

REFORMATION TODAY



MAY-JUNE 2001

181



Contributors to this issue:

Mark Troughton comes from a famous acting family. He is at present leading a small French-speaking church in Martigny, Switzerland. Mark is involved in the 'Divine Relay' training course which is designed to prepare men for the ministry. So far fourteen have completed the course. Mark and Jane have four children. The family photo shown above was taken in 1998.

Mark's address is: Route de Martigny 17, CH-1926 Fully, Valais, Switzerland.
e-mail: troug@freesurf.ch

Bruce A Ware is Professor of Christian Theology and Senior Associate Dean at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Prof Ware is also President of CBMW (The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood). For information

info@cbmw.freeserve.co.uk www.cbmw.org

Front cover: *View from the bay of the ancient city of Valetta, capital of Malta (see News). During the Second World War there were 2,000 bombing raids on Malta but the island held out and played a crucial role for the Allies.*

Editorial

Drawing Circles

Dr RT Kendall has informed his friends that he is to retire from his position of minister at Westminster Chapel having fulfilled 25 years of ministry there by February 1st 2002. A new pastor is sought. Dr Kendall has used the acrostic PROP to describe the need: a Preacher, Reformed, Open to the Holy Spirit and Pastor. The O in 'Open' is the governing factor. How big is the O? Is it a very big O that will include the Toronto Blessing and the Kansas City Prophets? Or will the O be subject to biblical restraints?

Taking up the idea of the O suggested above we can look at the same letter and use it in reference to the O in Catholicity. If we draw a circle that is too big, a circle which includes false prophets which our Lord warned against, then we betray the truth. If we draw a circle that is too small we shut out those whom our Lord Jesus Christ includes.

At the Banner of Truth Conference, Leicester, 1998, Iain Murray spoke on *The Division of Evangelicalism: A Key Issue in 20th-Century Church History*. This valuable cassette is available from the Banner of Truth. In this address Iain Murray describes how Billy Graham was so naïve as to place Richard Nixon within the circle of believers and later Bill Clinton as well. He shows how Dr Graham has shared a platform with many liberal teachers. This is universally well known. But the implications of this compromise are harmful and far reaching. Dr Graham says that he had no quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church. Archbishop Ramsay and Robert Schuller are examples of the liberal teachers with whom he has aligned himself. There is the amusing story of a crusade in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro 1974) in which the Presbyterian translator deliberately mistranslated Ramsay. When Ramsay said, 'You cannot come to Christ unless you bring your Roman Catholic brothers with you,' the translator said that the bishop said that he did not wish all Protestants to submit to the Pope! What came out in Portuguese was very different from what the archbishop said. (This is recorded in a biography of Ramsay). The incident illustrates the ludicrous nature of seeking to mix the antithetical, that is, anti-gospel, with the gospel. The alarming extent to which Dr Graham has in recent times compromised with Robert Schuller is documented in *Evangelicalism Divided - a Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (pages 73,74).

It cannot be affirmed too strongly that the only way we can preserve the meaning of the word evangelical is by insisting on fidelity to biblical truth. To illustrate this point I refer to Nigel Wright, a Baptist Union minister who has written a book called *The Radical Evangelical* (SPCK 144 pp paperback 1996). It is clear from his writing that he is liberal in theology. He reasons that many liberals believe enough to be included as evangelicals in the overall scene. His contention must be firmly rejected. The exhortation of Jude 3 is apposite, 'I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.' The word evangelical can be preserved only if we keep in line with the legacies of history, the 16th-century Reformation, the Puritans of the 17th century, the great evangelists of the 18th century and the missionary pioneers of the 19th century.

But the New Testament does not stop at identifying 'Christian' simply in terms of doctrine. The idea that knowledge is enough to make a Christian is wrong. The devil believes Scripture and he certainly is not a Christian. There must be evidence of spiritual life. The fruit of the Spirit is essential. 1 Corinthians 13 reminds me that though I think I have all truth, if I do not hold it in love I am nothing.

The difference between evangelical and reformed

Neat lines cannot be drawn across the spectrum of evangelicalism. However there are notable differences. The reformed believe in a comprehensive doctrine of progressive sanctification. They are opposed to legalism on the one hand and on the other the unbridled antinomian worldliness rampant in so many Western churches. Most reformed churches engage in evangelistic outreach to every age group but never use the altar call. The reformed reject the five points of Arminius. But to be reformed stretches far beyond the Synod of Dordt. To be reformed is to have a world view. The structures of society are not there just for us to nibble at in terms of evangelism. They are there to be reformed. The teaching of Scripture is to apply to family life, medicine and hospitals, politics, economics, poverty, the developing world, education, art, architecture and ecology. To be reformed is to be green as far as the preservation of God's creation is concerned. When they cannot reform existing structures reformed believers think in terms of creating new ones especially when it comes to schools and universities. If there is hesitancy in starting any ambitious scheme it is because a balance must be kept, a balance which is inherent in the great commission. On the one hand we seek to reach all nations and on the other we must apply the Scriptures to every sphere of life. Our resources are limited. We must be wise and faithful stewards.

The Importance of Catholicity

Erroll Hulse

The term catholicity conveys an important concept because by using it correctly we show that we recognise the universal nature of the Church of Christ. There is no other term which can equal it to convey the meaning of goodwill among Bible-believing Christians of all nations, tribes, languages and denominations. Catholicity is generous, kind and loving but not at the expense of truth. Jude 3 always applies. The material which follows needs to be read alongside the editorial. We are to contend for the faith but we do so in the spirit of love (Eph 4:15).

Catholicity is maintained best from a position of knowledge, doctrinal strength and maturity. Christian teaching is needed today more than ever. All Christians need to be well grounded and be encouraged to attain a comprehensive knowledge of the truth as it relates to themselves, to the Church and to the world. This will enable them to discern between essential issues and non-essentials. It will also enable mature comment when involved in controversial matters.

Lying at the heart of this subject is the question of what is meant by 'Christian' and basic to that, 'What is an evangelical?' (see editorial *Drawing Circles*). My position is that outlined by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *What is an Evangelical?* For the sake of brevity I would say that if you deny justification by faith alone and by grace alone you are not an evangelical. If you believe in the efficacy of the Roman Catholic mass (transubstantiation) you are not an evangelical. If you believe in baptismal regeneration you are not an evangelical. If you deny the reality of eternal punishment you are not an evangelical. If you deny the inerrancy of Scripture with reference to the original autographs you are not an evangelical. If you are doctrinally indifferent you are not an evangelical. If you tamper with the Trinity, as is explained by Bruce Ware in this issue of *Reformation Today*, you are not an evangelical.

Of course there are genuine believers who are confused and poorly taught or who may have been influenced by liberal teaching. It is difficult in many instances to be dogmatic about their standing before God but we certainly can be dogmatic as to what constitutes an evangelical Christian. I am addressing

the subject of evangelical catholicity which cares about truth as precious and which glories in the finished, perfect work of Christ on the cross.

When we define catholicity in terms of the evangelical faith we must avoid doctrinal compromise on the one hand and narrowness and bigotry on the other. In the 1950s there was a warranted reaction against narrow fundamentalism. Often fundamentalism represents contention for foibles of dispensational eschatology, which is an innovation.

1. The meaning of catholicity

Catholicity can be taken to mean a generous spirit shown to all Christians whatever their creed or denomination.

Technically the word comes from Greek *katholikos* which simply means universal or general. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* states its meaning to be 'broad in sympathies, tastes or interests, or relating to, or forming the church universal'.

An allied word is ecumenical which is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* meaning the inhabited or civilised world. In its widest sense it means 'pertaining to the whole Church'. If we combine these terms we have the idea of all Christians everywhere as they are found upon the face of the whole earth. By Christian I mean all those who show that they belong to Christ. In other words they are 'in Christ'. This definition is in keeping with the way in which the apostle Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians, 'To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints, together with all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.' Disqualification should apply only to those who deny essential truth or who deny the gospel by living in scandalous sin.

The promises made to the Messiah with regard to his reward indicate that he will have a people who are found in every nation across the entire land surface of the earth. We look forward to the time when believers emerge in such profusion in all nations that their evident unity in Christ rises above all sectarian interests so that our Lord's prayer will be fulfilled, 'May they be brought to complete unity, to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you loved me' (John 17:23).

Clarity as to the meaning of evangelical is important. The word is derived from the Greek *euaggelion* a bringing of good news. The word evangelical has been

used and continues to be used to convey the idea of faith in the saving message of the gospel. It is employed to describe local churches many of which incorporate the word evangelical into their name. An example of many hundreds is the Haywards Heath Evangelical Free Church, Sussex, England, which is a member of the grouping called the Fellowship of Independent Free Churches. Evangelical has been used to describe evangelical denominations such as the Evangelical United Brethren Church or the Evangelical Free Church both being denominations in the USA. In Britain there is the Evangelical Alliance which was formed in London in 1846 with 900 delegates representing 50 denominations. Today the EA claims to represent over a million evangelicals in Britain.

The most basic way of defining what we mean by evangelical is to point to the formal and material principles involved. The formal principle is *sola scriptura* which means that the Word of God is the only source of authority for all faith and practice. The material principle concerns justification by faith alone, by grace alone. Most evangelical bodies subscribe to a short summary of Christian doctrine. The Evangelical Alliance has a basis of nine points which includes an affirmation of faith in the reality of eternal heaven and eternal hell. Many find simple statements of faith inadequate and subscribe to a full Confession of Faith like the *Westminster Confession of Faith* or the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (the 1689 Confession). A more detailed definition of the meaning of evangelical will follow.

Denominationalism is inevitable. The New Testament suggests church government and that involves organisation. The Plymouth Brethren reacted against denominationalism but in fact are just as denominational, with rules and traditions, as any other grouping. A survey of denominations in the USA in 1989 published the following results: The Presbyterians, after 284 years, have divided into a present total of 7 denominations. The Methodists, after 205 years, have divided into 11 denominational groups. The Reformed (Dutch and German) after 360 years into a total of five denominations. The Baptists, after 350 years, have divided into 14 different denominations. The Pentecostals after 103 years split into 24 denominations.

The fact of language multiplies denominations. For instance round the globe there are now about 1,200 different Baptist denominations not counting innumerable independent unaffiliated local churches.

2. Catholicity illustrated in the life of Jesus

Catholicity is illustrated by an incident reported in Mark 9:38-41.

‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’ ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.’

This incident records Jesus’ warning against intolerance and an attitude of narrow exclusivism. ‘Jesus opposed the narrow exclusivism of the twelve’ (William Lane on *Mark*, p. 342). Jesus urged his disciples to exercise an open and generous spirit.

In the immediate context of this incident we are told by Mark of the argument among the twelve as to who should be the greatest. Pride lay at the bottom of that dispute. Pride also lies at the bottom of thinking that our party or church or denomination is superior to others. Our church may have a better constitution or a better doctrinal confession but it may well be that a neighbouring church which lacks such assets may be stronger in love and good works, in missionary enterprise and in evangelism. The seven letters to the seven churches remind us that churches differ greatly in character but at the end of the day they all belong to Christ and are all cared for by him (Rev 2,3).

This incident with the twelve shows that if someone loves and serves Jesus we must not esteem that person as unworthy because he or she belongs to another grouping. It is ironic that the twelve had failed in their efforts to drive the demon out of the boy (Mark 9:18) yet this stranger who was far less privileged than the apostles maintained an effective ministry (Mark 9:39).

3. The importance of catholicity in our leaders

I have defined catholicity as a positive and generous attitude to all Christians whatever their denomination. I see three reasons why catholicity is important.

1. Catholicity is important to the Head of the Church
2. Catholicity is important to the unbelieving world
3. Catholicity is important to church members

1. Catholicity is important to the Head of the Church

As we have noted Jesus prayed for the unity of his Church, ‘that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me.’ From the words ‘I in them’ we

note that the unity prayed for is for all believers and by that we understand those who are in living spiritual union with their Head, that is, Christ. This is a unity which has been procured at great cost. It applies to all those whom God has elected and called. This means that we can expect a very wide diversity of people from every language, tribe and culture. Some may come from ethnic backgrounds alien to our own. For instance in Yugoslavia for centuries there have been deep hatreds. Think for instance of the differences and the recent war between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosova. Think too of conflict in Israel between the Jews and Palestinians. In South Africa think of the apartheid era and all the tensions and resentments that resulted. Union with Christ raises all believers to a new world, a high plateau above all other levels, to a new relationship of adoption as brothers and sisters in one family. Old things have passed away. The new privileges and position transcend all that formerly divided.

The stupendous nature of salvation demands that we exercise a catholic spirit toward all other Christians. If they evince the basic criteria of union with Christ then we must be positive toward them. This is important to the Head of the Church whose shed blood has purchased all his people.

2. Catholicity is important to the unbelieving world

To the unbelieving world the gospel is not good news. It is bad news because the gospel calls for repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance from sin requires a break with the sinful world and its practices and that can be very costly. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is costly because it involves discipleship and that means commitment. For worldly people that is bad news. The good news is that those who repent and believe will be justified and will inherit eternal life.

Repentance and faith are demanding enough for those who do not believe without considering church divisions. If Christians are involved in conflicts with each other, Christian versus Christian, and church versus church, that is a distraction for non-Christians. It is most unhelpful if Christians do not have loving attitudes toward each other. The Christian family is supremely a family of love. It is very harmful to unbelievers when they observe Christians at enmity with each other. Such attitudes cause cynicism in unbelievers and give them excuses whereby they reject the testimony of the Church and in this they are confirmed in eternal lostness which is tragic in the extreme.

The objection can be made that it is totally unreal to imagine that Christians will not experience substantial differences in doctrinal interpretation and

differences in practical applications of truth. If differences are debated in the public arena then the manner in which opponents view each other and treat each other should be in stark contrast to the way in which politicians treat each other. We hold to the truth but we do so with love.

When the early Church of the first three centuries suffered intense persecution and when many were martyred, the observation was made, 'Look how much these who believe in Jesus love one another!'

3. Catholicity is important to church members

The universal nature of Christ's body the Church is wonderfully encouraging and has never been more so than today. The prophecies made in the Psalms and by the prophets are being fulfilled globally today. All believers should be involved in praying for missions and in supporting missionary endeavour to the ends of the earth. A catholic spirit is vital. The worldwide missionary movement involves Christians of all denominations.

It is important in our local churches that the members observe sincere catholicity in their leaders. This will be demonstrated in a lively interest in missionary work. It will be evident from their public prayers.

A cultish spirit is one which views only our assembly as having the truth, a spirit which is confined only to our own party interests. Such a spirit is deplorable. It is self-centred and leads to pride and censoriousness which is the opposite of catholicity. It fails to appreciate the grace of our Triune God as he works in hundreds of Bible-believing denominations across the world.

Catholicity is needed too with regard to extreme charismatic groups. Sometimes the behaviour in these groups is so bizarre that we are tempted to think that it is impossible for true Christians to be found there. But that is not the case. When we talk to radical charismatics we should try to persuade them to build their faith on the Scriptures rather than living by their own subjective feelings. But this may not be easy.

This leads to what I call the ligaments of catholicity.

4. The ligaments of catholicity

Catholicity is more than a generous attitude. Catholicity functions through the exercise of attributes: love, humility, patience, knowledge, wisdom and

gentleness. These attributes are like ligaments which make catholicity work in practice. A comment or two on each one will clarify.

Love is the essential and supreme quality attribute of the true Christian. We are to love our neighbours as ourselves and we are to love other believers fervently. This means that we always have their best interests in view and seek to do them good. If they differ from us in viewpoint or if they are awkward in disposition we must love them still.

Humility is basic to catholicity. What have I that I have not received? As a Christian I count others better than myself. I will soon have to give account to the great Shepherd of the sheep for the gifts he has given me. I have received much and am therefore accountable. In all my dealing with others I must be humble and follow my Master who said of himself that he was meek and lowly of heart.

Patience is essential in maintaining catholicity. Paul reminds us that there are weak believers (1 Thess 5:14). Certainly there are erring believers. Patience is always needed when there is tension or disagreement or contention. Isaiah says of the ministry of the Messiah, 'The bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.' The opposite of catholicity is to write off professing Christians who are idle or erring. We may have to adopt a stern attitude of correction or a call to repentance but catholicity avoids dumping people, that is, the attitude that the erring are not true believers, so 'forget them'.

Knowledge is the next ligament of catholicity. The more spiritual knowledge we enjoy the better our resources to discern the standing of those who profess to be Christian but who may lack the necessary fruit or evidence. It must always be our first priority to have a thorough working knowledge of the Bible but we need to add to that a knowledge of Church history. This provides us with perspective. The body of Christ has developed over the centuries. The diversity of Christians and of denominations is huge. This knowledge will encourage catholicity and at the same time encourage caution. Doctrinal errors have greatly harmed the Church in the past. Errors tend to recur. We can be warned against them by a knowledge of Church history.

Wisdom is an essential attribute in the exercise of catholicity. It is difficult to assess people and their sincerity. We want to have a catholic or generous spirit but we must not be naïve or merely sentimental.

Gentleness is important. Those opposed to the gospel often fasten onto the scandals such as the fall of the tele-evangelists. 'Well, what do you say to

that?’ We can respond by pointing to the fact that Jesus warned that, ‘Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will say to them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”’ These are fearsome words. When we quote them we need to do so with gentleness and sorrow. We are deeply saddened that the name of Christ is dishonoured. Says Paul, ‘Let your gentleness be evident to all’ (Phil 4:5).

When we have opportunity to provide a reason for the hope of salvation that we possess we must testify ‘with gentleness and respect’ (1 Peter 3:15).

5. Ways in which we practise catholicity

Every time we sing from a hymn book, even the most conservative and reformed hymns books, *Grace*, *Christian Hymns* or *PRAISE!* we practise catholicity.

Catholicity is practised by us all in our study of Church history, biography and theology. We rejoice in all that is to the glory of Christ which has been achieved by evangelicals of various denominations. Lining our shelves are books by the Reformers of the 16th century, some by the Puritans of the 17th century, some by Jonathan Edwards of the 18th century and J C Ryle of the 19th century. We select our books carefully on the basis of faithfulness to Scripture but after that scarcely ever give a thought to the denomination of the authors.

Catholicity is practised by evangelicals across all denominations when they support missionary agencies like *Mission Aviation Fellowship*. Every four minutes an MAF plane takes off in some remote part of the world acting as a lifeline to missionaries and those they serve. During 2000 parts of Mozambique were flooded. Not reported in the mass media was the fact that MAF planes were in action to rescue lives and MAF continued the work of relief long after the crisis. Also among a host of noteworthy inter-denominational bodies worthy of our support are the *Wycliffe Bible Translators* and *Scripture Gift Mission* which publishes Scripture portions in many languages.

Catholicity is practised when we use the handbook *OPERATION WORLD* for prayer. The current edition of that handbook was published in 1993 and describes 230 nations. The information provided highlights the evangelical cause in every country. Details are given of all religions and denominations.



Trinity Evangelical Church, Malta (see News)

However the whole ethos of *OPERATION WORLD* is to stir us to prayer for the evangelicals of all nations. The next updated edition of *OPERATION WORLD* is due in August 2001.

Finally we practise catholicity in our prayer lives when we pray the Lord's prayer. 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.' I have never ever heard a Christian qualify this prayer with a rider, 'Your kingdom come, O Lord – but only through our denomination!' Whenever we hear of souls turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to Christ, we rejoice. Whenever we hear of the suffering and martyrdom of God's people, we sorrow.

6. How to enjoy catholicity

When Jesus died in complete ignominy and humiliation he had very little to show for his work. This outcome of poverty is well described in Isaiah 49:4, 'I have laboured to no purpose.' Yet in Hebrews 12:2 we read about Jesus who, 'for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame'. The joy set before him was the Church which he was purchasing with his own blood. That was something future to him and in a sense is still future and incomplete. Only when the Church is complete will he return. John describes that time, 'I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.' There is joy in anticipation of the great

wedding day of the Lamb. One of the glories of the bride is that she consists of those drawn from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 5:9).

The likenesses or analogies employed to describe the Church are all inclusive in nature. Four such analogies are provided by the apostle Peter, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' (1 Peter 2:9). In terms of catholicity all believers are chosen equally. You cannot be more chosen than another. All those in Christ are royal and they are all priests. They are all sons and daughters and so are royal children of a heavenly King and every one of them has equal access to the throne of grace. Furthermore in terms of a passport all of them belong to a new nation as equal citizens. Finally every believer, no matter how humble, ill-educated or poor, is equally the precious possession of God along with those who may be much more privileged in terms of earthly advantages.

Moreover there is joy in viewing the ever-growing and expanding nature of the Church covering the earth increasingly. There is joy in having a spiritual part in this growth through our prayers and through our support of missions. We read in Isaiah 2:1-4:

In the last days

*the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.*

Jerusalem is symbolic of God's cause on earth. The last days are the times between the first and second coming of Christ. Christ's Church will grow, all nations will stream to it. Eventually the spiritual growth of the Church will reach such proportions that the social effects will become apparent. Disputes will be settled for many peoples. 'They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation nor will they train for war any more.'

Along the way there is much suffering and martyrdom. Constantly we read of those who are martyred in lands like Indonesia and Sudan. Yet there is joy in the ultimate success of the gospel. Our Lord is seated at the Father's right hand and he will reign there until his enemies become a footstool for his feet (Ps 110:1). 'He will not falter nor be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth. In his law the islands will put their hope' (Isa 42:4).

OPERATION WORLD

*The substance of a letter to the editorial board working on the next edition of
OPERATION WORLD*

Dear friends – Please be assured that wherever I travel in the world I recommend OPERATION WORLD. I describe it as my bedside book for prayer and I have sounded abroad its merits in five continents. Also I have advertised the expectation that the next edition is due in August this year.

Thank you for the proposed text for the UK. It is excellent. Whoever provided the Church of England report is a bit optimistic but if that is what they say then let's hope that the situation in the C of E is as strong evangelically as the statistics suggest.

For the UK and USA reference could be made to the fact that there has been a developing theological renewal over the last three decades. This is important because it is never safe to assume theology, and whenever theology is assumed it has been at great loss to the evangelical church.

I know that OPERATION WORLD of necessity is neutral denominationally but the theological renewal in the doctrines of grace is trans-denominational and now the UK is the capital of the world for exporting Puritan and Reformed books more and more in a variety of languages. The capital for Reformed and Puritan books used to be Grand Rapids, USA, but now far and away it is the UK; of note are *Banner of Truth*, *Evangelical Press*, *Day One* and others. Publishers like *Focus* could never sell all they do if there were not now a general acceptance of Reformed teaching. In 1955 that was regarded as heresy and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a voice crying in the wilderness.

It is acknowledged that the great divide in Evangelicalism now is, feelings as a base, or the Bible as a base (see *Evangelicalism Divided* by Iain Murray).

But without theology there can be no gospel and no evangelicalism. Theology as extracted from the Bible has lived and developed for two millennia and is now as robust and strong as ever having survived many devilish attacks made upon it. Evangelicals throughout the world will continue to thrive on biblical theology.

Erroll Hulse

News



Paul and Michelle Mizzi with daughters, Christine and Jeanelle

Malta

Pastor Paul Mizzi has a weekly radio programme with a wide coverage. He has had the opportunity to debate current issues on TV with a Roman Catholic. Paul's brother Joe Mizzi is a paediatrician. Joe authors evangelistic booklets in Maltese and has, in addition, written a book upholding salvation truth and demonstrating how each of the principal doctrines of Roman Catholicism deviates from Scripture. Joe Mizzi has a website which specialises in counselling Catholics. John Blanchard's *Right with God* is available in Maltese as is the 1689 *London Baptist Confession of Faith*.

Malta, which measures about 17 x 9 miles, has a population of 370,000. The main industry is tourism and about 100,000 visitors are always present. Centred strategically in the Mediterranean the island has a fascinating history from the time of Paul up to the second world war when the island was the scene of fierce conflict and played a crucial role.

The native population is Roman Catholic. While Maltese is the first language, nearly all the islanders speak fluent English.

Although Paul Mizzi has been in the ministry for 13 years it is necessary for legal reasons that ministers be formally ordained. To this end a public service was arranged for Saturday 10th March. Before a congregation of about 70 pastors Joseph Hewitt and Erroll Hulse set Paul Mizzi apart with the laying on of hands according to chapter 26 paragraph 9 of the 1689 Confession. This ordination in which a charge to the church was preached by Erroll Hulse and a charge to Paul Mizzi was preached by Joseph Hewitt coincided with the opening of a converted building to serve as an auditorium. This occasion was supported by pastors Edwin Caruana and Ray Hoover and their congregations. Joseph Hewitt preached on 1 Kings 9:3 combining this with an exposition of Ephesians 2:20-23, the Church of Christ is his indestructible body.

Germany

After his first pastorate Jonathan Watson worked for four years for the European Missionary Fellowship and made contact with a range of people from the continent, some of whom came on vacation in Ulster.

Questions put to Paul Mizzi:

1. Do you heartily affirm justification by faith alone and Christ's imputed righteousness to be God's way of salvation and do you affirm this to be your own personal experience?
2. Do you believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God and do you believe in *sola scriptura*, that is, the principle that Scripture alone decides all matters of faith and practice?
3. Do you affirm your wholehearted commitment to preach the whole counsel of God as it is summarised in the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith?
4. Do you promise to shepherd God's flock to the best of your ability bearing in mind that you will give account for this to the great Shepherd of the sheep in the last day?

Chapel Library, Pensacola, printed the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith in Maltese. This is a fine production and is used by Pastor Paul Mizzi. This confession is important because it demonstrates that this church is not a sect but has a Confession which is shared with churches across the world and through the centuries.

One young German was lively and inquiring and Jonathan gave him Dr Lloyd-Jones' 'Studies in the Sermon on the Mount' and talked to him about God's sovereignty. He sent other friends over and Jonathan welcomed them, showed them around Ulster, and gave them books. The result of this has been a group of men and women in Germany in their early thirties who planned a conference. It took place in Mucke, 35 minutes or so from Marburg.

There were between thirty and forty young men and women (plus one older couple) sitting around a conference table, with Jonathan expounding the doctrines of grace. They had notes and his messages were translated. There are some excellent titles in German such as, Owen's 'Glory of Christ', Sinclair Ferguson on Philippians, Stuart Olyott on Daniel, Walt Chantry's 'Today's Gospel.' The leaders had taken a risk in planning the conference, wondering how many would attend. They were delighted with the numbers and also by the fact that



*Jonathan Watson, pastor of the
Quennevais Evangelical Church,
St Brelade, Jersey*

there is much zeal to repeat this event next year. This interest in God's free grace is happening all over Europe, little publishing houses, translations and new conferences being reported in Portugal, Belarus, Italy and others.

Geoff Thomas.

Kazakhstan

The nation of Kazakhstan dominates central Asia and trade routes between east and west. Much of the country is semi-desert. Its population is 18 million people with almost 7 million Kazaks and 6 million Russians. Literacy is a high 98% of the population. The nation has enormous oil and mineral reserves, and it is moving to a market economy.

The country has almost 300 Protestant congregations all of which are Russian speaking. Until ten years ago there were

'Demand for this Kazak Holy Book is huge,' notes the Rev. Waldemar Kurz, the Bible League's Director of Ministries for the former Soviet Union. About half of the 44,000 first run new edition Kazak Holy Book were placed with churches and mission agencies within a month of their arrival.

A missionary in Kazakhstan using the new Kazak Holy Book reports, 'You cannot imagine the thrill of seeing Kazak believers – church leaders who have been believers for two, three and four years – with the entire New Testament in their hands for the first



hardly any Kazak-speaking Christians at all. All Kazaks are nominal followers of Islam, but only 5% are practising Muslims.

Today, for the first time in history Kazaks can read the entire New Testament in their own language. The Bible League has offices in Kazakhstan and there it recently welcomed the arrival of the Kazak Holy Book, which contains the entire New Testament and 16 Old Testament books, including Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah. It took ten years for the translation of the New Testament into the Kazak language to be completed.

time. If I were able to describe the joy on their faces it would bring tears to your eyes.'

The openness of people to the gospel is reflected in the increase of Kazak Christians during the 1990s. Ten years ago the number of known Kazak Christians numbered six. Today there are more than 6,000. More than 80 of these churches have been planted in Kazakhstan during the past two years. A number of these are multi-ethnic as well as Kazak congregations. The new Kazak Holy Book promises that the growing Kazak Church will become a mature church.

Geoff Thomas.

Valuable Study Resources

Bill James

Reading dictionaries is not obviously a most appealing occupation. But the busy pastor encounters numerous issues and topics during the course of study and sermon preparation and dictionaries can provide brief and pithy summaries of biblical and theological data on a subject. They can also give an immediate insight into modern scholarship in that field. So good dictionaries are a vital part of our libraries. Inevitably there is some overlap between dictionaries, and we are all limited by our budget. The IVP collection on CD-ROM is welcomed as an economical way of accessing a considerable volume of material.

The Essential IVP Reference Collection on CD-ROM £99.99

Computer technology is now widely used amongst evangelical publishers, and it is good to be able to welcome this valuable new resource.

Included on the CD are IVP's *New Bible Dictionary*, *New Bible Commentary*, *New Bible Atlas*, *New Dictionary of Theology*, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the whole series of NT Dictionaries (*Jesus and the Gospels*, *NT Background*, *Paul and His Letters*, *Later NT and Developments*), the *Bible Background Commentary*, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, and *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. The *KJV Bible* is also included.

The format is the familiar Logos Library System, which is widely used. Baker have used the same format for their *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (see below). In reading an article on the computer, with a single click on any Scripture reference you can see the text displayed in full (in KJV) in an adjacent window. You can search and be directed to every article (in all the books on the CD) containing a required word, topic or Scripture reference. And there are many hypertext links to key topics which cross reference not only within one book, but all books on the CD. So, for example, a search for 'Moses and Exodus' will come up with many Dictionary articles, and maps and diagrams in the *New Bible Atlas*. Articles and diagrams can be printed out; text can be copied and pasted (including footnotes) into a word processor. There is also a facility for making relevant notes as you go.

The Logos Library System means that further elements can be purchased and added as required. Books can be copied from the CD to your computer's hard drive as desired, to allow cross referencing across CDs (for example you could search for topics in both the IVP resources and Baker's *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at the same time).

There is of course no substitute for a real bound volume, but this format allows quick and easy reference to dictionaries so that we can make best use of their valuable contents.

Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

ed. Walter Elwell, Baker/ Paternoster, 933pp hc, plus free CD-ROM £34.99

New Dictionary of Biblical Theology

ed. TD Alexander & Brian S Rosner, IVP, 866pp hc. £29.99

Many readers will know and be grateful for Elwell's theological resources. Now he has produced a *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, which comes with a free CD-ROM including the full text of the book in Logos Library format.

IVP have also published a *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; this is available in CD format in the IVP CD Reference Library (see above).

As may be expected, in both volumes there are articles on the theology of each book of the Bible, and on the major theological themes. The articles are of high quality. In the Baker volume I enjoyed Leon Morris on *Justification* and Gerard van Groningen on the *Covenant*, and it was pleasing to find that articles on *Hell* and *Eternal Punishment* take a conservative position. IVP is less conservative, presenting an open-minded view of annihilationism. Both volumes have articles on Creation which take a framework view of Genesis 1, with no space for a more

literal understanding. Both volumes are valuable, and there is little to choose between them.

New International Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis

gen. ed. Willem Van Gemeren, Paternoster, 5 vols hc £169.99

This is a massive resource. After a number of introductory articles, this dictionary has lexical entries covering 3000 lexical and topical entries. The lexical entries are in Hebrew alphabetical order. However, the entries are indexed using the Goodrick/Kohlenberger system, which is cross-referenced to the more familiar Strong's system in one of the indexes. There is also a Scripture index, a subject index, and an index of semantic fields. The latter is most useful. For example, if you are interested in the way the OT expresses the terms for 'sin', then you look up the word (in English) in the index, and it refers you to all the Hebrew words which express that idea, and directs you to the relevant lexical articles. Those who have no Hebrew need not feel intimidated by these volumes.

In volume 4 there is a topical dictionary, including articles on the theology of the books of the OT as well as many other subjects. Under 'P' for example are articles on 'Pillar of Cloud and Fire', 'Plagues of Egypt', 'Prayer' and 'Prophecy' amongst many others.

The editorial team is conservative evangelical in flavour, and these volumes provide a most valuable help to those studying and preaching from the Old Testament.

Good News for the World

Mark Troughton

John 3:13-19

One of the biggest obstacles to people believing that Christianity is unique is the obvious fact that there are so many other religions on offer. We are spoilt for choice. Paul Weston in 'Why We Can't Believe' (*Frameworks*) quotes a Hindu saying, 'I believe that God exists, but that everyone has a different name for him. I think Christ existed, but I also believe that all my beliefs are true too.' Most people would believe in God, but to say Christianity is THE true religion rather than Islam, Judaism or Buddhism, to name but three, sounds arrogant, bigoted, judgmental and exclusive. This sort of exclusivism (in their minds, that is) has been responsible for wars of religion, crusades, pogroms, holy wars and such like. As we move towards the unification of religious faith (an increasing simplification of what 'God' means), we need to remind ourselves of how and why Christianity is exclusive.

But if the exclusive nature of Christianity is hard for people to swallow, so the inclusive nature of the gospel is sometimes hard for Christians to swallow. Many of us would feel uneasy about saying to a non-Christian, 'Jesus loves you'! We hesitate to be so overt, so unguarded, so we downplay the idea, objectify it ('God in theory could love someone like you'), rationalise it ('Should this person turn out to be elect one day, then I can reassure them Jesus loves them'). The problem here is the question, 'In what way is God's love inclusive and unrestricted? Does he love only the elect?'

These are important questions as they bear directly on how we present the gospel, what gospel we present, what methods we use in reaching people and what our basic attitude to non-Christians is. John 3:16 addresses these issues.

Our Lord and the early Church were no strangers to exclusivism and inclusivism. The Roman Empire, like the West today, was pluralistic and by and large inclusive and tolerant of faiths; you could put any deity you liked into the Pantheon ('all-gods') as long as you bowed the knee to the god-man Caesar. The same is true of the West: bow the knee to relativism and you can

worship anyone any way you please. Refuse and you're marginalised and persecuted (though in some parts of Europe not to the same extent) like the early Church was. So while ostensibly inclusive and tolerant, the Empire was actually intolerant of Christians who dared to present a rival Lord to Caesar.

In Nicodemus we have an example of someone who was ostensibly a universalist (he believed the blessing of Abraham was also for the 'goyim', the nations, on condition they were circumcised and kept clear of non-kosher meat, revered Sabbaths, new moons and other Jewish festivals into the bargain). In practice his inclusiveness was very exclusive indeed. After all he was a separatist, a Pharisee. So what Jesus has to say to him is extremely important. John 3 tells us in what way the gospel challenges these two ideas – ideas common in the world and in the Church.

1 The gospel of Jesus is inclusive and universal

Verse 16 tells us the origin of the plan by which people are brought back into a right relationship with God, how they are rescued from the condemnation that hangs over them because of their sins. It's the love of God for the human race as a whole, without exception. 'World', as J C Ryle points out in his *Expository Thoughts on John*, cannot mean God only loves 'the elect of every nation' a) because 'world' is never used of the Church b) a distinction is made in v 16 between those in the world who believe and those who don't, so John isn't talking about love for the Church. The love of God in view here is not his love for the elect (taught plainly elsewhere, cf. John 10 for example), but the love with which he regards all his creatures, especially the human race. Ryle points us to other texts to support this, cf. Psalm 145:8-9; Matthew 5:44-45; Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Titus 3:4.

The fact that we are unable to square this universal love with election is an abiding mystery – and isn't our problem (Deut 29:29). On preaching 1 Timothy 2:5, Spurgeon courageously defends the sincerity of God's universal, inclusive love, refusing to side with Arminian or Hyper-Calvinist rationalisations in order to make the verse fit into a neat system. He goes to amusing lengths in talking about all the doctrines in which he passionately believes, but doesn't fully understand. Likewise here we are faced with two apparently contradictory truths which we must humbly keep in balance.

It's crucial we maintain the astonishing breadth of the gospel and the inclusiveness of its offer. V 16 talks of 'whoever' or 'each one who'. The Great Commission is for me personally the clinching argument in the debate as to whether God loves this world in general. The disciples are to go into all the

world, starting at Jerusalem, the very city which murdered the Son of God, the city over which Jesus burst into tears prior to his passion because it would not come to him to have life. Start there, in that city and proclaim God's love and forgiveness. What is this grace? Grace is God's undeserved kindness to hell-deserving people.

So what Jesus says to Nicodemus in v 16 is meant as a rebuke to his exclusivism. God sends the promised seed to bring salvation not just to the Jew, but to the Gentile as well, to the people beyond the Promised Land, the world hostile to Israel, the pagan nations (graphically pictured as savage dogs, repulsive insects and reptiles – those 'beyond the pale'). The gift of God's Son is a gift to the whole family of Adam, so that each one who believes might have eternal life. Nicodemus needed to be confronted with the inclusiveness of the gospel. What a wonderful God we have – that he should SO love this world – this perverted, corrupt, vicious, unlovely society of creatures who'd prefer that their Creator was dead – that he should send not the angels or any other creature, but the second person of the Eternal Godhead and that the offer of rescue from judgment should be universally, sincerely, compassionately offered. It is nothing short of staggering.

So don't limit the free offer of the gospel; don't add conditions, don't make it an obstacle course for people to get to hear the gospel. In Matthew 11.28 Jesus underlines the fact that his burden is light compared to the onerous weight of the Pharisees' legalism. Do some of our methods of outreach, the style of our meetings, our songs, our traditions (sometimes of doubtful biblical warrant), the strangeness of the language we use in prayer, all add up to heavy or unbearable yokes we expect people to shoulder in order to become Christians? We can sincerely believe in the free offer, yet all these things which we call 'indifferent', but which can make a huge difference to the non-Christian, become an unbiblical, anti-gospel exclusivism, Pharisaism no less. Yet the apostle Paul, ex-Pharisee though he was, was so flexible, becoming a Jew to the Jew, a Gentile to the Gentiles, so that people might be won to Christ (1 Cor 9:21). In Matthew 5:45f Jesus holds up perfection before us and challenges us to love – not with the love of the in-crowd (even the tax-collectors whom you despise do that), but with God's love – which even reaches to his enemies.

A golf club is a place where they have something very attractive the other side of the wall – a healthy sport, a good social life, a way of making new friends, nice food, congenial surroundings. It's a game anyone can play. It's universal in its appeal. But you won't get a look-in unless you've got the right credentials – a worthy referee, the right education, a famous father or mother,

a sound bank balance. Entrance to the club is rather like the 18th hole: to get to the green you have to negotiate sand-traps, bunkers, water obstacles, trees and rough. Put that in religious terms: for the Pharisee, circumcision, kosher food, the ceremonial law. In Christian terms, what are our 'ceremonial laws'? Our refusal to change our building, our style, our pride and prejudice – any number of things that we consider 'fundamentally Christian' yet which are merely peripherals – shibboleths?

Do non-Christians feel welcome in our meetings, at ease and not stumbled by our religiosity or perhaps by our preoccupation with our own interests? Does the way we speak and act towards them demonstrate the compassion of Jesus, his pity, his unconditional love which overlooks their faults, lack of social grace, ignorance, awkwardness, embarrassment, rudeness even? Do we excel in hospitality (the core of evangelism today)? Atmosphere plays a big part in communication (the 'feel-good factor'). Do non-Christians feel welcome? The degree of our warmth expresses whether or not we have understood the extravagant generosity of God towards fallen man. 'Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be' (Samuel Crossman). Who are we to put obstacles in the way of anyone that they might hear the gospel? We need to tell it and embody it.

2 The gospel of Jesus is exclusive and particular

'Most religions revolve around the idea that we have to get to God by our own effort. If the effort is great enough then there's a chance (but no guarantee) that we'll be good enough to get there' (Paul Weston, *ibid.*). That's certainly true of both Hinduism and Buddhism. And it's logical to assume most people think Christianity is the same and that when Christians claim Christ is the only way, they're claiming something that is arrogant, conceited and self-congratulatory. But that's not where Christianity's uniqueness lies. It doesn't claim superior success in finding God (like explorers to the North Pole, 'We got there first!'). It claims that God himself has come in search of a lost mankind. The reverse. Christianity isn't a matter of our effort, but of God's coming, the Creator seeking to save the lost in order to spare them from eternal separation. And this coming was prepared for in eternity and time and actually happened in history in a particular place, culture, vortex of political and economic events. The very calendars most of us use show this (BC/AD).

The predominant world spirit today (post-modernism) doesn't allow for particulars that are universally applicable. For one religion to claim that its particulars are true for all people everywhere, throughout time, is regarded

with suspicion and disbelief because such claims are implicitly judgmental and intolerant of other ways. But suppose God did choose to become a man at a particular time, place, moment in history, born of a woman under Jewish law, a coming prepared for over centuries. Then it would be churlish to turn around and say, 'You have no right to claim uniqueness for your religion!' The momentousness of such a coming of God into human culture would make such a response as irrelevant as it would be foolish and short-sighted (not to say intolerant). Christianity is necessarily exclusive of all other religions because of the one particular that is universally applicable: Jesus himself.

It's the claims of Jesus – humble, egocentric, inescapable – which make him unique among all other religious leaders, which as C S Lewis said put him in a category all by himself. And if his claims are true, Jesus is the answer to post-modern scepticism and over-sensitivity about the universal applicability of particulars. Uniqueness is by its very nature exclusive. But the gospel means that this is an exclusiveness which is offered compassionately to all without exception.

John 3 focuses on several of his breath-taking claims :

- he claims unique divine insight. It wasn't Moses who went into heaven. Only God has access to and uninterrupted communion with the Godhead, v13. Jesus claims that knowledge for himself.
- he claims that obscure events in Jewish history foreshadowed, pointed to or typified his own life and death, v14. He claims that his 'lifting up' (his death) will have a universal impact. Just as the sinning Israelites were healed and delivered from the venom of the snakes by simply looking at the bronze snake lifted up on a pole, so also Jesus crucified at Golgotha 2000 years ago gives healing and deliverance from the ultimate disease – sin, and that for people from all tribes and races and languages. (The epistles unpack the depths of meaning of the cross in the following terms: sacrifice of blood, expiation, propitiation, redemption, justification, victory and reconciliation). The cross holds particular meanings, exclusive meanings, which people everywhere, without exception, are invited to appropriate by a change of life direction (repentance) and faith (trust) in Jesus.
- he claims that people's response to him personally (and in particular to his death) will determine where they spend eternity, v15. These are enormous claims that no other religious leader in the history of the world has dared to make.

So when we say that Christianity is true and other religions false, we are not claiming superiority for ourselves (there's enough shame and dishonour in the history of the Church to keep our heads well bowed). What we are saying is, 'Look at Jesus, consider him, listen to him, understand the meaning of his life and death and resurrection then worship him as he really is, the only Lord and Saviour. Verses 15, 16, 18 underline the fact that mankind's effort counts, in fact, for nothing. As we are drowning in the sea of our own wretchedness, God puts forth his hand to rescue us. Faith is the opposite of achievement. Not by muscle power for which I can take the credit, but by the rescuer's arm which clutches the empty, desperate hand. The rescue plan, its accomplishment, its application to individuals are all God's. Human beings receive it in simple trust.

But the same verses show why people everywhere (regardless of race, colour or cultural background) are ultimately separated from God: it is because of unbelief. Ryle says that v 19 exonerates God of the charge of injustice (we could add prejudice, favouritism or ethnic bias). The light shines in the darkness. If people are ultimately lost it's through no fault of the light, but through their own preference for the darkness and their refusal to believe in Jesus (cf John 16:8-11). When the post-modern world says that Christians are judgmental to want to elevate one religion above all others, it's not ethnic distinctiveness they're seeking to protect, it's the light of the truth they're trying to snuff out (John 1:5).

In closing

1. The gospel of Jesus is universal and inclusive in the breadth of its offer. We should be ardent, passionate about telling people the Good News. Our approach to reaching the lost should embody the universal compassion and pity of God in the incarnation. There is no place for pharisaical exclusivism. Our methods should follow the flexible and yet righteous approach of Paul.
2. The gospel of Jesus is exclusive and particular because God became man in Jesus Christ at a certain time and place. The life he lived and the death he died have particular meaning; the rescue offer can be appropriated only in a particular way. So we need feel no shame in jealously guarding 'the faith once for all delivered', 'the good deposit'. Here there can be no inclusive understanding of the cross, the resurrection or the person of Christ, which compromises on the specific meaning and content of the biblical vocabulary. There is only one way to eternal bliss.

But it's *Good News* for the whole world.

Tampering with the Trinity

Part 2

Evangelical feminist rejection of eternal functional subordinationism within the Triune God¹

Prof Bruce A Ware

Embrace of Masculine Trinitarian Language and Rejection of Inner Trinitarian Functional Subordination

Evangelical feminists, otherwise known as egalitarians, have generally favoured retaining traditional masculine trinitarian language. For reasons given in part one of this series (RT180), particularly because Scripture is for egalitarians God's inspired Word and self-revelation, the vast majority of egalitarians have sought to defend masculine God-language against the criticism of many of their feminist colleagues. In the process, however, they deny 1) that such masculine God-language has any implications either, of superiority of what is masculine over feminine, and 2) that the eternal relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indicate any kind of eternal functional hierarchy within the Trinity.

Let it be said clearly that non-egalitarian, complementarian² evangelicals agree wholly with the first of these denials. Because God created the man and the woman fully as his image (Gen 1:26-27), it is clear that no use of masculine language for God is meant to signal some supposed greater value, dignity, or worth of men over women. Furthermore, that women and men alike are redeemed by the Saviour (Gal 3:28), and that the believing husband is to grant his believing wife honour as a 'fellow heir of the grace of life' (1 Peter 3:7)

further indicates the full equality of personhood and worth vested in women and men, through both creation and redemption, by our gracious God. Egalitarian and complementarian evangelicals agree, then, that the Bible's masculine God-language in no way indicates the essential superiority or greater value of male over female. Both men and women are, in creation and redemption, prized, sought, and loved by God equally; women with men stand before God equal in standing, dignity, worth, and human personhood.

Concerning the second denial, however, complementarians and egalitarians differ greatly. Egalitarians see clearly that if an eternal relationship of authority and obedience is grounded in the eternal immanent inner-trinitarian relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then this gives at least *prima facie* justification to the notion of creational human relations in which authority and submission inhere. To avoid this implication, egalitarians argue fundamentally along three lines.³ First, they assert that the predominant masculine references to God in no way convey some corresponding authority attaching to the male. As Paul Jewett has put it, to affirm the functional subordination of women to men in any respect cannot avoid the charge that women are thereby inferior to men.⁴

Second, they assert that any suggestion of subordination within the Godhead, even the claim of a functional subordination of the Son to the Father, cannot avoid at least an implicit Arianism.⁵ The early Church theologians, it is argued, rejected all talk of subordination regarding any member of the Trinity to any other. Full equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit precludes any and all types of subordinationism. Since the Son is *homoousios* with the Father, we are wrong ever to speak of the Son in subordinate status to the Father and by so doing undermine the orthodoxy won by Athanasius at Nicea and affirmed ever since by the Church.

Third, all of Scripture's language of the authority of the Father and submission of the Son is only rightly accounted for within the incarnational mission of the Son. As Gilbert Bilezikian states, 'Christ did not take upon himself the task of world redemption because he was number two in the Trinity and his boss told him to do so or because he was demoted to a subordinate rank so that he could accomplish a job that no one else wanted to touch.'⁶ Furthermore, as Bilezikian again comments, 'Because there was no subordination within the Trinity prior to the Second Person's incarnation, there will remain no such thing after its completion. If we must talk of subordination it is only a functional or economic subordination that pertains exclusively to Christ's role in relation to human history.'⁷ So, while masculine language predominates in the biblical depiction of God, and while the divine Father-Son relationship is eternal, none of this indicates a relationship of authority and obedience in the Godhead or a corresponding relationship of authority and submission in human relationships.

Response to the Egalitarian Embrace of Masculine Trinitarian Language and Rejection of Inner Trinitarian Functional Subordination

First, it appears that egalitarianism is in a difficult position. It affirms the predominance of masculine biblical references for God and yet it seems incapable, logically, to explain this divinely chosen use of masculine language. Granted, one can argue, as we have seen earlier with Achtemeier, that referring to God in feminine language would result in a confusion between Creator and creation. But, must this be so? Even Achtemeier admits it need not, while she is convinced it likely will. But, if God himself thought and believed as egalitarians do, could he not overcome this supposed faulty Creator-creature confusion that might be drawn if he so chose, deliberately, to employ masculine and feminine metaphors in equal proportion? Certainly he could make clear, as he has, that he is Spirit and so not a sexual or gendered being. Furthermore, he could make clear that when he refers to himself as Mother he is not by this conveying an ontological connection with the world. So, I find it difficult to accept this as a full or adequate answer to the question of why God chose to name himself in masculine, but never feminine, terms.

Another obvious reason exists, one which egalitarians seem to bump up against regularly without acknowledging it for what it is. For example, in Wainwright's musing over God as 'Father' he notes that '“Father” was the name that the second person in his human existence considered most appropriate as an address to the first person'. But why is this? To this question, Wainwright can only say that '*There must be . . . something about*

human fatherhood that makes Father a suitable way for Jesus to designate the one who sent him. In trinitarian terms, the crucial point is that Father was the address Jesus characteristically used in this connection.⁸ However, just what the 'something' is, Wainwright does not tell us. But is it not obvious? Jesus said over and again throughout his ministry that he came to do the *will* of his *Father*. Clearly, a central part of the notion of 'Father' is that of fatherly authority. Certainly this is not all there is to being a father, but while there is more, there certainly is not less or other. The masculine terminology used of God throughout Scripture conveyed within the patriarchal cultures of Israel and the early Church the obvious point that God, portrayed in masculine ways, had authority over his people. Father, King and Lord conveyed, by their masculine gender referencing, a rightful authority that was to be respected and followed. Malachi 1:6, for example, indicates just this connection between 'father' and authority: 'A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD Almighty.' God as Father is rightfully deserving of his children's honour, respect and obedience. To fail to see this is to miss one of the primary reasons God chose such masculine terminology to name himself.

Second, while the early Church clearly embraced the full essential equality of the three trinitarian persons (because each of the three divine persons possesses fully and simultaneously the identically same infinite divine nature), nonetheless the Church has always affirmed likewise the priority of the Father over the Son and Spirit. Since this priority cannot rightly be understood in terms of essence or nature (lest one fall

into Arian subordinationism), it must exist in terms of relationship.⁹ As Augustine affirmed, the distinction of persons is constituted precisely by the differing relations among them, in part manifest by the inherent authority of the Father and inherent submission of the Son. This is most clearly seen in the eternal Father-Son relationship in which the Father is eternally the Father of the Son, and the Son is eternally the Son of the Father. But, some might wonder, does this convey an eternal authority of the Father and eternal submission of the Son? Hear how Augustine discusses both the essential equality of the Father and Son, and the mission of the Son who was sent, in eternity past, to obey and carry out the will of the Father:

'If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the one is the Father and the other the Son then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the *Son is equal to the Father* and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son. In the light of this we can now perceive that *the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh*, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that *it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man*. For he was *not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father*, but in virtue of the Son being

from the Father, not the Father being from the Son.’¹⁰

Notice two observations from Augustine’s statement. First, Augustine sees no disparity between affirming, on the one hand, the full *equality* of the Son to the Father, and on the other hand, the Son’s eternal position as *from* the Father, whose responsibility it is to carry out the will of the Father as the one sent from all eternity from the Father. Jewett’s claim that functional subordination entails essential inferiority is here denied by Augustine. Second, notice that Augustine denies Bilezikian’s claim that all subordination of the Son to the Father rests fully in the Son’s incarnate state. To the contrary, Augustine affirms that ‘the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh’. In other words, the sending of the Son occurred in eternity past in order that the eternal Word, sent from on high from the Father, might take on human flesh and then continue his role of carrying out the will of his Father.

As P T Forsyth writes, ‘the beauty of the Son’s simultaneous equality with and obedience to the Father expresses the willing service God intends his people to render’. Forsyth asserts that ‘subordination is *not* inferiority, and it *is* God-like. The principle is imbedded in the very cohesion of the eternal trinity and it is inseparable from the unity, fraternity and true equality of men. It is not a mark of inferiority to be subordinate, to have an authority, to obey. It is divine.’¹¹ And in another place, Forsyth makes clear that the Son’s obedience to the Father was indeed an eternal obedience, rendered by an eternal equal, constituting an eternal subordination of the Son to do the will of the Father. He writes:

‘Father and Son co-exist, co-equal in the Spirit of holiness, i.e., of perfection. But Father and Son is a relation inconceivable except the Son be obedient to the Father. The perfection of the Son and the perfecting of his holy work lay, not in his suffering but in his obedience. And, as he was eternal Son, it meant an eternal obedience. . . . But obedience is not conceivable without some form of subordination. Yet in his very obedience the Son was co-equal with the Father; the Son’s yielding will was no less divine than the Father’s exigent will. Therefore, in the very nature of God, subordination implies no inferiority.’¹²

Third, the egalitarian denial of any eternal submission of the Son to the Father makes it impossible to answer the question why it was the ‘Son’ and not the ‘Father’ or ‘Spirit’ who was sent to become incarnate. And even more basic is the question why the eternal names for ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ would be exactly *these* names. John Thompson has indicated a trend in much modern trinitarian discussion to separate Christology from trinitarian formulations. He writes that ‘Christology and the Trinity were virtually divorced. It was both stated and assumed that any one of the three persons could become incarnate. . . . There was thus only an accidental relation between the economy of revelation and redemption and the eternal triune being of God.’¹³ It appears that contemporary egalitarianism is vulnerable also to this criticism. Since nothing in *God* grounds the Son’s being the Son of the Father, and since every aspect of the Son’s earthly submission to the Father is divorced altogether from any *eternal relation* that exists between the Father and Son, there simply is no reason why the *Father* should send the *Son*. In Thompson’s words, it appears that the egalitarian view would permit

'any one of the three persons' to become incarnate. And yet we have scriptural revelation that clearly says that the Son came down out of heaven to do the will of his Father. This sending is not *ad hoc*. In eternity, the Father commissioned the Son who then willingly laid aside the glory he had with the Father to come and purchase our pardon and renewal. Such glory is diminished if there is no eternal Father-Son relation on the basis of which the Father sends, the Son willingly comes, and the Spirit willingly empowers.

And finally, what biblical evidence exists for the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father? A running theme in the history of this doctrine (as seen above in Augustine and Forsyth) is that the Son was commissioned by the Father in *eternity past* to come as the incarnate Son. As Jesus declares on well over thirty occasions in John's Gospel, he was *sent to the earth* by the Father to do the Father's will. Could this be reduced merely to the sending of the *incarnate* Son to fulfil the Father's mission for him now that he has already come into the world? Or should we think of this sending, this commissioning, as having taken place in *eternity past*, a commissioning which then is fulfilled in time? Scripture, it seems clear, demands the latter view.

Consider, for example, Peter's statement in his Pentecost sermon recorded in Acts 2. Concerning Christ, he says, 'This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross' (Acts 2:23). The crucifixion of Christ fulfilled God's 'set purpose' which he established far in advance of the actual incarnation. Though this verse alone does not tell us exactly how far back God's plan was set, we know from numerous biblical prophecies (e.g., Psalm 22; Isa 9:6-7; Isa

53; Micah 5:2, to name a select few of the most notable) that God had planned and predicted, long before the incarnation, precisely the birth, life, death, and ultimate triumph of the Son. If Christ's coming fulfilled God's 'set purpose', and this purpose was established long in advance of the incarnation, then it is clear that the commissioning of the Son occurred in Christ's relation with the Father in the immanent Trinity and not after he had come as the incarnate Son. Consider another of Peter's claims. In regard to Christ's redemptive work, Peter writes 'He [Christ] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake' (1 Peter 1:20). If we wonder how far back this commissioning of the Son took place, this verse settles the question. Before the world was made, the Father chose (literally, 'foreknew') the Son to come as the Redeemer. The Son's coming in time to shed his blood reflects not an *ad hoc* decision, nor a toss of the trinitarian coin, but the eternal purpose of the *Father* to send and offer his *Son*.

Ephesians 1:3-5 and Revelation 13:8 confirm this understanding. In Ephesians, Paul gives praise to God the *Father* for choosing his own *in Christ* before the foundation of the world, and for predestining them to adoption as sons *through Jesus Christ* to himself. Since Paul specifically 1) gives praise to the *Father* for this election and predestination, 2) designates *Christ* as the one toward whom our election and predestination are directed, and 3) states that the Father's elective purpose and plan occurred before the creation of the world, it follows that the Father's commissioning of the Son is based in eternity past, and that the Son's submission to the Father is rooted in their eternal relationship within the

Godhead. Revelation 13:8 likewise indicates that the book of life in which believers' names have been recorded is 1) from the *foundation of the world*, and 2) is of the Lamb who was slain. Again, then, we see clear evidence that the Father's purpose from eternity past was to send his Son, the Lamb of God, by which his own would be saved. The authority-obedience relation of Father and Son in the immanent Trinity is mandatory if we are to account for God the Father's eternal purpose to elect and save his people through his beloved Son.

But will Christ one day, as Bilezikian argues, be elevated to the same status or equality of role as that of the Father? Consider Paul's discussion of the consummation of Christ's reconciling work in a day yet future. He writes, 'For he [the Father] 'has put everything under his [Christ's] feet'. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:27-28). Because Christ was commissioned in eternity past to come, in time and in history, to carry out the will of his Father, when this work is completed, Christ will place himself in the very position he had with the Father previously. While possessing again the full glory of the Father (John 17:5), he will put himself in subjection to the Father (1 Cor 15:28). The relation of the Father and Son in eternity past, in Christ's historic and incarnate life, and in eternity future, then, is the same. Christ is fully equal in essence with the Father yet subordinate in role. Scripture clearly upholds these truths, and we in the Church should likewise do the same.

Conclusion

Because we have God's inspired Word, and because God has, in this Word, made his own triune life known, we must with renewed commitment seek to study, believe and embrace the truth of God as made known here. Where we have been misled by the history of this doctrine, may Scripture lead to correction. But where contemporary revision departs from Scripture's clear teaching, may we have courage to stand with the truth and for the truth. For the sake of the glory of the only true and living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may we pledge to him alone our fidelity, obedience and love.

Addendum: Points of Practical Application

1. *Embrace Rightful Authority Structures.* Because the structure of authority and obedience is not only established by God, but it is, even more, possessed in God's own inner trinitarian life, as the Father establishes his will and the Son joyfully obeys, therefore we should not despise, but should embrace proper lines of authority and obedience. In the home, believing community, and society, rightful lines of authority are good, wise, and beautiful reflections of the reality that is God himself. This applies to those in positions of God-ordained submission and obedience who need, then, to accept joyfully these proper roles of submission. It applies equally to those in God-ordained positions of authority who need to embrace the proper roles of their responsible authority and exercise it as unto the Lord.

2. *View Both Authority and Submission as God-like.* With P T Forsyth, we need

to see not only authority but also submission as God-like. We more readily associate God with authority, but since the Son is the *eternal Son* of the Father, and since the Son is *eternally God*, then it follows that the inner trinitarian nature of God honours both authority and submission. Just as it is God-like to lead responsibly and well, so it is God-like to submit in human relationships where this is required. It is God-like for wives to submit to their husbands; it is God-like for children to obey their parents; it is God-like for church members to follow the directives of their godly male eldership. Consider Philippians 2:5-11 and see the pattern of God-like submission manifest. We honour God as we model both sides of the authority-submission relationship that characterises the trinitarian persons themselves.

3. *Revive the Wholesome and Biblical Concept of God as Father.* As Jesus instructed us in his model prayer (i.e., the Lord's prayer), we are to pray to our Father in heaven. The concept and reality of God as Father is so very glorious, and we dare not lose this article of 'the Church's faith and practice' because of abusive fatherhood or cultural confusion over what fatherhood is. 'God as Father' invokes two counterbalancing and complementary ideas: *reverence* (e.g., hallowed be thy name), and *reliance* (e.g., give us this day our daily bread). God as Father deserves our highest and unqualified respect and devotion, and he deserves our absolute trust and dependence. Devotion to and dependence on God as Father captures, at heart, the whole of what our life before him is to be.

4. *Our Common Adoption into God's Family is as Sons.* All of us, as children of God, need to embrace God's rightful

authority over our lives. We are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26), and as sons we must see our role, as with the role of the eternal Son, always and only to submit to the will of our Father. Paradoxically, when we obey fully, we enter fully into life as God created it to be. As Jesus said, 'If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy might be in you and your joy might be made full' (John 15:9-10). We are to obey, without reservation, fully, and with great anticipation of blessing, for as we obey, we enter into full and lasting joy.

5. *Our Worship is of the Triune God, Equal in Essence yet Distinct in Role.* The beauty and harmony of God's created design of diversity in unity (as seen, e.g., in marriage and in the body of Christ) is rooted eternally and immutably in God himself. We only worship God when we uphold him *as he is*. If we despise unity and 'celebrate diversity' that is fragmented and disjointed, or despise diversity by insisting on a uniformity that denies created and God-ordained differences, we will not value God for *who* he is, and so we will not honour him *as he is*. In God, diversity of persons serves the unity of purpose, method and goal. The will of the Father is gladly carried out by the Son. When the Spirit comes, it is his joy to do the will of the Son. In purpose they are united, in roles they are distinct, and in *both* (purpose and role) there is glad acceptance. Together the three persons model what our 'diversity in unity' of relationship should look like and how our lives together are to be lived.

Endnotes

- 1 This and the previous article in this two-part series appearing here in *Reformation Today* were first delivered as a paper, 'Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father?' at the *Building Strong Families* Conference, Dallas, Texas, March 20-22, co-sponsored by 'Family Life' and 'The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood'. An expanded and edited version of these two articles will appear as part of a forthcoming chapter, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity' in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, edited by Douglas S Huffman and Eric L Johnson (Zondervan).
- 2 The term 'complementarian' is the self-designation of the evangelical constituency that would see God's created design for men and women as comprising male headship in the created order, reflecting itself in the requirement of a qualified male eldership in the Church and the husband's overarching responsibility in the leadership of the home. The single best volume describing and defending a complementarian vision is John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991).
- 3 See, e.g., Gilbert Bilezikian, 'Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 40/1 (March 1997) 57-68; and Stanley J Grenz, 'Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41/4 (December 1998) 615-630; Royce G Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); and Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
- 4 See, e.g., Paul K Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study of Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 71 where he asks, 'How can one defend a sexual hierarchy whereby men are over women without supposing that the half of the human race which exercises authority is superior in some way to the half which submits?' He continues by asking further (p. 84) whether anyone can 'establish the mooted point - woman's subordination to the man - by underscoring the obvious difference from the man - without the help of the traditional point - woman's inferiority to the man? The answer it appears to us, is no.'
- 5 Bilezikian, 'Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping', 67 says, e.g., that any talk about subordination 'smacks of the Arian heresy'.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 8 Geoffrey Wainwright, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls', *Interpretation* 45 (1991) 120 (italics added).
- 9 For a discussion of evidence that early Church theology upheld the simultaneous eternal equality of essence yet functional relationship of authority and obedience among the persons of the triune Godhead, see also Robert Letham, 'The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment', *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990) 65-78; and Stephen D Kovach and Peter R Schemm, Jr., 'A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/3 (September 1999) 461-476. In limited space, Kovach and Schemm cite examples from Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and Augustine, with supporting commentary from John Calvin, Philip Schaff, Jaroslav Pelikan, J N D Kelly, Charles Hodge, W G T Shedd, and they cite (p. 471) the conclusion of Paul Rainbow, 'Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism', 4 (unpublished paper, based on his dissertation, 'Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6', [D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1987]), in which Rainbow concludes, 'From the earliest form of the creed we can see that the Father and the Son are united in being, but ranked in function.'
- 10 St Augustine, The Trinity, trans Edmund Hill, vol. 5 of *The Works of St. Augustine* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991) IV. 27 (italics added).
- 11 P T Forsyth, *God the Holy Father* (1897; reprint, London: Independent Press, 1957) 42.
- 12 P T Forsyth, *Marriage, Its Ethic and Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912) 70-71.
- 13 John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 22.

Editor
Assistant Editor
Associate Editors

ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
 BILL JAMES, 9 Epsom Road, Leamington Spa CV32 7AR
 DAVID KINGDON, UK, TOM NETTLES, USA,
 JOHN CAMPBELL, AUSTRALIA
 DON GARLINGTON, MICHAEL HAYKIN, CANADA

Visit our website: www.reformation-today.org

Rates

1 year £12.00 – 2 years £20.00

Subscriptions
 UK & EUROPE

1 year £12.00 – 2 years £20.00

IRISH REPUBLIC

1 year \$20.00 – 2 years \$35.00

AUSTRALIA

1 year \$25.00 – 2 years \$45.00

NEW ZEALAND

1 year \$19.00 – 2 years \$32.00

USA

1 year \$15.00 – 2 years \$27.00

BRAZIL (USA \$)

1 year \$21.00 – 2 years \$37.00

CANADA

1 year R60.00 – 2 years R110.00

SOUTH AFRICA

1 year \$30.00 – 2 years \$50.00
 (Singa \$)

SINGAPORE
 AND MALAYSIA

1 year Rp. 30,000 –
 2 years Rp. 50,000

INDONESIA

(Please make cheque payable to Momentum CL)

Single copies one-sixth the above in each case which includes postage.
 For airmail add £4.50 sterling equivalent p.a.

Gifts are welcomed and those who wish to support the Magazine should make out their cheques to "Reformation Today". "Reformation Today" is registered as a charity no. 1017000

Bound volumes available: 91-110 and 111-130 each £22 or \$35, 131-148 £25 or \$40,
 149-172 £40 or \$60 post free

cut here

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send to:

Name:

Address:

I enclose Your name and address:

Tick

Reformation

Today

Bound

Volume

1 year	
2 years	
91-110	
111-130	
131-148	
149-172	

RT

2001

No.181**May-June****CONTENTS**

- | | | |
|-----------|--|----------------|
| 1 | Editorial | |
| 3 | The Importance of Catholicity | Erroll Hulse |
| 13 | OPERATION WORLD | |
| 14 | News | |
| 17 | Valuable Study Resources | Bill James |
| 19 | Good News for the World | Mark Troughton |
| 25 | Tampering with the Trinity – part 2 | Bruce Ware |