

REFORMATION TODAY



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1998

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The Carey Ministers' Conference
The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, UK
6-8 January 1999

Speakers: Dr Mark Dever and Dr John Currid of the USA
and Pastors Geoff Thomas, Gareth Crossley and Ray Evans, UK.

Dr Mark Dever: 1. Expository Preaching in the Face of Post-Modernism.

2. Communicating a Sense of Sin in the Face of Post-Modernism.

Dr John Currid: 1. An Egyptian Coffin or an Ark of Life? - A study in the Birth Narrative in Exodus 2:1-10.

2. The Burning Bush and the Call of Moses in Exodus 3:1-10.

For the opening session Geoff Thomas is preparing a biography of Klaas Schilder who died in 1952 aged 62. He is best known for his trilogy on *The Sufferings of Christ*. His life is fascinating on account of his stand against Nazism, for which he was imprisoned. He is a key figure in the development of History of Redemption preaching.

Conference enquiries and bookings to: John Rubens, 22 Leith Road, Darlington, Co. Durham DL3 8BG. Tel. 01325 353634. E-mail: rubens.ep@btinternet.com

The Westminster Conference
8-9 December 1998
Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London

TRIUMPH THROUGH TRIBULATION

1 *The Story of the Puritans*

Erroll Hulse

2 *Calvin's Preaching with Particular Reference to Job*

Derek Thomas

3 *The Wisdom of John Newton*

Bruce Jenkins

4 *The Puritans and Suffering*

Iain Murray

5 *John Flavel and the Problem of Providence*

John Murray

6 *Samuel Davies and the God of Wonders*

Geoff Thomas

Further information and registration forms from:

John Harris, 8 Back Knowl Road, Mirfield, W Yorks, WF14 9SA
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Front cover: *In a tour of Kenya planned by Keith Underhill (see News) Pastor David Ellis of Stowmarket visited Thimlich which is featured on our front cover.*

Editorial

Fresh from the printers comes *The Church is Bigger Than You Think* - the unfinished work of world evangelisation¹ by Patrick Johnstone, a strategic companion volume to OPERATION WORLD. Patrick Johnstone draws attention to many areas of the world where there has been spectacular growth. He provides world maps which depict growth by 1792, 1865, 1910 and 1966. On this basis we can see unfolding the purpose of God that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). Some nations have experienced dramatic multiplication of Christians and Church growth in our generation. China is perhaps the most outstanding example. Guatemala, very small by comparison, is another. Encouraging progress is reported. For instance we are informed that in the last 45 years more languages have received some Scripture in their own language than in all the previous centuries put together (page 143).

The value of this work lies in many positive features including:

1. The call for the local churches to be missionary-minded and for all missionaries to be linked to the local church. The local church is the launch pad for missions (page 181).
2. The call to prayer. The barrier of the Iron Curtain and the demise of atheistic communism in the Soviet Union was in answer to prayer. So it is by prayer that the much greater resistance of Islam to the gospel will be overcome.
3. The call to give special attention to the '10/40 Window' between the 10° and 40° north latitudes which includes the top half of Africa, the Asian Peninsula, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, SE Asia and most of China, the most unevangelised part of the world.
4. The call to observe the ever-increasing need of the urban unevangelised. In the 20th century attention has been focused on remote tribes. Today there is the call for pioneer missions in the mega-cities of the world.

5. The call to social action in heeding the increasing plight of children (over 100 million street children) and traffic in children for sex abuse and prostitution.

A criticism of OPERATION WORLD and this new companion volume is superficiality. There is a great deal of professing Christianity which is shallow and ephemeral. For example in the case of Argentina Patrick Johnstone has been misled by superficial and unreliable reports. The idea that Evangelicals have multiplied from two to seven per cent since 1980 is wishful thinking. Two per cent is a high estimate. In some areas it seems that the Christian witness has no salt in it and very little light. In the case of 'genocidal' Rwanda and Burundi large numbers have professed to be Christian but where is the influence on political structures? Patrick Johnstone has had to correct the flamboyant statistics for Brazil and divide them by half (see page 114). However deficiencies of this kind must not detract from the wonderful and comprehensive resource of information provided in OPERATION WORLD.

Bob Sheehan in his review of the Church at the end of the 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries calls for a positive attitude for the future. Apart from the need for front-line missionaries how can we contribute in a significant way to the advance of Christ's kingdom today? One way is the short-term missionary work of pastors who participate in teaching seminars for pastors in under-privileged countries. The Proclamation Trust in London with its Timothy project has been at work for a number of years organising missions abroad in which pastors from Britain engage in teaching seminars in overseas countries. Dr Kenneth Brownell of East London Tabernacle has just returned from his eighth visit to Sarawak and his fifth to Burma. Pastor Joseph Hewitt is preparing to revisit Cyprus and Lebanon.

There is also the work of translation of the best Reformed and expository books into other languages. For instance Roger Weil with contemporary needs in mind has written a systematic theology in Russian. Roger has concentrated his efforts on Eastern Europe, Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus. In the last issue of RT he described his second tour of Siberia this year.

1 Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*, Focus Publications, 314 page paperback, 1998, £9.99

The Churches at the End of the 20th Century

This article was written by Pastor Bob Sheehan shortly before his death on July 1, 1997.

It is undoubtedly true that as we approach the end of the 20th century God is blessing his churches in various parts of the world. Yet it is equally true that in England, and in Europe generally, this is not the case. Conversions are few and far between. Growth is painfully slow. Indifference to the things of God is not only a feature of the world but also a problem in many churches. Abounding iniquity indeed means that the love of many is growing cold (Matt 24:12).

Secularists have not been slow to seize upon this situation. From the scientific fraternity have come a number who have accurately been described as devoted to sneering at God. They are militant and triumphalistic, dancing on what they see as God's grave.

One such, Peter Atkins, Professor of Chemistry at Oxford, was reported as saying before a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science that religious belief is outmoded and ridiculous... a worn-out but once useful crutch in mankind's journey towards truth. He continued, 'We consider it time for that crutch to be abandoned.'¹ Atheistic cult guru Richard Dawkins would have been proud of him!

Yet, Bible-believing Christians have to recognise that Atkins and Dawkins are not simply isolated voices in the academic stratosphere. Many a Mr Average is of the same opinion. There is much truth in Brian Appleyard's assertion that God, for the British, and probably for most Europeans, is now dead.² He concludes that in the battle between science and religion, which has been waged for a century and a half, the war has been won by atheistic science.

Nor is this atheistic triumphalism limited to Mr Academic and Mr Average. Islam joins in with respect at least to other religions. Christianity has had its day. Islam's star is rising. New Agers sing the same chorus. The Christian Age has run its course. A New Age has begun. This unholy alliance of atheists, secularists, Moslems and New Agers sing from the same hymn-book. This is now a post-Christian Age.

Innumerable Evangelicals of all theological hues are singing the same tune but the tune is sung not in tones of triumph but in doleful lament. From pulpits and in journals of impeccable evangelical orthodoxy the term post-Christian is being heard. Christians are talking about a post-Christian world.

We know what they mean! They desire to state that European society is no longer under the influence of the Christian religion as once it was. That is undeniable! But to be post-Christianised is not the same as being post-Christian.

For a Christian a post-Christian world is an impossibility! When our Lord had offered himself as a sacrifice for sins he sat down at God's right hand, not to watch the Church disintegrate into oblivion in an atheistic world, but to reign until all his enemies become a footstool for his feet (Heb 10:12-13).

Even at the darkest low points in the upheavals foretold in Revelation, dancing on the graves of the witnesses to God, while occurring, is always premature (Rev 11:7-11). Even though the ungodly hordes of Gog and Magog surround the Church they are, in fact, unable to destroy it for God is her defence (Rev 20:7-9).

In days like our own, when it seems that in much of Europe godless secularism is triumphing, we should remember that it is an appearance, a reality with substance, but not a total reality. There is a Christ in heaven who rules over all things for the sake of the Church (Eph 1:22).

Moreover, we also need to remind ourselves that it is the end of a century. Such a comment might at first seem puzzling, an enigma. Why should the fact that it is the end of a century be of any significance to us? The significance lies in historical perspective.

At the end of the 20th century in Europe, many of us feel rather alarmed at the state of the churches, our smallness of numbers, our ineffectiveness in the world, and at the rising tide of ungodliness. The question I am asking is: Are such feelings unique to this generation and century? A historical answer to this question might surprise us!

AD 1000-1350

If we limit our historical survey to the last 1000 years we can say with little fear of contradiction that, although there may have been Bible-believing, gospel-loving Christians in England between AD1000 and AD1350 we know next to nothing of their existence. In itself this fact is immediately instructive. The situation for evangelical Christianity in England in 1096/97, 1196/97 or 1296/97 was far worse than in 1996/97.

Indeed, 'far worse' is a massive understatement. We can number the truly evangelical constituency in England today in thousands and thousands. We cannot name one evangelical believer in any of those named years. If, at the end of the 20th century our heads are drooping about the terrible state we are in, we ought to remember that the state of Evangelicalism in England has been far worse. Once it was (almost?) non-existent.

How much we ought to thank God for every church large or small, progressing or struggling in our land. Today in literally hundreds of places there is a gospel witness where once there was nothing but Roman Catholic darkness.

The end of the 14th century

It was towards the end of the 14th century that the 'Morning Star of the Reformation', John Wycliffe (d.1384) began to shine. Wycliffe deserves the title Evangelical, for his contemporaries recognised that the fundamental principle that he applied to theology was Scripture alone, and the consensus among modern, academic scholars is that he grasped, albeit in a somewhat faltering way, the doctrine of justification by faith alone.³

Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, were to grace England with their evangelical presence from the 1370s until they were absorbed into the Protestant Reformation in the 1530s and 1540s.

Initially the Lollards won considerable support. In 1395, knights sympathetic to the Lollard cause petitioned Parliament with a document of Church and doctrinal reform called 'The Twelve Conclusions'. But in 1396 eighteen of Wycliffe's views were condemned as heretical and Lollardy began to be driven underground.

By the end of the 14th century persecution was gaining ground and within a year of the 15th century opening the notorious law *De Heretico Comburendo* was passed (1401). Heretics, from that time, could be condemned by the Church for heresy and be passed over to the secular power to be burned alive.

The end of the 14th century was a bleak time for Evangelicals. Driven underground, soon their faith might cost them a painful physical death by burning or the mental and spiritual torment of recantation.

Dare we say at the end of the 20th century with our church buildings open to the public, our Christian bookshops, magazines and journals, our freedom to evangelise from door to door and in the streets, that the days are so dark? A Lollard would have thought such days to be millennial!

The end of the 15th century

One hundred years later little had changed for the Lollards. Their movement had continued with some vigour underground until the 1430s, had experienced something of the doldrums for fifty years, and had revived in the 1480s. Consistently, though, the attitude of the state towards them was one of persecuting hostility.

After one hundred years of pursuit, trials and burnings they had lost nothing of their internal vigour, but were still a despised and oppressed minority denied all right of legal existence and public work. How blessed we are to have such a large degree of religious freedom. Who stops us meeting? Who raids our gatherings? Who drags us off to prison? Which of us is suffering torture? Where are our prisoners and martyrs? It is a great privilege to serve God in England at the end of the 20th century!

The end of the 16th century

What a century the 16th was! It saw a Luther in Germany, a Calvin in Geneva and in England the works of Tyndale, Latimer, Bradford and Cranmer. The Reformation in England saw schism from Rome, the Protestant faith established and the first generation of mighty Puritans.

The 16th century was the era of William Perkins, the most significant of the first generation of English Puritans. Within Anglicanism a desire for greater conformity to the Word of God began to be sought with the rise of

Cartwright and the Presbyterian movement. Outside of the Church of England a more biblical church order was sought in Separatism.

The Evangelicals were many in number, yet their influence in the nation was constantly curtailed by the queen and measures were often enacted against them. Even under the Protestant Settlement of Religion under Queen Elizabeth I, the more the century drew to a close, the more Puritans were imprisoned and exiled. The Separatists fared even worse. Those separated from the Anglican Church were banished from the land under penalty of death if they returned.

By the end of the century most Evangelicals had decided to get their heads down and get on with the work in their churches because nothing would change in the nation until there was a change of monarch. They were resigned to a difficult situation and hoping for better days in the following century.

Non-Anglican Evangelicals at the end of the 16th century still lived under the severe curtailment of their freedom, were unable to practise religion according to their consciences, and stood in peril of at least banishment and possibly death. In the light of this, living at the end of the 20th century has distinct advantages!

At the end of the 17th century

The 17th century will be remembered for its civil war, its great leader Oliver Cromwell, and the halcyon days of Puritan preaching and previously unparalleled religious toleration between 1640 and 1660. Many of us romanticise those days and think we might have liked to have lived then!

However, the Restoration of the Monarchy brought terrible sufferings and suppression to many Evangelicals until 1688. Then persecution largely ended and a large degree of religious freedom followed. Surely, at the end of the 17th century Evangelicals must have been full of hope, vigour and activity? Not at all!

For many Evangelicals freedom brought spiritual lethargy. One historian comments, 'With the prospect of struggles, tortures and hangings gone, life seemed to lose all its zest. For them religious fervour and persecution were things that went hand in hand. When one ceased, the other likewise disappeared.'⁴

Just as the Restoration brought loose morality after Puritan restrictions, so it introduced free thinking. At the end of the 17th century Rationalism was in vogue. The particular form that it took in religious circles was Deism. A representative type of Deism reduced Christianity to five fundamental truths: God exists; it is our duty to worship him; the proper way to do so is to practise virtue; men ought to repent of their sins; rewards and punishments will follow after death.⁵

This anaemic religious thinking began to invade traditionally evangelical circles. By the end of the 17th century being rational was all the rage. Where it did not lead to non-evangelical Deism it introduced the chilling influences of hyper-Calvinism.

By the end of the 17th century traditional Evangelicals were remembering the good old days and lamenting the awful state into which so many of them had fallen or the unhelpful direction in which they were going. As reason had arrived the crutch of revelation was no longer needed. Atkins and Dawkins are not so modern after all! The contempt in which revealed religion is held today is similar in many respects to the situation which prevailed at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th in England.

It is not unimportant to note that the century which followed saw the Evangelical Awakening; the great revivals associated with Whitefield and Wesley. It has often been said that it is always darkest just before dawn. The rationalistic onslaught against Evangelicalism at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century was followed by a massive intervention of God. Is there any good reason for us not praying and hoping that God might be merciful to us again? When our hearts are downcast we are called to hope in God and his promises (Psalms 42-43).

At the end of the 18th century

Perhaps of all the ends of centuries in England Evangelicals had most confidence at the end of the 18th century. The Evangelical Awakening had brought new life to many individuals and churches. The Baptists and Congregationalists were awaking from the deadening influences of hyper-Calvinism as the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society demonstrated. The hope of seeing the gospel spread throughout the nations of the earth was springing into life.

Nor, in many respects, was this optimism misplaced. Of all centuries the

19th was one of the most vigorous among Evangelicals. At the Westminster Conference in December 1996 one paper was entitled *The Dominant Religious Power: Evangelicalism in England 1800-1835*. One modern historian has concurred in calling that century 'The Evangelical Century'.⁶ Therefore, a spirit of hopefulness at the end of the 18th century was not out of place.

At the end of the 19th century

Alongside the positive aspects of the 19th century, the missionary movement and evangelical social works and reforms, there were large looming shadows. 1859 saw the publication of *The Origin of Species*, and the beginning of the long evolutionary war against God. By 1880 the Higher Critical Movement was infiltrating the churches at breakneck speed, destroying confidence in the Bible. The idea of the Larger Hope, the non-existence of hell and the salvation of all was gaining widespread popularity.

Few stood up to fight this anti-biblical movement. Many supported it. Most were neutrals. A few fought bravely but lost. As one historian put it, resistance was located on the Baptist fringe.⁷ This Baptist fringe was led by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist of 19th-century England. However, in opposition to Bible-destroying Higher Criticism he could only muster seven supporters against two thousand at the Baptist Union Assembly.

After this, Spurgeon and twenty-nine faithful friends formed a fraternal to uphold old Evangelicalism in a country where it had gone out of fashion. This faithful group began its Confession of Faith, 'We the undersigned, banded together in Fraternal Union, observe with growing pain and sorrow the loosening of the hold of many upon the Truths of Revelation...'⁸ but their fragile witness closed the century with apparent defeat.

By 1892 the Baptists largely accepted Higher Criticism. By 1893 most Congregationalists had joined them. By 1896 the Methodists had followed the same path. The century closed with the old evangelical faith facing decline and obscurity.

What conclusions may we draw?

We must never under-estimate the serious situation in which European Evangelicalism finds itself at the end of the 20th century. However, nor

must we lose historical perspective. The history of ends of centuries in England over the last 1000 years teaches us that:

1. Things have often looked worse. Only at the end of the 18th century did the prospects for the next century look better. In many ways our situation is one of the best, for the end of a century, that Evangelicals have had during the last millennium. We still have many churches, albeit small ones, and many freedoms and privileges.

2. How things look and how things actually turn out are often different. At the end of the 17th century Rationalism was sweeping all before it and many Christians wondered whether Christianity would survive. Far from merely surviving, the Great Awakening revitalised its witness. The consequences lasted for nearly a century and a half. To say there is no hope for England, or for Europe, is sheer atheism! The counsel of despair is the God-denying counsel. There is no reason why we should not again be able to cry with Wesley of old, 'Best of all, God is with us!'

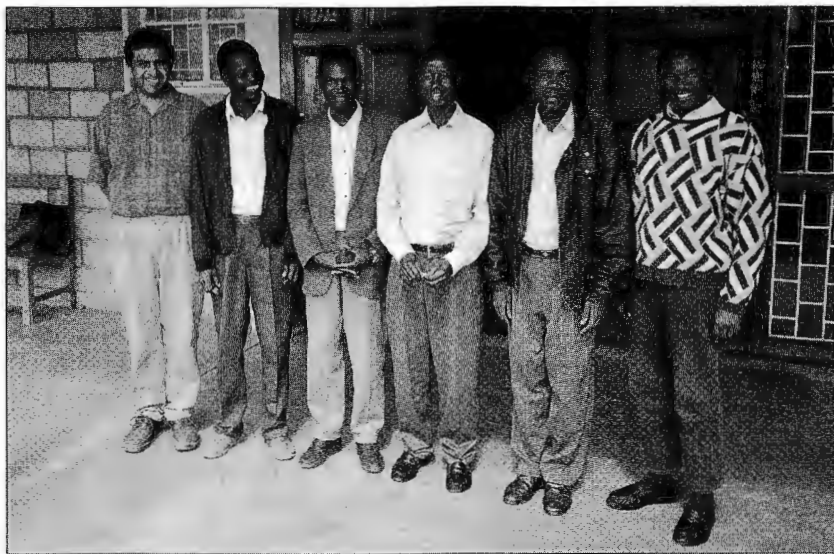
Even if it should please the Lord not to send days of refreshing but our struggle goes on relentlessly, our watchword should be that of Bucer, 'The Lord reigns! The Lord reigns!'

Enough then of this defeatist talk of post-Christian days! He whose kingdom shall never end (Luke 1:33) and whose Name shall endure for ever (Ps 72:17) calls us to behave like men and to face the challenges of our age with vigour. With Asa of old we need to pray, 'LORD, there is no-one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let men prevail against you' (2 Chr 14:11).

References

1. Quoted Appleyard B (12 Sept 1996) *The Independent*, Section 2 p2 *Which of these men know more about what life means?*
2. *ibid.*
3. Dickens AG (1989) *The English Reformation*, Batsford, p46. Hudson A (1986) *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*, pp48,383.
4. Piette quoted Underwood A (1947) A
5. History of English Baptists, Kingsgate Press p117.
6. Cragg GR (1970) *The Church and the Age of Reason*, Penguin p77.
7. Bebbington D (1989) *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History of the 1730s - 1980s*, Unwin/Hyman pl49.
8. *ibid* pl87.
9. *Sword and Trowel*, 1891 p446.

News



Sukes Pabari with first year theological students, Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi

Kenya

A report by Keith Underhill, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi

1998 marks 20 years since we, as a family, have been in Nairobi and saw the beginnings of Trinity Baptist Church, a church based on *The 1689 Confession of Faith*. In many ways it has been a real struggle to see the work go forward, but by the grace of the Lord it has done so, and we want to give thanks to the Lord for all he has done. At the end of July we concluded a Pastors' Conference. Of the more than 60 participants a good proportion were connected with churches that we have planted in different parts of the country.

I began to see that at last a Reformed Baptist constituency was emerging, pastors who stand for salvation by God's grace alone, through the work of Christ alone, and by faith alone. There are now 6 other established Reformed Baptist churches in Kenya pastored by men who have been through our 3-year theological training course in Nairobi. We are beginning to meet together as an informal association.

We also want to give thanks to the Lord for the training programme for pastors that continues with very great potential. Presently we can receive a maximum of only 8 students each year, and we are getting more applicants than that. Just at the time when new churches were

developing and the need for training was becoming more urgent, the Lord brought Pastor Nigel Lacey to come to Nairobi to devote his energy full time to this training. I am still a little involved, but the magnitude of the task demands someone's full time effort.

About a year ago two new ministries began to develop based on a nearby slum area. Two Somali refugees were converted from their all-pervasive Muslim background. Out of many millions of Somalis only very few even profess Christianity. In the same slum area live many people from the Rendille tribe from northern Kenya. They are almost totally unreached as far as any meaningful contact with the gospel is concerned. Just as this ministry was developing the Lord provided another worker, Sukesh Pabari, who has had years of experience working among Muslims.

For all these years one brother has been of inestimable help to me, but has been content to be more in the background. Pastor Naphtally Ogallo has been my fellow-elder for 14 years, and I am so thankful to God for his faithfulness to the work here in Nairobi, and for the encouragement he has been to me personally.

The Lord has provided these workers, and the work has gone forward. Opportunities abound, even in neighbouring countries, and we pray that the Lord will provide us with more labourers for the harvest field.

Jordan

A report from Peter Law

The young people in Marka have been doing Bible studies through Mark's Gospel with numbers double what they had been previously. Those coming are mostly unbelievers, but many have been thinking things through seriously. Usually there are 15 to 20 people. What is needed now is a clearer sense of what it means to be a believer, what it means to love Christ and follow him. Zeki (who leads the group) and I are studying and praying together each week, and have now decided to focus more on visiting people, to study with them and pray.

In Hashemi, please pray for wisdom in planning the meetings for the coming months. We are wanting to focus on the meeting on Wednesday as a basis for unity and reaching out. We are getting to know more people who are interested, but they are often reluctant to be seen attending our meetings and so we are trying to get round to their homes more. It all means a lot of hard work day by day.

I have been asked to teach a course at the seminary this coming semester, and so will be teaching 'Exegesis of Ephesians' from 1.15 to 4.00pm each Saturday from the beginning of October. It's going to be a great challenge, and I'm busy preparing at the moment. I hope to be able to communicate to the students the importance of loving the Word and of really getting to grips with what it actually says, and how that is fully worked out in our lives, our theology, and our ministry and preaching.

Mauritius

*A report from Dennis Hustedt Box
20062 Durban North 4016 South Africa*

My wife and I had the tremendous privilege of ministering on the island of Mauritius from 1st August-16th August by invitation of the Mauritian Baptist Association. This association is comprised of the only three Baptist churches on the island. While we took advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the island's stunning natural beauty, I was kept busy preaching most evenings, either in the churches or in homes. The need for gospel preachers and teachers is staggering.

The government, in conjunction with the Hindu majority and the Roman Catholic church, make the promulgation of the gospel difficult. When the Operation Mobilisation ship 'Doulos' docked in the capital city of Port Louis a few months back, the government did not allow the citizenry to board the ship. Evangelical churches are perceived to be cults and conversion, in particular from Roman Catholicism, normally means family ostracism. The Evangelicals on the island have been persecuted in non-violent ways for their commitment to the Lord Jesus. Evangelicals make up less than one per cent of the total population.

In travelling the poor back roads of the island one is struck by the idolatry. Hindu gods or Catholic shrines are stationed at seemingly every turn in the road. The syncretistic mix of Hinduism and a very superstitious variety of French Roman Catholicism is encouraged by the priests of both religions. Indeed, it is common for a

Hindu to offer coconuts and bananas at both a Hindu shrine and a shrine to the Virgin Mary. Clearly, the Saviour takes second position to the worship of the Virgin on the island.

On Saturday the 15th of August three major religious festivals were held. One was a Tamil Indian festival (featuring piercing of the body and walking over hot coals), another was a Hindu festival for all Hindus, the third was the celebration of 'the Assumption of the Virgin', an 1857 papal edict declaring that Mary ascended in like manner to Christ. One could feel the darkness and oppression.

Still, we left the island optimistic about its future. The evangelical community is growing. There is an evangelical Chinese community on the island. The Baptist churches are stabilising. Ed Moses, an Indian missionary from South Africa, is working hard to plant new Baptist church works in unreached towns and villages. There are a number of house churches which are springing up and dotting the island. African Evangelical Fellowship has a Bible College which is training future pastoral leaders. Above all, many Hindus and Creoles are tiring of their religion and see the emptiness of continual sacrifices to gods of cement.

Urgently needed are Reformed preachers and teachers as I left unaware of any Reformed work on the island. While it is almost impossible to receive clearance from the government for a missionary visa, short-term preaching and teaching tours would be very beneficial. I would be happy to liaise with those on the island for any who might consider serving in this manner.

Zambia



Pastor Conrad Mbewe

From a report by Pastor Conrad Mbewe of the Family Conference/School of Theology, August 1998.

This year the annual gathering was non-residential. It was encouraging that the brethren came in their usual numbers and with their usual enthusiasm. It was a glorious week.

The visiting speaker was Pastor Roland Eskinazi of Germiston, South Africa, who recently lost his wife in a tragic car accident. Filling in at the last minute for Dr Campbell who was not well was not easy, but the Lord abundantly enabled him. The delegates fed sumptuously from the Word.

The daytime meetings were attended by about 100 for the Family Conference and about 50 attended the School of Theology, coming from as far afield as Livingstone in the south, Mpika in the north and Chipata in the east.

In the evenings there were combined evangelistic meetings open to the public, and the numbers went up

to between 250 to 300. Some came from as far away as Namibia and America! With four nations represented, this was really an international conference!

The theme of the Family Conference was, 'In the World but not of the World'. Pastor Roland Eskinazi preached on the Beatitudes in the morning session, followed by Bible studies on the book of Daniel before lunch.

Afternoon electives dealt with practical applications in everyday life of the conference theme. The rest of the afternoon was spent in competitive sports.

The afternoon School of Theology sessions were on biblical and historical subjects followed by discussion times in which the students demonstrated a keen desire to come to grips with the material presented.

The evening meetings, being open to the public, were evangelistic culminating in the graduation of 5 Reformed Baptist Preachers' College students on the last night. All were challenged afresh by Pastor Eskinazi's stirring address on 'The Lost Art of Soul Winning' on the final evening. The conference ended with a rendering by the Kabwata Baptist Church choir of 'I pledge allegiance to the Lamb'. What a glorious end to an exciting and edifying week!

Breath of the Spirit in an American youth camp

A report by Joel Beeke

I just returned from the most blessed week pastorally of my life. We had a four day camp for youth. There were 140 teenagers present. Dozens came under impressions and convictions; some were led to peace in Christ. The Holy Spirit fulfilled something of Acts 2:4 in that camp. Now we're waiting for Acts 2:42 as well. The last night the chaperones got me out of bed at 3 am to speak with 13 girls who could not stop crying on account of their sins. My wife and I went to the cabin in haste. I never saw anything like it in my life. For two hours I read Scripture, prayed several times, went over and over the basics of the gospel. Several cried aloud that they found peace; others continued weeping and listening, listening and weeping. They were lost sinners and desperately needed the only Saviour. At the same time, another chaperone was marching all the young male smokers in the camp (about a dozen) to the campfire where they threw away all their cigarettes, including their lighters, into the fire, and vowed to serve the Lord.

On Sunday it was awesome for us here. You could feel the effect of camp in the congregation. Not only did I feel greatly helped by the Spirit in both sermons, but many young people were greatly helped by them. After the evening service I met with about 100 young people. The questions they submitted moved me to tears. They

were almost all of a spiritual nature. Never in 23 years have I had a set of questions like that. There is much fear among them that they will lose their convictions and their peace. In the light of this movement of the Spirit, the consistory decided we should hold a special congregational prayer meeting this week on Wednesday to pray for our young people. Remember us to our Master that Acts 2:42 may be fulfilled among our youth.

Welwyn Evangelical Church, Herts, UK

Welwyn Evangelical Church has called a new pastor. Mostyn Roberts was invited to the pastorate after a Church Meeting on 9th September. The service of induction will be on Saturday 5th December at 3.00 p m; the preacher will be Erroll Hulse. Welwyn has been without a pastor since the death in July 1997 of Bob Sheehan. Mostyn was formerly a solicitor. He began training for the ministry in 1988 and until earlier this year he was pastor of a Baptist church in Stockton-on-Tees. Both the church and the new pastor believe that the Lord has led them together and pray for his continuing blessing on the ministry of his Word.

Argentina

A report by Trevor Routley.

With the homecall of Dr Andrew William Robertson in July the



Willie and Ruth Robertson

Argentine Church has lost a man of boundless enthusiasm and vision. He was born in Argentina, but worked in London for many years, where he and his family attended Westminster Chapel.

I met him 5 years ago when planning the visit of Erroll Hulse to Argentina. 'Willie' (as he was known by all) organised, with his usual enthusiasm, meetings for pastors and interviews with church leaders. Subsequently he organised the '*Fraternidad Reformada Argentina*'. He was a man of clear convictions and forceful character. Having spent his working life in top airline management, he normally managed to get his own way!

Besides a doctorate in airline management, Willie also earned a doctorate in theology. He put this to good use on his return to Argentina in 1983, lecturing in the 'Instituto Biblico Buenos Aires' (IBBA) until his home-

call. He regularly expounded Romans and Hebrews, inculcating in his students a love for the Word of God. He was also passionately interested in Biblical Theology and the working out of the Covenant, especially in relationship to the New Testament. The result was his book, *El Antiguo Testamento en el Nuevo*, which was very well received. Its sequel was finished just before he died.

I only once, in the midst of family health problems, saw him ready to give up on a project - plans for theological education with a Reformed emphasis. My late home pastor, Bob Sheehan, was visiting and, seeing Willie's gloom, fuelled his enthusiasm by jotting down ideas for us (really, Willie) to work on. As a result, in August that year 8 students commenced studying Reformed Theology as an optional part of the Diploma of Theology offered by IBBA. Willie's vision enabled the acquisition of a fine array of Reformed books to be placed in the IBBA library through a grant and generous discounts from the Banner of Truth Trust.

A few weeks before his death, when I last saw Willie he said, 'I am at peace.' We miss him but others have taken up where he left off, especially Ruth, his wife, who declares her purpose to continue in Buenos Aires to encourage the above-mentioned projects. We will have served our Lord well if we learn from Willie's example and his commitment to the faith once delivered to the saints.

John Murray 1898 - 1975



John Murray in his student days in the early 1920s

The Man and the Theologian

by Geoff Thomas

The Man

In October we reach the centenary of the birth of John Murray, and it is fitting to honour so choice a servant of God who has had pervasive influence over the Christian Church this century and continues to do so. Though spending the first third of his life in Scotland John Murray in America never became a card-carrying Scot. He did not introduce into his lectures or sermons memories of the Highlands. On no occasion did I hear him mention his experiences in the Great War of 1914-18.

When war broke out in 1914 his brother William joined the Navy. Donald went to France with the Seaforth Highlanders. Tommy went to the Dardanelles with the Camerons. Tommy was a very godly boy who never said 'No' to his father. There was a particularly long and affectionate farewell to him, the thick-set and softly spoken father putting his arms around 20 year-old Tommy's neck. 'Good-bye, Tommy. I'll never see you

again.' When the 5 foot 6 inch John was 18 years and 179 days old - a mere schoolboy - he was called up and joined the Black Watch, the Royal Highlanders. Within six months he was fighting in France. He did not know the exact year when he was regenerated, but those months revealed his new disposition to God as the conduct of the men at war grieved him and he sought quiet spots to read and pray. He heard that Donald was missing in action and he sought more information and tried to trace where his brother was buried, but it was all to no avail. He came to believe that Donald had been wounded and had fallen into a shell-hole. Death was all around him.

Eight months after his arrival in France there was a prolonged battle, the turning point of the war. It was July 1918 and an Allied offensive drove back the German army. He had the exhilaration of seeing waves of kilted Highlanders, bayonets on their rifles, moving forward to the sound of the pipes, taking one position after another. He had been promoted to lance-corporal and was leading a group of men as young as himself. The fighting went on through the day and night and they slept standing up. It was in this offensive that he was struck with a piece of shrapnel which destroyed his right eye. He was nineteen years of age when he was invalided out of the army.

He entered the University of Glasgow where he obtained his MA in 1923, and believing he had been called into the ministry he studied under the leading preachers in the Free Presbyterian Church where his gifts were speedily recognised. The Church decided to send him to Princeton in the summer of 1924 to equip him to become a future theological tutor. This was the first of his many transatlantic crossings and he disembarked in New York, but having few documents he was made to wait on Ellis Island for hours. Finally Princeton Seminary was contacted and one of the staff came to Ellis Island to collect him. That was the beginning of forty years spent in the USA.

B B Warfield had been dead for three years, and though the Seminary was still largely in conservative hands the United Presbyterian Church in the USA was drifting into liberalism. The 225 students were a mixed bunch, as were the Seminary's trustees. Murray fitted in to the whole life of Princeton with ease. He had a Highland sense of humour. I heard some good stories from him.

His lectures began with prayer which he always took. They were deeply reverent, centred on God and his inestimable majesty, our access only by

our blessed Redeemer, our need for his help to achieve anything in our lives. Whenever I read John Calvin's prayers he always prays with a Scottish accent. Murray's teaching was lucid and exegetical, utterly persuasive, making Reformed doctrines live. There was mercifully no time for questions during the class. He lectured at a speed at which one could virtually write down all his words, though it was not dictation, and not quite preaching either.

A seminary is blessed if it has just one man like that. It is absolutely crucial to have someone who is apart, and can inspire, and bring, without striving, the reality of another world to the life of a school. In many ways Prof Murray and his Puritanism were not appreciated by the student body, even those who loved him and he was deeply loved by staff, students, and the whole of his denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I have not met a man so transparent in his life who could inspire such affection, even when others did not always understand what his whole life was saying, and why he acted as he did. But that has been the case with other Christian leaders, with Spurgeon, Machen and Lloyd-Jones. I think of the Corinthian congregation, and this letter arrives for them from the apostle Paul, so utterly different from anything they have seen before, convicting, healing, warm, holy, sanctifying, enlightening, leaving one with so much to consider. Prof Murray and men of God are like that scripture.

I never met anyone so free from any sense of self-importance, generous in giving away his books to the student body at the Seminary, financially so thoughtful to others in need. When he chaired a meeting how generous he would be in his praise. When people wrote to him from all over the world with their questions, he would spend time in long hand-written replies in that beautiful script with his fountain pen and black ink. Invitations to preach would be accepted from the smallest congregations in the most remote places. He had no thought of a crowd. How sensitive he was to his own sin, and modest about his own achievements.

The Theologian

Professor John Murray was a true theologian in the tradition and life of Princeton Seminary, where he had been a student and where he taught alongside Charles Hodge's grandson Caspar Wistar Hodge for one year before going to Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia. There for 37 years he lectured in theology, reviewed books and wrote some very significant

volumes, maintaining an integrity and holiness of life which most might expect of those training men for the Christian ministry, but which all do not display to the degree evident in the life of this Scot.

Murray blended conservative with creative convictions. He came from Sutherland, the northernmost county, and he was raised in the Free Presbyterian Church. On the Lord's Day he sang metrical psalms exclusively, and that was part of his mystique, the vigour with which he lifted up his voice to God with strength. He taught a course on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a document which he held in the highest respect. But if there were any phrases in it which he thought were not a correct interpretation of the Bible he would indicate this. The Confession was a subordinate standard, and yet he held to the system of theology it taught with unqualified conviction. In those rare places where he parted company with it there was no show of ostentation. He did not announce that he was a pioneer. His peace was in being in vital agreement with the beliefs of Reformers, Puritans, leaders of the Great Awakening, founders of the Free Church and the men who taught at old Princeton. There were some small points where he thought he could express the teaching of the Bible with more accuracy, but Murray was not one for making a song and a dance. Let us look at some of his convictions:-

Common Grace.

Prof Murray's denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, had not had a controversy on this theme. There had been a split in the Christian Reformed Church, centring upon the denial of common grace by Herman Hoeksema and the subsequent beginning of a little denomination called the Protestant Reformed Church. But wherever there are Calvinistic convictions common grace comes under fire, so he wrote on the theme. What is significant about Murray's sturdy affirmation of this doctrine is his use of the verses in Hebrews 6 - enlightenment, tasting the heavenly gift and the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age - as an indication of how gracious God can be to a defiant sinner. The sinner can display many civic virtues and a noble morality. Murray would agree with his friend R B Kuiper who shook his head at the men who denied common grace saying, 'If we discard common grace, we are driven inevitably to one of two conclusions; either man is not totally depraved. He can do good of himself; or the good which he does is not really good at all. His virtues, his patriotism, marital fidelity, filial piety, love of his children,

Geoff Thomas writes with the advantage of vivid and affectionate memories of Prof Murray as his tutor during his seminary days at Westminster Seminary

Here is an exam faced by the young Geoff on January 15, 1963 at 9.00 am. It reads:

Three hours. All questions to be answered. No Bibles to be used.

1. Set forth the Roman Catholic view of man's primitive condition.
Criticize the same.
2. State briefly what is meant by total depravity and set forth the biblical basis of the doctrine.
3. a) State summarily the Evangelical Arminian view of the plan of salvation.
b) Discuss fully the meaning of *proegno* in Romans 8:29.
4. Show what may be elicited from Galatians 3:17-22 to establish the unity of the Covenant of Grace.
5. Expound the subject of the *mode* of the incarnation.

common honesty are all of them glittering sins. In the doctrine of man the denial of common grace leads to rankest Modernism or blackest misanthropy.' Prof Murray exhorted us to cling with all our might to the truth of common grace.

The Free Offer of the Gospel

Dr Stonehouse helped Prof Murray to write a booklet on the free offer and the nature of God's sincere love for all men in offering to them Jesus Christ as Saviour. The help was minor, but Murray elevated Stonehouse to joint authorship of the book. The controversy in the OPC arose through the teaching of Gordon Clark. Murray affirmed that there was a sincere love in God for every single sinner, insomuch that in the preaching of the Church God came and had a message of good news for every person. 'I have a Saviour for you to take - Christ crucified for you to believe upon. God loves you so much that he has brought this message and this offer of forgiveness and eternal life to you. Taste and receive him. The offer of Christ is absolutely genuine and sincere.' The message was to be accompanied by urgent beseeching and entreaty. All day long the Lord held forth his hands to a disobedient people. 'I would receive you ... but you

would not come.’ How those convictions could be reconciled to the election of a number of sinners, and the limited design of the atonement is not revealed to us. Both truths - the free offer and sincere love of God on the one hand and on the other an effectual redemption by Christ of his Church - stand on the independent evidence of the teaching in the Scripture. Both are to be preached and believed. God alone knows how they may be reconciled.

The Virgin Birth.

There was nothing miraculous in the birth itself of Jesus, that is, in the emergence from Mary’s womb - what we call the birth of a child. It was a perfectly natural birth. The miracle lay in the begetting. *The Apostles’ Creed* mistakenly says that Jesus was ‘conceived by the Holy Ghost’ but conception is the act of the woman and in Mary’s case it was again a perfectly natural conception. The same word is used by Luke for Elizabeth’s conception. What was supernatural was the begetting. Jesus was begotten by the Holy Ghost, and that was the miracle. The supernatural was also to be found in the child begotten. If God willed he could supernaturally beget millions of children. That would not result in an incarnation. But in the birth of the Lord the child conceived by Mary and begotten by the Holy Ghost was the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity.

Covenant Theology.

Prof Murray defined a covenant as a saving act of God: it was monergistic and effectual in its accomplishments, the result of pure vertical sovereign grace. He went back to the early Reformed confessions - the *French Confession* of 1559, the *Scottish Confession* of 1560, the *39 Articles* and the *Heidelberg Catechism* and in those statements of faith there is not a reference to God’s relationship with Adam as a ‘Covenant of Works’. He much preferred the title ‘Covenant of Life’, but he always referred to it as the ‘Adamic Administration’.

Effectual Calling.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q.31) attributes ‘effectual calling’ to ‘the work of God’s Spirit’. But Prof Murray examines every use of the verb

‘call’ and it is God the Father who summons sinners into fellowship with his Son, not the third Person in the Godhead.

Definitive Sanctification.

Did Prof Murray create this term? If he did then he made a grand contribution to our understanding of the wonders of regeneration. Everybody who is regenerated is definitively sanctified, that is, the domination of sin over their lives is ended, they are given a new status, new resources and come under the new headship of Christ. They are in a new position entirely. So although he passionately maintained progressive sanctification he most emphatically endorsed ‘point’ or ‘punctiliar’ sanctification too, and opened up Romans 6 in a vital way.

The Theistic Proofs.

Prof Murray liked the arguments for the so-called theistic proofs for the existence of God. They had a limited usefulness, but they were not useless. His great admirer and friend Dr Cornelius Van Til had little time for them. General revelation was very limited in its scope as far as he was concerned. All it could do was to present a deity who had made all things, not the Son of God through whom was not anything made that was made. We once shared a hymnal and sang together Addison’s hymn, ‘The spacious firmament on high’, and we caught one another’s eyes when we came to the line ‘Their great Original proclaim’. It is inadequate, of course. The heavens proclaim the glories of the God of the Bible alone, not merely ‘their great Original’. When we hung around at the end of the lecture to talk to Mr Murray about the theistic proofs which had been so wisely commended, in the light of Dr Van Til’s coolness (students love to set their teachers at loggerheads), he said that he had talked to Dr Van Til about this over the years and that Van Til had nothing but enthusiasm for the proofs as he taught them. We were on a learning curve.

Creation and Evolution.

Prof Murray was very Warfieldian in his view of creation. In the 1950s there was not the pressure on conservative teachers which the creationists exert today. There was not a lot of thought given to the nature of the days of Genesis 1. Where Murray was strong was in distinguishing the concept of evolution from the concept of creation. He deplored the phrase ‘creation

by evolution'. Evolution was the unfolding or development of something which already exists. Some entity or complex develops when placed in conditions favourable to its own potencies. Creation, on the other hand is an act of God in nothingness or upon already existing materials. Without that act of God there would be no change. Evolution does not allow for the intrusion of any forces extra to the sum of the stuff of the cosmos. So there is creation, and there is evolution (eg. the various breeds of dogs), but there is not creation by evolution.

The Imputation of Adam's Sin.

Murray believed that his most original contribution to the science of theology was his exegesis of union with Adam in Romans 5. He wrote four long articles in the *Westminster Theological Journal* which were later published in a book tough with historical, dogmatic and exegetical awareness. It is the most demanding of all his writings. The mark of a mature minister is his ability to explain Romans 5 lucidly.

The Design of the Atonement.

The pages in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* which address the question 'For whom did Christ die?' are helpful because they are exegetical to the core. I remember listening to fellow student John Frame saying to someone else in the Dining Club that he thought that 'limited atonement' was the weakest point of Calvinism. Then we attended the four or five lectures Prof Murray gave on this theme, and the alleged weakness vanished. Murray's strength was the time he gave to the exegesis of Scripture.

There were other points clarified and strengthened by John Murray, but the above are truths for which I am particularly grateful. It is transforming for a seminary or congregation to observe a man of the stature of Professor John Murray. There can be any number of other godly and helpful lecturers who form special relationships with certain students, but the whole tone of an institution or organisation is lifted with the presence of one man who is full of God. Old Princeton had numbers of such men, and John Murray was not alone in the extraordinary team of young men who under J Gresham Machen commenced Westminster Theological Seminary.

Perfect Sanctification!

*An exposition of Definitive
Sanctification by the editor*

A significant advance was made in our thinking about sanctification through the work of Prof John Murray.¹ Had he been a member of the Westminster Assembly (1643-1647) the first paragraph of chapter 14 of *The Westminster Confession* might well have been formulated differently. Prof Murray drew attention to the fact that the specific action of God the Father is to call men effectually into fellowship with his Son (1 Cor 1:9).

Whenever we speak of sanctification we think of it as a process by which believers are gradually transformed in heart, mind, will and conduct. Many texts express clearly this gradual progressive work. For instance Paul exhorts us to purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor 7:1), and prays, 'May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess 5:25).

However, as Prof Murray has noted, the most characteristic terms that

refer to sanctification are used, not of progress, but of a once-for-all-definitive act. Calling into union with Christ, regeneration, justification and adoption are acts of God effected once for all. These acts cannot be repeated. The idea of definitiveness is one which allows of no increase or improvement. You cannot be fifty per cent justified or fifty per cent adopted. You cannot be fifty per cent in Christ. Either you are set apart in him or you are not in him.

To sanctify means to set apart. A saint is one who has been set apart in Christ. There are about twenty references to 'saints' in the Old Testament and about eighty in the New.² These are explicit references to definitive sanctification, to a single event that has taken place. For instance the believers at Corinth are addressed as 'those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints' (1 Cor 1:2, NJKV). The verb to be is in italics. Literally translated the text reads 'to the ones having been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints'. Later in the same letter Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). This demonstrates that conversion is a stupendous event. Regeneration, definitive sanctification and justifi-

cation take place in one act. When Paul refers to believers in Acts 20:32 and 26:18 he describes them as those 'having been sanctified' (perfect passive participle).

The primary passage describing definitive sanctification in the New Testament is Romans 6:1 to 7:6. Having expounded the doctrine of justification by faith, the apostle Paul turns to the subject of sanctification. In so doing he demonstrates that union with Christ simultaneously affects both justification and sanctification. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer on account of union. That same union achieves new life. Positionally the believer has been placed into spiritual union with Christ. That is a definitive act. The ongoing result is a vital living union whereby the Christian possesses spiritual life and holiness. That is why it is utterly incongruous to suggest that a Christian should entertain the idea of sinning. We know that these great realities of justification and adoption are simultaneous; nevertheless if we are to think of a logical sequence then positional sanctification precedes justification and adoption because it would not be possible for the Father to justify the sinner unless he was first joined to Christ.

Positional sanctification is portrayed vividly in Ephesians 2:1-10. 'God, who is rich in mercy,

made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.' He has 'raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus'. The same reality is expressed in Colossians: 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:1-3).

What is the difference between positional and definitive sanctification? Positional sanctification points to union with Christ whereas definitive points to the act of God the Father in the decisive act of the Father. Hence it is theologically more correct to use the term definitive. The expression positional sanctification is helpful because it tells of our being in Christ. In that sense the Christian is perfectly sanctified. His position is perfect but inwardly he is subject to progress. Our sanctification in Christ is perfect. We cannot be more united to him. In the positional or definitive sense it may sound odd but we can claim to be perfectly sanctified. Of course in the progressive sense we are never perfectly sanctified in this life.

Practical implications of definitive sanctification.

Baptism is designed to portray the

momentous implications of positional sanctification. First baptism is a burial. It is a funeral. Second it is a resurrection.

Positional sanctification means the believer is placed into Christ, that is into his death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6:1-4). When a person dies he is cut off from his former world. You will not receive a letter from him. He will not telephone or email you. There is absolutely no communication. The apostle is saying that we must count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. This means we are to have no communication with the old sphere of sin - no letters, no telephone calls, no, not even any thoughts about that past world of sin.

Death to the old sphere is like having a new owner. Slavery was widespread in apostolic times. Death to sin could be likened to a change of ownership. When a slave was bought on the market he left his former home and went to a different home to work for his new owner. We have been bought out of the slavery of our old master the devil and now we serve our new master who is Christ. Every effort to draw us back to the old master must be resisted.

Union with Christ is a funeral. The old unregenerate self is buried forever. I can never be what I was

before when I served the devil and the world. Baptism is not only a funeral, it is also a resurrection. It represents my new life. By union with Christ I have been raised from spiritual death. This can be illustrated by an event in the time of Elisha reported in 2 Kings 13:20,21.

‘Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man’s body into Elisha’s tomb. When the body touched Elisha’s bones the man came to life and stood up on his feet.’

When that man stood up on his feet, having been raised from the dead, he had to use them to run for his life. The raiders were coming fast. It was essential to escape from them. Imagine the amazement of those Israelites as they looked behind to see the man they had buried running after them!

Yet that is exactly what happens whenever a person is joined to Christ. God puts him into union with Christ’s death by which Christ’s merit and righteousness are put to his account. He is raised spiritually. He is a new creature in Christ. Old things have passed away and all things have become new. He now has new legs to run away from

sin and run to God's people where he belongs.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of coming to grips with what it means to be 'in Christ', that is to be positionally sanctified. We should note the following:

1. There can be no greater absurdity or contradiction than for one who lives in sin to claim to be a Christian.³ To accept a person who lives in sin as though he were a Christian is like propping up a corpse and declaring it to be alive.

2. If a person claims to be repentant then we should remember the words of John the Baptist who insisted that his hearers should produce fruit in keeping with repentance. It is dishonouring to Christ when people are baptised though they show no credible evidence of a living faith or repentance from a sinful life.

3. Baptism should only proceed when the realities represented are indeed realities, namely a living union with Christ.

4. The grand design of Christianity is the destruction of sin and an end to lawlessness. A whole world of sin and lawlessness is buried and left behind when a person is joined to Christ. This union is portrayed in

the burial and resurrection represented by baptism.

5. The fact that Christ is alive now and forever is the guarantee that all those joined to him now will live forever. In baptism, the candidate is raised out of death to walk in newness of life, that is, eternal life.

6. The only credible evidence that we are partakers of the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ is our death to sin and our walking in newness of life.

7. The Church must withdraw from and disown hypocrites who profess to believe but who discredit and dishonour Christ by their sinful lives.

8. Those who live in union with Christ, who love him and serve him, and are determined to obey his precepts, can derive the greatest possible comfort from his promises that they will never perish, but enjoy his company and the company of the redeemed forever on the new earth.

References

- 1 John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol 2, pages 277-304, Banner of Truth, 1977.
- 2 The Hebrew verb *qadesh* means to separate or set apart. The New Testament verb *hagiazō* means to set apart, so the adjective *hagioi* (plural of *hagios*, separated) means, when used as a noun, separated ones, saints.
- 3 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, Banner of Truth, p 202.

Heaven on Earth

A Treatise on Christian Assurance

A review by the editor

Heaven on Earth is the title given by Thomas Brooks to his famous treatise on the subject of Christian assurance.¹ 'To be in a state of grace is to be miserable no more; it is to be happy for ever. Now assurance is a reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious, blessed, and happy state; it is a sensible feeling, and an experimental discerning of a man's being in a state of grace, and of having a right to a crown of glory; and this rises from the seeing in himself the special, peculiar, and distinguishing graces of Christ, or from the testimony and report of the Spirit of God, "the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit, that he is a son, and an heir-apparent of glory"' (Rom 8:16,17).

'It is one thing for me to have grace, it is another thing for me to see my grace... Now this assurance is the beauty... of a Christian's glory in this life. It is usually attended with the strongest joy, with the sweetest comforts, and with the greatest peace. Assurance is not of the essence of a Christian. It is required to the *bene esse* (the well-being), to the comfortable and joyful being of a Christian; but it is not required to the *esse*, to the being of a Christian. A man may be a true believer, and yet would give all the world... to know that he is a believer' (pp 14-15).

Thomas Brooks unfolds what he terms 'the things that accompany salvation', namely faith, repentance, obedience, love, prayer, perseverance, hope. Typically of the Puritans he unites the direct witness of the Holy Spirit - 'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom 8:16) - with inferred or deduced assurance. The Holy Spirit who gives spiritual life enables the believer to recognise that spiritual life. Thus, in his first epistle, John speaks of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit. 'And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us' (1 John 3:24). But John at the same time gives tests for assurance, the three tests known as the doctrinal test, the moral test and the social test. I know that I have eternal life because I believe that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:1), I love God and carry out his commands, and 'We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers' (1 John 4:14). There must be no conflict between direct and inferred assurance. The Holy Spirit who assures me directly in my heart that I am a child of God is the same Spirit who has worked new life in my heart and conduct. The two go together and complement each other.

At least twenty-five members of the Westminster Assembly had written treatises relating to faith and assurance prior to the Assembly. The 16th-century Reformers virtually equated faith with assurance but as we see from

Brooks quoted above the Puritans made a clear distinction between the two. Saving faith and assurance must be distinguished.

The Puritan doctrine of assurance is formally outlined in chapter 18 of *The Westminster Confession*.² The subject is addressed in four paragraphs, 1. The possibility of assurance, 2. The foundation of assurance, 3. The cultivation of assurance, and 4. The renewal of assurance. Of these paragraphs the second is the most important as assurance is united on three bases. First, the subjective base of the objective reality of the Word of God with its promises to those who believe. Second the subjective basis of inward evidence and third the subjective testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits.

The way in which the Puritans expounded assurance is highly relevant in today's evangelical climate.

Wherever shallow evangelism with its practice of easy decisionism has prevailed, the danger exists of a false assurance of salvation. Connected to shallow evangelism is the 'Lordship' controversy. A number of books have appeared recently on this theme.³ In order to include those who have made a profession of faith but show no spiritual progress, the idea has been promoted that as long as a person has made a decision for Christ he is saved. Even though that person has not received Christ as Lord and shows no spiritual life he is still to be esteemed a Christian. But the Scripture declares,

'Without holiness no one will see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). How does a person know that he is saved? If he claims that he has a strong inward feeling and calls this the Spirit witnessing to his spirit that he is a Christian, yet at the same time lacks a credible Christian life, we may conclude that he is deceiving himself. The message of the first epistle of John provides adequate material to prove that a Christian lifestyle is essential for a well-grounded assurance.

Although written in the mid-seventeenth century I know of no better, clearer or more relevant book on assurance than Brooks' *Heaven on Earth* which is kept in print by the Banner of Truth.

References

- 1 Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth, A Treatise on Christian Assurance*, 319 page paperback, Banner of Truth. The first modern reprint of this work which was first published in 1654 appeared in 1961. The most recent reprint is dated 1996.
- 2 Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith, Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, 518 page paperback, Peter Lang Publishers. Joel Beeke's treatise is very thorough but readable and edifying throughout. A shorter treatment by Beeke of the Westminster Confession chapter 18 on assurance can be found in the Westminster Conference papers for 1997 under the title *Anthony Burgess on Assurance*.
- 3 The two leading 'nonlordship' authors are Charles C Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, Wheaton USA, 1989, and Zane C Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, Dallas: Recension Viva, 1989. The best known book defending the view that a Christian must have Christ as both Saviour and Lord is John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zondervan 1988.

From the Publishers

Editor

Christian Focus Publications,
Scotland.

Spirit Empowered Preaching, Involving the Holy Spirit, by Arturo G Azurdia, 191 pages paperback, £9.99. Before this British edition nine editions were published in the USA. The style today is to have well-known leaders commend a book and according to that criterion this one is in the gold medal class. John Armstrong suggests that Azurdia will convince you, if your mind and heart is open to God, to get power as well as material. Derek Prime says that seldom does a book arise of which one can say, 'This should be essential reading... but I can say this honestly of this book.' John Blanchard asserts, 'Were this book to be read, absorbed and acted upon by all involved in the preaching - and hearing - of the Word of God there would be a revolution in the Christian Church.'

The problem with this hyperbole is that one can be disappointed. This book simply draws attention to the key Scriptures on the nature and necessity of unction. If a preacher has an ego problem or is failing in this area of his work then this study will help him. Edmund Clowney in his commendation relates how he once asked Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'Isn't it difficult at times to tell whether one

is preaching in the energy of the flesh or the power of the Spirit?' 'Not at all,' replied the doctor. 'When you preach in the energy of the flesh, you feel exalted and lifted up. When you preach in the power of the Spirit, you are filled with humble awe at the work of God.' At the Carey Conference last January Martin Holdt expounded the theme 'Unction in Preaching'. He made a fervent appeal for attention to be given not only to preparation by way of study for the pulpit but preparation 'in the Spirit' for preaching. Evidently here is substantial help to do just that.

I recommend caution concerning over-critical attitudes towards faithful ministers of the Word. Preachers need to persevere in presenting well-researched content even when they struggle for vitality. 'My word will not return to me void, but will accomplish what I desire' (Isa 55:11). At a ministers' fraternal recently a pastor, whose ministry has been greatly blessed, lamented the present sad state of affairs. I reminded him that not many years ago such a fraternal of twenty to thirty ministers did not exist.

Bryntirion Press, Wales, managed and directed by David Kingdon.

Daniel, a scintillating 150 page paperback priced at only £3.99. Geoff Thomas preached a series of sermons

on Daniel at the fiftieth Annual English Conference (1998) of the Evangelical Movement of Wales, attended by 1,300. Unction shines through this well-structured and enjoyable exposition. The main outline reads: Under Nebuchadnezzar, under Belshazzar, under Darius, under Cyrus. The style is racy and gripping. Children can easily grasp the narrative section of Daniel but once we get to chapters 7-12 most are out of their depth. But here in short compass Geoff Thomas will assist you. You may not understand exactly why the goat attacks the ram furiously (Dan 8:7) but you are likely to get as close as you ever will to understanding why Daniel received those extraordinary, vivid visions.

The Banner of Truth.

Deserted by God? Hope for all who do not sense the Lord's presence during life's most troublesome times, by Sinclair Ferguson, 182 page paperback, retailing at £5.95. This is a most welcome experimental exposition of sections of Psalms 13, 42, 51, 55, 73, 102, 119 and 131. Suffering, failure, sin, illness, loneliness and disappointment come in a seemingly endless variety of shapes and sizes. At times there seems to be no way to turn. The author provides guidance and comfort from the Scriptures.

Soli Deo Gloria, USA.

The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul, by Joseph Symonds, a handsome bound volume of 346

pages, \$27.95. Unlike the former book (which title is slightly misleading) *this is a systematic treatment* analysing desertion and proposing cures. Symonds, who died in 1652, was a friend of William Bridge and Jeremiah Burroughs. This is a book for ministers.

Evangelical Press.

The Shepherd King - Learning from the life of David, by Roger Ellsworth, 320 pages, £7.95. There are 48 sections, each with an apt title such as: 'When God's arrows fall beyond us', 'When life falls apart', and 'A marvellous manifestation of mercy to a miserable man'. These expositions are excellent and are characterised by pastoral application throughout.

Baker Book House.

Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament by John D. Currid, 269 pages, £15.95 from EP in the UK. This is a thorough, stimulating and informed study of the many ways that the world of ancient Egypt can illumine the pages of the Old Testament: the itinerary of the Israelites as they fled Egypt and the plagues. There is an excellent chapter on The Egyptian and Genesis Cosmogonies. We are grateful for John Currid, a linguist, theologian and scholar in the premier league who portrays so well the absolute supremacy and reliability of the Word of God, and look forward to his ministry at the Carey Conference in January.

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