

REFORMATION TODAY



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Contributors to this issue

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Front cover: *Mark Harding at the Kaallaagte farm entrance (see Editorial).*

Editorial

Highly relevant materials are included in this issue. These are self-explanatory so for editorial I refer to the information on page fifteen concerning the dedication of Pastor Dennis Hustedt to the Aids crisis in Africa. Linked with this is the Spurgeon's Fraternal (see News). At that gathering intercession was made for revival. Sometimes revival comes in unexpected ways. Note what Isaiah says:

'If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like noontday' (Isa 58:10).

With regard to the Aids crisis I refer now to the initiation of a new effort located 50 kilometres north of Pretoria, namely, *Bethesda Outreach Ministries*, Kaallaaagte, Gauteng. The postal address is: PO Box 2642 Hammanskraal 0400 RSA.

Hammanskraal is a town famous for the Jubilee Hospital, a fine Christian foundation that has served the rural and mining community for decades. Access to medical help for sick children was a major consideration for Mark and Christine Harding when they began to look for a site to house the proposed Children's Village for Aids orphans in a vision they share with Pastor David Seefried of USA and his wife Sally who are the directors of this enterprise. Two adjoining farms just a few kilometres from the hospital have been purchased with a range of good houses and outbuildings. The property is well fenced and there is an excellent supply of water which is necessary and often in short supply in much of Africa.

The Hardings moved to Hammanskraal in December 2000. Mark describes his

experience as a young man in England. He was very depressed and thought he was going to die. He prayed to the Lord and received the assurance, 'I want you to look after my children!' In due course they moved to South Africa with two little daughters, Melanie and Lorna. They built a house with room for family, friends, visitors . . . Mark asked the Lord, 'Why have you given us such a big house?' Again came the intimation, 'Because I want you to look after my children!' Three more children were born to the Hardings and much later a little girl (Kirstin) was adopted. Over the last eighteen years twelve other children have been fostered, mostly from tragic backgrounds.

Then came the next chapter - the Seefrieds, leaders in Evangelical Baptist Missions, Box 2225, Kokomo, IN 46904, USA, came to South Africa with a burden to establish 'Bethesda'. . . a vision much wider than could have been dreamed of by Mark and Christine. However, between the four, the vision crystallised. The Seefrieds continue to explore and bring into action the essential wider links for prayer and financial and practical support. They have established a base on the second farm. The Hardings are now well settled in the farmhouse at Kaallaaagte with Kirstin, who loves the local school and enjoys the new enlarging family. There are presently five little orphaned children and four more are due to arrive soon. Two young EBM workers, Dana Scott and Michele Geurink, are helped by local workers in the homes and on the land. Recently Mark asked yet again, 'Lord, I prayed for a farm, but why 2 farms with 7 houses?' and this time came the intimation, 'Because I want you to look after hundreds of my children!'

Biblical Principles for Contemporary Worship

Ray Evans

These guiding principles for our worship were originally given as the second section of a paper entitled ‘Conservative and Contemporary Values in Worship’ given at the Carey Ministers’ Conference in January 2001.

Worship is so often an issue of controversy. We dispute furiously on issues of music and hymnody, of form and structures. Yet we are in danger of forgetting what worship is really all about. As James Torrance observes:

If someone asks me what is the use of going to church, what good does it do me, what do I get out of it, how do I answer that question? It is as though someone asks me what is the use of getting married, what good does it do me...There is only one supreme reason for getting married – for love’s sake, for the other’s sake, for mutual love, self-giving, a longing for intimate communion, and sharing of everything. So in Christian worship, we worship God for God’s sake; we come to Christ for Christ’s sake, motivated by love. An awareness of God’s holy love for us, revealed in Christ Jesus, awakens in us a longing for intimate communion...¹

It is not to be our aim in worship services to ape reverence by human sternness and seriousness, nor to ape joy by human frivolity. Rather our heart’s desire is to meet with the living God and to worship in response to his revealed glory.

Now we turn to four biblical principles which govern the form of our worship.

Principle 1: REGULATION

The principle is stated clearly in the Second Commandment, Exodus 20:4, in which God makes it clear that not only should he be our only God, but

also that he is to be worshipped the way he wants. The Westminster Standards summarise the point like this:

The acceptable way of worshipping God is instituted by Himself and is limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.²

As we turn to the word of one greater than Moses, the emphasis on true worship is underscored. John 4:24 is a verse of central importance, which establishes a number of key principles. First, as John Piper observes, we see the radical *Christian* nature of worship:

Jesus is the true Temple. In himself he will fulfil everything the Temple stood for, especially the place where believers meet God. So here again he is diverting attention away from worship as a localised thing with outward forms to a personal, spiritual experience with himself at the centre. *Worship does not need a building, a priesthood, and a sacrificial system. It needs the risen Jesus.*³ (Emphasis added.)

Second, worship is to be ‘in spirit’ – our spirit must be sincere, heartfelt and real, but of course for that to happen *the* Spirit must be active. Putting these elements together our worship is Trinitarian, bringing praise to God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Third, worship is to be ‘in truth’ – according to God’s revelation of Himself, supremely in Christ. Frame comments:

The nature of worship, then, is to offer God worship from the depth of our inner being...always based on his revealed truth...The person...must have a faithful commitment to the Word of God. Worship does not happen by a zap out of heaven that makes us fall down. It is the overflow of our understanding of God as he has revealed himself in the scriptures.⁴

Then fourth, John 4:24 emphasises ‘worshippers’.

The general conviction of the Reformers is that the worship of the congregation must witness to the priesthood of all believers. Worship is

not a spectacle, executed by a special class of people, but it is the corporate task of the Christian community.⁵

Congregational worship requires our forms to be intelligible. Peter Masters observes in the preface of his hymnbook:

We feel that language has changed far more in the 125 years since Spurgeon's hymnbook than during the 150 years which separated Spurgeon from Watts. We are now confronted with numerous quaint and jarring words or phrases which ought to be edited...Editorial changes have aimed at achieving instant comprehension wherever possible, thus enabling worshippers to honour the apostolic principle – *'I will sing with the understanding also.'*⁶ (Emphasis added.)

After all these emphases have been made – Christ-mediated, God-honouring, Trinitarian, spiritual, truthful and corporate, then we are in a position to discuss what so often takes centre stage, namely issues of form, structure and style. Piper reminds us,

In the NT [there] is a stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form and a radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart, ...not that it will be wrong for worship to use outward forms; but, rather, he is making explicit and central that this (place and forms) is not what makes worship, worship.⁷

Now I want to expand how the regulative principle addresses forms of worship. It is clear that regulation or prescription is not over-specified. There is no 'service programme' in the New Testament. It gives us the 'big things' of worship which free us from superstition and which unite all true Christians, but doesn't give us in any one passage all the details. Due to this you will find no detailed agreement about particulars of order, structure and even emphasis in all the writing on worship from godly people down through the centuries of Church history.

Some of the elements of worship are left only broadly described. What does 'decently and in order' mean in the specifics? We aren't told but only given pointers. To fall out over the precise outworking of things is not what the regulative principle is about at all. Indeed there is a very real danger in imposing too much detail upon others. In Bannerman's great work *The Church of Christ*, in sections dealing with the rule of elders, he stresses that

they must not order *less than* God requires but, equally, *to add* to these prescriptions is a serious denial of true Christian freedom and is an imposition upon the conscience where only King Jesus has crown rights. All church leaders are faced with the danger of making either one or both of these errors and must tread with care.

The regulative principle leaves aspects of church life and worship to be guided by wisdom – Christian prudence. (Notice passages like Phil 1:9f; 1 Cor 14:26b; Rom 12:1ff). There are the so-called ‘things indifferent’ or ‘adiaphora’, for example *where* Christians meet, *when* and *how long* they meet for, *what* the particular order of elements is to be and some *detailed content* of conducting a meeting. These are matters which neither bring the worshipper nearer to or further from God yet, very sadly, it tends to be these kinds of things people argue over. ‘Indifferent things’ can get invested with spiritual significance over time. Ask a minister what happens when he tries to change any of these things! People feel they are fighting for the honour of God, when it might just be their habits that are being questioned. Those habits have become so associated with worship that they cannot tell the difference between true prescriptions and areas of Christian freedom.

In saying this, I am not smuggling the normative principle in by the back door (that view states that you are free to do what you like and find helpful so long as it is not forbidden, whereas the regulative view states that a positive endorsement, command or principle needs to be given). It is part of the regulative view to say that God has deliberately left areas for our decision in worship contexts. He has **prescribed freedom** within prescribed forms and it is part of what it means to respond in love to him to make choices as an expression of our commitment.

Principle 2: FREEDOM

As Calvin observes:

The Master...did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages)...Because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary for salvation, and for the

upbuilding of the Church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe.⁸

How do we make decisions within boundaries? It is **not** a case of ‘everyone having their turn’ or ‘let’s try a bit of everything’. Piper stresses this,

God must mean to leave the matter of form and style and content to the judgement of our spiritual wisdom – not to our whim or tradition, but to prayerful, thoughtful, culturally alert, self-critical, Bible-saturated, God-centred, Christ-exalting, reflection, driven by a passion to be filled with all the fullness of God.⁹

Let’s take just one area by way of illustrating how we need to think carefully. Let me ask you, why do we sing? Could we not ‘just’ pray, for a hymn is but a sung prayer. There must be something about music that stirs us and helps us respond in love for the Lord, and God has clearly sanctioned it. But note this:

Of the nature of music performed by the Hebrew musicians we have no knowledge whatsoever.¹⁰

The Bible doesn’t prescribe how loud, how long, how slow, how vibrant and so on. Yet how hot people get over music! People can’t be getting hot over the regulative principle being broken; it must be about choices people are making that others don’t approve of, don’t like, or think an insult. If the words are true, it must come down to what we think of the ‘fit’ of the music to the context. But we aren’t told what a ‘right fit’ is for all people in all places!

Lewis asks us to remember:

Both musical parties, the Highbrows and the Low, assume far too easily the spiritual value of the music they want...**Our music is valued for the intention, not the act; our Father doesn’t ‘need’ our music to please**

him, but is like a human father who values a worthless present of a beloved child.¹¹ (Emphasis added.)

As for the issue of who chooses what, and how, we sing let me just share one word that cautions me in my role as a church leader lest I use power to merely impose my will: *‘Is it not too often the case that the whole life and worship of the congregation revolves around the personality of the minister?’¹²* We are prone to hide behind the rationalisation that ‘only people like us have enough discernment and spirituality to choose’.

Principle 3: TOLERANCE

Given the previous principle this needs to be emphasised, for inevitably choices made by individuals and churches will differ. Paul addresses some of these matters in Romans 14 and 15 (though admittedly in a section dealing with the massive biblical-theological issue of the change of covenant administration), and in 1 Corinthians 16:2 we also see him model how to handle a difference about a decision with a fellow-believer who thought differently. Some comments can be made. First, tolerance of others’ point of view is a grace not a weakness. Most of us admire the fair-mindedness in Spurgeon’s thoughts about choosing appropriate hymns to include in his hymnbook:

Whatever may be thought of our taste we have used it without prejudice; and a good hymn has not been rejected because of the character of its author, or the heresies of the church in whose hymnal it first occurred; so long as the language and the spirit commended the hymn to our heart we included it, and believe that we have enriched the collection thereby.¹³

Second, holding to strong preferences is ‘okay’, as long as preferences are not confused with absolutes or commands (note Paul’s strong feelings in 1 Cor 16:12 about what Apollos should do, but his willingness to concede). Tolerance doesn’t mean blandness or a lack of strong convictions (as it so often does in today’s post-modern culture). It is perfectly good to have strong likes and dislikes, to have good reasons for holding to them, and to try to persuade others to share your views.

Third, it is to be noted that learning to live with others’ differing choices can be a real cause of spiritual growth. Lewis commented about music in his church,

I disliked very much their hymns which I considered to be fifth rate poems set to sixth rate music. But as I went on I saw the merit of it. I came up against people of quite different outlooks and education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realised that those hymns (which were just sixth rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-sided boots in the opposite pew, and then you realise that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.¹⁴

He didn't pretend that the poetry or music was other than what it was (to his very developed sensibility), but he learnt that others could use them as a true vehicle of worship and he could still profit spiritually from it.

Where charity and humility are absent, divisions and recriminations can soon erupt if we want our own way – whoever we are! John Frame asks,

When sophisticated members of the church insist that worship only employ the most sophisticated music of their own culture, what has happened to their love for those who are poorly educated or of a different cultural stream?...when advocates of contemporaneity want to set the traditions of the church completely aside and replace them with something largely meaningless to the older generation are they acting in love? ¹⁵

Too often people elevate their own preferences to the level of principles that are self-evidently 'good'; and meanwhile they categorise others' choices as 'wrong' or even 'wicked'. But a healthy church with a strong understanding of true tolerance can live with very real differences on 'indifferent issues'.

Principle 4: PRAGMATISM

This is very definitely principle 4, not 1, 2 or 3! It means that whatever we decide to do, we do to help one another and to help outsiders. We do our best for the Lord and each other. My broad sympathies are with this:

Let the Church seek – and today more so than ever – to reach contemporary man, to go out to meet him, to go with him two miles rather than one; that is essential. But it is not through the cult [i.e. the worship

meeting] that it must try to do this. The cult is something quite different; it is the sphere where finally, step by step, the Church will bring together in adoration, praise and thanksgiving those whom it has reached by evangelisation...In the cult the primary concern throughout is to enable the Church to find its orientation towards God and to live it out. That is why, not in its worship, but alongside it the Church has an absolute obligation to pursue an evangelistic effort.¹⁶

Generally it is helpful to think of meetings primarily for believers where we worship God and are built up, and meetings that are predominantly for outsiders where our main aim is to evangelise them rather than edify us. Even in the first kind of meeting, this principle of pragmatism is important. Piper states,

Worship has a horizontal effect while being vertical in focus. All the people should think of how others are helped to experience God by their Godward hunger and demeanour...all the circumstances – sound, light, music, welcome, heat, ushers, parking should not distract from a focus on God. ¹⁷

We want to do that which doesn't distract or disrupt, and that which can help. That is, we are bound to be making pragmatic decisions about what is **best** for most people. In our church worship meetings we are of course still saying to outsiders, *Come and See*. Christians worshipping God intelligently and truly can have a powerful impact (see 1 Cor 14:24).

But the church also needs to think about meetings whose emphasis is on outreach, meetings in which there is 'dominant evangelism'. In following the '*Go and Tell*' commands we want to take seriously the Apostle's passion, found for example in 1 Corinthians 9, to remove barriers and to build bridges with his hearers. The only offence we want people to take is that caused by the word of the cross.

It may be that dominant edification and dominant evangelism both take place in meetings on the Lord's Day. But recall that Scripture gives us great freedom with the latter to explore ranges of options to communicate the gospel. The regulative principle isn't violated because we aren't primarily meeting for 'vertical worship' (although any Christian evangelising will be honouring God and worshipping within his heart), but we are trying to use

God-honouring methods to reach the outsider. There is freedom here to use what is helpful to *them*. We will exhibit passion, principle and pragmatism in this endeavour.

Conclusion

Let me close with thought-provoking quotes from Frame,

Simply opposing the modern world at every point is an entirely inadequate approach. I say that for theological reasons. I certainly wish to be counted among those whose thoughts and actions are based on principle, not pragmatism. But I confess to find myself, on the basis of biblical principle itself, very often siding with those who are considered pragmatists rather than those who are regarded as the most principled among us. The fact is that when we seriously turn to Scripture for guidance, that guidance usually turns out to be more complex, more nuanced, than anything we would come up with ourselves... *Certainly scriptural principle is more complex than any mere negation of existing cultural trends...* Sometimes following Scripture makes us appear conservative in the context of society, sometimes it makes us appear liberal or radical. *The important thing is that we follow God's Word no matter what people think.*¹⁸ (Emphases added.)

References

- 1 J Torrance, **Worship, Community and the Triune God**, p71.
- 2 Quoted in J Thackway, **Words of Truth** (Bible League Trust), p24.
- 3 J Piper, **Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning** (Desiring God Ministries), p7.
- 4 J Frame, **Worship in Spirit and Truth** (Presbyterian & Reformed), p125, 126.
- 5 K Runia, 'The Reformed Liturgy in the Dutch Tradition', in **Worship: Adoration and Action**, ed. DA Carson, p105.
- 6 P Masters, **Preface to Psalms & Hymns of Reformed Worship** (The Wakeman Trust), 1994.
- 7 J Piper, **Gravity and Gladness**, p5, 7, 8
- 8 J Calvin, **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, vol 2, ed. JT McNeill (The Westminster Press), p1208.
- 9 J Piper, **Gravity and Gladness**, p37.
- 10 **Illustrated Bible Dictionary** (IVP), part 2, p1035.
- 11 CS Lewis, 'On Church Music', in **Christian Reflections**, ed. W Hooper, (Collins, Fount Paperbacks), p96.
- 12 T Torrance, **Theology in Reconstruction**, p167.
- 13 Quoted in the Preface to **Christian Hymns**.
- 14 CS Lewis, **God in the Dock** (Eerdmans), p61, 62.
- 15 J Frame, **Contemporary Worship Music**, p25, 26.
- 16 JJ von Allmen, **Worship: Its Theology and Practice**, p77-79.
- 17 J Piper, **Gravity and Gladness**, p34.
- 18 J Frame, **Contemporary Worship Music**, p113.

Book Reviews

In Defense of the Decalogue -

A Critique of New Covenant Theology.

Richard C. Barcellos,

Winepress Publishing, Founders Press,
Box 150931, Cape Coral, FL 33915,
USA. 117pp, pbk.

New Covenant Theology or NCT is a theological position that denies that Christians are subject to the Ten Commandments in the age of the New Covenant. The Decalogue is deemed to have passed away with the Old Covenant. NCT has become the subject of intense debate in the USA especially among Calvinistic Baptists. It would appear to be an attempt to chart a passage between the excesses of Dispensationalism on the one hand and Paedobaptist misuse of Covenant Theology on the other.

In this book Richard Barcellos argues that NCT is a deviation from biblical teaching. He engages with the published writings of some of the leading New Covenant theologians, although he recognises that there is as yet no definitive work on the subject and that NCT itself is currently subject to some modification among its proponents. Historically this teaching has been known as doctrinal antinomianism and has been argued in a number of different ways. Barcellos considers that the position is a sufficiently serious challenge to biblical orthodoxy to demand a contemporary refutation. He examines his subject exegetically,

systematically and in the light of historical theology. It is important to see the issue in the light of history as the historic Reformed teaching on the moral law has been charged with leading the Church astray. He argues convincingly that the law written on the hearts of believers under the New Covenant is the Decalogue given to Moses. He examines carefully NCT exegesis of the law in the New Covenant passages in Jeremiah and Hebrews and shows that the law referred to is the Decalogue. He further exegetes the treatment of the law in the Sermon on the Mount and argues that our Lord teaches the permanence of the law. The Decalogue played a major role under the Old Covenant and although its Old Covenant role has passed, it continues to function under the New Covenant as the law written on the heart.

Barcellos handles controversy in a courteous manner. He accepts that 'many things taught by New Covenant Theology do accurately reflect the theology of the Bible. However there are some fundamental errors in the foundation, thus producing fundamental errors in the house.' This work is well written and provides a useful survey of a challenge to historic Reformed Christianity.

At the end of the day these issues are decided by careful exegesis and such

has been provided by Jonathan Bayes in his book *The Weakness of the Law* which was reviewed in detail in RT 177.

Robert Oliver.

Democratic Religion:

Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900. Gregory A Wills, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Have the practices and doctrines of Southern Baptists over the past one hundred years been typical of early Southern Baptists? Gregory A Wills, who teaches Church History at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky addresses this question in his book *Democratic Religion...* in a revealing and readable way.

After going through numerous Georgia church records, Wills points out that early Southern Baptists, as Baptists today, believed in church membership for believers only. The conversion experience was considered essential to church membership. Early Southern Baptists also insisted that the local church be committed to orthodox Christianity as expressed in a confession of faith. These confessions were all expressive of a Calvinistic view. Main ones were *The London Baptist Confession (1689)* and *The Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1742)* which are lengthy statements of Calvinistic theology. Wills makes this clear in his chapter 'Associations, Creeds and Calvinism'. A member was expected to subscribe to the covenant and confession of the church when he joined. The right of private judgement in matters of faith were for people as

members of the state, not as members of the church.

Southern Baptists in the nineteenth century practised church discipline when any member persistently deviated from either the belief system of the church or the purity of conduct expected of a professing believer. Antebellum (pre-Civil War) Baptists would with difficulty have considered a church without discipline to be a church. Southern Baptist churches practised the disciplining of their members throughout the nineteenth century, but by the end of World War I the practice was rapidly disappearing. As churches began concerning themselves primarily with efficiency and progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, church discipline passed away because the first goal of the churches was no longer purity of life and doctrine, but rather system, by which was meant 'general financial giving' and activity, the making of every member 'available and useful'. This is amply discussed by Wills in his chapter 'Democratic Religion Transformed'.

There is much to learn here of Southern Baptist practices in the years preceding the twentieth century – even the relationship of women and blacks to the churches are discussed. In the light of the controversy now going on among Southern Baptists this book is timely and necessary reading.

I know that the price of \$39.95 seems prohibitive. Sell your shoes. Buy it and read it.

Henry W Wood.

A Trauma in the Southern Baptist Convention

Brian Russell

According to the latest statistics, the Southern Baptist Convention has over 37,000 churches with a combined membership of just over 17 million. It is also an established fact that at least two-thirds of these members do not attend church at all, but are not taken off the roll because neither the churches nor the denomination want to lose prestige in the community or nation. The SBC is the largest Protestant denomination in the USA on the basis of these statistics.

An added problem preventing the discipline of these members is the sizeable number of moderate ministers and churches in the Convention, estimated to be about 40 percent. A 'moderate' is defined as a semi-liberal who believes the Bible contains God's Word, but is not inerrant. So they dismiss Genesis 1-11 as myth, but accept the Sermon on the Mount. They believe in the deity and humanity of Jesus, but not in his supernatural conception. They accept the cross as a demonstration of God's love, but not as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice for sin. They reject homosexuality as a sin, but ordain women as pastors of churches, and so on.

I did not know this when, after pastoring churches in the Baptist Union of South Africa and Zimbabwe for 20 years, I was called to a rural Southern Baptist Church by a providential set of circumstances in 1982. Shortly after arriving, I realised that although I had a resident membership of 358, the congregation averaged only 120 in attendance. Many of these members lived in the county and had not been to church for periods ranging from 20 to 60 years. Others lived in neighbouring cities, but were not attending a church there either. Repeated efforts on my part failed to get them to come back to church or join another church, but the members would not hear of taking them off the roll. It did not help that the delinquent members had close relatives in the active membership of the church, and I was accused of being judgmental. No persuasion from the Word of God could convince them that discipline was obligatory for a New Testament church.

My attempt on another front to tackle the problem by discouraging the baptism of unregenerate candidates also met with opposition. I insisted that every candidate for baptism had to go through a six-week course of instruction, and

as a result either during the classes or afterwards, some decided they weren't ready to be baptised. When time passed and they were still not baptised, the families accused me of discouraging their children from being baptised. This was a serious charge because most Southern Baptists believe that once you are baptised by immersion on profession of faith, you are eternally saved. So the baptising of children less than 10 years old is very common, and our Home Mission Board estimated recently that 60% of the adult baptisms in the SBC are re-baptisms of people converted after their childhood baptism.

Another effort to implement practical church discipline also failed. I tried to encourage lapsed members to resign from the membership of the church if they had no interest in returning to worship with us. Their letters of resignation were rejected on the grounds that members can only be constitutionally taken off the role if they die or are transferred to another church.

The last nail in my coffin was my decision towards the end of my 17-year tenure to make it graciously and lovingly clear in the funeral tributes of members who hadn't been to church at all for 20 to 60 years, that non-attendance was spiritually impoverishing and contrary to God's Word and the example of our Lord Himself. This, however, was bitterly resented by the families concerned on the two occasions I did it.

Without giving notice of an important motion affecting the church (as clearly required by the church's constitution), the business meeting of January 5, 2000 was ambushed by a group of 32 people who had never been to any church business meeting before and 20 of whom had not been to a worship service for many years. A motion was made to terminate my ministry and carried by 57 votes to 31. It was a tremendous shock, but I was comforted by the fact that God had closed the door to my ministry in that church, and not I.

As we did not have any place to preach the next Sunday, my wife and I decided to spend a few days at my daughter's home 80 miles away, and worshipped in a Reformed Presbyterian Church in the morning. That afternoon I received a phone call from one of my former members asking me to conduct a service in his house that evening for a few people. About 60 men, women and children were present, and out of that service a new church has been born without any prompting from me. It is called Redeeming Grace Baptist Church and has 45 baptised members who have signed a covenant adhering to *The London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)* and a constitution strong on church discipline. *God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform!*



Sam and Sarah Groves of Durban North Baptist Church. Sam is full-time assistant in the ministry to Pastor Dennis Hustedt. Dennis has announced his resignation as senior pastor with effect from the end of the year but plans to stay in the area to assist the church and other local churches. He will take up the position with SIM of Coordinator for Aids Ministry in Southern Africa. The Aids epidemic is described as the most serious epidemic in history, the consequences of which are catastrophic.

South Africa

The Spurgeon's Fraternal in South Africa meets for fellowship and prayer three times annually rotating from Capetown to Johannesburg to Kwazulu. Distances restrict the number who would like to participate. The fraternal on average is attended by about twenty pastors. Sometimes wives are able to come.

This year the fraternal met at Skogheim from 5th to 7th July just prior to the annual Evangelical and Reformed Family Conference held every year at

Skogheim, Marburg, in Natal (Kwazulu). A large proportion of the time is devoted to intercession and one day of the three is set apart for prayer and fasting, a spiritual exercise greatly valued.

A theological subject is chosen and opened up in two or three expositions. This time the subject of New Covenant theology (see review by Robert Oliver) was presented by Peter Sammons and by Roland Eskinasi. There was at least one New Covenant man among the pastors present. The theme was debated in a spirit of love. Judging by the



Left to right: Dana, baby Lerato, Kirstin and Matome

discussion it does not seem that there is going to be a landslide in the New Covenant direction. At the last session Jonathan Holdt, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, opened up chapter eight of *The 1689 Confession*, 'Christ the Mediator'. This was discussed and reflected upon especially the clause in paragraph two. . . *Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the divine and the human, were inseparably joined together in one Person, without the conversion of the one nature into the other; in other words, without confusion* (*A Faith to Confess*, p 28). This truth lying at the very centre of redemptive history reminded us not only of the wonder of the incarnation but acted as reminder that we are called to teach sound doctrine in a manner which is food and drink for hungry souls.

Skogheim as a venue has been built up over the years and made increasingly attractive as a family conference centre. About 350 attended the meetings including day visitors. Every year the



Mark and Christine Harding, Kagiso and Dana from Michigan, USA

ad hoc committee plans ahead. Two speakers are invited from abroad. This year they were Gerard Hemmings, pastor of Amyand Park Chapel, Twickenham, in the wider London area, and Stephen Rees of Grace Baptist Church, Stockport, near Manchester. Stephen was married just before he and his wife Ann left for South Africa. Both men preached the Word with application and edification. At one point they responded to the request to give brief testimonies. Gerard Hemmings was converted while in the Roman Catholic Church and gradually came to see that it was impossible to be consistent while remaining in that system. Stephen Rees said he could never remember when he did not believe. This has sometimes led to an assurance problem. Helpfully he explained how he deals with that. . . 'Do I believe now?' At the opening session Nico van der Walt expounded 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. He appealed for all the expositions to be Christ-centred. This was fulfilled admirably and appreciated most of all by those who come for an annual feast from areas of spiritual drought or from lonely missionary outposts.

Ministering to people struggling with homosexual feelings/behaviour

Stefan Cantore

Stefan is a member of Chertsey Street Baptist Church, Guildford. He is a senior executive in the NHS and a Trustee of the True Freedom Trust. For over six years Stefan led a support group for men associated with TFT and was involved in aspects of pastoral care for the individuals in the group. He has been involved in pastoral care within Chertsey Street Church for men who struggle with issues relating to their sexuality. Stefan recently gave this paper to a meeting at Tyndale House in Cambridge.

Biblical Perspective

The testimony of Scripture is plain: although people may be aware of homosexual or lesbian feelings, homosexual genital conduct falls short of God's plan for His creation. In other words same sex sexual activity is sinful.

Consideration of homosexuality must be based on the creation order. Genesis 1 and 2 are foundational texts: the importance of the divine image in both male and female, the significance of becoming one flesh in the context of a male and female monogamous marriage, the creation of the family to enable the bearing of children – all of these basic building blocks of human life and society are supported, regardless of time or prevailing culture, and this foundational teaching is widely quoted in both Testaments. We will just mention two texts:

Leviticus 18:22 reads: 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.'

The debate about whether Old Testament texts have any bearing on Christians today have been raging since the time of the early Church. Some would argue that the eating of prawns is similarly condemned. But where a command is grounded in a creation principle and where it is taken up unequivocally in the New Testament we can be confident that this is a lasting pattern for Christians.

(Paul addresses the prawn eating issue in Romans 14:17, when he says: 'The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking.')

Romans 1:24 reads: 'Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.'

The passage then goes on to talk about the envy, murder, strife, deceit and gossip that followed as God gave them over to a depraved mind. It is clear from this passage that all of us have sinned. We have rejected God's self-disclosure in the creation order and turned to idols. We need the grace and forgiveness that our loving heavenly Father has to offer us in Christ.

There are six other verses or passages in Scripture which relate to homosexual behaviour: Genesis 19:1-8 (Sodom and Gomorrah); Judges 19: 22 (attempted male rape in Gibeah); Leviticus 20:3 (adds the death penalty); 1 Corinthians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 1:10 and Jude v7 (the latter two make reference to perversion and can reasonably be interpreted as referring to homosexual behaviour). No other verses refer to the subject. There is no place in the Bible that commends homosexual behaviour.

It should be noted that adultery gets many more mentions in Scripture than homosexual behaviour. The Bible is clear that sexual behaviour is to be experienced within the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual interaction between people outside that relationship is sinful and damages not only the people involved but, if they are Christians, damages their relationship with God. Many parallels are drawn in Scripture between physical adultery and spiritual adultery.

It is worth noting that neither homosexuality or heterosexuality are biblical concepts and owe more to the work of secular psychotherapists than Scripture. Similarly there are no such creatures as homosexuals or heterosexuals – just men and women made in the image of God who as a result of the havoc sin has caused experience fallenness in a wide variety of ways – which for some

involves sexual desires and behaviours that focus around those of the same gender.

An obvious aspect of ministering to Christians who struggle with homosexual feelings is to encourage them to understand the Word of God as truth as it relates to their own circumstances. It is clear that sexual behaviour is not for outside marriage between a man and a woman but neither does it rank as a sin above all others in a category of its own. Some preaching can leave those who struggle in this area feeling worse than any other sinners, and even more alienated from God and from other Christians than they feel already. An overemphasis on this subject can leave the majority of the congregation with a 'holier than thou' feeling.

A more sensitive pastoral approach is to admit that many Christians may struggle with a variety of temptations, but there is help in God's Word for all of them, and God's grace can extend to all. Every individual is valuable to God.

A common feature of men and women in these circumstances is a sense of great separation from God and other believers, a sense of not being normal and not acceptable to God. Self-loathing can grip the person, a sense of being beyond help and unable to do anything about their circumstances. The gospel is directly relevant to the individual in these circumstances. At the same time there is a biblical balance to be struck. We do not offer a crass 'come to Jesus and all your struggles will be over' message. Relief from the struggle may not come immediately. Indeed, it may continue to be a struggle for the person's entire life; however God will honour the faithful believer, and as the hymn writer said he will 'sanctify to thee thy deepest distress'.

Causes of homosexual feelings

The Bible does not provide us with a detailed answer to the question of what causes homosexual feelings. The world's research has tended to focus on finding a genetic cause, but none has been found to date. And that is rather like searching for a gene for a range of sinful behaviours - do we expect a search for the adultery gene to follow? I believe homosexual feelings result from a complex psychological process that originates usually in the early stages of life. An important writer and research psychologist Dr Elizabeth Moberley concluded that homosexuality is the result of a legitimate same sex need from

childhood which has to some extent remained unmet. Having this same sex need met is a vital factor in the development of self-worth, value and identity. This childhood need is to receive positive messages about oneself from a significant same sex role model very early in life: for the boy the father and for the girl the mother. Since Moberley wrote in the early 80s other psychologists have identified the dynamic within the family as well as the choices made by the child themselves as key determinants of whether or not someone grows up with homosexual feelings. What seems to happen then at puberty is that essentially unmet emotional needs become sexualised and so sexual behaviour is seen by the individual as a way of getting his or her needs met. The work of psychotherapists specialising in this field has recently highlighted the dynamics within a family and not just the relationship of the child to the parent of the same sex. The dynamics are complex and just because one person in a family has same sex attractions does not necessarily mean a brother or sister brought up in the same environment will struggle with the same issue.

So when someone is struggling with homosexual feelings, what are possible aspects of their personalities and perspectives on life that we should look out for? We remember that human, and therefore sexual brokenness involves a distorted self-image.

- It affects responses to life and relationships
- It affects responses to God
- It affects responses to growth and healing

The results of the brokenness include

- Obsessive and perfectionist tendencies
- Fear of failure (criticism painful)
- Demand that there must be answers (looking for 'formulae' that work)
- Never satisfied (the grass is always greener in other people's lives)
- Addictive personality
- Anger
- Co-dependency (self-value based on what can be done for others)
- Controlling personality (must have control of life, events and people)

Some believe that 'healing' or even exorcism may be the answer. Actually a sudden 'quick fix' solution can exacerbate the problem, and for the struggler Christianity becomes just another success/failure exercise. Rather, as with all severe temptations and deep problems, long-term, patient pastoral care based on biblical truth is needed.

The Pastoral Care Tool Kit

1 Listening

Give plenty of time to listening to what the person is saying: don't go straight into problem-solving mode. There may be nothing you feel you can say, but to give quality time to listen with care is an invaluable start. It may be that folk will share in stages, and patience will be needed. Questions to gently clarify may be helpful – for example, is the person experiencing same sex attraction, or are there behaviours as well? Are such behaviours compulsive? Is the person in a relationship? Such facts help form a picture of what sort of help may be appropriate.

2 Accountability

Accountability arrangements have proved beneficial, especially for those who have been caught up in addictive behaviours. It is also useful for people to be involved who could act as role models, particularly to model masculinity to men and femininity to women.

3 Information

There are now a number of helpful books and seminar tapes that are available from TFT that can help people struggling with homosexual feelings to understand what is going on in their lives and to help them develop strategies to struggle effectively.

4 Encouraging strong involvement in church life

Some of the root causes of homosexual feelings may be significantly addressed by strong involvement in church life. Poor self-esteem is helped through being able to use skills and abilities for others and with others. Poor sense of belonging is helped by brotherly and sisterly fellowship. A sense of masculinity is helped by having positive role models who are happy to be honest about their own temptations. The Word of God preached effectively and seasoned with grace assures the believer that God is for them and not against them.

5 Support from others who struggle

TFT can provide a range of support mechanisms to help the individual believer. This work is intended to be complementary to the fellowship of the local church; however some find it too difficult to contemplate sharing their struggles in the church context and so come directly to TFT for help.

There are a number of ways this support is provided:

- Meeting with a Pastoral Support Worker, someone trained by TFT to meet with individuals for 4 one-hour sessions. The experience of being listened to can prompt insights that help the individual move on in their understanding of the causes of their struggle and so help them formulate their own action plan.
- Befriender. A person may meet with someone accredited by TFT on a friendly peer support basis. Younger clients often use this service through email. We are beginning to use moderated internet support groups. For example we currently have a very active group for those involved in full time Christian ministry.
- Support groups. Led by those who have received training from TFT, such groups meet in various parts of the UK; the average membership is about 10, and the focus is on Bible study and mutual support.

6 Counselling

Some pastoral counselling still encourages people struggling with homosexuality to get married, but marriage does not turn someone with a homosexual orientation into someone with a heterosexual one. I would not rule out marriage, because it offers much to people struggling with their sexuality, but it must be entered into honestly with both partners aware of the struggles they both will face as they live with this issue in the context of marriage. Homosexuality is not about ambivalence to the opposite sex, although some may be present; rather it is about a deficit in relating to people of the same sex. Marriage can accentuate the problems. Elizabeth Moberley writes:

‘Same sex developmental needs can only be fulfilled by definition in a relationship with a member of the same sex. Heterosexuality may be the ultimate goal but the attainment of genuine heterosexuality depends on the fulfilment of the same sex developmental process. There are no short cuts to heterosexuality!’

So counselling is likely to focus on same sex relational needs, which may include authority problems or difficulties with same sex colleagues at work or at church. Counselling will inevitably look at relationships with the parent of the same sex as the counsellee. The counsellor should encourage positive same sex relationships between the struggler and people who do not struggle with the same set of issues. As fulfilling relationships develop, so the same sex deficits can be met and change begin to take place.

There may be a need to spend time and effort counselling parents. They may feel guilt-ridden. Feelings of anger, shame, grief and profound disappointment are not uncommon. The goal of counselling in these situations should be to encourage a re-building of relationships.

7 Friendship

The close and intimate friendship of someone of the same gender as the struggler but who does not themselves struggle with homosexuality has the potential to act powerfully as a healing agent in the life of the struggler.

8 Educating the congregation

Is the church truly a community of acceptance and healing, a community of forgiven and forgiving people? The experience of many struggling with this issue is that the church is partial. If you share many other problems you will be supported, but if you share this, hostility and ostracism may result. This is of course the reverse of what the struggler needs. Moberley argues that the issue of homosexuality is a testing ground not merely for ethical discussion but for the very ability to live out the gospel! The issue of pastoral care to individual Christians struggling with homosexual feelings can be broadened out to consider how the individual church community handles pastoral care generally and demonstrates the love of God to those who are chosen by him and seek to grow in their faith in fellowship with other believers, regardless of the background from which Christ has called them.

Goals and likely outcomes

The aim in ministering to people struggling with homosexuality should first and foremost be to encourage them in their faith and in their determination to

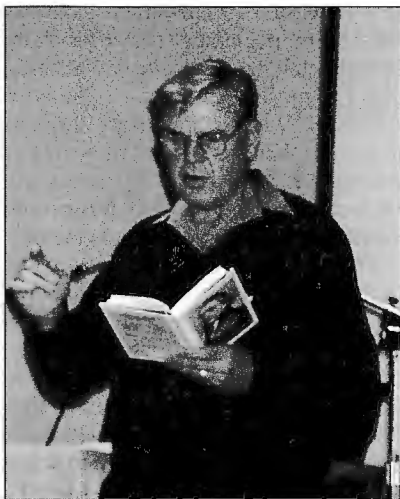
Reformation in Church Attendance

Martin Holdt

Never was that old saying more true and more relevant than today: 'The married couple that prays together stays together.' To that saying could be added another, 'The married couple that goes to church together grows stronger together.' In my ministry of 40 years I have noted that about 90 percent of those who ask for pastoral counselling are irregular in church attendance. To this observation I will add a remarkable discovery. In one American state the divorce rate has reached 50 percent. Further investigation produced the amazing fact that of that 50 percent divorced only one in 54 were regular churchgoers and only one in 500 belonged to the category of those who read the Bible and pray together daily.

How important is regular church attendance? Is it not a fact that regular attendance at both Lord's Day services is the strength of the local church and absenteeism her weakness? Since so many who come for pastoral counselling are irregular in attendance of church services, that seems to say something! It is important to know why attendance on the means of grace, that is the regular preaching of the Word of God, is vital.

The fact of the matter is that the devil doesn't want people to hear the Word of God. His tactic is to maximise distractions by creating attractive competitive interests. In most wealthy nations the principal distraction is sport, either to



This photo was taken of Martin Holdt as he led the morning prayer meetings at the annual Evangelical and Reformed Conference at Skogheim this year.

be involved or to be taken up watching sporting events on TV. The words of the prophet Isaiah are so relevant today. 'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken' (Isa 58:13-14).

Hebrews 10:25 addresses the heart of the matter. 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' When considering this verse we need to know the purpose for the writing of the letter to the Hebrews. It was written to encourage believers who were beginning to suffer from spiritual fatigue and who were being urged to persevere and not to throw in the towel. Various arguments are used to restore them to a spirit of zeal. For example, they are told of the superiority of Jesus over angels, over Moses and Aaron and of the superiority of the new covenant over the old. They are warned of the dangers of falling away, and they are reminded that there is absolutely no substitute for the Christian faith. Then comes this verse, 10:25. The letter to the Hebrews was written not long after Pentecost when it was said of early believers: 'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts' (Acts 2:46). Now however things had changed, and there was a need to urge believers not to slacken in their zeal concerning attendance on the means of grace.

Absence from church services must be resisted. 'Let us not,' are the opening words of exhortation. Christian living includes negative resisting. In James 4:7 we are told: 'Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' The devil will stand in the way of anyone who wishes to put himself under the sound of truth. The sinful nature will suggest an alternative to attending the ministry of the Word of God, and Colossians 3:5 is pertinent to this point: 'Put to death, therefore,

whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.' Therefore, when a person stays away from the ministry of the Word of God, the question ought to be asked: 'Is what is being done to be preferred to the experience of hearing the Bible expounded?' Next it is important to note that absenting oneself from a place of worship can become a bad 'habit'. The danger too of others learning from a poor example is ever there, and children particularly are influenced by bad habits. From the youngest age children discern the difference between spiritual zeal and spiritual sloth. Since sanctification amounts to replacing bad habits with good habits, the bad habit of becoming slack in church attendance is to be resisted firmly. A habit is a settled tendency or practice. We are to beware of bad habits, and we are to cultivate good ones, 'You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:22-24).

Why is irregularity in attendance of church services a bad habit?

Firstly, it is despising the primary means of grace given by God. When Jesus told Peter 'Feed my sheep', he was commissioning him to a work to which all pastors are called, namely to labour in the Word and in doctrine so that the people of God may be fed with the truth of the Word. God gives to his servants a word for the people. This is God's way of providing spiritual food for his people. When he spoke to the

seven churches in the book of Revelation, in each case it was through the appointed messenger. There would have been no compensation for absentees if they were not there to hear the message given to the messenger. If a person is not there when God spreads the table, it amounts to saying, 'No, thank you, God.' That is terrible! The only time I excused my children from the table when they were at home was when they were ill. If they were absent with a feeble excuse, it would have been considered an insult to their mother as she lovingly prepared meals for them. The same holds true for those who carelessly absent themselves from the place of worship when the Word of God is being preached.

What water is to a plant, the preached Word is to a believer. For lack of it some wilt and all but die spiritually. Admittedly, there will be times when the pulpit will disappoint, but is it always the preacher's fault? Have the hearers prepared themselves? Has there been adequate praying for the ministry of the Word? This is essential if we understand passages of Scripture like Ephesians 6:19-20: 'Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.'

It is significant that in Psalm 73:16-17 Asaph's spiritual problem was solved when he went to the sanctuary. That is where we are brought to see life in the perspective of God's purposes. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said that more problems are solved in the pew under the sound of good preaching than

anywhere else. The godly Anna was in the temple when the child Jesus made his first appearance, and she was well into her eighties! How many people there must be who miss God's special visits of grace through the preaching of the Word simply because they are not there.

Secondly, it is a bad habit because it is a poor use of one of the greatest gifts God has given to mankind, namely, the gift of time. A calculation of the amount of time it takes to attend three meetings a week will reveal that that would amount to less than 5% of the time God has given to us each week! This includes the time spent in travelling! Furthermore, the time spent amongst the people of God before the Word of God is more hallowed than time spent anywhere else. This small investment of time spent in God's house is beneficial beyond all other expenditure of time since here we are dealing with the issues of eternity.

Thirdly, irregular attendance at church services is bad because it is slighting our Lord whose special presence is promised when we meet for worship. Matthew 18:20: 'For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.' When Thomas was absent when Jesus met with his disciples in his post-resurrection appearance, our Lord did not make up to him by a special personal visit afterwards. Thomas had to be with the assembled group in order to meet the risen Christ. George Swinnock, the Puritan, made the point that the actual meaning of Psalm 87:2, 'The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,' is that our Lord's coming amongst his assembled people is preferred by him to family worship. Our private devotions are

essential to the maintaining of our Christian faith and walk, but even more important is our gathering together with God's people.

Fourthly, slackness in attendance of church meetings is a bad habit because it is declaring an indifference to fellow believers. In the previous verse to Hebrews 10:25 believers are told to 'consider one another in love'. How can a believer honestly declare his compliance with Jesus' command to love one another if he stays away from the gathering of the saints when they meet? Presence and participation of a believer with the family of God's people is meant to be a positive encouragement.

Fifthly, it is a bad habit because it is a sign of spiritual ill-health. How do we know when the psalmist was at his best? We know this precisely because he could declare, 'My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God' (Psalm 84:2) and 'I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord"' (Psalm 122:1). Surely these statements are the thoughts of a man whose delight in God was such that he was quite ecstatic about the gathering of God's people to worship him and to be instructed in his Word. When believers cannot identify with these feelings, it is indicative of a spiritual sickness for which healing is necessary.

Sixthly, it is a bad habit because it is derogatory to God's house. If you stay at home for a frivolous reason, what message does that send to your neighbour? Surely the unconverted have reason to ask, 'Does such a cause get such half-hearted support? Are

these believers serious about their claim to deny self, take up the cross and follow Christ? Do they really love God?' I have often heard people excuse their absence from a Sunday service because of visitors who arrived unexpectedly. What a poor testimony it is to give in to the sudden and unexpected arrival of visitors! Surely if the visitors do not respond to an invitation to attend the service they can be urged to make themselves at home until their hosts return.

A common excuse for irregular attendance is, 'I don't get anything out of the preaching!' It is true that preachers can go through dry times, but we need to face this problem positively. As I asked above, have the hearers prepared themselves? Has there been adequate praying for the ministry of the Word? Even though the exposition may be below par, 'the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword... it judges thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Heb 4:12).

I conclude with this exhortation. Examine yourself with regard to church attendance. Remember that the Lord designs to build up his people through this means of grace. Remember too that besides the benefit of listening to preaching, worship should include:

Bringing sacrifices of praise and gratitude to God's house and going with the positive objective of worship.

Going to meet with and encourage others. Besides the regular 'family of God' whose fellowship we enjoy, we should be on the lookout to encourage visitors and make them feel welcome.

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)

– and the Free Offer of the Gospel

Michael A G Haykin

Part 2

Part 1 of this article in the last issue described how Andrew Fuller grew up in Soham in the spiritual ethos of Hyper-Calvinism. His conversion was also described and how eventually he became the pastor of the Baptist Church at Soham. Fuller was compelled to wrestle with the problems posed by and analyse the presuppositions of Hyper-Calvinism. To clarify his own mind as he wrestled with these pressures and challenges he wrote the book The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation. This eventually became his best known work.

In the first part of this article it was shown that there were two main practical conclusions to Fuller's arguments:

First, sinners have every encouragement to trust in the Lord Jesus for the salvation of their souls. They do not need to spend time dallying to see if they are among God's elect or if God is at work in their hearts by his Spirit. Moreover, they can no longer sit at ease under the sound of the gospel and excuse their unbelief by asserting that faith is the gift of God.

Second, ministers of the Word must earnestly exhort their hearers to commit themselves to Christ and that without delay. In so doing they will be faithful imitators of Christ and his apostles, who 'warned, admonished, and entreated' sinners to repent, to believe, and to be reconciled to God. Many Hyper-Calvinist ministers of Fuller's day, though, were too much like John Eve and had next to nothing to say to the unconverted in their congregations, because they believed that these men and women were 'poor, impotent...creatures'. Faith was beyond such men and women, and could not be pressed upon them as an immediate, present duty. Fuller was convinced that this way of conducting a pulpit ministry was unbiblical and simply helped the unconverted to remain in their sin. Fuller put his position well in an article of the statement of faith he made at his induction into the Kettering pastorate in 1783: 'I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; ...and that it is their [i.e. the hearers'] duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him for salvation... I

therefore believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them to be not only *consistent*, but directly *adapted*, as means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.'

Controversy

As we have noted, Fuller originally wrote *The Gospel Worthiness of all Acceptation* to help clarify his own thinking. It was not intended initially for public consumption. Nevertheless, his friends, the elder Hall, Sutcliff and Ryland encouraged Fuller to consider seriously its publication. But Fuller delayed publishing his manuscript. He honestly feared that it might injure the cause of Christ. He was also afraid of the controversy that it would engender. This latter fear was only alleviated by the conviction that his argument for the obligation of men and women to believe in Christ was indeed of vital importance. Finally, in October of 1784 Fuller took the plunge and made the decision to publish. The following month he walked the thirteen or so miles from Kettering to Northampton to deliver it into the hands of Thomas Dicey, a wealthy Northampton printer whose father and grandfather had made the family money through the sale of ephemeral popular

literature. When Fuller's book appeared the following year, it was indeed an epoch-making work. It provided a theology for many others in the Baptist denomination whose thinking was moving in the same direction and developing along the same lines.

Of the various early, written attacks against Fuller's position there were two major ones, both of them by London Hyper-Calvinists. The first, by William Button (1754-1821), pastor of Dean Street Baptist Church, appeared in 1785. The second, by John Martin (1741-1820), who pastored Grafton Street Baptist Church, was published in three parts between the years 1788 and 1791. It is noteworthy that despite their attacks on Fuller, both Button and Martin subsequently had friendly relations with him. Button, for instance, was a firm supporter of the Baptist Missionary Society from its early years until his death. And Martin, in 1797, could speak of his sincere respect for Fuller.

Far less significant than the theological responses of Button and Martin, but probably more irksome, was the petty sniping and ostracism to which Fuller was subjected. Rushden Baptist Church was about ten miles south of Kettering. From 1785 to 1794, though, relations between Fuller's church and that in Rushden were quite acrimonious. In the summer of 1785, a Mrs Wright, who

was a member of the Rushden church but was now living in Weekley, just north of Kettering, requested a letter of dismissal from Rushden to Kettering. The pastor of Rushden, William Knowles, refused to give her one, because, he said, 'the church at Kettering had gone off from their former principles'. After a while Mrs Wright again sought a letter of dismissal from Rushden, but to no avail. On behalf of the Kettering congregation, Fuller then wrote to the Rushden work and asserted that they still held to those truths 'commonly called Calvinistical', which were 'the source of all our salvation and all our hope'.

A response from Rushden was a long time coming. Eventually on December 22, 1785 the Rushden Baptists wrote back and accused the Kettering congregation of lording it over their church. 'Have we not,' they wrote, 'an undoubted right to dismiss or not to dismiss a member at [our] discretion without being compelled thereto?' Nevertheless, they said, if the Kettering church wanted to receive Mrs Wright as a member, they were free to do so, but it would have to be without a letter of dismissal. Indeed, at this point, the Kettering Baptists were prepared to accept her without such a letter. The Kettering church also acknowledged that there was indeed one difference between them and the Rushden believers. It was obviously this one difference which had

led to the strained relations between the two churches. 'We consider,' Fuller wrote in the minute book of the Kettering congregation, 'the doctrines of grace as entirely consistent with a free address to every sinner, and with an universal obligation on all men where the gospel is preached to repent of their sins and turn to God through Jesus Christ.'

However, Mrs Wright, being of a timid disposition, was unprepared to leave the Rushden fellowship with ill-feeling. She thus stayed in the Rushden church until Knowles died in 1794, and finally, on February 16, 1796, she was given an honourable dismissal to Kettering.

'The armies of the Lamb'

Along with this re-thinking of the responsibility of both preachers and hearers of the gospel came a fresh perspective on the nature of the Church. Now, Fuller wholly affirmed traditional Calvinistic Baptist thinking about the Church. In that tradition the Church is a body of people who have personally repented and exercised faith in Christ, and borne witness to this inner transformation by baptism. But Fuller is also concerned to emphasise something else about the Church.

When Fuller spoke of the local church his emphasis often fell on the Church's responsibility to evangelise

and indeed participate in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. As he wrote in 1806:

‘The primitive churches were not mere assemblies of men who agreed to meet together once or twice a week, and to subscribe for the support of an accomplished man who should on those occasions deliver lectures on religion. They were men gathered out of the world by the preaching of the cross, and formed into a society for the promotion of Christ’s kingdom in their own souls and in the world around them. It was not the concern of the ministers or elders only; the body of the people were interested in all that was done, and, according to their several abilities and stations, took part in it. Neither were they assemblies of heady, high-minded, contentious people, meeting together to argue on points of doctrine or discipline, and converting the worship of God into scenes of strife. They spoke the truth; but it was in love: they observed discipline; but, like an army of chosen men, it was that they might attack the kingdom of Satan to greater advantage. Happy were it for our churches if we could come to a closer imitation of this model!’

Fuller certainly had no wish to abandon either the stress on doctrinal preaching for the edification of God’s people or that on proper discipline, but he had rightly noted that the pursuit of these concerns to the

exclusion of evangelism had produced in all too many eighteenth-century Baptist churches contention, bitter strife and endless disputes. These inward-looking concerns had to be balanced with an outward focus on the extension of Christ’s kingdom.

Moreover, evangelism was not simply to be regarded as the work of only ‘the ministers or elders’. The entire body of God’s people was to be involved. This conception of the Church is well summed up in another text, which, like the one cited above, compares the church of Christ to an army. ‘The true churches of Jesus Christ,’ he wrote five years before his death, ‘travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer’s kingdom.’

Retaining the basic structure of seventeenth-century Baptist thinking about the Church, Fuller has added one critical ingredient drawn from the experience of the evangelical revival: the vital need for local Baptist churches to be centres of vigorous evangelism. It is vital to note that behind Carey stands Fuller. Harry R Boer puts it this way: ‘Fuller’s insistence on the duty of all men everywhere to believe the gospel... played a determinative role in the crystallisation of Carey’s missionary vision.’

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