenged. In a poll in the United States of America among so-called ‘born-again’ Christians, only 18 per cent said they read the Bible every day. Almost 23 per cent of these professing Christians said they never read it! If this is true of personal devotion, it is probably true that family devotions take place even less! What an indictment!

The Bible is the foundation of all that man believes about God, and all that God requires of man. This is the primary means by which God speaks to us! It is one of the ways he uses to form us, to mould us into the likeness of his Son. He uses it to reveal himself to us, to lead us and to guide us. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the

mouth of God.' Surely if we believe these words then it stands to reason that not only do we need to build up our families by catering for their physical needs, but even more importantly we need to nurture our families with spiritual food in such a way that as families we can be as 'salt and light' to the world! We need to return to a foundation for our households!

*Is there a need for a special time of regular family worship?*

Of prime importance is the fact that God created the family. In Genesis 2:18 we read that God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, and therefore God created the woman who was to be the wife of Adam. It was from this single original family that all of mankind came, all the civilisations that have ever existed, all the nations, all the men, women and children! And because God created the relationship, it must therefore stand to reason that it had God's blessing, and that it was ordained by God that this would be the foundation of mankind. Man and woman were not created to be polygamous, but one man was intended to be committed to one wife through the covenantal act of marriage, and they were created that they might procreate through childbearing within this context. Children are not born to be immediately independent, but to be nurtured, reared and taught by responsible parents, parents who are committed to an almighty God and who also love one another. The problem with the picture is sin.

Society as we know it does not behave in the way that God ordained. Marriage is seen as a waste of time and an inconvenience. Lifetime commitments to a wife or a husband are rare, and family values are being attacked and eroded daily. Immorality and violence are the order of the day, and rebelliousness is encouraged as a basic form of freedom. As one looks at society and notes increasing levels of crime, which at the same time is becoming more and more violent, with the criminals becoming younger and younger, it is interesting and sad to note the fact that all this is coupled with the decline in the status of the family unit. Parents have reneged on their responsibility for bringing up their children. Schools are not only expected to educate, but to instil discipline, which does not happen in the home. Even Christian families have often handed the responsibility of spiritual teaching entirely over to the church, when in fact it should be the church that is built on the foundation of spiritual teaching in the home!

What does all this lead to? As the family unit disintegrates as a basic building block of society, so society itself begins to collapse and disintegrate. One only



*Glendon Thompson, Lois and Micael.*

*Glendon is the minister of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Florida, Johannesburg.  
He was assisting Martin Holdt before Martin left for the Cape – see News.*

needs to look at a once great nation such as the United States of America, built on Puritan values, to have ample proof of this. Even in my own country, South Africa, the new-found freedoms have not only brought in political change, but a dramatic change in and disintegration of the same Calvinistic values which only a few years ago were so prevalent and on which many of the norms we lived under were based.

But what then are we as Christians to do about it? We need to begin by returning to a scriptural basis for our families, one in which we take up the responsibility of raising our children on the truth of the Word of God. Spurgeon said the following: 'I cannot make out how you Christians live who have not family prayer in your houses. You will find that where sons and daughters have turned out a curse to their parents, and those parents have been Christians, it might have been set down to this, that while the parents have been Christians, they were not Christians at home. They had not family prayer. They never reared a family altar. I believe nine out of ten such cases can be explained that way.'

Throughout the history of Christianity, faithful parents have been teaching their children the good news of salvation. In Deuteronomy 6:1-9 we see how the ancient Israelites were urged to teach their children the laws and commandments. In particular verse 7 reads: 'Impress them on your children.' Also, of note in this section is that it is the parents who are being addressed. One of

the main reasons for the continued and steady growth of the church worldwide was the faithful teaching of children by God-fearing parents. And strong church leaders and members often come from homes where there has been sound teaching. Paul commends Timothy's mother and grandmother for teaching him. There are many people who despair at their inability to be effective witnesses for Christ, but we need to realise that the fulfilment of the great commission begins at home! And yet is this not at times one of the most neglected areas of our personal ministries?

We need also to understand that without the faithful and consistent teaching of the Word of God in the home, our children will not have the sound biblical foundation and example they need to be able to continue with when raising their children. An example of how the Israelites failed in this and the effects thereof can be seen in the last chapter of Joshua and in Judges. Joshua urged them to serve the Lord and the people promised that they would. Joshua 24:22 reads: 'Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.' Turning to Judges 2:10, hardly a generation later, we read: '...another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.' This is incredible! It seems clear that the very people who had experienced first-hand the incredible provision and power of God had failed to pass it on to their children, even though they had promised to do so! And the Israelite society disintegrated to such an extent that we read in Judges 21:13: '... everyone did as he saw fit.'

But perhaps one of the key reasons for raising our children on a diet of Scripture is because it is something that God desires. Malachi urges husbands and wives to remain faithful to one another, and likens divorce to violence. And why, he asks? Malachi 2:15 provides us with the answer: 'Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.' It appears from this passage that a significant output of marriage in God's eyes should be 'godly offspring'!

We should also note the concern that Christ himself had for children during his earthly ministry. We see how he took the little children in his arms and rebuked the disciples for trying to keep them from coming to him. And we also hear his words when he says: 'And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.' What a challenge to us as parents! If we do not direct our children away from sin and towards God, are we not guilty in some way of causing our children to sin? Will we then not have failed in our duty to

declare to them the way of salvation? Will their blood not be on our heads, when we one day stand before the Judge? Will we not have shown a distinct lack of love and concern for them, if we have neglected our duty as parents in the training and teaching of the Word?

I believe that for the Christian family, times spent together around the altar of God are not a 'nice-to-have', but an essential, God-ordained practice for a spiritually healthy home.

*There is a need, and it is not optional!*

What means has God provided for family devotions? We have already looked at the fact that it is God who created the family, and within this context he has made various provisions in order for family devotions to take place in an effective manner.

Fathers have been put in place as the head of the home and to lead it. Paul emphasises this in 1 Timothy where he says that elders and deacons are to manage their children and households well. Part of this leadership is leading in spiritual concerns; for example, Ephesians 6:4 tells us: 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.' In the Old Testament the father was a type of priest in his own home, in that he represented God in it. He was responsible not only for the morals and behaviour of his children, but also for their instruction. The Bible's emphasis throughout is that bringing up the children on the Word of God is the primary and most essential duty of parents, and it is the father's place to take the initiative.

Not only must fathers lead, but they are to pray for their wives, be considerate of them and treat them with respect (1 Peter 3:7). We need to remember that it is the wives who normally spend the most time with the children in bringing them up. In this capacity they need much patience and wisdom and without the prayerful support of their husbands this will be undermined.

It is also extremely important that the family altar is not the only place where the worship of God is demonstrated. Children will quickly identify inconsistencies in the lives of the parents, and we need to understand the part we play as role models. What we teach during devotions must be lived out in our lives if we are to be effective in our ministry to our children. Children need to understand that Christianity is not purely something found in print on the pages



of a book called the Bible, but that it is something that is wonderful and glorious, full of power and might, and that our love for Christ is the very essence of our enjoyment of life. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments that we must create in them the desire to be like us, not in the worldly sense, but in the spiritual sense. And they must understand also that the greatest desire that we have for them is not that they would be rich and famous, highly successful in a worldly and material sense, but that they would truly know and love the Lord God Almighty, and desire to know him even as we as parents do!

*But what needs to happen on a practical level?*

Whatever method we use, it must not be mechanical, legal and repressive. We need to strive to make the devotional time attractive to the children, a time which they look forward to each day, but remembering always to show reverence. Central to this time must be biblical teaching, which may either take place directly from the Word of God, or else from another biblically-based source such as *Pilgrim's Progress*, biographies of great men and women, church history and the like. Memory verses and the use of a good catechism are also useful. A time of singing may also be helpful, remembering that the Lord is pleased when we praise him in this manner. This will also help the family to learn the hymns that are sung in church, something which would no doubt please many pastors! And then we must remember to include a time of prayer, during which we must encourage all the members of the family to pray, from the youngest to the oldest, giving direction over the things to pray for.

However the key to successful family devotions is, I believe, not in the method that we use, but in our own personal walk with God. We need to be men and women who are 'filled with the Spirit'. Our personal times spent drawing near to God in reading and studying his Word need to be regular, and we need to spend time on our knees before him, pleading for wisdom and guidance in this grave responsibility, and also for the salvation of our households, for his glory alone! Then only I believe will we be able to wait upon him in the quietness of our hearts, in total peace, assured of his hand in all our feeble attempts to open up his Word to our families. Praise God we do not need to take on this burden on our own!

So, in conclusion, in whatever we do, in our work, at home or in the church, let us do all things for the glory of God, and in so doing, we will bring up our children in the 'training and instruction of the Lord'. Then only can we hope for a better society, and for a return to the values that we hold so dear!



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# Quality Church Membership

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*Bruce Jenkins*

Church life immediately after Pentecost had an enviable quality. The members, however formal or informal their membership might have been, were involved in something truly wonderful. The doctrine was apostolic, the preaching was powerful, and the Church was growing. The presence of the Lord was evident and awe descended on every soul. There was an abundance of grace, and the people were so glad to be involved that they devoted themselves fully to the life of the Church. There was a unity of heart and soul that was expressed in the people often being in each others' homes. The love and generosity were overwhelming and practical, and no one was in need. The presence of God and the level of commitment of the believers were so vital that people were either added to the Church by sovereign grace, or they refused to join.

In stark contrast, the contemporary experience of many people is that church membership is as much the cause of frustration as inspiration. The preaching disappoints us, church splits have soured relations with other believers, and we struggle on in our small congregations. Worse still, we wonder whether God has vacated the premises.

If church membership should be so good, and is often so disappointing, what can be done to restore its quality? The answer most often suggested is that the fault lies with the church members. If they only became more committed and less complaining, things would improve. This is only partially true, and there are in fact three essential elements to church life. Quality church membership depends on :

1. The attitudes and commitment of the church members
2. The quality of church leadership
3. The presence of God

## **1. The attitudes and commitment of the church members**

### *i. An appreciation of the glory and weakness of the Church*

The church is at the same time glorious and weak, and the quality of church life is dependent on the members fully appreciating both of these facts. This alone will sustain biblical ideals and moderate idealism. We will be disappointed if we expect church to be heaven on earth, but we need to be persuaded that our church is the one place on earth where we come closest to heaven.

Our view of the church, indeed of our own church, needs to be as elevated as the New Testament view of the church. Christ is the head of the Church (Eph 5:23). This means that he is the source of its life, has the final authority in it, and that it is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23). It is his, not ours. The existence and prosperity of the Church is so important to him that he is actively building it, and the authorities of hell will not overpower it (Matt 16:18). The Church is the present fulfilment of what the Old Testament temple represented: it is the place where God dwells (Eph 2:22). The significance of the Church is cosmic: through the Church, God displays his manifold wisdom to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Christ places each congregation under the same scrutiny under which the seven churches of Revelation 2:1 – 3:22 were placed, because the ongoing spiritual vitality of every single congregation is a matter of profound importance to him.

This view of the glory of the Church is vital if we are to weather our disappointments. We must be persuaded that the Church is glorious, that its existence and continuation is a product of divine grace, that it is not a man-made innovation, that the Christian life without it is inconceivable, and that we are not worthy to be a member of it.

Less needs to be said about the weakness of the Church because it is all too evident to us. It is nevertheless vital to grasp that the Church will be imperfect until Christ returns and its members are glorified. An understanding of the weakness of the Church will caution us that reformation will be necessary, that it will be ongoing and not instantaneous, and that we will need to be patient with each other.

## *ii. A conviction that church members are members of a body*

The church is a body (1 Cor 12:12-27), and a true member of the church is one of the limbs of that body. The picture is one of mutual dependence and shared life. This relationship is a matter of fact, not of voluntary decision, and we are required to live consistently with it. There are a number of implications.

The church is not a preaching post, but a body, a community and a family. We have a shared life that goes beyond attendance at formal church meetings. It extends to our being often in each others' homes, and to our fellow members being our friends, the people we prefer to be with. Christians are intimately related to each other, and nowhere more so than in a local church. The Lord said that those who have given up family for His sake will receive the same back a hundredfold in this life (Mark 10:29-30). Who are these people if not fellow members in our church who are to be as close as family to us? This

point does not seem adequately to have been grasped. I recall visiting a Reformed church and preaching on an aspect of our mutual conduct in the community of God's people. Judging from the comments received afterwards, this was an unfamiliar theme. The people gathered each week to hear the pastor preach and then went home. He was thumping home sound doctrine to ground them in the faith, and studiously avoiding anything he regarded as subjective. The church seemed to be a pulpit rather than a body.

Aloof and contentious individualism is intolerable. For many Reformed people, church life has consisted of contending for the truth and for biblical practice in a church of contrary views. Churches have been battlegrounds, and contention a way of life. The trouble is, where the battle has been won, many ardent folk continue to wage it, with friends. An excessively cautious spirit persists which monitors the church and exercises a kind of quality control from an aloof and isolated position. To change the metaphor, they retreat to the sidelines as though the church is the team and they are a spectator or the coach, and then comment on or criticise its performance. In fact we ARE part of the team, and share responsibility for its 'performance'.

We need to be devoted to all the activities of the church. One strategic decision needs to be made at the very outset that the prayer meeting, for example, will always be attended. The decision then never again needs to be made. To have to decide whether or not to attend every time the meeting comes round places us at the mercy of the fluctuating feelings of the moment.

Where possible, we need to live in the community where the majority of other church members live. If we have to travel in from a distance, it reduces the degree to which we can interact with the lives of our brethren, and the quality of church life is diminished seriously.

## **2. The quality of church leadership**

### *i. A qualified church leadership*

The quality of church leadership plays a decisive role in quality church membership. Elders have the responsibility of oversight and of teaching, and consequently exercise a disproportionate influence in the church. Any serious deficiencies in leadership will inevitably diminish the quality of local church life. There need to be in the leaders a commitment to, and spiritual qualifications for, the important things identified below, or the members will be disheartened constantly.

The leaders need to be committed to the truth. The truth needs to be articulated in the constitution of the church in the form of a good confession. The leaders must believe it and are be personally persuaded of it. They must be gifted to mine the Bible for its treasures, and to teach and preach in a way that instructs, inspires, and brings God near to the people. Of equal importance, the truth must govern the conduct and decisions of the church. There also needs to be something of the element of power in the ministry of the Word. If the preaching is boring, repetitive, superficial, and irrelevant, then the members will be neither eager to attend nor willing to invite their family and friends.

Like Paul, the leaders should be models who inspire confidence and respect, and whose lives the members wish to copy. They need to be committed to making disciples as well as converts. They must be gentle, and there must be no hint of authoritarianism. They must have a shepherding spirit, compassionate enough to care, and principled enough to discipline.

Expectations of the leaders ought, however, to be tempered by the earlier consideration of glory and weakness. They carry the glory of the gospel in very weak vessels. Once satisfied that they are committed to the important things, and are adequately gifted to discharge their duties, it is necessary for the church members to be patient and encouraging, to pray for their leaders, and to look for progress rather than perfection (1 Tim 4:15).

## *ii. Opportunities for involvement in ministry*

The pastors of the church have a primary responsibility to equip the saints for service (Eph 4:11-12). It is essential that they actively pursue this responsibility by training members for ministry, creating opportunities for them, and encouraging them to exercise their own initiative. Leaders must not be obsessed with control. If they are possessive about all the ministries of the church, require perfection from everyone in the performance of their duties, and never use inexperienced people because of the risk of embarrassment, then the members will become either complacent or enormously frustrated. There never has been quality church life where pastors have done everything and members have not participated vigorously in ministry.

The benefits of this to everyone are quite evident. The work is shared and multiplied. People have opportunity to use their gifts and talents. They are involved in serving others and not simply in absorbing truth. It becomes more difficult to notice the faults of others, because when people are doing things themselves they become aware of their own faults and the difficulties involved in ministry.

It is imperative that women are equally encouraged to serve. If we seize on the fact that the New Testament prohibits women from certain offices and activities, and then make 'prohibition' the dominant feature of our attitude toward them, they will be disheartened. The ethos should be one of encouragement of women to do the many things that anyone may do, and in particular the things that women are best equipped to do, without ignoring the prohibitions.

### **3. The presence of God**

#### *i. The presence of God and his blessing on the church*

This is the crowning characteristic of a church in which true believers are glad to be members. Where the sense and evidence of the Lord's presence is absent, there is an awful feeling of empty futility and predictable routine.

There are many indications in the New Testament that the presence of the Lord is to be the constant experience of any church. Where two or three are gathered Christ has promised that he will be in the midst (Matt 18:20); where the church is going into all the world and making disciples Christ will be there (Matt 28:19-20); and the church is a building which is a dwelling of God (Eph 2:22). There were many features in the early Church that indicated that the Lord was present: everyone kept feeling a sense of awe (Acts 2:43), the Lord was daily adding to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47), and the apostles were speaking with great power (Acts 4:33).

One of the most compelling evidences of the presence of God was that 'abundant grace was upon them all' (Acts 4:33). God was at work in all of them in many ways. Church life was not thin and one-dimensional, merely human. The means of grace were present and effective. The Word changed lives, prayers were answered, and the gospel converted people. There was a richness and effectiveness to the church's ministry because it was not purely programmes and forms, but God was present and at work. When people were in spiritual distress there were counsellors to guide, shepherds to care, and burdens were shared. Coming into the church was stepping into the sphere in which eternity, and the God of eternity, had drawn near and was making manifold impressions on the lives of people.

We have no direct control over the degree and manner of the presence of the Lord, but we depend on his presence completely, and need to be asking for him constantly.

## *ii. A growing church*

There will be no quality of church life where there is no ongoing evangelism in which all the members participate. Also, the quality of church life will be diminished where there is no addition of new converts. Evangelism is our responsibility, and growth is the Lord's, but we need both.

When people are evangelising, they are concerned about understanding the content of the gospel, and are anxious to find the answers to the objections that their friends are raising. They are also careful to lead godly lives because it is impossible to witness and at the same time to live inconsistently with the gospel they have shared. People who evangelise are spiritually alert.

Growth also contributes to the quality of church life. It could be argued that it is a mixed blessing, and that more people provide more problems. But where there are more people there are more resources of every kind. People are able to find Christian friends of their own generation in the church. Single Christian people have the prospect of meeting and marrying other single people who are believers. It becomes possible to sing praise with more volume than 10 or 12 people are able to generate. New converts are full of enthusiasm and curiosity and struggles, and it is always a great encouragement to have them.

Church growth is beyond our direct control, but there is every reason to work for it, and to pray often for it.

## **Conclusion**

Many of us have very happy memories of church life, and detect these elements in our own experience. I became a church member when I was converted as a teenager. Over a sustained period the preaching was riveting, and I drank it in. I invited friends to come and listen because I knew that they would hear something spiritually powerful and relevant. The young people were especially close, and nearly twenty-five years later I still have intimate friends from that group who are closer to me than family. I recall prayer meetings when there was indescribable intimacy with God and with each other. I aspired to preach and was given opportunities when there must have been scant evidence that I would do anyone any good. It took courage on the part of the leaders to entrust me with such public responsibilities. It was quality church membership; about that there is no doubt. We wanted to be there, we counted it a privilege, the preaching was powerful, we loved the people, we had opportunities for ministry, we loved to sing, we wanted to pray, and the Lord was evidently present among us. Despite the onset of routine with the



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## An Enjoyable Mindstretcher

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*Cornelius Van Til –*

*An analysis of his thought,*

John M Frame,

463pp large size paperback, Presbyterian and Reformed, available in UK from EP for £18.95.

*A review by the editor*

I agree with John Frame's view that Cornelius Van Til is the most important Christian thinker of the twentieth century. This is a *multum in parvo* book, much compacted with no padding. An overview is presented of those who have written on Van Til, including 'debunkers', those who have strongly repudiated his main ideas. There is a description of the formative influences on his life as well as a character study of the man: his career, his writings, personality and teaching style. His place in history is outlined



*Cornelius Van Til*

especially as the consolidator of the Machen reformation. Then laid before the reader is Van Til's teaching on the Trinity, the Sovereignty of God, Analogical Knowledge, the Clark Controversy, Revelation, Presuppositionalism, the Primacy of the Intellect,

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passage of time, and many disappointments, it is still good to be a member of a church. Many of the things mentioned above are not just memories of a romanticised past, but continue in my present church. The Christian life remains for me absolutely inconceivable in any context other than the glories and troubles of a local church.

Quality church membership is surely attainable, and depends on the three elements identified above. We are all responsible to have the right attitudes about our church, and a wholehearted commitment to it. We are particularly dependent on our leaders, and need to pray for them and for their progress. We also need God to intervene and bless us with his presence, and must pray that he will. All our expectations need to be tempered by the knowledge that they will only be realised fully when Christ returns. On the other hand, our discouragement and cynicism must be answered with the truth that this is, even now, Christ's glorious Church.

Logic, the Ethics of Knowledge and Common Grace. About 80 pages are devoted to inter-action with the thinking of the Church fathers, Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Butler and Edward J Carnell in which we see Van Til's apologetics in action. That section concludes with a sample of Christian-theistic argument 'Why I believe in God'. Van Til as critic forms a section of the book, a most enlightening discussion of Van Til's views of Immanuel Kant, Karl Barth and Herman Dooyeweerd. Theonomists and other Van Tilians are discussed.

A Van Til analyst himself requires a massive mind. John Frame is so blessed with the additional gift of being lucid. The majority of readers are not high flyers in apologetics or philosophy/theology. Van Til was a superb thinker but often complex and convoluted in his style. Thus it is a joy to read his theology and apologetics through the lens of Frame's mind.

Readers of *RT158*, which was devoted to the theme of Christian unity, will have noted that John Frame is a man of peace. This study of Van Til is full of light without a trace of heat or resentment. Yet in no way is Frame an eclectic as though truth does not matter. Truth is the reason for this work. All the way through readers are helped to see the reasons for diversities of outlook and perception. Those who disagree with Van Til are fairly and generously represented. Frame deals gently with opposition. Karl Barth called Van Til a *Menschenfresser* (a cannibal)! Frame

defends Van Til from this charge in good humour. Throughout, the author shows that he has thought issues through to his own conclusions. His well-proportioned appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of Van Til adds further value to this book. He has some telling criticisms. For instance on the free offer of the gospel he points to a defect, 'the free offer is directed toward a "generality" of people, rather than toward actual people' (p 399).

A highlight for me is the chapter on common grace and the light it sheds on the mentality of hyper-Calvinists who use eternity to freeze time, and get themselves enmeshed in a weird kind of deism as though God has simply wound up the clock of providence whereby our spiritual human responsibility in day to day life is rendered meaningless. I was fascinated to read about Van Til's successors. It is a pleasure to learn more of Van Til as a personality. I only met Van Til once and was endeared to him but through this book I can see why his students loved him. There are many delightful comments such as 'When others his age would be reading novels in a geriatric home Van Til was preaching the gospel in the open air on Wall Street.'

Van Til never let us forget the myth of neutrality in the natural man. Romans chapter one must always dominate our understanding of the natural man, even post-modern natural man. A mighty injection of this is needed today, a further reason for being thankful for this excellent book.

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## Pastor Robert J Sheehan 1951-1997

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### *Editor*

The Reformed cause and Reformed Baptists in particular have suffered a major loss in the homecall of Bob Sheehan. He fell into a coma after major brain surgery on May 8th, surgery that attempted to heal and seal three haemorrhages which he suffered from May 3rd. On July 1st we received the news that Bob was in the company of the Lord's own joyful assembly (Heb 12:18-21). His loved ones, his church and his close associates are left with a staggering sense of loss.

During May 1996 the Grace and Carey Conferences united. Bob Sheehan acted as chairman throughout. The way in which he handled this reflected not only his gifts as a theologian and leader but his graciousness of character.

A review of the articles by Bob Sheehan that have been published in *Reformation Today* convinces me that we have lost our most talented young theologian. His writings, relevant to contemporary challenges and eminently readable, addressed central major issues and could be likened to fine furniture, crafted by a skilled joiner, well planed and polished. The recent articles on the attributes of God were beautiful in their lucidity (RT149 and 150). Bob was particularly robust in the area of family life and wrote several articles on that theme including Basics of Marriage (RT60) and Preparing for Christian Marriage (RT99). He was not afraid to tackle controversial or difficult issues such as birth control (RT64). His understanding of the relationship of law to grace was outstanding as was his keeping the line between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, a subject which is of foremost importance for Strict Baptists where there are residual hyper-Calvinistic tendencies (See RT155).

Bob developed a comprehensive and astute understanding of the nature of revelation and the place of the canonical Scriptures. This is shown in the number and excellence of his materials, for instance: 'God has Spoken: an Exposition of Special Revelation' (RT133), 'The Sufficiency of Scripture' (RT140), 'The Original Text of Scripture' (RT141), 'The Translation of Scripture' (RT142), and his recent analysis: 'Continuing Prophecy – a response to Wayne Grudem' (RT157). His grasp of the basic issues involved in translation enabled him to produce the work *Which Version Now?* (32 pages, a Carey Publication available from Evangelical Press, UK), more relevant than ever in explaining the issues. It is easy to be simplistic in arguing for the merit of our favourite translation and be ignorant of the complexities involved. Pastor Sheehan was proficient in New Testament Greek which he taught at the European Missionary Fellowship School

at Guessens located just a short distance away from the Welwyn Evangelical Church of which he was pastor from 1981. In teaching theology at EMF he exercised a profound influence upon the students and further into their far-reaching places of service.

Bob wrote often for *Grace* magazine and sometimes for *The Banner of Truth*. He lectured regularly at the London Reformed Baptist Seminary.

Pastor Geoff Gobbett of Hope Chapel, East Ham, London, who studied at London Bible College at the same time as Bob Sheehan, became his close friend. Pastor Gobbett led the memorial service at Welwyn.

Bob was born of Christian parents who themselves were converted in the early 1950s and along with his brother, Leslie, now a consultant in Ipswich, attended New Park Hall in Barking. Bob told me that as a boy he was impressed by the devotion of his father, a working man who laboured from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm yet regularly attended a prayer meeting at 6.00 am on his way to work!

He began his theological studies at London Bible College in 1969, graduating in 1972. While at college there was an occasion when he and other students were upset by Barthian influences among the lecturers and petitioned the principal about it. However in the end Bob alone was prepared to sign the letter and was duly carpeted by the principal for his trouble!

He served as a student pastor at Hyde Heath Chapel in Buckinghamshire, where he met his future wife Wendy. He was only 21 when he took on a pastorate in Coventry where his clear-cut preaching was unacceptable. He filled the pastoral role at Grace Baptist Church, Bexleyheath from 1974 to 1981. He played a crucial role in reawakening an interest in Reformed truths among the Strict Baptists.

Two days before the first haemorrhage he attended a consultation meeting at Leamington Spa to discuss theological training for Reformed Baptists. I was present at that meeting and noted Bob's deep and long-held concern for theological training.

Unquestionably Bob was gifted with an exceptionally sharp intellect. But that is not all. He was a keen, disciplined and wide reader. He enjoyed biographies both Christian and secular. He improved his gifts with hard work and especially with a well thought out reading plan. We need to read selectively and deeply, not only by scanning books and magazines. His interest in literature led to his election as chairman of the Evangelical Library, London, where his leadership made a considerable impact.



*Welwyn Evangelical Church*

At home Bob loved his work as pastor being sensitive to personal needs and problems. This care extended to other pastors who turned to him for counsel. Caring for others often deprived him of the time he needed for his own recreation. When Wendy suggested that he had too much on he would reply, 'I only have one life to live and I am going to live it to the full in his service!' In addition his overseas interests were considerable. He visited missionaries Trevor and Lucy Routley in the Argentine several times. He ministered in Spain and Serbia and in April this year in South Africa where his ministry was loved.

To be deprived of one so talented at so young an age (46) brings us face to face with the sovereignty of God. We cannot comprehend God's purpose. Many of the Marian martyrs died at the same age. John Bradford (1510-1555) was typical. We are reminded that the moment of homecall can come at any moment irrespective of age or physical fitness. This fact underlines that we must do all we can while we can. It means too we need to have a sense of priority. Most of us are pressed by a constant round of duties that pressurise us and sometimes confuse us. Resolution is needed to prioritise. Recreation that refreshes is important but that requires planning too.

This loss is felt most grievously by Wendy, Jonathan 24, Tim 21, Ruth 19 and Rebekah 16. It is of immense comfort that the whole family are united in believing. Welwyn Evangelical Church sorrow over the loss of their excellent pastor. The fact that there are several capable young men coming from that church spells hope for the future and is a tribute to Bob Sheehan who has inspired them.

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## Pastor William E Payne 1938-1997

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*Brian Robinson*

The Sovereign Grace Baptist Churches of Canada were shocked recently at the sudden passing of their brother in Christ and fellow pastor, Bill Payne. Bill was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Burlington for over 24 years. He would have celebrated his 25th anniversary this October. He had also served in Central Baptist Church in Toronto and Calvary Baptist in Burlington. Brother Payne passed away at Fox River, Cumberland County in Nova Scotia on 29 June, 1997 while on holiday with his wife Hetty. Bill was well known among the Calvinistic Baptists in Canada, as well as by many of Reformed persuasion on the international scene.

Brother Payne is survived by his wife Hetty and two sons, Mark and Stephen, their wives and seven grandchildren.

William Payne was born in Liverpool, England on April 16, 1938, the son of the late Thomas and Hanna Payne. In his youth he attended Calvary Baptist Church in Liverpool. He was greatly influenced by the pastor of that congregation, the late A E Chillington, and it was under his faithful ministry that Bill was converted. While attending that church Bill met and fell in love with one of the girls of the congregation, Hetty Stephenson. After a stint in the armed forces, Bill and Hetty were married in 1959. That same year they emigrated to Canada.

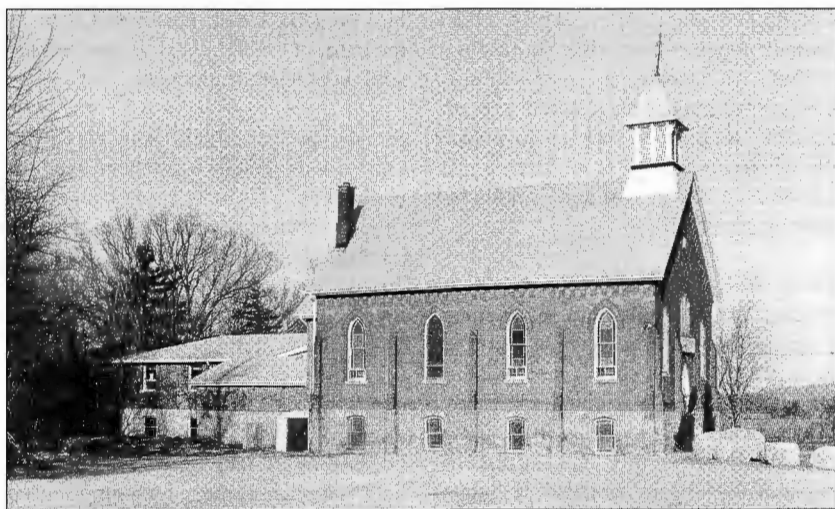


*Bill and Hetty Payne*

In Canada Bill attended Toronto Baptist Seminary. This would be a life-long relationship for he later became the homiletics professor at the school while pastoring on a full-time basis. After graduating from seminary Bill was ordained and called to Calvary Baptist Church in Burlington. It was about this time that the doctrines of grace were causing a ferment among Canadian Baptists. Bill was already convinced of these doctrines and preached them with vigour and yet also with graciousness. Because of his stand he was dismissed from his church. About 40 parishioners joined with him and they formed the nucleus of Trinity Baptist Church where he would remain for the remaining years of his ministry.

Brother Bill was greatly loved by his people, and the church prospered. They were able to purchase a disused church





*Trinity Baptist Church, Burlington*

outside Burlington on Appleby Line. It had a seating capacity of about 150. The congregation grew under Bill's able leadership until it was filled and the building had to be extended.

Bill was an able expositor of the Word of God and his people were well grounded in biblical doctrines. Several of the young people went on to become pastors and theologians, including Carl Muller (for several years assisting at Trinity Baptist in Burlington), Kirk Wellum (now at Sovereign Grace Baptist in Sarnia) and his brother Steve Wellum (now teaching at Trinity Western in British Columbia). It was fitting that two of these, Pastors Carl and Kirk should be involved in the funeral service.

Bill was a prodigious worker, reader and writer. He was the heart and soul of the Reformed movement in Canada. It

was under his supervision, along with Pastor Leigh Powell (Covenant Baptist in Toronto), Pastor Roger Fellows (Bowmanville Baptist – now at Leyton Drive Chapel in Bradford, England) and Pastor Gordon Rumford, that the monthly meetings of the Fellowship for Reformation and Pastoral Studies were begun. This successful endeavour draws about 25 pastors each month to consider papers on biblical, historical or pastoral subjects. The papers are always followed by fruitful discussion. Bill was also the leader in establishing the Canadian Carey Family Conference. The first conference was held in 1979, and from a modest beginning of about 50 or 60 this has now grown to some 300. It draws quite a number from the USA and speakers have been brought in from Canada, the USA and England. It has had a profound impact for good as far as the Reformed cause is concerned. In addition an annual Pastors'

Conference was started, again under brother Payne's initiative. It has not grown as much as the Family Conference but has been a great encouragement to pastors seeking to preach the whole counsel of God. The Family Conference has grown and is attended now by about 250.

From Bill's pen have come many articles for journals and magazines. From its inception he was the editor of *Reformation Canada*. One of my favourite articles was a pamphlet entitled 'Pastor, What is the Difference?' in which he simply but succinctly explains the difference between hyper-Calvinism, Arminianism and what the Bible teaches concerning the doctrines of grace.

Bill was in every way a pastor's pastor. It was he who gathered various independent churches into what is now the Sovereign Grace Fellowship of Baptist Churches in Canada. It is small in number and some of them are small, struggling causes, but Bill gave leadership and encouragement to all. He had the courage to see that being small was no disgrace, and that much of what was done was of a pioneering nature.

Pastor Payne was a coveted speaker at conferences in Canada and also in the USA. There were invitations from overseas too. His gifts were wonderfully used of the Lord as he spoke with great clarity as well as simplicity, making difficult theological concepts plain to even the youngest believers. He loved to exalt Christ, and as one battered and bruised Christian commented after 'accidentally' hearing

him preach, 'He so preached Christ as the balm of Gilead, that my law-bruised soul wept tears of gladness.'

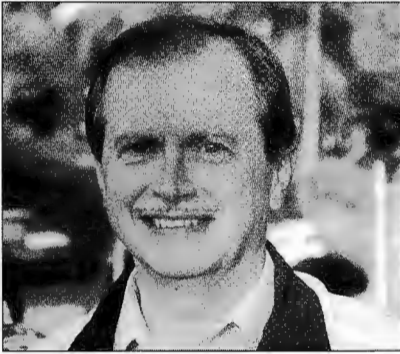
A saying for which Bill was well known was 'Balance brothers, balance is the key.' As was remarked at the funeral service, he exemplified this in a remarkable way. 'He was like the bubble in the middle of the carpenter's level, always at dead centre.' His theology, his family life and his private life were well balanced. It was he who gave the Canadian Reformed movement its own distinct flavour, and because of the largeness of his heart he kept many disparate elements focused on Christ and the task at hand.

It was a glorious summer day, Saturday July 5, 1997 at 2.00 p.m. when over 350 people came to honour this servant of God. The church was filled an hour before the service time. Some listened from the basement and others from outside. Most listened with tear-filled eyes. Pastor Carl Muller, Bill's right hand man and associate pastor for many years, led the service. Pastor Kirk Wellum preached the funeral message from 2 Timothy 4:3: 'For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.' Pastor Brian Robinson (Westminster Baptist Chapel) reflected for a few minutes on the life that had been lived to the glory of God and the blessing of God's people. We were reminded of a saying of Bill's that he had often repeated with regard to his own death: 'When they tell you that Pastor Payne is dead, don't believe it. When you hear the news, say to yourself, "Pastor Payne was never more alive than he is now."'

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## News

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*Don Carson (see page 30)*



*Nico van der Walt (see page 32)*

### **Christian involvement in the public sphere**

*a report by Sharon James*

In Britain there is a backlash against the permissive liberalism of the last three decades, and as Reformed Christians it is incumbent on us to be well-informed in our attitudes and prayers. We can learn from the past: believers have fought against slavery, campaigned for penal reform, set up schools, orphanages, old people's homes, and engaged in all manner of other philanthropic enterprises. What good works should our churches be engaged in today? Have some of us withdrawn into a pietistic ghetto mentality?

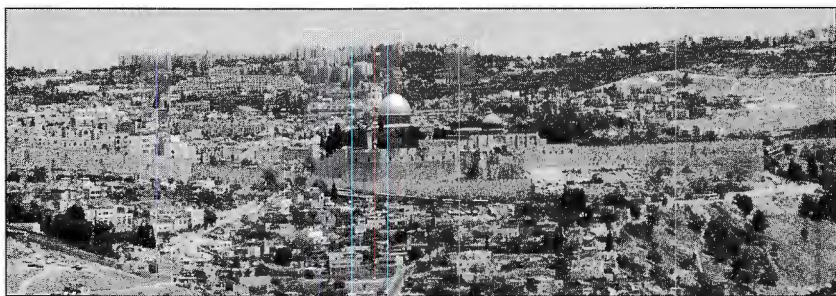
#### *The Christian Institute*

This organisation is based in Newcastle, but is increasingly consulted for a 'Christian viewpoint' by the national media in Britain. It organises lectures on the Reformation on a regular basis, with speakers such as Iain Murray. But the main emphasis is on addressing the issues of the day: homosexuality, the media,

pro-life concerns, education, crime and so forth. An important development is the employment of a Christian lawyer, who is able to advise Christians who face discrimination because of their faith. Recently 'politically correct' decisions which the Christian Institute has taken up include the refusal of one university to allow a 'LIFE' group at the freshers' fair, while allowing homosexual groups a stall; and the 'equal opportunities' policy of one county which denies grants to any body holding that homosexuality is wrong! In such ways the work of the Christian Institute is likely to become increasingly necessary and important. They have an impressive catalogue of tapes and publications available from: The Christian Institute, Eslington House, Eslington Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE2 4RF.

#### *The Jubilee Centre*

The Jubilee Centre (Freepost Box 111, Cambridge CB1 1BR) aims to develop a biblical response to the key issues of the day including criminal justice. *Relational Justice: Repairing the Breach* appeared in 1994, published by Waterside Press.



*Jerusalem*

There are some interesting insights in this series of essays. Statistics are given which clearly link rising church or Sunday school attendance with falling crime and vice versa (pp 34-5). The distinction is drawn between 'moralism' (belief in personal moral responsibility) and 'causalism' (where the aim is to regulate individuals and their relationships so as to minimise suffering overall – regardless of the moral status or past behaviour of the individual concerned). Questions of justice now involve accountability and liability, cause and effect, rather than, as used to be the case, praise and blame, reward and punishment (pp 38-9). Indeed, punishment has been replaced by 'treatment'. But it is argued here that the 'rehabilitative ideal' has itself brought injustices (pp 54-5). The need to recompense victims of crime and treat them with appropriate consideration is dealt with, and also the need to consider the situation of prisoners' families.

*The Institute of Economic Affairs, Health and Welfare Unit*

(2 Lord North Street, London SW1P 3LB.) This is a secular think-tank which sends out a steady stream of provocative materials exposing the bankruptcy of much liberal and permissive thinking. Two books by Norman Dennis, 'Families without Fatherhood' (co-authored with George Erdos) and 'Rising Crime and the

Dismembered Family' are strongly recommended. They expose how 'conformist intellectuals' have denied that the family is breaking down by speciously arguing that it is only 'changing'.

**Israel**

*Richard Gibson*

*Family Conference.*

From 9th-11th June 1997 the Grace and Truth congregation held their annual Family Conference in Beit Yedidiya, Haifa. The key note speaker was Erroll Hulse, who managed to cope with a simultaneous translation into Russian and Hebrew in the 3-4 sessions each day. The majority in attendance were Russian Jewish Christians along with some more veteran Israelis. Each session ended with a vigorous question time. Erroll may have thought that some of these people really did have KGB training! Some excellent questions were asked about the practicalities of Christian family life. This was vitally important material as most were new believers who knew the Bible and the classic in-house controversies, but had never heard such practical teaching on the Christian family. On the final evening a large contingent of Israeli Arab Christians came to share a fellowship evening with the Jewish Christians (this is also an annual event). It was profoundly moving



*Baruch Maoz, the editor, Richard Gibson, Lyn Hulse and Bracha Maoz*

to see such unity between people who live in two worlds so totally at odds with each other. Elias Jubran is the driving force behind this wonderful expression of unity. He has an outreach to Jews and Arabs in his small family shop in the Galilee as well as being responsible for teaching three groups of Russian Jewish Christians. He and Baruch Maoz are men ahead of their time in terms of their vision for true Christian unity in a violently divided society.

#### *Church building*

The Grace and Truth congregation have just recently purchased a plot of land on which to put up their congregational building. They must now get building permission and authorisation to hold public meetings. Regional councils in Israel are not known for their speed in dealing with such matters, plus the fact that Orthodox pressure groups will also do all they can to impede any progress. Continue in prayer for this matter.

#### *Bill 174c*

The religious censorship bill 174c continues to rumble onwards. More than ever before it looks as if it will successfully pass into law. At present the Messianic Action Committee, (which was set up after a national consultation of Israeli congregations at the beginning of this year), counts 68 (until recently it was

78) out of 120 members of Knesset who will support the bill. Prominent members of the cabinet have also declared their support of the bill. The present Israeli government is wholly dependent on the Orthodox parties for her existence. These parties are united in their support of the bill. The sacrifice of the civil liberties of Israel's Jewish and Arab Christians seems to be a relatively small price to pay for the continued support of the Orthodox parties.

The Ministry of the Interior, taking advantage of the atmosphere created by the bill, is calling residents of the country into its local offices and insisting that they report on their congregations. They must give thorough descriptions of the meetings and give information on various individuals involved. The Messianic Action Committee has a letter from the Ministry of the Interior demanding that a non-Jewish wife of an Israeli citizen report to them in writing 'concerning the Christian faith'. This is not a request for a testimony, rather an intelligence gathering exercise in preparation for the implementation of the bill which they expect to be passed into Israeli law.

The Knesset is in recess, returning on 27th October. This is a dangerous period in which the proposers of the bill will be vigorously lobbying members of Knesset.



We may forget bill 174c with the passage of time, but be sure that the Orthodox anti-missionary groups will not!

If you wish to get reports direct from the Messianic Congregational Action Committee via email please contact Baruch Maoz at 100320.1324@Compuserve.com.

## South Africa

*Editor*

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.' So begins Charles Dickens in his classic *A Tale of Two Cities*. The time was just prior to the bloody French Revolution, the cities: London and Paris. In London there were daring burglaries by armed men. Highway robberies took place in the capital itself every night. Families were publicly warned not to go out of town without removing their furniture to a warehouse else they would return and find it all gone! The public hangman was the busiest of men hanging a burglar one day, an atrocious murderer the next and the day after a wretched petty thief who had stolen sixpence.

South Africa is the story of two cities. There is so much that is beautiful that you often wonder whether you have been translated already into the new earth cleansed of all that is ugly. Then there is the dark side depraved and wicked in the extreme. A widowed believer is part of the congregation. Her husband was gunned down by trigger-happy youths. Ironically her husband, a medical doctor,

did more to help the poor and attend to their needs than any other in that area. Never in South Africa have there been more university graduates per square kilometre. Many of the most qualified have left: enough talent to fill every portfolio of every government cabinet in the rest of Africa. Many more talented spirits are preparing to leave, taking their money and their expertise with them.

And yet it never was a time more propitious to stay, to contend, to persevere, to reason, to be involved, and to make history. This is the time for Wilberforces. I often reminded grumblers that when the Voortrekkers arrived they had nothing except their Bibles and their wagons! Those who courageously contend in public life are not without encouragements. If the Lord is with us who can be against us? There are heroes and we can be thankful for them. Yes, if we look at crime this is the worst of times. For reformation, for open doors and for gospel opportunities this is the best of times.

During a busy itinerary that took me to the principal cities of South Africa I saw the best and the worst, luxurious homes and sprawling shanty towns including the vast Khayelitsha near Capetown, stunning in its scope and in its poverty.

Besides the privilege of ministry in churches that evidence the blessings and growth attendant on expository and evangelistic ministries (Germiston – Roland Eskinazi; Emmanuel, Johannesburg – Glendon Thompson; Durban North – Dennis Hustedt; George – Errol Wagner), I gratefully record the following:

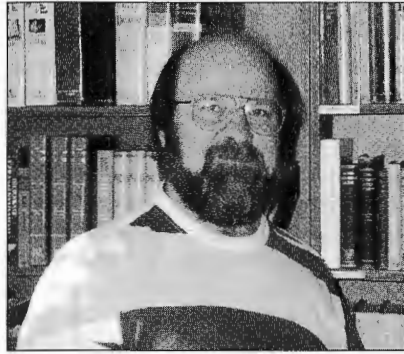
### *Annual conference, Skogheim, Natal*

The annual Reformed Studies Conference provides a meeting point for believers from a wide spectrum of denominations and languages of South Africa. Don Carson of Deerfield, Illinois was the





*Alewyn and Michelle Mouton*



*Des Moore*

principal visiting speaker. He expounded six times from chapters in Ezekiel with much application to our times and in a separate session explained post-modernism (See review of his book *The Gaggling of God* in RT152).

*The Reformed Baptist Association* – 19 pastors stayed on an extra day at Skogheim for the RBA meetings to which non-members were invited. Don Carson continued his ministry during the day and in the evening I gave a description of the world situation. It was heartening to meet men who formerly opposed Reformed teaching but who now propagate it. At a later date in my tour I met up with the RBA at Boksburg in the Transvaal. That afforded an opportunity to spend time with Mark and Beverley Nieuwoudt and Mark's parents. We greatly enjoyed working alongside Mark and Beverley in Windhoek in 1995. Mark and Beverley will be in our prayers as they take up the pastorate on the Island of St Helena following Andrew and Caryl Coats' long and dedicated pastorate.

#### *Port Elizabeth*

I could hardly believe my eyes in visiting the headquarters and home of the Bible

Institute of Eastern Cape. This provides an ideal prospect for a Bible College. The principal, Vernon Light, was formerly pastor of Newcastle Baptist Church (now led by Pastor Peter Sammons who also edits *Reformation Africa South*). Vernon has not only succeeded in re-establishing the work but also in raising the theological standards of the college. He has now been joined by Des Moore from the UK. I was truly heartened by the zeal and vision of these brothers especially in reaching out to the Xhosa people and training men for full-time ministry as well as catering for those seeking theological education part-time.

#### *Unity in the Cape*

Since moving to the Cape, Martin Holdt has encouraged an annual Grace Conference similar to the one in the Transvaal. While at Hermanus with Martin I enjoyed ministry at Hermanus United Church where there is a large congregation. I also travelled into Capetown to speak at a rally organised by the Presbyterian church at Monte Vista (Rev Trevor Marshall) and the Goodwood Baptist Church (Pastor Bernard Cartledge).

### *Vredenburg, Cape West Coast*

It was a joy to be with church planter Brent Bartlett who spent a day showing me the extensive industrial development along this stretch of coast which is being organised with maximum ecological sensitivity as it is one of the world's most spectacular bird sanctuaries. Brent is here, there and everywhere in his evangelistic efforts to establish a church in Vredenburg with an eye to the future for one also at Saldanha Bay. When my bags were left openly in his car I protested having heard much of the problem of crime in SA. How widely this varies in any country. Brent assured me that there hadn't been an incident in Vredenburg in six months and that there is 100% employment in this rapidly developing area which is virtually crime free.

### *Three Rivers, Vereeniging*

Nico van der Walt is pastor at the Antipas Baptist Church in Three Rivers, Vereeniging. Nico is greatly blessed with a gifted and supportive eldership with whom I spent an evening having been asked to address the subject of, 'What is involved in church planting?' I met with Alewyn and Michelle Mouton who visited from Johannesburg. They affirmed their commitment to preparation for future missionary work in Cameroon. The Three Rivers assembly is strong in missionary interest and they are specially supportive of Sebastian and Karen Floor who are missionaries and Wycliffe translators among the Mwani people (100,000) in N Mozambique. The church also supports several other missionary families.

### *Ministry in the Lynnwood Ridge Dutch Reformed Church, Pretoria*

For 11 years Martin Holdt has been teaching in a Bible school within the parameters of this very large Dutch

Reformed community. Nico took over the position when Martin left for the Cape. I was invited to provide 2 one hour lectures in the morning, followed by questions on The Reformation and The Puritans. These sessions were repeated in the evening. There is a very lively interest in the Reformation and Reformation theology. About 160 attended in the morning and about 140 in the evening.

### **Sri Lanka**

#### *A report by Dr John Hall of Yate, Bristol.*

Hard work in feeding the spiritually hungry can be the best cure for a tired and jaded pastor! In a 15 day visit to Sri Lanka I spoke 44 times! I presented seven lectures a day for four days to 16 final year students at a Bible College. The task set me was to teach the substance of the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon). This involves the cosmos of Sovereign of grace in its initiation and application. Grace produces and empowers changed lives and creates a family of sons and daughters of God. Through all this I was myself renewed by the glory of Christ.

In war torn Trincomalee I preached for Pastor Muraleetheran. His church began seven years ago and now needs a new building. I visited an assembly in a village where about one third of the people (ethnic Gypsies) have been converted. Between 60 and 70 assembled for worship all ready to follow the message from their Bibles. Not long ago these believers were illiterate.

This is just a small part of two weeks in which I experienced enablement in a way new to me, feeling the support of the church which I am privileged to lead.

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