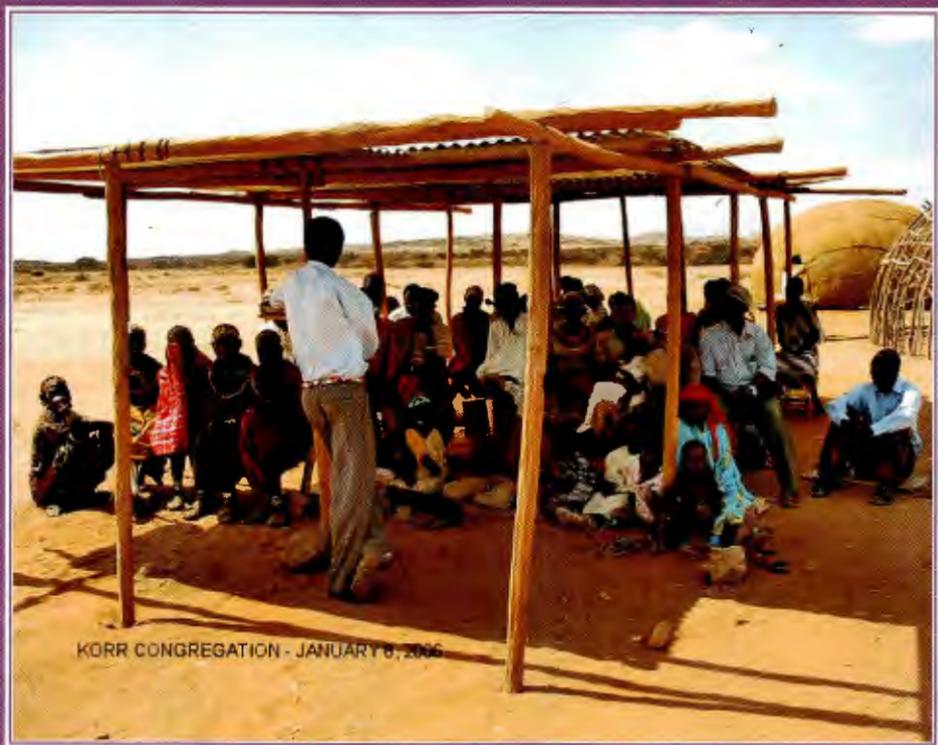


# REFORMATION TODAY



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THE LIFE OF  
**ROWLAND  
HILL**

*'The second Whitefield'*



**TIM SHENTON**

*The Second Whitefield (see page 11) is a short biography of Rowland Hill. The full biography by Tim Shenton, 420 pages, is to be published by Evangelical Press with the title *The Life of Rowland Hill*.*

*Front cover – Sunday service of Trinity Baptist Church, in Korr, Kenya. See News for story of reaching the Rendille people.*

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## Editorial

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### *David Bosch and Transforming Mission*

It is remarkable that David Bosch's *Transforming Mission - Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, published by Orbis, 584 pages, was in its eighteenth paperback edition in 2003. This volume is deemed the most comprehensive and thorough study of Christian mission to be written during the 20th century. It is translated into several other languages including Indonesian. It is likely to be the foremost set book on mission for years to come.

South African David Bosch (1929-1992) was a prolific author and eloquent speaker. He was fluent in Xhosa, Afrikaans, Dutch, German and English. Bosch began as a missionary in the Transkei from 1957 to 1971. He then began to serve as professor of missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He served as dean of the faculty of theology from 1974 to 1977 and again from 1981 to 1987. He was general secretary of the Southern African Missiological Society from its founding in 1968 and editor of its journal *Missionalia* from its inception in 1973. He served as chairman of the South African Christian Leadership Assembly in 1979 and as chairman of the National Initiative for Reconciliation from 1989. This was part of his tireless ministry to bring about reconciliation among racial, denominational and theological groups in South Africa and across the world.

Living in the oppressive apartheid regime of the national government (1948 - 1994) David Bosch thought and wrote in a crucible. He was out of step with his Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) and government. He resisted attractive posts offered to him from abroad as he wished to be a faithful witness in the land of his birth. Apartheid laws prohibited black and white students from sharing a university dormitory or cafeteria. But UNISA was multiracial because it had no resident students. UNISA developed the highest academic standards of any correspondence institution in the world from bachelor's through to doctoral level. Tragically in the last ten to fifteen years liberal theology has made a clean sweep of the theological department and has also massively decimated the major Dutch Reformed Church (NG).

Extremist racist nationalists hated Bosch's multiracial views. An attempt was made to assassinate Bosch's right-hand man, Willem Saayman, in his bed, but the rifle bullet hit the headboard on his wife's side and she survived. The truth of this incident came out in the Truth and Reconciliation trials. I have personal affinity with this since during six years of study at Pretoria University I lived with my parents in Waterkloof Ridge only 200 metres from the home of the renowned Professor Johan Heyns who was assassinated in his home by a gunman who has never been brought to justice.

Bosch's *Transforming Mission* is essential reading for any serious student of the subject. It is massively informative and deeply challenging. The one great flaw is its ecumenism. Bosch travels through Church history in ecumenical style. He provides a running commentary on Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Barthianism, and Liberal Protestantism but does not really get to grips with the necessity of justification by faith alone and the reality of Galatians chapter one which shows how we are required to view those who destroy the gospel. The Dutch Reformed Church (NG) was much involved with the World Council of churches. Bosch is in line with that. His own personal basic presuppositions are biblical and Calvinistic. The downfall of the Dutch Reformed Church has been its over-estimation for liberal scholarship, eclecticism (the desire to defer to a wide knowledge), and a general unwillingness to discipline those who oppose rather than uphold the saving gospel of Christ.

Just two years before the revolution led by Nelson Mandela and F W De Klerk, the then Prime Minister, David Bosch tragically bled to death in a motor accident. It was a terrible thing that he died needlessly. He died a victim of the apartheid system he worked so hard against. When the ambulance emergency service failed to arrive in time to cut him free from the crash, the delay was queried. The answer given was, 'You did not say he was a white man!' When an effort was made to document this fault it was found that the tape recordings had disappeared. Sadly that was typical of a very sad epoch in South African history.

David Bosch was gifted with a powerful intellect and was able to bring various disciplines together. He grasped clearly the demise of modernism (the Enlightenment) and the advent of postmodernism. The outline which I suggest for the sixth paradigm in world mission is the sum of my own evangelical, non-ecumenical observations. It is based on what I have observed closely in at least 30 countries.

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## Paradigm Shifts in Mission

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In his *magnum opus Transforming Mission* (see editorial), South African David Bosch outlines *Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*.

In discussing the manner in which the Christian Church has interpreted and carried out its mission through the ages, Bosch follows Hans Küng who maintains that the entire history of Christianity can be subdivided into six major paradigms. Küng in turn derives his concept of paradigm from physicist Thomas Kuhn, who argues that science does not grow in small steps but in quick bursts. These occur when a small group comes to realise that something is fundamentally wrong with the paradigm that has been accepted for a long time. If you look up the Large Oxford Dictionary you will find different uses for the word paradigm. The nearest equivalent in this context of mission is 'model'. Each model or paradigm has its distinctive characteristics. Except for the Protestant Reformation which took place dramatically and amazingly quickly, (1517 to 1521), the changes from one paradigm to the next have been gradual.

The paradigm shifts in the theology of mission can be viewed as follows:

1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity
2. The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period (100-500)
3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm (500-1517)
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm (1517-1700)
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm (1700-1970)
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm (1970 -

This structure invites 1. A commentary on paradigm shifts 2. A focus on world missionary enterprise today 3. The primacy of church planting 4. A summary of the features of the emerging ecumenical paradigm.

### 1. A commentary on paradigm shifts

Thousands of pages have been written on the history of mission. Here I make a few observations. The first missionary journey reported in Acts 13 and 14 provides us with basic missionary principles to which we will return. Two further extensive journeys are described by Luke. The apostle Paul was flexible in his methods. For instance he hired a lecture hall in Ephesus as a centre for outreach (Acts 19:9). Co-workers multiplied. Paul was able to delegate tasks and commend his fellow missionaries to go out on specific missions. For instance in Acts 20 we read that Paul was accompanied by Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from

Thessalonika, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy from Lystra and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. The basic principles of Acts 13 pertain to the end of Acts.

With regard to the second paradigm it is striking to note that by the end of the third century there was no area of the Roman Empire which had not been penetrated to some extent by the gospel.

What are the reasons for Christian expansion in spite of severe persecution? Stephen Neill gives six reasons.<sup>1</sup> First there was a burning conviction which filled the believers with zeal. 'A great event had burst upon them in creative power.' Second the good news which was carried forward by the believers concerning the absolute reality of Jesus, the resurrection, and the judgement to come was in many ways welcome to the hearers in an age of uncertainty. The highly imaginative mythologies of Greece were incredible and provided no foundation for life. Third the Christians commended themselves by the evident purity of their lives. It is not as though the churches were free from scandalous sin but the teaching of the New Testament about holiness which did shine in the Christians was like light to darkness when compared with the utter sordidness and corruption of society. The fourth factor was a sense of community and of belonging for everyone in the Church, male and female, slave and free, rich and poor, Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile. Here was a body of people bound together by one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Fifth was the reality of love and compassion in a Roman world of cruelty and the misery it produced. There was care of orphans, care for widows, and for prisoners and deprived people. Sixth although the magistrates were loath to proceed to harsh measures of repression when persecution broke out martyrdom was attended with the utmost possible publicity. The calm and beautiful testimony of martyrs made an unforgettable impression and it is evident that the Holy Spirit used these testimonies to create conviction of sin, repentance and faith.

As the paradigm structure is subjected to analysis it soon becomes clear that there are sub-paradigms. Covering a period of over 1,000 years, the medieval period is the most complex. It was during this time that Islam was born and expanded. The Roman Catholic Church gradually became dominant and increasingly intolerant of dissent. Serious error was endorsed until saving religion was buried under a mass of tradition. Increasingly the issue of personal salvation was blurred (see article on the Mass).

Some regard Boniface (680-754) as England's greatest missionary. He and his companions evangelised extensively and successfully in Germany. With 51 others Boniface was martyred in Holland when he was preaching the gospel in that land which at that time was in pagan darkness. The missionary method commonly employed was to aim at the conversion of the chieftain or ruler of a tribe and then from the top down aim at the conversion to Christianity of the whole people. In

terms of the great commission that is correct. Jesus said ‘Disciple nations.’ However the method used by the monks meant that the people embraced Christianity in mass with only a general idea of doctrine. Without delay they were baptised in large groups. It was hoped then to follow up with teaching about discipleship.

The Waldensian movement was founded by Peter Waldo about the year 1173. Brutally persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church the Waldensians were evangelical and kept the focus on personal salvation. Their missionary passion was evident and that movement should be regarded as a sub-paradigm.

True believers learned to survive in spite of increasingly difficult conditions. There are instances of outstanding missionaries such as Raymond Lull (1232-1313), missionary to the Muslims. Gerhard Groote (1340-1384) is another example. He was born in Deventer, Holland. Groote’s parents were wealthy. In his youth he behaved so badly that the local priest refused to give him communion. But in 1374 he was converted. He died aged only 44 but during the last five years of his life he laid foundations from which sprang a widespread movement that was known as the Brethren of the Common Life. Groote founded a semi-monastic order for women and promoted and provided for the education of boys. He preached repentance and denounced the sins of the clergy. He translated portions of the Bible. His disciples multiplied. Some were very gifted such as John Cele (1360-1419) and Hegius (1433-1498). Under Cele a school at Zwolle attracted 1200 students. Under Hegius a school at Deventer provided for 2,200 students. These disciples, even though they did not attack Roman dogma head-on, were nevertheless persecuted but survived and this movement laid foundations by way of Bible study and prayer for the 16th-century Reformation.

We find so little said about mission by Luther and Calvin that we could question whether they had any idea of what we understand today as mission. Cardinal Robert Bellarmine in criticising the poor Protestant missionary record wrote, ‘Heretics are never said to have converted either pagans or Jews to the faith, but only to have perverted Christians’.<sup>2</sup>

Were the Reformers missionary minded? With regard to their immediate environment they certainly were. Students learned theology at Wittenberg and went out all over Europe. For instance two students, brothers Olaus and Laurentius Petri, set off for their homeland of Sweden and through their preaching turned the entire nation to the Protestant faith. John Calvin trained 88 missionary pastors for church planting in France.<sup>3</sup> They laboured with tremendous success in spite of persecution. Eventually the number of Protestant believers numbered over two million. It seems that Bosch was unaware of Calvin’s work in France; otherwise he would never have asserted that ‘the Reformers could not conceive of a missionary

outreach into countries in which there was no Protestant (Lutheran, Reformed, etc.) government'.<sup>4</sup> Many missionaries trained by Calvin were martyred in France.

But Bosch is at his lucid best when he asserts; 'It is absurd to summon the Reformers before the tribunal of the modern missionary movement and find them guilty for not having subscribed to a definition of mission which did not even exist in their time.'<sup>5</sup>

The Reformers must be given credit for shaking the fabric of the Roman Catholic Church which in due course resulted in the counter-Reformation and an extensive purification and purging away of much corruption. Little if any doctrine was changed. A new spirituality emerged which produced an army of missionaries. We recall that the Vatican had command of a vast political and ecclesiastical machine. Virtually the whole of South America was divided between the Spanish and Portuguese and many other parts of the world were taken over and jealously guarded against the entrance of Protestant missionaries. Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique were allocated to the Portuguese, other nations to the Spanish, and yet others to France and Belgium.

We should take note of the fact that while the Reformers no longer considered the great commission as binding, the Anabaptists certainly did. Textual references to the great commission are frequently quoted in their Confessions of Faith. Itinerant Anabaptist evangelists travelled everywhere preaching the gospel and giving no respect whatever to parish boundaries. There simply was no limit to the missionary field as far as the Anabaptists were concerned. G H Williams in his monumental book *The Radical Reformation* shows that the Anabaptist movement was as extraordinary in its extent as it was diverse in doctrinal character.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. A focus on world missionary enterprise today**

The missionary situation today is vastly different from when mission began as reported in Acts 13.

At that time the geographic areas facing the apostles approximated with the borders of the Roman Empire. We live in the global age when all nations (230 in all) are known in detail. To that must be added the very important factor of peoples and tribes. There are several thousand unreached people groups living in remote areas of huge countries like China, Brazil and Indonesia. Knowledge of these has increased greatly in the last few years.

The numbers engaged in missionary enterprise today are larger than ever before and growing steadily. The great majority work through missionary societies while at the same time maintaining spiritual bonds with a home church or with several supporting churches. Very few attempt to act independently. A few work in a

secular capacity to gain visa status and then use part of their time to promote missionary enterprise. However it is virtually impossible to succeed without the spiritual backing of a home church.

To attempt a global perspective it is important to observe that the missionary surge in the 19th century came out of Western Europe. For instance Latourette writes of Germany: 'In the nineteenth century not only did more voluntary movements emerge than ever before from the Protestantism of Germany to minister to those within the country suffering from the ills of society and to reach the rank and file of the population with the gospel. From it also issued more extensive efforts to carry the Gospel to the entire world than at any previous time in the nation's history'.<sup>7</sup> The Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland have generous records of missionary endeavour. The following table with striking features is extracted from OPERATION WORLD<sup>8</sup> and gives approximate statistics for Protestant missionaries. The following is a selection of countries most active in missionary enterprise.

Germany	(82m)	4,090 to 150 countries	
UK	(58m)	10,654 to 198 countries	148 to Nepal
Norway	(4.5m)	1,060 to 82 countries	87 to Japan
Finland	(5m)	1,494 to 84 countries	87 to Ethiopia
Sweden	(9m)	1,106 to 100 countries	158 to Tanzania
USA	(278m)	60,200 to 220 countries	
Canada	(31m)	7,094 to 180 countries	
Australia	(18m)	4,388 to 134 countries	260 to PNG
New Zealand	(3.8m)	1,836 to 114 countries	

#### *Developing nations*

South Africa	(40m)	2,622 to 100 countries	
Brazil	(170m)	4,754 to 100 countries	66 to Guinea Bissau
South Korea	(46m)	10,464 to 156 countries	546 to Japan
Philippines	(75m)	2,829 to 77 countries	138 to Thailand
Nigeria	(111m)	3,700 to 50 countries	
India	(1,013m)	44,000 of which 60 percent are working cross-culturally in India.	

This army of missionaries consists of men and woman and includes specialist missionary societies such as Wycliffe Bible Translators of which there are over 7,000 and Missionary Aviation Fellowship over 900 of whom maintain an essential ministry of providing access to missionaries in remote places. Most missionaries while maintaining union with a home church work under the auspices of interdenominational missionary societies. Overseas Missionary Fellowship is an

example with 1,245 missionaries, and Africa Inland Mission International is another with 900. Some missions are denominational and one of the largest is the Pentecostal denomination Assemblies of God with over 3,500 missionaries. Some organizations encourage short term missionary efforts such as Campus Crusade which has over 15,000 workers. Radio work beamed into countries where Christian missionaries are barred is vital. The number engaged full-time in that kind of ministry is probably over 2000.

Included in the numbers cited above are men and women who perform wonderful works of compassion in creating desperately needed orphanages and in establishing hospitals and schools. Funding from churches is copious for these works. Furthermore there is the vital support provided by clerical workers to care for accounts and organise visa requirements. We need not be negative about any of these missionary services but strictly according to the book of Acts missionaries are preachers who plant churches. Today most missionaries are married. They achieve their work with their wives and marriage and family form a central platform in almost all missionary scenarios.

### 3. The primacy of church planting

Although the word missionary is not used anywhere in Scripture, it is helpful to recall the thrust of the first preachers who were sent out from the church at Antioch. As we examine the first missionary journey these are the primary principles which stand out.

1. The call from God came to two men. A third by way of a helper was John Mark.
2. The call came through the local church. All the members and all the leaders were involved. Paul and Barnabas did not claim to possess direct instructions from heaven which made it unnecessary to consult the leaders and members of the church.
3. These missionaries were under the authority of the sending church. When they had accomplished the work they returned to give a full report to the church at Antioch.
4. These men were essentially preachers. That was the means employed to persuade unbelievers. They preached the gospel and that was used by the Holy Spirit to convert hearers.
5. These preachers established churches by way of gathering converts and then ordaining elders to lead every newly gathered church.

These facts focus on the primacy of preaching and also on the fact that church planting is the ultimate aim of mission and that churches must make this their priority.

Church planting is God's way of establishing Christ's cause on earth. Jesus said, 'I will build my Church.' Every healthy church will think in terms of missionary work at home and abroad and think in terms of church planting.

An example is that of Brian Ellis from London, England, a missionary to the Philippines. Married to a Filipino lady he concentrated on planting a Reformed Baptist church in Manila. This church at Cubao, Manila, has grown and now has a seminary and also hosts an annual conference for ministers. Through the years Brian has encouraged church planting. Now there are about 20 Reformed Baptist churches in Manila and many more in other parts of the Philippines.

Keith Underhill of Nairobi, Kenya, is another example of a missionary who has been used to establish a church with a Reformed Baptist doctrinal confession (the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith). His wife Priscilla cares for their home while Keith travels long distances with fellow evangelists to needy areas. Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in Nairobi acts as base from which more than twenty-five other churches have been planted in other parts of Kenya, with new opportunities emerging to enter Sudan. There is a pastoral training program for more than twenty men. Church leaders gather together for an annual conference and for an Association meeting. In this issue of *Reformation Today* (see News) we observe a new church forming among the Rendille people who are an unreached people group.

#### **4. A summary of the features of the emerging ecumenical paradigm.**

Some of the characteristics of the sixth missionary paradigm, 1970- are:

- 1 An increasing sense of unity of evangelicals across the world.
- 2 An increasing appreciation of the place of evangelical theological education and the value of evangelical and Reformed books.
- 3 An increasing appreciation that the Church is multi-racial and that the great commission will be fulfilled by international co-operation and unity. The idea that mission is from North America and from Western Europe is gradually giving way to the realisation that by 2050 only one in five Christians will be non-Latino and white. Major growth is in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Western European Christianity is in decline. This is described by Philip Jenkins' in his book *The Next Christendom, the Coming of Global Christianity*.<sup>9</sup>
- 4 An increasing awareness of the need of compassion and good works - relief of pain, hunger and suffering accompanies the gospel. 'For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no-one to help, he will take pity on the weak and the needy' (Ps 72:12-13).
- 5 An increasing realisation that the completion of the missionary task is actually within reach - a re-appraisal of eschatology. From the beginning God declared

his intention to bless all nations (Gen 12:3; Ps 2:8; 22:27-28; Isa 49:6; Mal 1:11; Rom 16:26). (For details as to how far mission has yet to reach all the unreached people groups of the world see article *How far have we to go?* RT 200).

- 6 An increasing awareness that we cannot escape the challenge of involvement in political issues; the plight of refugees, green issues, the persecution worldwide of Christians, human rights, and anti-Christian legislation especially that directed against marriage.

## Conclusion

It will be hard to find any book with a more magnificent conclusion than the last paragraph in the Gospel of Matthew in which the risen Lord makes plain the great commission. Two factors stand out. First there is the overwhelming magnitude of the task given to the Church. Every tribe and every people group is to be discipled. Once discipled the converts are to be taught everything revealed in Scripture. Second there is encouragement commensurate with the magnitude of the task. What better knowledge could there be that our Saviour has all power in heaven and on earth and that he is exercising that power on our behalf and will do so every day to the very last day of this world? His presence is promised in the actual work as we engage in it day by day. That the commission is binding on Christ's Church to the very end of the age is indicated by the time-frame - to the end of the age.

Sadly there is a tendency in most churches to concentrate increasingly on consolidation and neglect mission and evangelism, to be zealous to guard frontiers rather than crossing them. Often there are two Cinderellas in the local church, evangelism and mission, both in rags.

The promise of Jesus in the great commission applies particularly to action. He is with us exercising all his power as we reach out to make disciples of the nations.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.188ff.
- <sup>3</sup> John Calvin and his Missionary Enterprise, *Reformation Today* 163.
- <sup>4</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, 584pp., 2003, p.246.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.
- <sup>6</sup> George H Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, Westminster Press, 922 pp., 1961.
- <sup>7</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, Volume 2, *The Nineteenth Century in Europe* (2), 532 pp., 1950, p. 114 ff.
- <sup>8</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *OPERATION WORLD*, 21st Century Edition, Paternoster, 798 pp., 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> Philip Jenkins. *The Next Christendom, the Coming of Global Christianity*, OUP, 261 pp., 2002.

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## The Second Whitefield (1744-1833)

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*Tim Shenton*

They are three of the most powerful preachers that England has ever produced and yet only two of them are well known. The first is George Whitefield, commonly regarded as ‘one of the greatest figures in modern evangelism’ and rightly brought to the forefront by Arnold Dallimore’s excellent two-volume biography, first published in 1970. The third is Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, of whom many would agree with Carl F H Henry’s summary, when he called him ‘one of evangelical Christianity’s immortals’.

But who is the preacher between these two heroes? Who links them together? Who was it that Lady Huntingdon wrote about with such enthusiasm, when she said, ‘The crowds that follow him wherever he is called to preach overwhelm me with astonishment and gratitude to the God of all grace, who hath endowed him with such gifts. He boldly proclaims the doctrines of the cross, and the word of the Lord runs and is glorified in the conversions of multitudes. Dear Captain Joss told me above a hundred awakened souls, the fruits of his preaching, have been received into the Tabernacle Society, – so eminently does the benediction of our dear and precious Immanuel rest on the labours of his servant. I have attended him at Blackheath and Kennington, where the Lord blessed his testimony in a very remarkable manner. Thousands and thousands attended, and the most awful and solemn impressions seemed to pervade the vast assemblies. Excepting my beloved and lamented Mr Whitefield, I never witnessed any person’s preaching wherein there were such displays of the Divine power and glory. May he who hath raised up this *second Whitefield*, with talents and zeal so distinguished, make him eminent in his day and generation, crown his message with success, and by his own Almighty power, the copious effusions of his Spirit, and the effectual manifestations of his grace to his soul, keep him faithful to the end.’

This ‘second Whitefield’ of whom the Countess spoke was Rowland Hill. He took up Whitefield’s mantle when that great man died in 1770, just as Elisha took up Elijah’s mantle.

Rowland Hill was born at Hawkstone in Shropshire on 23 August 1744. He was one of six sons born to Sir Rowland Hill of Hawkstone, who was Sheriff

of Shropshire in 1732 and elected a Member of Parliament for the city of Lichfield in 1734 and 1740. Rowland's mother, Lady Hill, was the daughter of Sir Brian Broughton.

Rowland was educated at Eton, where he was converted, mainly through the influence of his brother Richard. He went on to study at Cambridge University, where he formed a sort of 'religious club', similar to Wesley's holy club at Oxford. Rowland said 'Our custom was to read with each other the Greek Testament, and other evangelical publications: these meetings we always concluded with prayer. The university was almost in total darkness. No wonder, therefore, if, for such exercises, and for some other strong symptoms of a *Methodistical bias*, we were specially marked, and had the honour of being pointed at as the curiosities of the day. This did good. Others soon joined us, to the number of ten or twelve: some of them were *Nicodemian disciples*; others have proved bold and useful ministers.'

It was at Cambridge that he came under the influence of the eccentric John Berridge, of whom he wrote, 'Many a mile have I ridden, many a storm have I faced, many a snow have I gone through, to hear good old Mr Berridge; for I felt his ministry, when in my troubles at Cambridge, a comfort and blessing to my soul. Dear affectionate old man. I love him to my heart.'

At Cambridge he started to preach with great fervour and stirred up no little persecution. His yearning was to have 'a heart totally given up to God's service; I then know that however weak I may be in myself, God's power shall be manifested in me. I long to see myself *nothing*, and Christ *all*, to learn by experience that glorious song, *Worthy is the Lamb*. At present my time is much taken up in making and writing sermons for some of our idle parsons, who, to save trouble, will preach what is given them. At present we have two of that stamp, and we fear not but we shall get more into the same plan. Thus till I am ordained I will preach by proxy. Who knows what a blessing this may be to preacher and hearers?'

After leaving Cambridge, he struggled to get ordained, but that did not stop him from preaching the gospel of Christ, with power and success, in many parts of the country. Whitefield's death on 30 September 1770 was a great loss to Rowland and deprived him of a wise counsellor and friend. Edwin Sidney was convinced that after Whitefield's death there was only one man who had 'caught the fire of his zeal, possessed similar powers of eloquence, and was actuated by the same self-denying and disinterested spirit', and that man was

Rowland Hill. 'His doctrines, his preaching talents, his popularity, his want of any definite system, were all Whitefield again.' Whitefield's followers certainly flocked around Rowland, 'owned him as their leader, and acknowledged that their drooping cause was revived through his instrumentality, both in London and in various parts of the kingdom. His appearance in every place was the signal for revival.'

The thrilling scenes that attended his preaching of the gospel in Yorkshire are described in an extract from one of his letters to his sister Jane and will serve as a good general example. 'On Sundays large numbers went away for lack of room, while those that remained enjoyed "the sweetest waterings" that ever could be wished for. Old professors were so touched that they wept uncontrollably, while whole families of children were awakened to such an extent that they spent the night agonising for the blessings of the Lord. Christians were abundantly blessed and overpowered with grace, and particularly with the spirit of supplication and thanksgiving, that they continually prayed or praised, unable to sleep in their beds for the joy of the presence of the Lord.' According to Rowland, the greatest mercy was that many were 'pricked at the heart, who before knew nothing of the Lord. In short, all in Leeds bear testimony that they scarce ever remember such an outpouring of the Spirit of God.'

After his marriage and ordination his chapel at Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire was built; it was capable of holding 700 persons. Wotton became his regular summer residence. However, it did not stop him from fulfilling what he believed to be his commission: 'to preach the gospel wherever he went'. He was not bound by the restrictions and traditions of men and was easy about wandering beyond the strict line of the national church, which he freely acknowledged to himself, saying, 'Had I a thousand lives, I trust they would be spent in the Lord's blessed work. I dare not be fettered by human laws, while I am under a divine command to "preach the gospel to every creature", and "to spend and be spent for Jesus Christ". I have been somewhat a sufferer for such conduct; but laws like these appear to me not better than the statutes of Omri: and I dare not renounce the Lord's *standing* rule to all his ministers, while under the conjoined promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."'

On his travels he toured Wales and Ireland and made two important trips to Scotland. He also visited jails at Bristol and London, where he preached to the prisoners in such a way that seemed to gain the confidence of even the most

hardened. He maintained, while conversing with condemned criminals, a solemn dignity of manner, with an admirable control over his feelings; but when he left the cell of darkness and misery, a painful reaction took place in his mind. After coming from Newgate, in London, where he had visited some poor wretch who was going to suffer death, he would scarcely eat anything at dinner, and at its conclusion drew back in his chair to the wall near the window, quite absorbed in the solemn recollection of the scene of distress. If asked a question, he answered it in an absent manner, and every now and then muttered some indistinct expression, in reference to the painful subject, which had taken such a hold of his benevolent and sensitive mind.

Several rich London businessmen were deeply affected by Rowland's preaching and as a result were eager to support him in building a permanent place of worship. Rowland had often preached in the open air to huge congregations in St George's Fields, and during the Gordon riots of 1780 he spoke to assemblies of nearly 20,000 on 'righteousness, temperance and judgement to come'. Many were so touched by his preaching 'that they returned home to seek in retirement mercy from God, forgetting political excitement in the all-absorbing anxiety for the salvation of their souls.'

After much prayer for divine guidance Rowland and his friends thought St George's Fields, one of the most deprived districts of Southwark in South London, would be an ideal location to build a place of worship, and at length they decided to erect a building for that purpose and to call it Surrey Chapel (it seated about 2500). Rowland found many supporters who were not only willing to contribute towards the project, but to let him spend the summer months (June - October) either travelling or at his home in Wotton, happy to let him appoint supply preachers to feed the flock during his absence. At this time many chapels throughout the kingdom were open to him as well as many churches in the country and in London.

The sermon he preached at the opening of Surrey Chapel was based on 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: 'Christ crucified is the subject of the Bible; and this Bible we conclude to be the word of God. I have already hinted that this is the only subject which I mean to know among you... We will glory in the Godhead of our Saviour, and gladly lay it as the grand foundation stone of the gospel, upon which our superstructure is built. We will make this place to resound with the honours due to his eternal and ever-blessed name, as King of kings and Lord of lords... In this blessed name alone, my beloved brethren, I preach salvation amongst you: no otherwise wish me Godspeed than as he only is

exalted by me as your All in all. Should I presume to preach to you in any other name, or point you to any other hope, avoid me as your enemy.'

Many wonderful and extraordinary events occurred in and about the chapel, and many striking conversions; so much so, that when a distinguished minister preached one of the closing sermons at the chapel, the old building being about to be turned into a commercial warehouse, he said, 'I believe there have been more souls saved in this chapel than there are bricks in these walls.'

On one occasion, as Rowland was returning from his customary walk to Blackfriars Bridge before the evening sermon, he heard a young man say to his friend, 'Let's go to old Rowland Hill's chapel and have some fun'. Rowland followed them into the chapel and gave orders to his doorkeeper to place them in the front seat of the gallery, right in front of the pulpit, and to fill up the seats around them so they could not leave. After the prayers Rowland gave out his text, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God' (Psalm 9:17), and immediately he looked full in the face of the two men, exclaiming, 'And there will be fun for you there!' The congregation, who knew all about Rowland's eccentricities, were sure he had a special reason for making such a remark; and when he repeated the comment each time he quoted his text, all looked in the same direction as Rowland to see at whom it was aimed. Soon the two strangers became the centre of attention. One of the men was so struck by the sermon and Rowland's pointed comments that he fainted and had to be carried out by his friend. He returned to Surrey Chapel alone the following Sunday and was wonderfully converted. He later became a minister and before his death was chairman of the Congregational Union.

Eleven years after Rowland's death, Richard Knill, on a deputation for the London Missionary Society, spent some time at Stambourne Parsonage, where the young Charles Spurgeon was growing up. On three successive days Knill taught Charles about Jesus and prayed with him and, before he left, during morning prayer when all the family were present, he took Charles on his knee, and said, 'This child will one day preach the gospel, and he will preach it to great multitudes. I am persuaded that he will preach in the chapel of Rowland Hill.' He spoke very solemnly, and called on all present to remember what he said. Then he gave Charles a sixpence as a reward if he would learn the hymn: 'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.' He also made him promise to sing that hymn when he preached in Rowland Hill's chapel.

Some years later, after Spurgeon had become the pastor of the New Park Street Baptist Church in London, Alexander Fletcher was engaged to deliver the annual sermon to children in Surrey Chapel, but he fell ill and Spurgeon was

asked to take his place. 'Yes,' replied Spurgeon, 'I will if you allow the children to sing, "God moves in a mysterious way", I have made a promise, long ago, that that hymn should be sung.' So Spurgeon preached in Rowland's chapel and the hymn was sung. 'My emotions on that occasion,' recalled Spurgeon, 'I cannot describe, for the word of the Lord's servant was fulfilled.'

However, Spurgeon began to doubt that Surrey Chapel was the chapel in Knill's prophecy; he thought it might be Rowland's country chapel at Wotton. Then, out of the blue, the minister of Wotton-under-Edge invited him to preach there. He went on the condition that the congregation should sing, 'God moves in a mysterious way,' which was duly done. 'To me,' remarked Spurgeon, 'it was a very wonderful thing, and I no more understood at that time how it came to pass than I understand today why the Lord should be so gracious to me.'

Rowland's Surrey Chapel was closed on 21 March 1881 and in 1910 converted into a boxing arena known as The Ring, which was destroyed by enemy action in World War II. When the new chapel was opened on 26 September 1888, the guest speaker was Charles Spurgeon. Although Spurgeon did not know it he preached from the same text as Rowland did at the opening of the old chapel in 1783. After Spurgeon had sat down in the pulpit, Benjamin Senior, the pastor of Surrey Chapel, said, 'Why, you have preached to us from the same text as Rowland Hill, when he opened Old Surrey Chapel over a hundred years ago.' 'Well, how strange!' was Spurgeon's reply. When Senior mentioned this fact to the congregation it caused a 'thrill of excitement' and a 'spontaneous cheer'.

Immediately after Surrey Chapel was built, Rowland, in accordance with his own generous mind and by example, set about training his own people to give liberally to many benevolent causes, to great effect. Twice when collections were made throughout the kingdom, in all churches and chapels, for the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's and the subscription for the relief of the people of Germany, who had suffered the ravages of the French, the collections at Surrey Chapel were the largest raised at any one place.

One institution that started on 1 January 1784 at Surrey Chapel was a benevolent society for the relief and personal visitation of the sick and afflicted poor. Rowland laid down the rule that no one was to be excluded on account of their sect or party. Catholics and Protestants were to be treated equally. Rowland also established a Sunday School and a school of industry in the borough that clothed and educated twenty-four girls. The school's wings contained alms-houses for another twenty-four poor women, who were given

a comfortable room, sufficient fuel and four shillings a week towards their support. The only qualifications for entry were distress and a Christian character.

In addition he started a religious society, with the Articles of the Church of England as its standard doctrine. Any converts who gave him satisfactory evidence of their sincerity were admitted into the society and allowed to partake at the Lord's Table. He was keen on prayer meetings, which were held every week at Surrey Chapel and at the Tabernacle, Wotton, which he constantly attended, but no one was allowed to pray in his presence unless specifically asked by him; and he was zealous to see the gospel spread over the world and to do what he could to support the work of missions, which is why he became closely involved with the London Missionary Society.

With these and other benevolent societies it is not surprising that it was said of Surrey Chapel that 'no other place of worship in the kingdom, perhaps in the world, has ever, during the same space of time, been the seat of so much genuine piety and charity. Its congregations have been more united, its services have been more devout, its sermons have been more interesting and impressive, its contributions to all forms of charity have been more abundant, than those of any other sanctuary within or without the pale of the established church. It has set the example and taken the lead in all the most important schemes of Christian benevolence, by which the last forty-five years have been distinguished, and never was any former age so truly distinguished by such glory and virtue.'

Rowland's life was preaching. Even into his seventies he was preaching at least four times a week to his people in London and five times when in Wotton. In a letter he spoke of one of his preaching tours: 'Old as I am, I am just returned from a long missionary ramble; but I feel I am getting old. O that I may work well to the last!' Even in his old age, if on his journeys he did not find a pulpit ready for him each evening, he felt disconcerted. 'Ever since my Master has put me into office,' he wrote, 'I have ever esteemed it my duty to remember his admonition - "As ye go, preach."' 'When invited to houses along his route, his general reply was, 'I shall be happy to come to you, if you can find me a place to preach in.'

There was always a large congregation ready to hang on his words. William Jay said of him, 'The popularity of this exalted character was not comparative or transient: it was full at first and it continued to the last. Whenever his name

was announced for preaching, the place was always crowded, and a multitude hung upon his lips... As there was no declension in his acceptance, so neither was there any cooling in his zeal... The love of Christ constrained him to live not to himself, but to him that died for him and rose again. Preaching was his very element and delight.'

The last time Rowland preached was on Sunday 31 March 1833, his text being I Corinthians 2:7-8. Although exceedingly feeble, he preached for nearly fifty minutes. The outline of this sermon reads rather like a confession of faith as he mentions his conversion when a boy at Eton and the success of his early ministry. His final appeal to the sinner is both typical and striking: 'How will you escape, if you neglect so great a salvation? You say you hope to come to Christ by-and-by. By-and-bys are not with you; you may be struck dead before your by-and-bys come. God be praised, we can say, "His arm is not shortened that it cannot save", it is stretched out, even now.' Eleven days after this sermon, at about twenty-five minutes to six on Thursday evening, 11 April, without a sound or a struggle, Rowland slipped into the presence of his Lord, whom he had served so faithfully for so long.

And so the man who had followed in the footsteps of Whitefield, a preacher described as 'all life, fire, wing, force', kept the torch burning for another in that long line of spiritual giants, the unforgettable Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Oh that God might once again, in his grace, raise up men of a similar mould, who walk behind them proclaiming the same gospel.

Perhaps it is fitting to conclude this short tribute to Rowland Hill by Edwin Sidney who knew him both as a public preacher and a private man. 'From the early age of boyhood, to the hoary hairs of one approaching his ninetieth year, he had never spent a day, except confined by sickness, without some effort to promote the cause of the Redeemer, and this with no less energy when frowned on by his family and despised by the world, than when he lived amidst the kindest attentions from relations, and basked in the exhilarating beams of an unequalled popularity. Though he was surrounded by many enemies in the early part of his career, not one of them could discover a stain in his character; and notwithstanding the fire of his eager spirit, the occasional haste with which he acted, and the eccentric course in which he moved, he has left behind him not only a lasting fame for unwearied diligence, undaunted resolution, and extraordinary success, but that which alone can give weight to the instructions of any minister, an unsullied reputation.'

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## Assurance of Salvation

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*Bob Davey*

*part 2*

In the first part (RT 212), I established that a well-grounded assurance of salvation is the biblical result of justification by faith and is included in the gospel offer of a full and free salvation. It is the Holy Spirit who seals assurance to the soul. He seals not only justification but also adoption (Rom 8:16,17).

Now I seek to demonstrate, biblically, that the purpose of the marks of grace (sanctification) is to expose hypocrites and to confirm and strengthen an already assured faith in true believers.

### **The marks of grace**

Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14). The marks of grace are the evidences in the believer's life of the new birth and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As our Lord says, 'By their fruits you will know them' (Matt 7:17-20). The spiritual graces in the true subjects of the kingdom of heaven are also described in the Beatitudes. They identify the true subjects of King Jesus (Matt 5:3-12).

Spiritual life evidences itself in the whole personality as follows:

#### *belief in the Lord Jesus* <sup>1</sup>

Is there recognition of the uniqueness and glory of his person as God the Son, the Lord of Glory, the Lord of All? Is there esteem for what he has done through his virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, glorious resurrection, ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God and what he will do at his coming again as Judge? Is there submission to him as the only Saviour from the guilt and power of sin and trust in the infinite merits of his substitutionary penal death? Is there the hearing and following of the good Shepherd (John 10:4-5,27-29)? Is there submission to him as 'my Lord and my God' (John 20:28)?

#### *spiritual outlook on life*

Are your affections on things above, where Christ is seated with God? Is life a pilgrimage, a life of faith? Is there desire for the means of grace, that

is, for Bible reading, meditation, self-examination before God, prayer, worship, preaching and also Christian fellowship? Where is your true treasure to be found? <sup>2</sup>

*living to the glory of God*

Is there genuine love to God and a desire to please him above all else? Is there love and prayer for his kingdom? Is there a single eye for his glory? <sup>3</sup>

*hunger and thirst for spiritual progress*

Is there an increase in appreciation of the beauty of divine things with an increasing desire to know God? <sup>4</sup>

*holy desires*

Is there an awareness of sin within and mourning because of it? Is there a longing to be sinless like God? Is there growing sensitivity to evil and temptation? Is there growing love of goodness for its own sake? Are the commandments of God embraced with a willing heart? Above all, is there growing gratitude and love to Christ? <sup>5</sup>

*holy living*

Is there genuine effort to eradicate sin from your life? Is there self-denial? Is there genuine effort to live a holy life pleasing to God? Is there effort to keep the whole law of God without picking and choosing? Is there love toward everyone without distinction, expressed in practical ways?

Do you seek the salvation of all who do not know Christ? How can you love your neighbours and not care where they will spend eternity? <sup>6</sup>

*fruit of the Spirit*

Is the fruit of the Spirit clearly evident in you? Does love have its rightful place in your priorities? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? <sup>7</sup>

*love of the brethren*

Is there warmth in your heart just at the thought of other Christians? Do you love their company? Do you regularly pray for them? Do you love the Church of Christ and her gatherings? Are you happy to share with other

believers the work of the gospel and be identified with them? Is there the love of serving the brethren, even in the humblest way? <sup>8</sup>

### *Separation from the spirit of the world*

Do you see through the empty glamour and false promises of life without love toward God? Do you resist the devil, so that he flees? <sup>9</sup>

### *Willingness to suffer for Christ*

Without deliberately courting it, are you ready to suffer persecution for the name of Christ? Do you pray for those who treat you badly because you are a Christian, and do good to them? Do you remember to pray for other Christians who are being persecuted? <sup>10</sup>

### **Why we cannot rely on the marks of grace alone to produce assurance**

Firstly, the danger of the counterfeit. There is need to take evidences of conversion as a whole because the devil can counterfeit any particular mark. Bible examples of the counterfeit are:- conviction of sin, often with an attempt at reformation in life (2 Cor 7:10); words of Scripture brought vividly to mind (Matt 4:5,6); spiritual joy (Mark 4:16,17; John 5:35); spiritual gifts (Matt 7:22,23); orthodoxy in belief (Matt 7:21); religious observance of the means of grace (Matt 23); zeal for God (Rom 10:1-3); miracles (Matt 7:22,23). For a thorough handling of this subject, see part two of Jonathan Edwards' *The Religious Affections*.<sup>11</sup> Also, there is our Lord's warning about temporary believers in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20).

Secondly, the danger of self-deception. Salvation by works and merit is the natural religion of fallen human nature. Self-deception and a false peace can come from seeking to deduce that one is a Christian from the marks of grace. The devil encourages this. Lip-service will be made to salvation by grace and justification by faith but, at bottom, there is a reliance on the marks of grace or sanctification for peace and assurance. This is a form of salvation by works. Where is there the going to Christ and to Christ alone for free salvation? Christ will not share His glory with another, nor will the Holy Spirit imprint his stamp of approval on that which is false.

Thirdly, the work of the Holy Spirit, in grace, that falls short of salvation. This is highlighted in Hebrews 6:4-5,9. The text declares, 'It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly

gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.' The text goes on to say, 'dear friends we are confident of better things in your case.' This passage encourages strongly an assurance which is confirmed by obedience and perseverance. 'We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure' (Heb 6:9-12, see also 2 Peter 1:3-10).

Fourthly, faith fluctuates. There are degrees in the strength of faith, which can fluctuate. There is weak faith (Rom 14:1), little faith (Matt 6:30;8:26), strong faith (Rom 14:19,20), great faith (Matt 8:10;15:28). Also, sanctification fluctuates. These are no proper foundations for generating a settled assurance of salvation.

For a well-grounded assurance there is no option but to bring God's own testimony into the picture, the direct witness of God. 'God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription; the Lord knows those who are his' (2 Tim 2:19).

As B B Warfield says, 'True assurance can never arise in the heart save by the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit, and he who looks not for that can never go beyond a probable hope of being in Christ.'<sup>12</sup>

Some new believers may have some spiritual peace but not recognise it for what it is, due to the lack of knowledge, pressure of doubts, conflicting feelings or temptations of the devil. Yet, true saving faith (the seed of God) lies in the soul, indestructible. There, in the soul, dwells the triune God, who maintains the life. There is need to beware of dishonouring God by not recognising what he has done and is doing in the soul. These new believers need to be reminded of justification by faith and exhorted to go to Christ afresh for this free salvation until he disperses their fears.

Some measure of spiritual peace is implicit in the salvation believers have come to possess by faith. There is some awareness of the fundamental change within. There can be no turning back (John 6:66-68). You can know you have cast yourself upon Christ for salvation with a sincere heart and have believed the promises of Christ. These are reflex actions of the soul that has faith. But the absolute certainty of salvation has to be witnessed to the soul by Christ himself, through the Spirit.

## **Full assurance of salvation**

Full assurance is saving faith in the flower. The Spirit of God witnesses the acceptance by God to the soul, to the full. It is to know with absolute certainty and with great joy that reconciliation has taken place. Think of the father's welcome to the returning lost son in the parable of Jesus. 'His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him' (Luke 15:20). The gospel message is, press on, until you know the great joy. Once properly assured, always assured is the rule. Can it ever be doubted? 'Only believe, and thou shalt see that Christ is all in all to thee.'

## **Desertion and assurance**

True believers may lose their peace of mind because of spiritual negligence, deliberate sin, yielding to sudden temptation or continual assaults of the devil. At such times God may withdraw the light of his felt presence in such a way that the believer feels he is living in darkness, deserted by God. The Father is chastising his wayward child. Hebrews 12:5-11 is the key passage for this. When God chastises, he does so in other ways than the withdrawal of assurance. God never disowns his children, nor can he! Salvation itself is not lost. Peace of mind lost, yes; assurance of salvation lost, no! <sup>13</sup>

This sense of desertion happens to all believers, sometimes even without apparent reason. God does all this in love, for our good. It humbles us. It is for our sanctification, for our faith, and for spiritual fruitfulness. Such experiences should not undermine assurance of salvation; rather, if anything they confirm it, because God is dealing with us as our heavenly Father and we submit.<sup>14</sup>

## **Other Scripture passages that deal with assurance of salvation**

### *1 John*

John wrote his letter to confirm true believers in their faith and to promote full assurance of salvation's joy (5:13; 1:4, NIV margin). Marks of a true knowledge of God (walking in the light) include the spiritual experiences of fellowship with God, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, divine love in the heart, a purified conscience, spiritual understanding and confidence in prayer.<sup>15</sup> Also, what could be a clearer statement of the direct, inward, witness of assurance of salvation than, 'Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart' (5:10a)?

Continued enjoyment of such fellowship depends on keeping God's commands and his word, continuing in apostolic fellowship and doctrine, love of the brethren and separation from the world and false prophets. <sup>16</sup>

*Romans 8: 14-17*

Paul introduces the theme of 'sonship' of all believers (8:14). In verse 15, Paul refers to the Holy Spirit's work at conversion as twofold. In the Greek, there is an exact duplication (*elabete pneuma*): 'you received the Spirit.' The Holy Spirit, firstly, convicts the sinner of the guilt of his sin and the just retribution waiting from God. It terrifies. Secondly, this spiritual work issues in conversion and the Holy Spirit seals to the soul of the new believer the new status as an adopted child of God in Christ. As a result, from the soul, the believer naturally approaches God with assurance, as 'Father'. It is no longer presumption to do so, for the divine seal of the Spirit is upon it. Communion with God is now a reality. The terror has gone!

There is no reference to the marks of grace at all. To introduce them is to bring in a foreign idea. Justification and standing before God are the grounds for assurance as a child of God. That is what the Spirit is witnessing to.

The assured believer can then gain access in experience to the 'golden chain of salvation' of Romans 8:28-30 at the point of justification. From there, the believer can range back and forward over God's glorious plan of salvation.

*2 Peter 1:1-11 and 1 Peter 1:3-9*

Peter's starting point is 'precious' faith (2 Peter 1:1 and 1:5) which is described by him in his first letter: 'Though you have not seen him (Jesus Christ) you love him; and even though you see him not, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls' (1 Peter 1:8,9).

To this faith, the spiritual graces are to be 'added' with all diligence (2 Peter 1:5-7). In this way believers will both grow in grace and grow in quality of communion with the Lord Jesus (2 Peter 1:8). This will confirm their faith as genuine, prevent major backsliding (2 Peter 1:10) and also pave the way for a rich welcome into glory (2 Peter 1:11).

Peter echoes both Paul and John.

Let us take the words of the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, for thoughtful consideration. ‘There is the promise of the Holy Ghost to come and fill your hearts with joy unspeakable and glorious to seal you up to the Day of Redemption. Sue this promise out, wait for it, wait for it by faith, make it the aim of your faith. We are said to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal 3:11). Believe there is such a thing, aim at it, wait for it and serve God day and night in all humility to obtain it, rest in no other lower and under assurance and in the end the Lord will give it. The reason why men attain it not is because they rest in other assurance and they do not aim at this. They content themselves with bare believing and in that their consciences are quieted.’<sup>17</sup>

### *Conclusions and application*

In the matter of assurance of salvation, we have been considering the foundations of Christian experience. Individually we have to make sure our spiritual foundations are sound and solid. What is promised in the gospel offer is not only forgiveness but also the embrace of the Father’s love (Luke 15:20).

Paul regarded the outpouring of the love of Christ in the heart as that for which he could confidently pray for all believers (Eph 3:14-19) - ‘that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God’ (3:19). The pinnacle of Christian experience is the embrace of divine love to a super-abundant and overflowing degree.

However long we have been Christians we can do no better than go back to the beginning of faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and the word and promises in Christ are always yes and amen. It is to Christ we can always go, and we can wait on him with a penitent heart until he is pleased, with the Father, to embrace us and melt our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity communicate their divine love and divine delight to the believer. This is the ‘hidden manna’ and ‘a new name, known only to him who receives it’ (Rev 2:17). This fellowship is personal, private and profound. For this Christ died.

On the day of Pentecost it was The Holy Spirit who produced power and authority in the preaching and church life, and gave courage and energy to witness and suffer for Christ in an alien environment. This is what our Lord had promised (John 7:37-39).

The marks of grace are necessary to distinguish genuine experience from counterfeit. They are the evidence of sanctification in Christian character and holiness in the life, the true work of grace.

The happy resurgence of the doctrines of grace over the last fifty years, of which I have been privileged to be a part, seems in many places to be in danger of losing its way. The hoped for revival and renewal has in large measure not materialised. Perhaps it is a good time to take stock and re-examine some of our priorities.

Nowhere is the lack of true biblical spirituality shown up more than in the lack of appetite for prayer meetings and also a lack of vitality and urgency in prayer meetings. The answer to Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers would result in the release of the power and glory of God in and through the Church (Eph 3:20,21). Historically, has not individual and corporate prayer been the gateway to true revival and renewal of the Holy Spirit?

In the biblical doctrine of assurance we have the answer to the pretensions of Pentecostals and Charismatics to a superior experience of God. It could well be that in some measure those theologies have been a reaction against a perceived dead orthodoxy with its relatively joyless faith and lack of warmth. If so, the remedy is true experience as well as true doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16; Rom 10:9-11; John 6:37,40,47

<sup>2</sup> Col 3:1-3; the whole of Hebrews chapter 11; Matt 6:19-21

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 10:31; Matt 22:37; 5:10,11; 6:10; 6:22-24

<sup>4</sup> Matt 5:6; Rom 11:33-36; Phil 3:12-14; 2 Peter 3:18

<sup>5</sup> Rom 7:21-25; Matt 5:48; 22:37-40; 1 John 5:3; 1 Pet 1:8

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor 7:1; Rom 12:1,2; James 2:10-11; Matt 5:43-48; Mark 16:15,16

<sup>7</sup> Gal 5:22,23; whole of 1 Corinthians 13; Eph 3:16-20; 5:18

<sup>8</sup> John 13:34,35; 1 John 2:9-11; 1 John 3:18,19; John 13:13-15

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor 6:14-18; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:7

<sup>10</sup> Matt 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; 2 Tim 3:12; Matt 5:44; Rom 12:19-21

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Select Works Vol.3*, Banner of Truth, 1961, pp.54-119

<sup>12</sup> B B Warfield, *Faith and Life*, Banner of Truth paperback edition, 1974, p.188

<sup>13</sup> see part one of this article in *Reformation Today*, Number 212, p.14, with the quote of Donald MacLeod and my illustration of King David

<sup>14</sup> John 15:1,2

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 1:3-7; 5:12; 3:24b; 4:13; 4:16-21; 3:21; 5:20; 2:27; 5:14,15

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 2:3-5; 4:6; 2:24; 2:9-11; 3:10-18, 23; 4:7,11,12,20; 2:15-17; 4:1-4

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Works, Vol.1 An Exposition of Ephesians*, Nichol edition, 1861, pp 248,249

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## The Mass

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The Roman Catholic Church claims that the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mass are the same, 'one single sacrifice'. She teaches, 'The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "This divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner."<sup>1</sup> This is an unscriptural teaching. Jesus Christ was the one time sacrifice for all. He finished his work of salvation, and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 10:12). He sat down because his work of salvation was completed and finished. For any man to teach that there is a way to continue to offer his sacrifice is to say that Christ Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient.

Furthermore she teaches that in the Mass the body and blood of Jesus Christ is really present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine, her official words are, 'this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. "This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."<sup>2</sup>

What was the Origin of the Mass?

Radbertus a Benedictine monk first proposed the idea of the Mass in the ninth century. In the year 831 he published a treatise, 'Concerning the Body and Blood of Christ'. In this, he held that the bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper were, by consecration, converted into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and were actually the same body and blood as was born of the Virgin Mary. The teaching however did not become an official part of Roman Catholic doctrine until so pronounced by the Lateran Council of 1215 under the direction of pope Innocent III. It was strongly reaffirmed by the council of Trent in 1545 in which any denial of the Mass is anathematised.

The idea of the Mass as promoted by Radbertus was opposed by Berengar (1000-1088).<sup>3</sup> Berengar was canon and director of the cathedral school in Tours. Later he became the archdeacon of Angers. He was esteemed as a man of considerable learning and consistent piety. By study of the Scriptures and the Church fathers Berengar during the years 1040 to 1045 came to the conclusion that the notion that the bread could be turned into the literal flesh and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) was contrary to biblical teaching. Indeed he believed it to be a vulgar superstition. He shared his views among his pupils in France and Germany. Much interest and debate was stirred up. Eusebius Bruno, bishop of Angers, to whose diocese Radbertus belonged, sided with him but the majority

opposed him. Berengar's opposition to transubstantiation became known in Rome. That spelled trouble for him. He was tried before a Synod of Tours in 1054 under Leo IX but escaped through the help of Hildebrand who presided as papal representative. Hildebrand was satisfied with the admission that the bread and wine are in a spiritual sense the body and blood of Christ. Hildebrand invited Berengar to Rome for a final settlement.

The outcome was an unhappy one. Berengar appeared before a Lateran Council held in 1059, under Nicolas II. Berengar likened this assembly to wild beasts who would not listen to his contention that the Lord's Supper is spiritual and not a literal eating of the flesh of Christ. A violent and bigoted Cardinal Humbert in the name of the Synod forced upon Berengar a formula of recantation. Berengar did not possess the courage of a martyr. Out of fear of death he recanted.

This defeat did not deter Berengar who skilfully reasoned that Christ's body is now in heaven, which renders it impossible for that same body to be multiplied by priests here on earth. There is only one sacrifice of Christ and only one body of Christ. He called the doctrine of transubstantiation an absurdity. He pointed to the fact that Scripture calls Christ a lion, a door, a vine, a corner stone and a rock but these are all metaphorical.

Since he did not cease in his campaign against the Mass Berengar was summoned to Rome for a second time. He was threatened with excommunication and punishment if he did not withdraw his views on the Lord's Supper. Berengar was terrified with the prospect of the worst of deaths. Under coercion he again recanted.

He returned to France despondent and decided to give up the contest as hopeless. Bullying did not change his views. He deeply regretted his weakness and compromise and begged the Lord to pardon him as he had pardoned Aaron and Peter. He was now an old man and he decided to spend the rest of his life in strict ascetic seclusion on the island of Saint Come near Tours where he died in peace in 1088.

What is so wrong with the Mass?

1. *The Mass is a denial of the finished and perfect work of Christ*

The book of Hebrews teaches that all sacrifices and offerings are at an end because the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ has been made once and for all (Heb 10:10). 'Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people' (Heb 9:28). 'By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy' (Heb 10:14). In summary form we can say with absolute confidence that the offering of Christ once made provides propitiation and satisfaction for all his elect people from the beginning to the end of time. There is no other acceptable sacrifice for sin anywhere to be found. When Jesus cried out on the cross, 'It is finished!' he proclaimed that his work was complete. It is absurd to go on sacrificing Christ as though his work were incomplete.

2. *The Mass claims to give supernatural power to priests*

When the priest utters the words 'this is my body' over the bread, and the altar boy rings a bell, in that moment a miracle is supposed to take place and the bread is changed into the literal flesh of Christ.

This means that God is supposed to be under the control of priests using a man-made ritual. The Catholic priest John O'Brien expresses the teaching in these words, 'While the Blessed Virgin was the human agency by which Christ became incarnate a single time, the priest brings Christ down from heaven, and renders him present on our altar as the eternal Victim for the sins of man - not once, but a thousand times! The priest speaks, and lo! Christ, the eternal and omnipotent God, bows his head in humble obedience to the priest's command.'<sup>4</sup>

It is absurd to propose that Almighty God is subject to human control. Turning again to Hebrews we find that sacrificing priests are abolished. They are no longer necessary (Heb 10:8-14). Jesus is our high priest. He does not need anyone to repeat any further sacrifice. 'But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.' (Heb 10:12).

### 3 *The Mass is used for financial gain*

The Irish have a saying, 'High money, high Mass; low money, low Mass; no money, no Mass!' There are different Masses. Votive Masses are made for the relief of those suffering in purgatory and for those recovering from sickness but also for success in business ventures, safe journeys, protection against storms, floods and droughts. Requiem or funeral Masses are performed on behalf of the dead. Nuptial Masses are said at marriages. All these have a price tag. The most popular Mass is the Votive Mass, which is supposed to alleviate or end the suffering of souls in purgatory. Over the centuries vast sums of money have been made though the Mass. There is nothing in the Bible to warrant the idea of

purgatory and certainly nothing, which supports the idea that repeated sacrifices of this kind achieves anything.

Article 31 in the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England describe the Mass as 'blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits'. These are well chosen words. A fable is a story or a fiction, which has no substance in reality. That exactly describes the Mass. It has no foundation in Scripture. Moreover it is blasphemous because it grossly misrepresents the character of God as though he can be used in the hands of priests *ad nauseam*. It is a deceit because it deceives souls by diverting them away from the one and only source of salvation. It is dangerous because the Mass is the opposite of justification by faith alone. In other words the partaker puts his or her trust in the sacramental power of the element and not in the actual completed and perfect work of Christ.

### 4 *The Mass is hostile to the truth of assurance*

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that no one can have assurance of salvation. Indeed it teaches that those who claim assurance of eternal life are presumptuous. The Council of Trent even pronounced a curse upon anyone who presumed to say he had assurance of salvation. Personal assurance of salvation is the very essence of biblical Christianity. Christ by his perfect life and atoning death has secured everything needful to salvation (2 Peter 1:3). His perfect righteousness is imputed to the believer who is thereby justified by God the Father. All sin is atoned for. But with the Mass one has to return over and over again in the attempt to deal with sin. The experience of Martin Luther illustrates

the futility of seeking assurance of salvation on the basis of performing good works. The routine of confessing sin at the confessional box does not lead to salvation. The never ending round of rosary prayers and of attending Mass brings no assurance. Even after the last rites have been performed for a dying person and the sacrament of extreme unction applied, according to Roman Catholic teaching, the departing soul faces purgatory.

### *Conclusion*

In the sixth chapter of John's gospel Jesus teaches that physical eating of bread does not save. The Israelites ate the manna that was supernaturally provided day by day in the desert and they perished in the wilderness. It is not eating chemical substances that saves. Rather it is 'the Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6:40).

As believers we come to a table to celebrate a finished work. 'This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do you, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come.' (I Cor 11:25-26) We do not come to an altar to witness another sacrifice. We gather round a table of fellowship together to remember the once and for all sacrifice.

Concerted efforts, especially in America with ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together), are being made to establish unity between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics.<sup>5</sup> The doctrinal differences impeding such unity are immense. There is the problem of human

tradition displacing the supreme authority of Scripture. A great obstacle is the heresy of baptismal regeneration. There is the outrageous claim of the Pope who claims to take the place of Christ on earth. There is the problem of the worship of Mary, prayers to the saints and prayers for the dead. Furthermore we must address the subjects of the confessional, purgatory, indulgences and enforced celibacy for the clergy. But first on the list is the Mass because this touches the central truth of the atonement. Many have preferred martyrdom, even to be burned at the stake, than to deny the perfect and complete work of Christ on the cross for our salvation.

*Note* I am grateful for the help of Richard Bennett who made helpful suggestions and checked this material. He spent twenty-two years as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. His webpage is: [www.bereanbeacon.org](http://www.bereanbeacon.org) My experience was limited to five years boarding school at Marist Brothers College, Inanda, Johannesburg, not as a Catholic but as an observer.

<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, Paragraph 1367.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 1376

<sup>3</sup> The story of Berengar's resistance to the Mass is described in detail in Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, volume four, page 554 ff.

<sup>4</sup> John O'Brien, *The Faith of Millions: The Credentials of the Catholic Religion*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1963, 1974) pp. 255-256

<sup>5</sup> An example is the book, *Your Word is Truth*, a series of essays dealing with the subject of Scripture and Tradition edited by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, 168 pp., Eerdmans, 2002. Contributors include Timothy George and J I Packer.

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## News

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### World-wide perspective

According to a study by Professor Thomas Schirrmacher, director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the German Evangelical Alliance, at least 55,000 Christians are killed for their faith every year. Christians in India, Indonesia and Pakistan run the highest risk of losing their lives.

Since 1970 the number of Christians has tripled in Africa and Asia and doubled in Latin America. The Communist atheistic realm has shrunk but is totally dominant in North Korea where between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians suffer in harsh concentration camps. According to Open Doors World Watch List of countries where persecution of Christians prevails, North Korea tops the list for the fourth consecutive year. Can you do anything about this? You can log on to [www.prayfornorthkorea.org](http://www.prayfornorthkorea.org) and sign Christian Solidarity's petition condemning North Korea's flagrant abuse of human rights and the suffering of its people.

### Kenya

Keith Underhill, Missionary/Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, describes the Rendille people, an unreached people group, which he has been visiting regularly since 1998.

In the city of Nairobi, Kenya, a handful of Rendille people have come under the influence of the gospel. They came to the city looking for work as watchmen. Trinity Baptist Church has welcomed many who perhaps initially came for benevolent assistance. Twelve Rendille in Nairobi have come to know Christ, have been baptised, and have found more than food for their bodies. They have been satisfied with the bread of life.

Their fellow Rendille live about twelve hours' drive north of Nairobi. There are some forty thousand plus members of the Rendille tribe. Ninety-five percent of the tribe have little or no knowledge of Christ. Less than five percent can read or write their language. Translation of the Bible into the Rendille language has been in progress for many years. Apart from Keith Underhill's visits many areas where the Rendille live continue to have no exposure to the gospel.

The main Rendille town of Korr is within a few hours' walk of a large portion of the tribe's population. Here Daniel Galale and Boniface Kililo, trained Rendille men from Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi, are seeking to plant a church (see photo on front cover). The Godana family have recently relocated from Nairobi so that Godana can be an evangelist to his people. We are looking to encourage other Rendille Christians in Nairobi to return, and three young, educated Rendille men are being trained.

In Korr there is one Protestant (Africa Inland Church) and a Catholic Church. Not far from the town a Bible Presbyterian Church is being started.

The Rendille live in groups of up to 50. Huts are arranged in a circle, called goobs (pronounced 'gobs' like 'jobs'). The huts are dome shaped with a narrow inverted v-shaped slit of an entrance.

There is good respect given to the preaching of the gospel, as to any visitor. They are a monotheistic people who have a well-defined system of religion centred around the animals they herd, especially camels. There is much pressure on anyone who converts to Christianity and does not continue with traditional sacrifices. Very few of the 95% of traditional Rendille have made any profession of Christianity.

Great need for water sources exist. Many travel two to three hours each direction to get water. Pray that there will be a greater thirst for the water of life from the fountain that flows freely. We must pray that the Lord of the harvest will raise up labourers for the Rendille people from among Reformed Baptists.

*Ministry Opportunities in Kenya and Beyond*

At least 75% of Kenyans claim to be Christians, but shallowness prevails. There is a great need to plant Reformed and Baptist churches everywhere, especially amongst the unreached peoples.

The general strategy is to make use of present contacts and plant churches in the towns. This will enable closer encouragement for church plants in the surrounding rural areas.

Amongst the Pokot and Rendille the brethren who are trained lack experience in a Reformed Baptist church and need much encouragement

Basic Qualifications for prospective missionaries:

1. Heart-felt acceptance of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.
2. Set apart for the work in Kenya by a church confessing the 1689 Confession.
3. Either a. Pastoral experience,  
or b. Lengthy background in a Reformed Baptist church.
4. To spend first 6-12 months in Nairobi with Trinity Baptist Church under the oversight of the elders as regards the work in Kenya.

Place	Description of needs
Mombasa	Church planting in Mombasa, port city of 1 million, mainly Muslim. Overseeing work of Titus Tumaini amongst the Malakote in Idzowe, and George Mwanjisi in Boyani. Organizing an annual Pastors' Conference.
Machakos	Church planting in Machakos town, central town of Wakamba people. Encouraging the churches and their leaders already established in Mutituni, Kiatuni, Kyangango, Ulaani, Katuaa and Kasikeu.

Kericho	Church planting in Kericho town, together with John Langat. Encouraging the church at Chebangang. Developing contacts in the general area together with John Langat and David Ngetich.
Rendille (Korr)	Church planting in Korr with Daniel Galale and Boniface Kililo. Encouraging evangelism throughout the Rendille people who are largely untouched by the gospel or any church, with a view to planting churches.
Karapokot (Kamketo)	Working with the 3 leaders (Andrew, Joshua and Thomas) to bring stability and maturity to the 6 existing churches. Helping in the ministry of the 2 full primary schools. Developing more leaders for the churches. Encouraging reaching of areas still unreached.
South Sudan	Ministering to Sudanese refugees in Nairobi and Kakuma refugee camp. Helping in the training of Nelson and Garang with a view to relocation and church planting in southern Sudan by 2009.

For more information contact Keith Underhill at [kunderhill@maf.or.ke](mailto:kunderhill@maf.or.ke)

## **Nigeria**

Daniel and Kathleen Gula have been missionaries in Borno State, Nigeria, for many years. Last year in August they attended the Carey Family conference in Shropshire. This year in a letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> July Kathleen wrote to describe a narrow escape. In less than an hour of their leaving Mandugur the capital of Borno State 56 churches were burned down and 26 were killed. There are further threats from the Muslims to burn more churches and kill more Christians. Very evidently an extremely volatile state continues in Nigeria which calls for our prayers.

## **Eritrea** (see RT 208 and 209)

Christian Solidarity reports continued severe persecution for Christians in Eritrea. Letters of protest have been written to Eritrean embassies and demonstrations held outside the Eritrean embassy in London. Eritrean authorities repeatedly deny the religious persecution in the country. But many facts indicate otherwise. British evangelist Gerald Gordon was arrested for inquiring about the welfare of Orthodox Church Patriarch Abune Antonios. This occurred during a chance meeting with the President of Eritrea. He was detained for three days before being expelled from the country. He was given no reason for his detention. There were about 35 Christians in the prison with Mr Gordon, all of whom were held without charge.

There is a high profile case of 31 year old Eritrean gospel singer Helen Berhanes. She is a member of the outlawed Rhema Church. She was incarcerated in May 2004. She refused to sign a paper renouncing her faith even though this would have

ensured her immediate release. She has subsequently spent most of her days in solitary confinement and is reported to have spent some time in a shipping container at the Mai-Serwa military camp. Eritrea is now notorious for holding Christians in shipping containers. Letters of protest can be addressed to:

Eritrean Embassy,  
96 White Lion Street,  
LONDON  
N1 9PF

## **Argentina**

From Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June a Reformed Conference for ministers and church leaders was held at the 'Kairos' Conference centre in Buenos Aires. In all there were twelve men from Argentinian and Chilean churches and with speakers and various day visitors there were between 15 and 20 at each session. Those who came included missionary Don Donell from Cordoba and Bob Selph, missions co-ordinator of ARBCA the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America. Particularly encouraging was the late booking of two men from a church north of Buenos Aires who were starved of teaching in their church and had come to appreciate Reformed writings. They drank in everything. One spent £80 on books - a large sum by Argentinian standards. Trevor Routley and other organisers had hoped for more to come, but the enthusiasm of those who did more than compensated.

Over the three days Kevin Houser, a Canadian missionary in Chile and I shared seven doctrinal lectures on 'The Plan of Salvation' and I also preached each morning from John 3 and 10. Paul Branch (Buenos Aires) spoke on 'Justification'. Bob Selph gave one session on the essential elements of the gospel. Omar Ramos from Chile closed with a sermon. A Spanish translation of John Murray's 'Redemption Accomplished and Applied' was given to each attendee.

Undoubtedly there was blessing and the sense of the presence and help of God. The goodwill and spiritual fellowship between the men were evident. The testimony of many was that in Argentina preaching generally is not expository and ministers and congregations are prone to being swept along by 'winds of doctrine'. Omar Ramos said the situation was similar in Chile; he had been approached by churches recently asking for help because they were without doctrinal moorings. If these few men can be of help to the churches then the conference, in teaching and encouraging them, was worthwhile. They all wanted another next year!

Pray for the glory of Christ in the church in Argentina and for these men, whether pastors or otherwise, for their growth in grace, in understanding, in mutual encouragement, their struggle against false teachings (charismatic, prosperity gospel and man-centred pragmatism), for their influence and for plans for the future. *Mostyn Roberts, Welwyn.*

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## Praying down Wrath

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### *Understanding the Imprecatory Psalms*

#### **War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons from the Imprecatory Psalms**

James E Adams  
P&R, 1991, 126pp, pb.

#### **Crying for Justice: What the Psalms teach us about Mercy and Vengeance in an age of Terrorism.**

John N Day  
IVP, 2005, 199pp, pb.

Is there anything that gets you really angry? I am not talking about a sinful temper tantrum, or fits of rage, or irritability. Is there anything that stirs up *righteous* anger in your heart? Perhaps it is the North Korean prison camps, where Christian believers suffer unspeakable atrocities. Or perhaps the regime in Eritrea, where our brothers and sisters are packed into metal shipping containers, to endure the baking heat of an African day, and the cold of the night. Or is it the abuse of God's name, or contempt for his law, or mindless violence?

If we are ever angry, would we ever consider praying the imprecatory Psalms, calling down curses on the wicked? Think for example of Psalm 137 which blesses those who dash Babylonian babies against the rocks. Or Psalm 58 which speaks of the gladness of those who bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. How are we to understand such extreme sentiments? And do such Psalms have any place in Christian life and experience?

In answering these questions, we have great help from the writings of James Adams and John Day. Both books are fine examples of biblical theology, seeking to understand the text within the setting of its own time and culture but also within the scope of redemptive history. Most importantly, we are brought to understand these Psalms and their message in the light of Christ and the New Covenant age. But these books are also invaluable in that they are written by pastors, and are written with a view to practical and pastoral application. Day's book is especially valuable, in that he works through three of the most bloodthirsty Psalms, giving an exemplary exposition.

Rather than summarise the content of each book in turn, what follows is my own study based on these volumes. I trust this may be a helpful introduction to the subject. We will look first at objections to the imprecatory Psalms, then ask how we should use such radical prayers today.

### **Objections to the Psalms**

There are those who would prefer that imprecations be blotted out from the pages of Scripture. They say that they are just an embarrassment to the modern Christian. These are verses that we blush to read, let alone use, or have read out loud in public. There are three main arguments for this position:

*These words do not represent God's will*

C S Lewis, for example, struggled with such Psalms, describing them as the

expression of 'evil emotions'. 'In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like the heat from a furnace mouth.'<sup>1</sup> So, he claims, these do not represent the mind of God. He goes so far as to say that 'all Holy Scripture is in some sense - though not all parts of it in the same sense - the word of God.'<sup>2</sup> What does he mean by that? What I think he means is that in these Psalms we have a record of King David's prayer life. It is a true and valid record, and in many ways we can identify with David's emotions. But that does not mean that David's wrath is commended to us. After all, there are many things in Scripture which are described, for example in narrative sections, which are sinful. There are acts of sexual immorality, and deceit and murder. And just because they are committed by heroes of faith, and recorded in Scripture, does not mean that they are held up as examples for us to follow. So also then, in the Psalms, perhaps this is descriptive of David's prayer life, but not prescriptive for the Christian believer.

That argument is appealing, but it is not strong. After all, there is in the text no hint of divine disapproval of David's words. Furthermore it is not as if such imprecations come out of a clear blue sky. They are part of the stream of OT theology. God himself announces covenant curses on those who curse Abraham and his seed (Gen 12:3; Deut 32:43). The Levites were commanded to announce to Israel curses on those who broke the covenant (Deut 27). This is a vital element of divine justice, that wrath will fall on impenitent evildoers. So we should not be surprised to find such sentiments appearing in the inspired record of David's prayers.

Still, perhaps we are still uncomfortable that the language is so extreme. How can we talk about rejoicing to bathe your feet in the blood of your enemies? (Ps 58:10). If we wince at this, then it may be that we have not understood the gruesome reality of the ancient battlefield. In the picturesque village of Stow on the Wold in the English Cotswolds there is a quaint little street called Digbeth; it means 'ducks' bath'. We are told that when a battle was fought in Stow during the civil war, the slaughter of the Royalists was so great that blood flowed like water down that street, and ducks bathed in it. To stand as victor on such a field would be literally to be bathing your feet in the blood of your enemies. And should we be surprised at the Israelites rejoicing that at last the battle was won, deliverance had arrived, and the threat of the enemy was finally removed? Similarly, we need to understand Psalm 137 in its historical context. In ancient siege warfare, when the defences were finally broken the army would break into the city and commit numerous atrocities on the surviving inhabitants. Infants would be slaughtered, some in their mothers' wombs, others being dashed against rocks. The exiles in Babylon would have witnessed this violence against their own people, perhaps their own children. So is it surprising that when they pray for justice they pray for 'an eye for an eye' against their enemies, that finally the evil empire will be crushed and its progeny be killed? Is it not the will of God that all his enemies will ultimately be judged, never to threaten his people again?

*These words should only be expressed by Christ*

There are those who accept the validity of the imprecatory Psalms, but they

suggest that such curses can only rightfully be uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. After all, the Psalms are supremely the hymn-book of the Messiah. They point to Christ and they express his will. He, being perfectly righteous, is entitled to take such imprecations upon his lips. His perfect desire for judgment will always be tinged with mercy and compassion. His words will never be tainted with sinful cruelty. This was Bonhoeffer's solution to these Psalms. In particular he saw them through the filter of the Cross. The Lord Jesus was justified to call down such blood-curdling judgments because he, in his own person, bore such justice on the Cross and became the means of forgiveness for even the vilest sinner.

There is elegance in this interpretation, yet still it does not satisfy. After all, the Lord Jesus did not pay the price for every sin on the Cross, did he? The impenitent must still bear the wrath of God in hell. And if that is the divine purpose, can only Christ pray that such purposes be fulfilled? Is the Psalter the hymn-book of the Messiah so exclusively that it is denied to all of his people?

*These words represent OT morality*

Some recognise the validity of the imprecatory Psalms within the context of the Old Testament. Indeed, the Old Testament includes much about wrath and judgment. But, it is claimed, such sentiments have no place within Christian experience. We now live in the New Covenant age of love and grace and forgiveness found in Christ.

There is much that could be said in response to this position. There is a fundamental problem here in dividing

the Scriptures into two watertight dispensations which must be kept apart. But the objection fails even on its own terms, because when we come to the New Testament we find not only love and grace, but also curses and imprecations. Indeed, the Lord Jesus himself openly cursed his enemies as we see in Matthew 23, esp. v.33, 11:20-24. Our Lord spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Bible. And when you turn to the New Testament letters you find terrible warnings of wrath, and even curses (Gal 1:8). The Book of Revelation is in places even more blood-curdling than the most extreme of the Psalms.

More than that, some imprecations are specifically endorsed in the New Testament. Acts 1:20 quotes Psalm 109 approvingly, applying it to Judas. Clearly the Lord not only heard but answered this prayer. And notice that Peter ascribes the imprecation not only to David but the Holy Spirit himself (Acts 1:16).

So we cannot escape the imprecatory Psalms. They are clearly part of God's revealed Word. The question now is how should we understand them, and use them, in the New Testament age?

### **Using the Imprecatory Psalms Today**

*They are prayers for God's glory*

Our first principle is to understand that imprecations are not fuelled by selfish, sinful anger, but by a passion for God's glory. We see this for example in Psalm 58:11, or 139:19-22. David is not engaged in any prayer for private vengeance. This is no personal quarrel. No, he is concerned that justice is being trampled under foot. The law of God is being cast aside. The Lord's people are

suffering. But more than that, God himself is being held in contempt.

Surely if we love the Lord we will be jealous for his glory. If a husband is angered when his wife is demeaned or offended, how much more should we be stirred up when our Lord is abused. What extraordinary arrogance of mere mortal creatures to lift up their heels against the God of heaven! What pride, what arrogance, that they should shake their fists in the face of the living God who made heaven and earth! (Ps 2:2-6).

Should it surprise us that the godly have a passionate desire for God's glory? That we should be impatient with this wicked world? That we cry out 'Come, Lord Jesus'? We want his kingdom to be established; we want his rule to be seen and obeyed. We want rebellion to end and evil to be crushed. These are godly desires, are they not? Indeed, the Lord himself teaches us to pray in this way (Matt 6:9-10). It would be strange if such desires were not accompanied by strong emotions. As Jesus testified in his own experience, 'Zeal for your house consumes me.'

Do we have a problem with that? If there is a report on the news for example of some horrible abuse of a child, or some terrible murder, do we not pray for the perpetrators to be captured and brought to justice? When you hear of some suicide bombing, or mass terror, are you not stirred to pray that the evil people who orchestrate such attacks be brought to justice? If we are so stirred because of offences against a child, or against civilians, how much more when the offence is against the Lord himself!

Very closely related to zeal for God's glory is zeal for his people. We are angered when the Church is attacked or slighted or undermined. You remember when Saul of Tarsus the fearful persecutor was at last arrested on the road to Damascus by the vision of divine glory, he heard the divine voice 'Saul, why do you persecute me?' As far as the Lord is concerned, an attack on the Church is an attack on his own person. We are described as the apple of his eye, his treasured possession. This is why the New Testament includes various prayers of imprecation against the enemies of God's people. Think of the persistent widow - a picture of the Church praying for justice (Luke 18:7-8). Or think of the martyrs in heaven praying for justice (Rev 6:10). Or think of the prayers of the saints rising into heaven; they are answered by judgments coming on the earth (Rev 8:4-5). Think of the expectation of Paul writing to the Thessalonian church that their enemies will be condemned (2 Thess 1:6-7).

Perhaps some of the most striking curses of the New Testament are against false teachers. Galatians 1:8 is particularly striking. This is because there is no surer way to rob God of his glory than to destroy the message of saving grace in Christ alone. Paul's response is not just to shake his head in sorrow. He knows after all whence all false teaching comes - from the father of lies himself. Paul also knows that the health of the church is at stake; more than that the eternal salvation of its members. So Paul gets angry, and he prays for justice.

These are all prayers for God's glory. Perhaps if we do not pray with such vigour, then we have lost our passion

for the Lord. Perhaps we have become indifferent to the offensiveness of sin, and we are listless in our love for Christ. Perhaps our zeal has grown cold. The expectation of Scripture is that when evil is crushed at last, then God's people will rejoice (Rev 19:1-2).

Yet here we need a second principle to guide us in our use of imprecations:

*They are prayers which yet hope for grace*

There is a danger that in calling down curses, we may be easy prey for the devil who would stir up our sinful passions. We might become bitter and unloving believers. This is far from the tenor of the New Testament. We have seen that the Lord did not shy away from imprecation, but he also taught us to love our enemies (Matt 5:43-45,48). The Pharisees of Jesus' day had a very strong sense of justice, and a desire for God's kingdom. But their passion bore bitter fruit. They regarded the Gentiles as dogs; Judaism became a religion marked by hatred. Jesus, in contrast, calls for love.

Even in the Old Testament, we must not forget the emphasis on loving our enemies. There are commands to give help and show kindness to enemies (Ex 23:4-5). Think of Naaman's slave girl, who had every reason to hate her captor and slave master. Yet she lovingly pointed him towards the way of healing. Remember Elisha at Dothan, showing compassion on the men who had come to kill him. Supremely it is the Lord Jesus who expounds this principle of love.

The great question is how we keep both principles of love and imprecation

together. Clearly the Lord Jesus taught love, but also cursed the wicked. How can this be?

The answer is best expressed in Romans chapter 12:14-21. Imagine now that you are a persecuted believer, perhaps in some vile prison camp. Your enemies are all around you, determined to make your life miserable because of your faith in Christ. They pursue your brothers and sisters in the Lord. They burn Bibles and hinder the preaching of the gospel. What should your attitude be towards them? The answer is that a Christian must love them (Rom 12:14). Our desire is always for their conversion. We long for their salvation. Isn't that what Paul testified when he was called before the court of King Agrippa? (Acts 26:29).

But - and this is where the balance comes - if our persecutors remain determined and unrepentant, then they will face the judgment. And indeed, all of our kindness and love that we have shown in the face of their hatred will be like burning coals on their heads (Rom 12:19-20). So we love, but we also desire justice. This is not a confusion of mixed motives; it is the key to praying the imprecatory Psalms as a Christian. Because we are confident that God will hear and answer our prayers for justice, we know that we need not (indeed we must not) show any violence or harm or abuse towards our enemies. We can take the battle axe out of our own hearts and give it to the Lord. He will deal with them. Perhaps they are not as evil as we think, or perhaps they are far more wicked than we imagine, but the Lord knows and he will do what is right. Then, as we pray for justice and we anticipate the awful destiny of the wicked, any feelings of hatred or resentment against our

persecutors turn to pity, even love. The Lord will avenge; it is only now for us to love. And we desire that just as we have been saved by pure grace and mercy, so too this might be the experience of our own persecutors, that they will come to Christ before it is too late. After all it was not so long ago that each one of us was unsaved. At that point we richly deserved the wrath of God, and imprecations could be called down on our heads. We are still by nature vile sinners; only by pure grace can the Lord receive us. So our prayers cannot be self-righteous. We pray for justice as saved sinners, and as we have first received mercy, then we are to long for love and mercy even for our most bitter enemies.

It is this blend of love and justice which expresses the will of God. He does not desire the death of the wicked. Yet he will not flinch from final judgment; his wrath will be great and terrible. If the

Lord only loved, that would be immoral sentimentality. If the Lord only desired justice, where would be grace and mercy? But the Lord demonstrates both love and justice at the same time, and so should we.

Such balance is expressed by the imprecatory Psalm 83:16. 'Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name O LORD'. It is a call for judgment, always longing that yet there would be salvation.

May the Lord help us, and give us godly passions. We need to be filled afresh with zeal for justice and God's glory. And we need to be filled afresh with love and grace. Then we will be Christlike in our desires, and then we will be able to pray aright the imprecatory Psalms.

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1. Day, p.21.
  2. *Ibid*, p.24.

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