

REFORMATION TODAY



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2000

178

Contributors to this issue

John Campbell is an Australian Baptist pastor who has specialised in a study of John Owen and his writings. He has spoken at international Reformed conferences, and is often a guest lecturer at theological colleges.

Dr Jonathan Chao (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania) is the founder and president of *China Ministries International, Inc.*, headquartered in Taiwan. He is a leading authority on the Church in Socialist China.

Dr Flip Buys is the principal of the Mukhanyo Theological College, Mpumalanga province, South Africa. There are about 40 indigenous pastors and students at Mukhanyo. Dr Buys earned his doctorate while serving as a missionary in Sharpville. He now serves with the Missions Board of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

Carey Conference 9-12 January, 2001 Swanwick, Derbyshire, UK

The conference is open to both men and women this year and is planned with plenary and seminar sessions.

Speakers:

- John Blanchard - *Meeting the tide of unbelief*
Ray Evans - *Conservative and contemporary values in worship*
David Ellis - *Conference and teaching ministry in developing countries*
Dennis Hustedt - *Theological extension*
Sharon James - *1. Women helping women*
2. The wife's responsibility to help her husband
Bob Selph - *World vision*
John Scott - *The role of theology in the enterprise of preaching*
Kirk Wellum - *The constraining love of Christ*

There will be time set aside for prayer and sharing as well as free time on the Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

Full details and booking forms from:

John Rubens, 1 The Saddlery, The Chase, Newton Aycliffe, Co. Durham
DL5 7LX. Tel: 01325 310530 e-mail: rubens.ep@btinternet.com

Front cover: *Southern Sicily is famous for its temple sites. The temples, one of which is completely preserved, were constructed 2,500 years ago. Built on a hill, the city of Agrigento is seen in the background. Not far from Agrigento is the town of Ribera where Pietro Lorifice, an ex-Roman Catholic monk, pastors a church. He also provides oversight for two further churches.*

Editorial

Dr Jonathan Chao presents us with a picture of church growth in China which is of very great encouragement. This is followed by a report by Dr Flip Buys which confirms the extraordinary growth of the Christian Church not only in China but in many other parts of the world. Dr Buys reminds us that rapid growth involves huge problems. Gains can soon turn to losses. Badly taught disciples can veer into heresy. The great commission consists of two parts. First there is discipling to baptism into the Trinity. The second is to teach the full counsel of Scripture, to consolidate and maintain those who make up the body of Christ.

In the meantime we can engage in practical evangelism at home in many ways. The following area is one which is often overlooked.

Fearless Love – Understanding Today's Jehovah's Witnesses

This is the title of a paperback written by Anne Sanderson in which she acknowledges help and guidance given by Pastor Guy Finnie. She and her husband Derek are ex-JWs. She tells her story of how she came out of the Watchtower movement and how she was called into union with Christ.

Journey into Fear is a chapter which describes her JW upbringing and subsequent involvement in the JW movement. *Journey out of Fear* describes how hard it is to be extricated from the JW system.

Throughout the book personal experience is interwoven with explanations of JW teaching, how that system functions and how it has failed, especially in the realm of prophecies unfulfilled. (Unlike the papacy the JW leaders respond by admitting their fallibility). Detailed attention is given to John 1:1,2 as a crucial passage declaring the deity of Christ, a scripture which is distorted by JWs.

Anne Sanderson transports her readers into the very heart of the Watchtower mentality, a mind-set based upon Matthew 24:45-51. In this passage our Lord draws attention to the faithful and wise servants who are ready when he returns. At the same time he warns against the unfaithful servants who grow impatient and begin to beat their fellow servants. Watchtower leaders claim that they, as the leadership, represent the faithful and wise servants. It is their task to provide food for the JW movement as a whole. All JWs serve the leadership in a system of good works (hours of house visiting).

The elite group is limited to 144,000. In actual fact those now living who form the elite, number 8,755. These alone are anointed with the holy spirit (lower case

is used because the JW's do not believe in the Trinity as we do). The approximate five million baptised JW's are not anointed. They constitute the slave class and live by the truth revealed to the elite and dispensed by the elite.

This two tier system is highlighted every year when the memorial supper is held. This memorial supper is the single most important date in the JW calendar. A careful count is made of all who attend and note is made of those who partake of the bread and the wine. In 1999 there were 14,088,751 in attendance in 89,985 congregations worldwide, but only 8,755 received the bread and the wine. There are many congregations where not one JW believes himself to be anointed with the holy spirit! And so the bread and wine is passed around in vain.

Mrs Sanderson shows how those with little Bible knowledge but who have a spiritual need can easily be deceived by the Watchtower system. Once locked in it is exceedingly difficult to escape. A powerful reason which keeps JW's in the system is the fear of being disfellowshipped (excommunication). To be disfellowshipped results in radical shunning and rejection by JW members. In addition to this is the loss of all hope of escape when Armageddon comes.

Mrs Sanderson reckons that in 14 years of active service as a JW she must have knocked on the doors of 38,000 homes. JW door knocking for 1999 is reckoned to be 1,144,566,849 hours worldwide. In door knocking a great deal of understandable impatience and rejection is experienced by JW's. To them all Christendom is apostate. Every scandal, every homosexual minister, every bad story confirms JW belief that all professing Christendom is false, unreliable and hypocritical.

Anne Sanderson expresses sorrow that evangelicals often reject JW's with impatience and even anger, not realising how deeply the Watchtower system is flawed. Many golden opportunities to win JW's are missed. JW's' deepest and most pressing need is repentance from sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Often giving personal testimony to the love of Jesus is better than arguing about texts.

This book is not the best handbook on the errors of the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is designed to change hardened attitudes toward JW's and prepare many to look upon them with love and compassion. They are a people miserably deceived by a Satanic system. Such is the obvious erroneous and flawed nature of the JW movement that it is amazing that the whole has not already disintegrated.

Fearless Love – Understanding Today's Jehovah's Witnesses is a 272 page pocket size paperback published by Christian Focus at £5.99. Recommended too is a four page broadsheet published by ET, ideal for all church members to keep handy to give to JW's.

China – Growth through Suffering

*Jonathan Chao - This article first appeared under the title, ““Success” under the Cross’ in **Modern Reformation**, the journal of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 1716, Spruce Street, Philadelphia PA 19103, USA.*

Every Christian would like to see the Church of Jesus Christ grow. Church growth is the norm. Non-growth is abnormal and needs reassessment on the part of the leaders. But how does the Church grow? Churches grow as the believers share the gospel of Jesus Christ by word of mouth and attract opportunities for this by their transformed lives. Sometimes the ordinary role of the Spirit is especially observable in times of massive growth. In some places, like in China, the Protestant Church has grown a hundred times during the last fifty years (1950-2000) under adverse circumstances and a hostile environment. That environment has been one of persecution by an atheistic state.

Does persecution, which brings much suffering for the believers, lead to church growth? Yes, it seems so in the history of modern China. In January 1950, a directory published by the National Christian Council indicated that there were 834,000 Protestant communicant members. Today, while there is no reliable survey available, an educated estimate would put the number of believers at nearly 85 million. Of these, 15 million worship in the state-approved churches under the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM); the other 70 million are found in a variety of house churches scattered throughout the land. The rate of church growth has increased dramatically during the last twenty years. During the 1980s, house churches expanded rapidly in the provinces in interior China; during the 1990s, the missionary movement arising from interior China has spread to the border provinces. Today in North and Northeast China reports indicate that there is a church in every village.

Factors contributing to church growth in China

There are many factors besides persecution that contributed to church growth in China. The first factor involves the destruction of ecclesiastical,

educational, and medical institutions established by foreign missions by the Chinese communists through its agent the TSPM during the first sixteen years of the People's Republic and the emergence of non-institutional house churches which carried on a secret movement in the homes of those believers who held on to their faith under severe pressure (1950-1966). Christians also suffered during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when believers were physically and mentally persecuted for their faith. Additionally, China saw the rise of itinerant evangelists during the latter years of the Cultural Revolution and the early post-Mao years (1976-1982). These itinerant evangelists were responsible for the restoration of timid, hidden believers and for organising them into worshipping and missionary-sending churches. Another factor contributing to church growth was the development of a voluntary, lay ministry and models of evangelist training, which is radically different from those in the so-called free world. Also, there is an environment of deep spiritual hunger resulting from decades of atheistic-materialistic educational imposition, producing what has been called a 'crisis of faith' or spiritual vacuum. The ongoing help from churches abroad, such as radio ministry, Bible delivery, training, financial aid, and prayer has also affected growth. Finally, persecution has been a factor, which should be understood within the context of Chinese political history under an authoritarian government. Even in post-Mao, economic reform-oriented China, persecution has not ceased to this day. In noting the relationship between persecution, suffering and church growth in China, it would be best to keep these other factors in mind as together they contribute to a vital growing Church under the sovereignty of God working out his plan in human history. If one asks any Christian in China, 'Why has the Church grown so fast in China?' his answer would be, 'God did it.'

Context of persecution and Christian suffering

Aside from Marxist hostility to Christianity, there exists a Church and state relationship in China that can best be summarised in terms of the supremacy of the state over all aspects of the people's lives, including their ideological thinking and religious faith. A concept of orthodoxy and heterodoxy was at work in traditional China for over a thousand years before modern Christianity landed in China. The Chinese imperial government embraced Confucianism as its 'official orthodoxy', and promoted it through education and officialdom. All other philosophies and

religions such as Taoism, Buddhism, Islam and later Catholicism and Christianity, as well as organised folk religions, were considered as 'heterodox'. Today under socialism, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and the writings of Deng Xiaoping constitute the government's 'official orthodoxy'. Consequently, Western democratic ideology and the above-mentioned five 'world religions' as well as organised folk religions, including the non-registered house Christianity, are considered heterodox, ideologically speaking.

However, how should they deal with millions of people who embrace religious beliefs? The policy of the state since 1950 has been to organise these world religions under five different 'patriotic religious organisations', such as the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, whose function is to help the state to implement its religious policy and to promote its national political programmes under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the direction of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) of the government and the supervision of the United Front Work Department of the Party. Under this kind of arrangement, religious believers are granted the freedom of belief and the freedom of worship in churches that are registered with the RAB, which also grants preaching licences to the preachers, approves their appointments, and limits their locality and sphere of ministry. Churches under the TSPM do not have the freedom of evangelism outside of places of worship, nor are they allowed to conduct training of professional or lay preachers without the approval of the RAB.

Protestant house churches and underground Catholic churches which refuse to accept the above limitations prefer not to join the patriotic organisation in order to retain the freedom to conduct evangelism as they are led by the Spirit of God, to plant new churches, and to train their leaders. Such activities are considered illegal, and their gathering and training centers are subject to arrest as 'illegal religious activities'. House church groups that are organised, and many of them are, ranging from 5,000 to 5,000,000 members, are labeled as 'cults', and are persecuted accordingly. The apparatus of control is a concerted effort on the part of the patriotic religious organisations, the Religious Affairs Bureau, the United Front Work Department, and the Public Security Bureau (police system), and the Ministry of State Security (the counterpart of a combination of FBI and CIA) to implement the government's religious policy. Since 1992, the

government has been requiring all non-registered churches to register and to join the TSPM. Failure to register makes them illegal entities, and 'offenders' are subject to arrest by the local police who have the authority to impose fines (one to two years' annual salary) or send them to Educational Labour camps without due process of law.

Persecution directed against church planters

Even among the house churches, the average believers do not suffer much persecution, though they still suffer from unequal treatment at work and in society in general. The main targets of persecution are church leaders, especially the itinerant evangelists who conduct pioneer evangelism and plant churches outside their hometowns and provinces and the church leaders who oversee the development of their churches and who conduct the training of younger church leaders as evangelists and pastors. When a leadership gathering or training centre (usually a farmer's home) is discovered, the police send truckloads of officers to encircle a courtyard-house complex so that no one escapes from the gate. After taking the names of all those present, the officers take them to the police station, where each person is interrogated by two to three police officers in isolation for several days, sometimes for twenty-four hours straight by three shifts of interrogators. During the interrogation, house church leaders are often slapped, beaten, kicked, or struck by 2,000-watt electric rods. Then a fine of 2,000 to 5,000 Renminbi, national currency, is imposed on such an individual. This is equal to one to two years of a farmer's annual income. Those who fail to pay the fines are sent to Educational Labour camps for eighteen to thirty-six months of hard labour. Nowadays, many churches prefer to borrow money to redeem their co-workers in order to spare the pain from their family members and to redeem their time for ministry. Waiting for fines by the police can take as long as a month. The 'offenders' are kept at the police detention centre along with other criminals, such as thieves, robbers and murderers. There, Christians are often beaten or humiliated. Once they are sent to the Educational Correction camps, church leaders as new 'inmates' are often beaten and humiliated by the 'king of the cells'. One elder was put next to the urinal and forced to drink his own urine, mixed with detergent and his own excretions. Many other forms of persecution are intended for the believer to give up his faith and ministry. Some of these include solitary confinement in a cubicle so small that one cannot even stand up or stretch his legs fully.

Persecution, Christian suffering, and church growth

As a kind of theological and missiological reflection, I can think of seven reasons why persecution and Christian suffering help to contribute to church growth in China.

First, persecution deepens a Christian's spiritual life. Under prolonged persecution of Christians, Chinese believers have come to accept persecution as their lot as followers of Jesus. They have experienced the words of Jesus: 'In the world you will have persecution; the world will hate you, because you do not belong to the world' (John 15:18-19). They have also come to understand that suffering is concomitant to discipleship, as stated by Paul: 'It has been granted to you not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake' (Phil 1:29). In the midst of persecution, Chinese Christians have come to experience identification with Jesus, namely, being identified with him meant suffering for him and in suffering for him they come to experience a closer relationship with him and with the Father through the descent of 'the Spirit of glory', which rests upon them when they are reproached for the name of Christ (1 Peter 4:14). Those who have gone through imprisonment testify how they experienced the joy of close communion with the triune God. When they are released, they seldom talk about the tortures that were inflicted upon them. Rather, they talk about how they were drawn closer to the Lord. A spirit of meekness, humility and joy characterises their transformed personalities. When they preach Christ to others, they preach a Christ whom they have come to know experientially, a Christ for whom they suffered, and a Christ who saw them through their darkest hours.

Second, persecution can purge the believer of his inward sins and confirm his faith in Christ. Those who went through imprisonment (where they suffer humiliation and physical abuse, hard labour, and often starvation) testify that during the first few weeks of their interrogation and confinement they were forced to examine their lives and their ministry as if giving an account of themselves to the Lord as their judge. They went through prolonged and detailed confession before the Lord for their failures and their sins. This cleansing process would yield a clean heart, and they experience a sense of freedom from sin and a freedom to serve God as Peter told his readers: 'Therefore, Christ suffered for us in the flesh; arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the

flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God' (1 Peter 4:1-2). They experience a renewed understanding of God as a God of holiness, a God of righteousness, and a God of mercy. In this process, their faith is renewed and further confirmed. When they come out of prison, they preach the gospel with greater boldness than ever before. The purifying process also can make them more determined than ever to pursue holiness and to live at peace with God.

Third, persecution causes the larger house churches to split into several smaller groups. As the small groups grow in size, they split again for security reasons. In the countryside, small groups mean thirty to fifty people. In the cities, small means ten to fifteen persons. When these new groups are formed, new leadership emerges or is appointed, and training for them becomes an immediate task. That is why leadership-training sessions are conducted all over China in a clandestine manner. In Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, because the political atmosphere used to be rather tolerant, house churches began to build church buildings that could accommodate 500 to 1,000 people. Since the enforcement of registration began in 1996, several of these church building were blasted down by the government and others were taken over by the TSPM. In the process, house church leaders there adopted a policy of near total withdrawal, both pastoral leaders and the congregations, while losing their sanctuaries. They organised themselves into dozens of smaller house churches, which experienced faster growth than when they were together.

Fourth, when a political movement is launched by the government, such as the anticrime campaign in 1996 or the current anti-Falungong campaign that began in August 1999, top house church leaders are the first to be arrested. This forces the younger men and women to come up to take the places of leadership. When the younger men are arrested, the young women rise up in their place. In North China when the top leader was arrested and sentenced for eighteen months, his son and his right-hand man took over the leadership for training and administration of their 300-plus house churches respectively. When he came out, he discovered that his group had over 400 house churches. If growth in leadership is any indicator of church growth, China certainly has her share of an ever-growing army of church leaders.

Fifth, persecution forces the believers to grow into a close solidarity and the leaders to develop a fluid, tight organisational structure and communication network. Most of the larger house church groups have developed several layers of leadership-oriented and functional organisational structure, which is also accompanied with a multi-level leadership training system. These levels are usually determined by geographical expansions: organisational structures, co-workers' meetings, and training sessions are conducted at the village level, township level, country level, provincial level, and national level. Deprived of the opportunity to maintain offices, regular phones, and paperwork, they have to communicate by word of mouth or cellular phones (more recently), and they have to meet frequently for review and planning purposes. In this mobile manner most of their energy, time and money are devoted to survival, training and missionary expansion. In other words, they travel light, like sojourners, and like an army on the march and doing field battle. They worship in believers' homes, they hold church business meetings in believers' homes, and they carry out training (ranging from three days to three months) in believers' homes, and these venues change according to the degree of security.

Sixth, persistent state persecution has turned the Church in China into a church of persistent prayer. Persecution in terms of forbidding regular church meetings, pressure for registration, arrest of itinerant evangelists and their training centres, and imprisonment of church leaders put the house churches under impossible situations. Sometimes the only thing they can do is pray; the only help they can expect is from the Lord. This has been the case since the formation of the Three-Self Reform Movement in 1950 (the name was later changed to TSPM in 1954). God does answer their prayers with signs and miracles, such as sudden death of their persecutors or the promotion of imprisoned church leaders to become assistant wardens, much like the role Joseph played in the prison of Pharaoh. For the past twenty years that I have been in contact with house church leaders, I have noticed that in all their gatherings they have a custom of getting up at 5:00 a.m. to pray for two hours in the morning. They do this either privately or corporately. In the community prayer, they always pray for those in prison or undergoing suffering. They also pray for the expansion of the gospel throughout China. In training sessions, they apply spiritual lessons that they draw from the lectures. It is very true in

China that prayer leads to revival, and revival leads to missionary expansion. This is the secret to church growth in China.

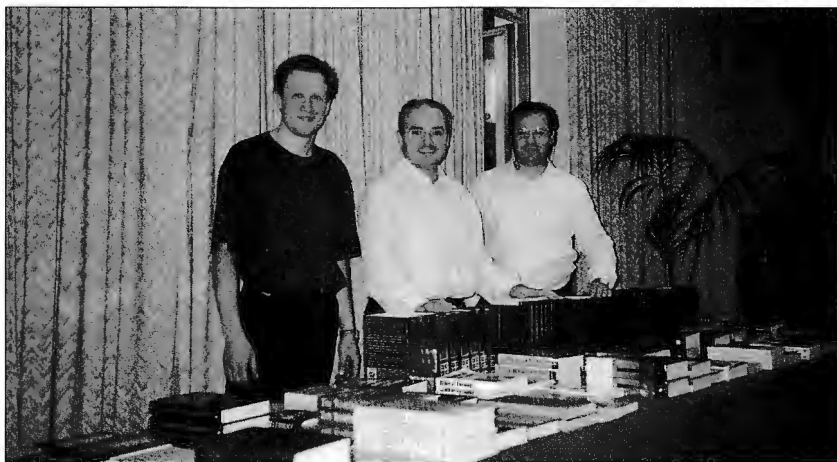
Seventh, the testimonies of those who have suffered long under persecution have become a source of inspiration to the growing Church in China. Their faithfulness spurs the younger leaders to continue in their footsteps; their convictions are passed on to the subsequent generation of church leaders. The testimonies of Wang Mingtao (1900-1991, imprisoned for twenty-three years) and Yuan Xiancheng of Beijing (imprisoned for twenty years and still maintaining an independent house meeting since 1979), of Xie Moshan of Shanghai (imprisoned twenty years), and of Samuel Lam of Guangzhou (imprisoned twenty years) and Epaphras Chen of Yinchuan (also twenty years) are but a few examples. A tradition of faithfulness to Christ even unto death has been established among the house churches and a spirit of resistance to state persecution prevails throughout China. Today the state's determination to subjugate the independent house churches through registration and management under the TSPM and the house churches' determined resistance to that pressure through prayer and enduring suffering is like two armies engaged in warfare. One side uses brute force, the other resorts to God's spiritual power. As a student of Chinese Church studies, I can say that the ongoing expansion of the Church in China has already passed the point of the state's ability to control it. There are already more Christians than party members, some of whom are turning to Christ.

Conclusion

Ultimately Christians endure suffering for the sake of the gospel and for a testimony to Jesus Christ, just as the apostle John testified: 'I John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Rev 1:9). He who testifies to the lordship of Christ cannot escape persecution from those who oppose him. Yet, through enduring suffering, their discipleship is authenticated through their being identified with his suffering, death, and resurrection, and to them Christ gives the power to overcome the world and the Spirit of glory to abide with them.

The Church in China is a sobering success story of church growth.

News



*Ready to serve at the booktable at the first Puritan conference, Catania, Sicily;
Giovani Marino, Reno Ulfo, and Andrea Ferrari*

Italy

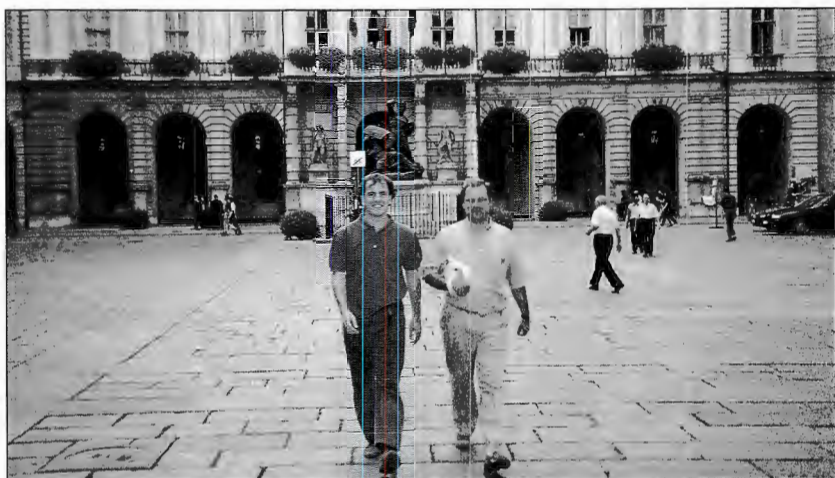
A report by the editor – literature and conferences

It is unlikely that anything like a Puritan Conference has been attempted in Italy before. 80 attended a day conference on 'The Puritans' in a hotel near the Catania airport, Sicily. Recent translations of Puritan titles into Italian in attractive format were on display for sale. Attention was lively and the question time profitable. It was a pleasure to observe the rapt attention given to the story of the Puritans and the spiritual lessons that flow from that story.

The Sicilian one-day conference was repeated in Turin the following

Saturday. There was a healthy proportion of young people among the 50 who attended. The event was made possible by the hospitality of a substantial evangelical church, where I preached the following Sunday.

In the driving seat of the 'Puritan reformation' are young men in their early 30s, Andrea, Reno, Fabio who have experience as pastors in the Assemblies of God (Pentecostal) denomination, and a younger man, Giovani, who is assisting in translation. I came away burdened to pray for the fires of revival and reformation to be kindled and to burn in church groupings like the Assemblies of God and the Waldensians. The Waldensians, with a great history dating back to the 13th century, have in recent years sunk into liberal theology.



Markos of Turin and Andrea, in one of the beautiful Turin city squares

Only three days were spent in Turin. While in Sicily I preached in several churches and experienced a warm unity with the congregations. The Reformed literature work which sails under the flag of ALPHA AND OMEGA is making steady progress. Titles include *The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes, and *Meditation* by Thomas Watson.

Leeds, UK

Creation Conference. A report by Andy McIntosh

About 700 people came to the 'Say Yes to Creation Conference' on Sat 30th Sept at the University of Leeds.

David Rosevear's vivacious introductory talk on 'The myth of Chemical Evolution' set the day off on an enthusiastic note. Then we moved into seminars ranging from 'Is Genesis 1 poetry?' to 'Was Noah's Ark feasible?',

'Dating and the age of the earth' to 'How to help teens and children', 'Aliens - is there life out there?' to 'Ape men and fossils', 'The six most asked questions' (a very popular one by Monty White) to 'Hallmarks of design' (I could hear Stuart Burgess' talk on peacock feathers over again!) and many other topics. The demand to get in to these seminars meant several frantic changes of rooms to accommodate increasing numbers. A BIG bonus this time (we ran similar events 9 years ago in Leeds, and 7 years ago in London), were the all-day activities for the children, organised by Steve Layfield, Peter McNabb and an army of helpers, also a crèche run by Ann Wilkinson. The addition of a superb 'Creation Tent' supplied by Peter Cotton from Lincoln and the many bookstalls contributed to a vibrant atmosphere, and many calls for a repeat event! I gather Dave Walton in Newcastle is planning something along these lines. The day ended with a great emphasis by Monty White on the importance of a

'Bible first mentality', as he spoke on the subject 'Firm foundations – the Bible and science'.

All ages were represented and amongst the group attending were those seeking not only answers on creation but also on salvation, as evidenced in an hour long question time during the afternoon. A number of John's Gospels were taken.

USA

A report by Steve Frakes, who is an elder of Mount Zion Bible Church, 2603 West Wright Street, Pensacola FL 32505, USA.

Chapel Library, which prints and distributes a wide range of fine literature, and Mount Zion Bible Institute, described below, both operate from the same premises as the church.
email: school@mountzion.org
internet: www.mountain.org

Mount Zion Bible Institute provides correspondence courses without charge, and counts among its students many in the USA in prisons, churches, and home schools. The courses are also ideal for developing countries (see article by Flip Buys). They are Reformed, mostly using existing texts by C H Spurgeon, H Bonar, J C Ryle, A W Pink, and others. The average course is 10 lessons long and can be completed in two to three months using one evening a week. The 22 courses fall into four broad categories.

1. Basic salvation includes man's utter ruin, God's redemption through his sovereign grace, and repentance (as against decisionism).

2. Sanctification includes the life of prayer and discipleship (following Christ with a whole heart – dying to self).

3. General studies include a New Testament Survey and Church History.

4. Doctrine includes the doctrines of grace, the attributes of God and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Outside the USA, the courses are distributed through branches established to serve a particular area or church. The branch administrator is a local pastor or missionary who operates his branch as an independent entity, co-ordinating the student enrolments and giving graded feedback. To date there are 21 branches, mostly in Africa: 5 in Zambia, 3 in Malawi, 3 in Uganda, 2 in Nigeria. As the Lord enables, Mount Zion supplies both the reading material and study guides without charge to the branches, who in turn do not charge the students (except postage).

From start to finish the emphasis is on experimental spirituality and Christian practice. The material is 'solid food' (Heb 5:12), but not academic in the sense of playing to the academic world. The focus is on a changed heart for a changed life. In order to please God and not men, no diplomas are offered.

The work is church based. Your prayers are desired for the pastor, LeeRoy Shelton, Jr. and for the ministry administrator, Michael Snyder, who is recovering from treatment for throat cancer.

India

Visit to South India – Sept/Oct, 2000

Philip Grist, previously missionary with Grace Baptist Mission in South India.

The Lord is moving mightily in many parts of India today. My recent three week visit to Tamilnadu, accompanied by Edward Challen previously a missionary to Bangladesh, has been the most encouraging of all my visits. 35 years ago the situation was dismal, churches appeared dead or dying. It is so much better now.

Young men, convinced of Reformed theology, are being raised up. I was invited to participate in the three-day centenary celebration of the Kilpauk Tamil Baptist Church, Chenuni, Madras. Ernest Booth, one of the early pioneer missionaries with the then-named *Strict Baptist Mission*, established the work in 1900. He would be overjoyed to see the growth now. Samuel Devanesam, the present pastor, is noted for his hard work, zeal and evangelistic fervour. The mother church is Kilpauk, with an average congregation between 400 and 500. From Kilpauk, at least a dozen other churches have been planted around Chennai city. Whilst many of these churches have pastors, Sam still bears much of the responsibility. Kilpauk has sent out three missionary couples working in tribal areas of North India under the direction of the Indian Evangelical Mission which supports 430 national missionaries.



Samuel Devanesam

Three hundred miles south of Chennai is the 'holy' city of Madurai with its massive Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess Meenaksbi and built about 500 years ago. Millions of Hindus visit this temple every year. A couple of miles out of Madurai city is the village of Pasumalai. A young brother, D Stephenson, much influenced by *Grace Publications* literature lives here with his family. A Reformed Baptist church has been established in his house in a spacious upper room accommodating 40 people. Edward Challen and I preached on two evenings. These men have gained a clear understanding of the doctrines of grace and preach them with conviction.

Edward and I spent four days teaching pastors in Chennai. An average of 15 men were present. Edward took 6 studies on Isaiah and I dealt with 'Prophets and Prophecy', a very relevant topic within today's India which is swamped with charismatic teaching.

Pray for India, its billion people and its vast spiritual needs.

Theological Education for Untrained Pastors

Flip Buys

A vast world-wide need

From 22-25 March 2000 I was privileged to attend an international consultation T.O.P.I.C. (Training of Pastors in Churches) in Manila, Philippines, on the training of pastors for churches in the economically weaker countries of the world. There were representatives of at least 80 training institutions from 50 countries around the world.

Reports were given of astonishing growth in numbers of Christian churches in Africa, Asia, South America and countries that were formerly behind the so-called iron curtain. This growth has occurred so rapidly that formal training institutions like universities and seminaries will never be able to train enough pastors to shepherd these churches. Studies have shown that there are at least two million preachers in pulpits in these countries every Sunday who have never had any theological training whatsoever.

In many African countries churches have an average of only one trained pastor for every 20 churches. A pastor from Uganda sitting next to me told us that his denomination has 1000 congregations but only 8 trained pastors. Another one from the Evangelical Christian Church in Zambia told us that his denomination has 675 churches with only 31 trained pastors. We were told that thousands of churches have been planted in the Philippines over three decades and similar growth is expected to continue. All the formal seminaries and training institutions in their whole country could never train even 5% of the pastors needed for these churches.

One Chinese pastor from the People's Republic of China told us of the phenomenal growth of house churches in his country in spite of ongoing persecution. (In many of these churches the pastor will just throw his Bible to his congregation when he is arrested and the person who catches it automatically becomes the next pastor. In some places teenage girls are appointed as pastors because they are the only literate people with Bibles.) The pastor who

gave the report is presently running a programme of training 20,000 Chinese pastors for these house churches.

It is said that in some of these countries the Church is growing itself to death! The structures simply cannot cope. The provision of adequate leadership is not keeping pace with the influx of people into the Church. There is a vast lack of the most basic Bible knowledge as well as foundational Christian doctrine amongst church members and their untrained leaders.

Millions of African 'Christians' still have the idea that Christ needs the assistance of ancestral spirits to bring real reconciliation with God. The outcome of the lack of basically trained pastors is nominality, heresies and syncretism. The difference between the Church and the world just fades away. Instead of helping communities to find solutions for problems of poverty, AIDS, unemployment, political and ethnic strife, and violence through relevant teaching and preaching of the Word of God, the Church and the Christians just become part of the problem. More and more effort is required to backtrack and seek to correct wrong ideas of what it means to be a Christian.

Theological education is now the highest priority in all mission work in fulfilment of the second part of the great commission of Matthew 28:19: '... go and make disciples of all nations, ... *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*'

The whole consultation wrestled with one question: How can training institutions worldwide co-operate to accelerate both the number of pastoral leaders being trained as well as the rate of training so that *not only church growth but also church health* may be accomplished?

The greatest need in economically weaker countries

The greatest need for the training of more pastors exists in the countries with weaker economies like those in Africa, Asia and South America where people on average earn 14 times less in salaries than in Europe and North America. The same holds true for the former deprived communities in South Africa.

At the moment formal theological educational institutions like universities and seminaries provide less than 10% of the need for trained pastors. The other 80 – 90% will only be reached through innovative systems of distance education.

The most important reason why formal theological education is not feasible for people from the weaker economies of the world is that they have neither the

finance nor the necessary entrance qualifications. Another reason is that many formal theological institutions do not have a real vision for missions and produce pastors bereft of world vision who likewise produce self-centred, ingrown churches.

On the other hand, many examples were given of how a totally new and different approach to theological education in some parts of the world has eventually changed churches and denominations from dying bodies into dynamic evangelising churches that are growing numerically as well as in spiritual depth.

Solutions that are providing good results in several places in the world

The overriding insight which came through in many of the discussions at this consultation is that *non-formal decentralised theological education* is the most important answer to the problem of the vast world-wide need for the training of more pastors in our time.

Non-formal theological education involves a basic core curriculum being put together and taught as an *in-service training programme* by existing pastors to small groups of students in church buildings or homes. Some fast growing churches in Asia even say that every local church should be a training institution where new pastors are trained. The benefits of this kind of non-formal training of pastors are the following:

- It costs about 20 times less than formal theological training. There are no costs on expensive buildings, high salaries of highly academically trained professors, boarding and lodging of students (and their families) and travelling costs of theological students.
- Students can do much needed ministry in local churches while they are busy with training. In this way they also learn a lot from the practical example of their lecturer/mentor, while they are involved in the work of ministry and evangelism with him.
- The problem of pastors, who have completed high academic qualifications and are now just too expensive for churches, is also solved.
- Non-formal training reaches those leaders who are already accepted and acknowledged as leaders in a community and have a real sense of calling to minister the gospel to their own communities. Pastors who have had a full-

time formal theological education at a far-away university or seminary often encounter the problem that they enter a community in which they are not accepted (at least initially but sometimes permanently) as real leaders. High academic qualifications that have been obtained through full time theological education as such are no guarantees that the leadership 'status', which a leader needs to function well, is a given in a less developed community. Precisely because of this factor, world-wide research of the functioning of leaders in economically weaker communities has highlighted the tragic fact that academically highly trained pastors quite often become failures in practical ministry and backslide into immoral and corrupt practices. The majority of highly trained pastors often do not really want to serve their own churches or communities but do everything in their power to find better jobs with higher salaries. This seldom happens with leaders who have been trained through non-formal in-service training programmes. They are generally more committed to practical ministry and church growth and have a deeper sense of calling.

- Because of the educational fact that the best learning takes place when a person is teaching as well, existing pastors who are involved in non-formal theological training of other pastors are actually involved in a programme of continuous training themselves, which keeps their own ministry fresh and dynamic.
- Non-formal in-service training of pastors provides unique opportunities for the personal guidance (mentoring) of students by their 'lecturer'. In this way the spirituality and the character formation of the student receives much more attention than it usually does at formal theological institutions.
- Non-formal in-service theological training greatly increases the number of lecturers and training opportunities.
- Students are not torn away from their cultural context as so often happens in formal theological training. In formal theological training, students – after several years of adapting to a completely different cultural context – often become so detached from their own people that they cannot communicate on a really deep level with their own people any more.
- This model of training comes much closer to the churches, because the student usually in his ministry applies the things he has learnt. Several of the training courses which have already been designed for this kind of training of pastors have been designed in such a way that the student should immediately (sometimes as part of his exams) go and teach it to the people to whom he is ministering.
- With this training model, churches are much more directly involved in the training of pastors than with formal theological training at a seminary.
- This model of training resembles much more closely the model which Jesus himself used in the training of the disciples and is also more in line with

2 Timothy 2:2, *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Both formal and non-formal training are needed and should strengthen and enhance each other

In the discussions a clear consensus grew that formal and non-formal theological training of pastors should never be seen as opposing each other. Both models are still needed and should rather be seen as two sides of a coin. They are designed to mutually assist, strengthen, extend and amplify in the following ways:

- Non-formal training can make the results of formal academic training and research available to people and communities who would otherwise never have had access to these.
- Formal theological education can provide more training to lecturers of non-formal training programmes.
- Non-formal theological training comes closer to the needs at grassroots level and in such a way makes a much needed contribution to the contextualisation of formal theological education to ensure that formal theological training programmes do not become sterile and irrelevant.
- Non-formal training programmes can be of great value to broaden the perspectives of formal theological training programmes.
- Non-formal training programmes may provide a good 'sifting' mechanism to identify students with gifts and talents who can be assisted to enrol for graduate and postgraduate studies. Formal theological training programmes usually have more time and facilities available and are in a better position to do in-depth research on issues which are relevant for the church and the kingdom of God at large.
- Formal theological training programmes may fulfil a much-needed monitoring need in the continuous evaluation of the academic standards and theological foundations of non-formal training programmes

How should all this be implemented in order that the two million pastors are eventually trained?

When can a pastor be considered trained?

In order to establish good programmes of formal and non-formal training programmes in such a way that various programmes and models complement and enhance each other a burning question must first be answered: When is a pastoral leader sufficiently trained?

At the consultation consensus was reached that a pastoral leader is basically trained when he has competence in the following four areas:

1. Concerning the Bible he should:
 - Know, understand and apply it in a valid way
 - Know basic biblical doctrines
 - Be able to communicate it (teach, preach and counsel)
 - Have a biblical world-view.
2. Concerning conformity to Jesus Christ he should have:
 - Christian character and conduct
 - A servant attitude
 - A deep sense of continuing dependence on the triune God.
3. Concerning competence in basic ministry skills he should be:
 - Able to prepare and deliver sermons effectively
 - Able to evangelise and plant new churches
 - Able to pastor believers with a view to disciple them towards spiritual maturity
 - Able to teach
 - Able to lead believers in such a way that their own vision for the growth of God's kingdom is stirred up.
4. Concerning leadership, he must have a vision and be able to reproduce:
 - Himself as pastoral leader
 - His church.

A core curriculum?

One possible way of assisting non-formal training institutions and paving ways for co-operation is to design a core curriculum which could establish broad parameters of a programme that may achieve the outcomes of a basically well-trained pastoral leader. This core curriculum should be flexible enough to allow for additions and issues of local application according to the needs of a specific area.

Such a curriculum should meet the following criteria. It should be:

- Comprehensive – complete at basic level
- Culturally adaptable – generic and transferable (principles, concepts should be presented as transferable truths)

Compact – teachable within a reasonable time frame (2-4 years)
 Conformable – adjustable to different educational levels, perhaps grades 6 to 12
 Compatible theologically – it should be biblical, evangelical, trans-denominational to the extent that the specific teachings of denominations (e.g. mode of baptism) should not be a hindrance for students who are evangelical Christians but have different views on peripheral issues
 Competent and measurable educationally – evaluation of progress, feedback and assessment loops should be given with the core curriculum
 Consistent with biblical perspective – the Bible should be the main textbook
 Conducive to practical ministry and personal spiritual growth and multiplication – students must be able to use and apply the content in their ministry immediately
 Available in key languages – English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, French, Swahili, Zulu, etc
 Commonly available at low cost.

Unfortunately there was not enough time available to prepare and evaluate proposals for such a core curriculum. There were several training institutions present that had copies of their curricula of a wide variety of T.E.E. (Theological Training by Extension) and other models of curricula available for insight. The consultation has now appointed a committee to work on such a core curriculum and send it to interested institutions for evaluation and possible field testing.

The whole idea with such a core curriculum is to offer it to training institutions involved in the non-formal training of pastors. Those institutions wanting to use it may then strengthen their own credibility by advertising that their training courses are in line with internationally recognised standards and are using the T.O.P.I.C. core curriculum.

Thanksgiving

This consultation has enriched my life and ministry and also convinced me that the Lord has led us on the right track with our own work at Mukhanyo Theological College, Gauteng, South Africa, although we still have many problems to solve and stumbling-blocks to overcome. I am also convinced more than ever that the harvest is so ripe in Africa that a lack of vision and commitment to do everything in our power to accelerate the training of more harvesters will be a grave sin and grossly grieve the Holy Spirit.

Watching TV in Postmodern Society

Erroll Hulse

To some, postmodernism is like the Loch Ness monster. It may exist but that is highly unlikely.

Some Reformed leaders deny that postmodernism does exist and they belittle attention given to it. One leader suggests that postmodernism is about ghosts! Before studying theology and history I graduated in architecture and have sustained my interest in that discipline. To suggest that postmodernism is like the wizard of Oz – a world of fantasy – is as unreal as it is to suggest to an architect that postmodern architecture does not exist. Every time I travel into our city of Leeds and every time I visit Western cities like Dallas, Toronto, Pretoria, Sydney, I view an increasing number of postmodern buildings. These I analyse and in most cases enjoy. Architecture is exceptional inasmuch as postmodern architecture is a great improvement on the functionalism that prevailed in the modernist era.

Postmodernism as a philosophy is currently universally pervasive. Postmodernism is beginning to reign in politics and in our universities and institutions of learning. While the philosophy holds sway in establishing thought patterns, evangelical Christianity is either dismissed or marginalised.

Moral relativism

Francis Schaeffer described an absolute as ‘a concept which is not modifiable by factors such as culture, individual psychology or circumstances, but which is perfect and unchangeable’. An absolute is ‘the antithesis of relativism’, and nihilism is ‘a denial of all objective grounds for truth’.¹

Postmodernism is nihilistic. There is no ground for absolute truth. For Christians, the Bible is God’s Word without error. In that Word we have the absolute of God’s being, the absolute of God’s unchanging moral law, the Ten Commandments and the absolute of Christ’s second coming to judgment.

There are other absolute certainties. Christ dead, buried and risen is one. Another is the worth of Christ's offering: 'By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.'

Television the medium of postmodernism

'TV has achieved the status of a "meta-medium" – an institution that directs not only our knowledge of the world, but our knowledge of the ways of knowing as well.'² TV has become a radical monopoly. John Campbell describes TV as 'ubiquitous, (it is everywhere) capable of manipulating opinion, reinforcing pluralism and revamping reality in a short time. Appearance replaces reality, charisma replaces content and result (pragmatism) replaces integrity.'³

The entertainment industry spreads postmodernist philosophy into every home through TV. TV is one of the wonders of the age of technology. If the apostle Paul returned today I would want to explain to him Concorde, an Alpha Romeo, a cell phone, windows 98, and a TV. In the hands of the Reformed Christians TV could be used on a grand scale for benevolence according to the tenets of Philippians 4:8, *Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*

However TV networks are under the dominion of those who promote postmodernist culture and in some instances are massively under the influence of the gay lobby. Technically the situation in the UK is fast becoming like the USA in which new fibre optic technology will allow hundreds of channels creating a more and more segmented audience. Many in the UK are still in the phase of having five channels, three of them commercial, and in all five Christian moral standards have been largely abandoned. Violence, murder, obscenity, adultery, blasphemy, mockery of Christ and every form of sexual perversion is depicted without restraint.

A sensible response to so much which is offensive and repugnant is to stick only to programmes which edify and then supplement these with videos of nature, travel, drama, orchestra, opera or sport.

The effect of several hours a day of indulgence in TV for a vast number of people calls for analysis. 'Reading a 300 page book demands sequential thinking, active mental engagement, and a sustained attention span. Reading

also encourages a particular sense of self – one reads in private, alone with oneself and with one's thoughts. Watching TV on the other hand presents information rapidly and with minimal effort on the part of the viewer, who becomes part of a communal mass mind. Visual images are presented, rapid fire, with little sense of coherence, consistency, and unity for its viewers.⁴

The power of TV over written material is that it comes in a moving image. It is image driven, image saturated and image controlled. When the image overwhelms and subjugates the written word the ability to think, write and communicate in linear fashion is undermined. Ideas are dislocated. TV images are poured out in the form of impressions, emotions and stimulations. Written propositions and statements are not like that. A written proposition is either true or false. Images in themselves do not have truth value. Muggeridge commented that when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf instead of waiting for the Word from Moses, they attempted to televise (or make visible) God. Biblically speaking, God commands that we not make graven images nor attempt to televise the invisible. In the beginning was the Word, not the image (John 1:1).⁵

The effect of a welter of images and impressions which lack moral and intellectual cohesion is to fragment the mind. This accords with the postmodern mentality which abandons a unified disciplined cosmos. A person bombarded incessantly is lowered into a world of unreality. Such a person lives with fleeting impressions. How is it possible for a thinking person to watch constant rounds of five minute slots? If we analyse what is going on we will be repulsed by advertising. I refuse to listen to adverts of any kind whether on radio or TV. As Christians we love the Lord our God with all our minds. Time is precious and must not be squandered.

With books we can learn from great spiritual leaders and thinkers. Reading engages our minds. We are in control as we read. This is not the case when we are watching TV. When I read I can stop, meditate, reflect and underline. I am able to revise, reconsider and go over the ground again and again until I know that I have mastered a theme. When last did you stop in the middle of TV and meditate on some great truth presented? Moral and spiritual value is decayed by TV. Apart from the news, which is usually partial, most of what we see is not anchored in the real world but concerns unreality. The real world is not like Hollywood.

The habit of reading is absolutely critical. Few believers read serious books. Ask them and you will soon discover this to be true. Through meditation on the

Word of God assisted by exposition, the believer is built up in his faith and in his worldview. The Jews were intrigued with miracles. They wanted, as did Herod, to see a miracle. But Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples' (John 8:31). If TV takes over from reading the subsequent loss in spiritual terms is enormous.

'Postmodernism thrives on fragmentation, incoherence and meaninglessness as modes of being and acting since there is no God and no objective reality and no universal reality to provide unity to anything.'⁶ The speed of the images makes careful evaluation almost impossible.

The effect of thousands of impressions and rapidly changing images from the pseudo-world of discontinuity is an inevitable blurring of the mind. Habitual viewing tends to make people intellectually impatient and lazy. They are less able to think in a straight line and less able to sustain concentration.

'The great imperative in TV is incessant entertainment. Amusement trumps all other values and takes captive every topic. Every subject – whether war, religion, business, law or education – must be presented in a lively, amusing or stimulating manner.'⁷ If it fails to entertain boredom results. The yawning watcher will turn to another channel if he is not entertained. He craves incessant entertainment.

The TV mentality comes through in church when people call for entertainment rather than preaching, or at least they expect preaching to be entertaining, full of anecdotes, stories and images to which they have become accustomed through TV. They do not want preaching which demands concentration and challenges their minds. In postmodern culture people look for the feel-good factor. Therefore if the preacher does not make them feel good he is regarded as a failure. John the Baptist, our Lord and his apostles confronted their hearers with reality, with sin, righteousness and judgment to come.

In postmodernism, absolutes have been stripped away. Whatever censorship that there used to be has been rusted away as the Judeo-Christian moral law and basis of ethics is ignored. Sexuality is for the private intimacy of marriage according to God's holy ordinance. TV producers promote sex scenes explicitly. Modesty is abandoned. The Scriptures teach that sexual love is sacred. That is why it is set about with exclusions and restrictions. But with TV there is no sense of modesty. TV producers do not think of harm done to children. Jesus said of those who caused people to sin, 'It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck than for him to

cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves' (Luke 17:2). For those who have power over the media, glory in their unrighteousness and mock those who protest, the Word of God promises that the punishment of eternal fire is not far away.

'Today's sexual revolution goes beyond extra-marital, pre-marital and multiple partner heterosexual activity. Anything goes including sado-masochism, bisexuality, homosexuality and pornography. According to the logic of the system paedophilia and bestiality cannot be far behind.'⁸ Sadly restraint comes only after disaster strikes. For instance this year in the UK a little girl Sarah aged eight was murdered by a paedophile. This resulted in a national outcry. Vigilante groups were formed in many areas of England to locate and eject paedophiles. Sensitivity regarding sexual perversity is increased.

With regard to TV, if you are addicted to it, the answer is to eradicate from your TV menu all trivia and all that is unhealthy and use that media only for the information you really need. The desire to read and the ability to read will suffer under the ruthless regime of TV. One way to deal with this problem is to go on a TV fast. Replace TV watching with truth-enhancing activities especially reading books which will cause you to grow in grace and in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Well-chosen Christian biographies can have a powerful effect and redirect and inspire your Christian life.

References

- 1 Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, Hodder, 1968, p. 177.
- 2 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin NY, 1985 pp 78-79, quoted by Groothuis, p. 282.
- 3 John Campbell, 'Communicating the Gospel in a Postmodern World' in *Loving the God of Truth*, IBC, 1996, p. 157.
- 4 Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, Delacotte Press, NY, 1979, pp. 47-70.
- 5 Douglas Groothuis, *ibid*, p. 286. The quotation from Muggeridge is from his *Christ and the Media*, Eerdmans, 1977, p. 59.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 289.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 291.
- 8 Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars*, Winepress, Mukilteo, WA 98275, 1997, p. 21.

Practical Evangelism in a Postmodern Era

John W Campbell

In this article we will consider realistic contemporary approaches to evangelism on a local church level.

Dr Lloyd-Jones was right when he rejected post-World War 2 claims that humanity had changed in its essential nature. Despite recent enormous cultural alteration, mankind as made in God's image and spoiled by sin is the same. However the ethos, mood, outlook and flavour of Western culture has so shifted that a rethink of tactics is valuable. This civilisation has changed its address in our lifetime, and we must know where to forward our message of hope.

Some things must never change in their essentials. The gospel must be preached, pastoral care must be given, Christians must pray, learn, witness, serve, lead godly lives and so on. In this paper I am responding to certain features of postmodernism by addressing three areas. These areas are inter-related. All the following suggestions have been tried either by me or by some of my close pastoral colleagues.

Firstly, relationships are very important to postmoderns, and even a cursory glance at TV programmes confirms this: 'Friends'; 'Party of Five'; 'Neighbours' etc. Impersonal ventures such as letter drops and newspaper ads are often of minimal effect. Statistics indicate that most people won to Christ come from personal contacts - family, friends, workmates, fellow students and neighbours. Common elements may involve hobbies, sports, clubs, service organisations, car pooling or career. God is sovereign, and may choose to work however he likes, but on the human level relationship seems a vital thing to consider.

The key is to work on these relationships, and often when they are combined with food and hospitality a congenial atmosphere is created for witness. These efforts need to be covered in advance by prayer. Venues can range from homes and church halls to neutral places such as restaurants, rugby clubs or board

rooms! An evangelistic lunchtime Bible study in the best board room in the city not only led some to faith in Jesus but spilled over into local law chambers and drew in nominal Christians who realised their lack of knowing God; a guest dinner in a city hotel with 60 Christians and 60 unbelievers listening to an after-dinner gospel speaker brought several spiritual responses; a men's breakfast brought out some doctors and businessmen and made links to build upon later - these were all based on friendship. Picnics, 'table eight' home guest nights, short term evangelistic groups using good material such as *Simply Christianity* or *Christianity Explored* often go down well. While we may not like aspects of the Alpha Course, its undeniable appeal must make us look for similar options. This is the video age! Consider how you might creatively mix work, food and hospitality for the cause of the gospel.

Secondly, the unchurched and unenlightened population often respond through bridging activities rather than to an invitation to attend church. The above practical ideas fit in this category. Bridging ministries or programmes that touch human needs and give the church opportunities to exercise care and involvement should be carefully considered. Activities can be organised with the personal needs of people in mind, such as relating to age range or common interests. They may involve either short- or long-term efforts. Discernment is necessary to avoid losing sight of gospel priorities.

What are some long-term possibilities?

'Caring For Life' as connected with Leeds Reformed Baptist Church, UK, is an excellent large-scale example of bridging ministries, but its sheer size makes it impossible for most to copy. A few churches have woken up to the significance of the ageing populations around them and have not given all their energy to the undoubted problems of our youth. Our church runs a Seniors' programme that now has a high profile in this community. A committee plans a weekly half-day event that entails a wide variety of interesting activities, together with a meal that seats about 85 and a gospel devotion. The widening contacts and sense of community are very worthwhile, and there are numerous spin-offs including new church attenders and an occasional Seniors' church service. A 'Family Prayer' for sick and needy seniors is well received and may be the only time many of them pray or hear a prayer.

Craft groups in our churches have been very effective, and we have seen a number of unchurched become Christians through the relationships developed

and the care shown. Creative, dedicated committees are required for such ventures, but the rewards are evident. Over time, the 'Thought for the Week' slot speaks to many, who often attend more for friendship reasons than for the craft itself. Then there are the young mothers' groups, and playgroups (where mothers don't drop off toddlers but stay and share activities in the group, which may have a babysitter or may involve mothers in a rotation of minding). Akin to this area is the offering of suitable parenting courses, or the screening of a family series of videos that biblically addresses perceived needs.

Still on the family front, evening 'homemakers' was once very effective here in Australia but changing patterns saw it decline. Now there are numerous dysfunctional family situations to be faced, even within the church. Singles form a more significant proportion of society today, with many more divorced and others marrying later in life, perhaps because of career. Useful singles groups can be developed within churches and provide valuable fellowship, sometimes combining with young marrieds who do not have children. Home Bible study groups can serve several functions including fellowship, evangelism and service.

Children in this age of declining Sunday Schools often find help in a well-run 'Kids' Club', usually conducted after school once a week. Many outsiders may come who would not be taken to church on a Sunday. Where possible, Scripture teachers should operate in schools, and in countries like Australia a school chaplain is often appointed by local churches for counselling and moral leadership reasons, with full government approval. This should be roundly supported in a now paganised culture. Prominent sporting teams in this country may also have a chaplain, and I know a number who minister to teams such as the Australian Cricket team. Perhaps some innovative ministers or elders could identify a likely local sporting situation? Other long term service options may include developing a food barn with ministry to those barely coping with life's basics. Not everyone is called to these particular activities, but maybe your church is one of those?

What are some short-term approaches to consider?

Bearing in mind the state of our society with its lost moorings and dysfunctional relationships, a church may profitably conduct one-off special meetings. We will shortly co-sponsor a weekend where one of our best known Christian doctors will conduct a seminar on depression on a Saturday night, and share in

a panel discussion on suicide with other Christian leaders in place of our Sunday evening service. One break in our evening routine is not going to damage our cause, and we hope to contact many outsiders by giving attention to the extreme pain caused by the rate of suicide in our country. We have a school chaplain in our church, so he will also be on that panel, thereby enabling us to address the youth suicide issue in a strong gospel setting. We recently co-sponsored successful meetings with a cult expert who spoke on 'New Age influences' and drew large crowds. Creation Science also visited us with useful impact. As an amateur astronomer I use occasional 'Star Nights' to speak of creation, design and beauty.

Short term courses on 'Recovery' themes may be helpful. We are going to try one or two pre-packaged video and discussion courses in the near future. Few of us have ready-made experts in our churches, and the right programme means there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Topics such as men's and women's issues, divorce recovery, addictions, behaviour boundaries and the search for significance can provide natural opportunities to touch the lives of outsiders while also encouraging believers in their own growth and witness. Why not run some specially aimed family church services?

Another immediate challenge our church faces is how to help refugees who are coming to our city - most of them Muslims. We have some strategy in place. For the future, less pressing but practically helpful may be running computer classes for beginners or financial planning for struggling people. What is 'a cup of water offered in the name of Jesus'?

Thirdly, our churches must be much more ready to go out where the people are, and not wait so passively for them to come seeking us. Times have changed, and even some Christians do not regularly come to meeting places any more. Old fashioned gospel services (Calvinistic or Arminian!) don't normally draw in great crowds, and we don't want to go the way of gimmicks or of prostituting worship to fads. Incidentally, some churches allow suitable community groups to use their buildings, believing that it helps some get used to being in a church setting.

The preceding suggestions often involve working away from church property. Why not run a Christian stall at a New Age festival: are we not of the true New Age? One pastoral friend has acted as a police chaplain for over ten years in his city. Some write engaging newspaper articles, or speak on local radio. Involvement in memorial services (even if you have to run your own) with

hospitals, police or military has brought unexpected results. Years ago I chaired two social welfare community groups in successive church situations, but while it gave me and those churches higher community profile I finally felt that it was too distracting from my pastoral priorities. One must try the doors for the right openings, and when they come give it your best shot, using what church personnel is available. An ex-bikie, ex-prisoner in my church has come to Reformed doctrine through the Internet, and now has begun a small Socratic early morning group with apologetics as its main aim. He has a promising wider vision for its development.

Christmas provides ready opportunities to capitalise on the only season of the year when Christian hymns are played all over the place. Carol singing, festivals of Christmas music and hospital visiting are a few of many avenues still open. The secular and pagan nonsense at Christmas need not stop us from effective, appropriate witnessing.

These three elements pertaining to our postmodern culture - relationships, touching perceived needs, and working beyond church boundaries are presented in this article with the hope that they will be profitable.

Books on Postmodernism

Editor

First of six books I have chosen from many to recommend on postmodernity is a wonderful little paperback by Os Guinness, *TIME FOR TRUTH, Living free in a world of lies, hype and spin*, 135 pages, IVP, 2000, £5.99. The theme of the book runs along the lines that truth is far from dead. Truth is alive and well and matters supremely. Indeed the only way to live a free life is to become a person of truth. The author uses vivid examples of non-truth to illustrate his call for to us to live with integrity. President Clinton is taken as an

example of postmodern lying. Seven habits of highly effective postmodern lying are, pride of mind, partitioning (cordoning off unpleasant realities), people pleasing, posturing, (making impressions), prevarication, power-play, (brazening out scandal), and personalising (it is personality that counts, not truth). The quote is made: 'George Washington couldn't tell a lie, Richard Nixon couldn't tell the truth. And the present occupant of the White House can't tell the difference!'

Douglas Groothuis, *TRUTH DECAY, Defending Christianity*

against the Challenges of Postmodernism, 300 pages, IVP, 2000, £8.99. This is an excellent book both for beginners and for advanced apologists. For instance Groothuis while appreciating Newbigin, exposes his weaknesses (p. 152ff). He does the same with Alister McGrath (p.120ff). The value of Groothuis is his ability to show how truth must be defended under attack. There is a fine appendix on television as the agent of truth decay.

TELLING THE TRUTH, *evangelizing postmoderns*, consists of 28 essays edited by Don Carson famed for his *magnum opus* THE GAGGING OF GOD (see review RT 152). TELLING THE TRUTH is published as a bound volume of 416 pages by Zondervan, 2000, £16.99. This is a valuable reference book in which some essays are more relevant than others. The reader has to work hard to dig out the practical applications.

Three books by Lutheran Gene Edward Veith, Jr., Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and Associate Professor of English at Concordia University, Wisconsin make for thoroughly enjoyable reading. The first is POSTMODERN TIMES, *A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, 256 pages, Crossway, 1994, \$14.99. This is a superb introduction to postmodernism. Speaking for America Veith points out that Christianity has been excommunicated from the culture at

large – systematically excluded from the schools, the intellectual establishment, and the media. But Christians have established their own schools, publishers, arts groups, broadcasters, businesses. This he suggests may prove invaluable as postmodernist pressures intensify. With regard to the churches Veith warns against giving in to postmodern pressure for the feel-good factor. Muddled, shallow, eager-to-please preaching is useless but so is dead orthodoxy. The challenge is to meet the need of teaching doctrine that is both experiential and grounded in truth satisfying to both the mind and the heart.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES, *A Christian Guide to Literature*, 254 pages, 1990, Crossway, \$14.99 explores and comments upon forms of literature and provides a history of traditions of literature. STATE OF THE ARTS, *From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*, 250 pages, 1991, Crossway, \$14.99. The latter, though not a classic like Hans Rookmaker's MODERN ART AND THE DEATH OF A CULTURE (IVP 1970), is essential to understanding what is taking place, and why it is taking place, in the world of art today. It is not all about disintegration and a vicious and resentful attack on our senses. There is room for Christians to tell the truth in art. The Bible-believing Georges Roualt (1871-1958) is considered by many to be the greatest religious artist since Rembrandt!

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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Editorial | |
| 3 | China – Growth through Suffering | Jonathan Chao |
| 11 | News | |
| 15 | Theological Education for Untrained Pastors | Flip Buys |
| 22 | Watching TV in Postmodern Society | Erroll Hulse |
| 27 | Practical Evangelism in a Postmodern Era | John W Campbell |
| 31 | Books on Postmodernism | Editor |