

REFORMATION TODAY



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Group photo of conferees at Barberton, see report page 27



View of tent at Barberton which was used for the bookshop during the conference

The article on the uniqueness of the *Bible* is dedicated to Lydia to help her re-affirm her faith in God's Word.

The article Memorising God's Word has been extracted from Don Whitney's book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Navpress, 1991. We are grateful for Don Whitney's permission to do this.

Front cover picture – Missionary pastor Karl Peterson at the first EP conference at Barberton, see report page 27.

Editorial

No book in the world is like the Bible. It is unique in content, inerrancy, authority and sufficiency. It is God's book for mankind. In it we find the way to eternal life.

What is the best way to understand the Bible? The answer is by following the Bible story-line which is the unfolding drama of redemption. A line can be drawn from the creation of the world described in Genesis one and two, to the creation of the new heavens and new earth described in the last two chapters of the Bible. How can we join these two points from beginning to end?

Two ways are popular. One is to look at the whole story by way of God's covenants. The Abrahamic covenant makes way for the Mosaic covenant which was broken and which in turn made way for the New Covenant. The continuity and discontinuity of the Old and New Covenant is a live issue today as is seen in the review by Bill James. Another way of tracing the story-line of the Bible by the development of the kingdom. Following this idea the Bible can be divided into eight sections.

The Old Testament

1. The pattern of the kingdom
2. The perished kingdom
3. The promised kingdom
4. The partial kingdom
5. The prophesied kingdom

The New Testament

6. The present kingdom
 7. The proclaimed kingdom
 8. The perfected kingdom
1. *The pattern of the kingdom.* The garden of Eden provides us with a view of the world as God designed it to be.
 2. *The perished kingdom.* Genesis chapter three describes the fall of our first parents. They were alienated from God and thereafter lived in sin and unbelief. They and all their progeny came under God's curse.
 3. *The promised kingdom.* God called Abraham and promised that in him and in his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:1-3).

4. *The partial kingdom.* The Old Testament describes how promises to Abraham are partially fulfilled as Israel was formed to be a special people who to be the custodians of his law and his promises. But Israel proved unfaithful. The people flagrantly broke the covenant. The result was the disintegration of the nation. The Northern Kingdom was scattered and the Southern Kingdom (Judah and Jerusalem) was taken into exile in Babylon, partly in 597 BC and then more fully in 587 BC.
5. *The prophesied kingdom.* Many promises and descriptions of the coming Messiah are found in the Psalms and the prophets. Hence the Old Testament is sometimes called the Book of Promise. Isaiah the prophet promised that Yahweh would send his Servant who through his sufferings and humiliation would redeem his people (Isa 52:13 – 53). When Judah and Jerusalem were overwhelmed by the Babylonians Ezekiel ministered to the exiled community in Babylon. There he promised the inauguration of the new covenant (Ezek 36). Contemporary with Ezekiel was Jeremiah who promised the same (Jer 31).

The New Testament

6. *The present kingdom.* When Jesus came he said, ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:15). In his perfect life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven Jesus accomplished everything needed for our salvation. That is why we call the New Testament ‘the book of fulfilment’. It describes and explains how the promises of the Messiah in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ.
7. *The proclaimed kingdom.* When Jesus ascended he sent the Holy Spirit who on the day of Pentecost came to take charge of the progress of the kingdom on earth. This last period is called, ‘the last days’. When we pray ‘Your kingdom come’ we are praying for the growth of Christ’s Church in all the world. This is the time when the gospel is proclaimed to all nations, tribes and languages of the earth.
8. *The perfected kingdom.* When Jesus returns he will usher in the Great Judgement in which all people from all generations will be judged (Matt 25:31-46). The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous. Those who hate God and have expressed their contempt in unbelief will be sentenced to everlasting punishment. Those who have trusted in Christ and evidenced their faith by love and good works for him will inherit the eternal kingdom.

I have followed this outline from a 160 page paperback carrying the main title GOD’S BIG PICTURE – and sub-title *Tracing the story-line of the Bible*, by Vaughan Roberts, published by IVP, 2002. A larger exposition along similar lines is Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture – The Application of biblical theology to expository preaching*. 266 pp., paperback, IVP, 2000.

The Uniqueness of the Bible

What is the Bible? People speak about the seven wonders of the world. There are the seven natural wonders, the seven architectural wonders and the seven engineering wonders of the world. What about historical wonders? The formation, perfection, completion and preservation of the Bible is surely a wonder in human history. In the Bible God has given mankind an infallible book on which we can depend. In the Bible we have described in the four Gospels the greatest historical wonder of all which is the incarnation: the virgin birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ.

The Bible is a compilation of 66 books. Inspired by the Holy Spirit these books have been written over a period of about 1,500 years. About 40 authors were involved. It is essential that we have the truth in written form because that is the only way in which we can have perfect accuracy and permanence. In God's written Word we have accessibility. This is often taken for granted. Accessibility is vital. I do not have to visit a museum or library to find a Bible. The Bible is in my home. It is accessible.

The Bible is a necessity because without it we would have no self-revelation by God of his nature. We would have no reliable record describing his interventions in human history. Without the Bible preachers would be deprived of an authoritative source for the good news of eternal life and how to attain it. Hence we can appreciate that it is essential that the Bible is translated into all the languages of the world so that everyone can have access to it.

The necessity of the Bible has been recognised. The whole Bible is now available in 422 languages and the New Testament in 1079 languages. No other book remotely comes near to that. The Bible is unique in its circulation. Billions of copies have been printed over the centuries. The demand is steadily increasing around the world.¹

The priceless value of the Bible is seen in its unique nature. I will comment on five ways in which the Bible is unique: its formation (the way it was formed), its composition (its content), its inerrancy, its authority and its sufficiency.

1. *The Bible is Unique in its Formation (the way it was formed)*

Hebrews 1:1 gives us a summary of how the Old Testament came into being: 'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.'

Parts of the Bible have come by direct speech as when the Lord spoke to Adam and Eve and when he spoke directly to Moses from within the burning bush. He also used direct speech from the mount of Sinai to all the children of Israel. There he spoke the Ten Commandments which he also wrote on tablets of stone. 'When the LORD finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God' (Ex 31:18).

Most Scripture has come through inspiration of the prophets. Jeremiah wrote, 'The LORD said to me, "Behold I have put my words in your mouth"' (Jer 1:9). Scores of times in the prophets we read, 'The word of the LORD came to me, saying.' The apostle Peter wrote, 'Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 2:21,22).

Jeremiah is an example of a prophet with a difficult calling to preach to a people who were rebellious and disobedient. Sometimes the work was too demanding. Jeremiah was ready to quit. But then he found God's word was in his heart like a fire, a fire shut up in his bones (Jer 20:9). At one stage the wicked King Jehoiakim burned Jeremiah's work. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, had written his prophecies on a long scroll. The king cut off pieces of the scroll and threw them into a fire until the whole was destroyed. 'After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, "Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were written on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up"' (Jer 36:27,28).

With the advent of Christ into the world we have in him the supreme revelation of God. John's Gospel begins, 'In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.' By this we understand that Christ is *the* very essence of the revelation of God.² Christ is the apex and fulness of the Father's revelation to mankind. In his coming to dwell among us Christ fulfils all the Old Testament promises. He comes as prophet to teach us, priest to pray for us and king to rule over us.

How did the New Testament come into being? The answer is that Jesus gathered disciples around himself and taught them. They were his witnesses. They described his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. In the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we can view Jesus from different vantage points. One Gospel is by Luke who was a medical doctor and a historian. Luke also wrote the book of Acts which describes the day of Pentecost and the advance of the Gospel across the Roman Empire. The letters of the New Testament came into being as churches multiplied around the Roman Empire. The apostle Paul was the foremost apostle. He wrote letters of correction and guidance to the churches. These form a major part of the New Testament. For instance Paul's letter to the Romans consists of a systematic explanation of the way of salvation followed by instruction as to how to behave in the church and how to relate to the world.

The New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation which describes the new creation (as Genesis described the first creation), and the spiritual conflict which will characterise this final period of world history until Christ returns.

2. *The Bible is Unique in its Composition (its content)*

The precise determination of what should be included and what excluded from the Bible is a matter of paramount importance. The different parts are amazingly varied in character: history, law, biography, wisdom books, prophecies, narratives, letters of teaching and apocalyptic books. How can we be sure that the different writings are intended to be in the Bible especially when the books are so very different in character? Stringent tests have always applied as we will see.

We use the word 'canon' in the sense of a measuring rod to determine what is to be included and what excluded.³ The content of the Old Testament canon continued to grow until the end of the writing process which was with the book of the prophet Malachi (about 435 BC). Appropriately Malachi concludes with a prophecy telling of the coming of one like Elijah who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

There were books written during the inter-testamental time. These writings describe the history of the Jews during that period. All of these are inferior to Scripture. None of them were accepted by the Jews as Scripture. The errors in the Apocrypha preclude it from the canon of Scripture.

The Old Testament is a preparation for the New. It is the book of promise and the New Testament is the book of fulfilment. What about the twenty-seven books of the New Testament?

It took a long time before the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were agreed by the Church to be perfect and therefore canonical. There was little question about the books written by the apostles but Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude were scrutinised. The close association of Paul with Luke helped to bring early acceptance of Luke's Gospel and of the book of Acts. Likewise Mark's close association with Peter brought early acceptance of Mark's Gospel. However the over-riding factor is the test of perfection and self-attestation. The latter factor means that a book must bear its own witness of divine origin. Thus in AD 367 Athanasius recorded in a letter an exact list of the twenty-seven books we have today. In 397 at the Council of Carthage representing the western part of the Mediterranean world there was agreement with the eastern churches on the same twenty-seven books.

The giving, the preservation and the assembling of the canon of Scripture should ultimately be appreciated by Christians not merely as part of Church history but as an integral part of the history of redemption itself.

3. *The Bible is Unique in its Inerrancy*

Paul's description of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:15,16 reads as follows, 'From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

Note that Paul describes the Scriptures as 'God-breathed'. Since God is perfectly holy, just and true he cannot tell a lie. Scripture bears that quality of absolute perfection. This of course applies to the original autographs. The Bible has come to us through the centuries by copying. Those who use the Greek apparatus will detect immediately that there are variants because of copying. However the number of variants is small and the nature of the variants is such that the Word of God is not adversely affected.

God's words are reliable as Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (Matt 24:35). These words are true of all prophecies made in the Bible. For instance in the Olivet discourse Jesus described the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, all of which came to pass exactly as he said it would. Jesus authenticated the Scriptures and

said that they cannot be broken (John 10:35). He expounded all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

In 1978 Christian leaders met in Chicago to refine work on the subject of inerrancy and produced a wonderfully useful document titled *The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy*. Paragraph 4 in the short summary statement reads: 'Being wholly verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.'

If inerrancy is denied then we wonder if we can really trust God in anything he says. If he makes mistakes in the little matters how can he be trusted in the greater issues? Furthermore if we deny inerrancy we essentially place our own minds above the standards of God's Word.

The Chicago document deals with the matter of copying original manuscripts and the matter of variants.

Are there other documents that are without error? The business of lawyers is to produce documents that are without error. Architects strive and often succeed in producing drawings that are perfect in dimensions and in detail. The subject is not mysterious. It is practical. The Bible is hugely more than legal documents or architectural drawings and specifications. In all its complexity and diversity of material the Bible claims itself to be without error: 'And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay' (Ps 12:6). 'The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul' (Ps 19:7).

4. *The Bible is Unique in its Authority*

By the authority of Scripture we understand that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that if we disbelieve or disobey any word in Scripture we disobey God. We can read other books but they do not call us to account. Yes, you might read an excellent spiritual book but the human author of that book has no authority over you. A human author can never have power to throw you into hell. But the Bible is different. It is unique because there we find the authority of God. The Bible is God's Word and by it he calls everyone to account.

In the fall we all by nature became alienated from God. The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so (Rom 8:7).

Now in the gospel we are called to reconciliation. Reconciliation is only needed when there has been a breach. Now all men everywhere are called on by the Father to repent and to believe in his Son and so be reconciled (Acts 17:30; 1 John 3:23).

We are given to understand that the Father has given his all for our salvation as it is written, 'This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' The call to close with Christ and believe in and trust in him is a clear command. There is no other way of salvation. 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). The issue is plainly stated at the conclusion of the famous chapter three of John's Gospel, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him' (John 3:36).

It is fatal to resist the Holy Spirit when he convicts us because there is no one else who has the power to save us.

The Bible is unique in setting before us the reality of the coming final judgement of all men together with the clearest call to come to Christ and so be saved.

'The things Jesus says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, "This is the truth about the universe. This is the way you ought to go." But he says, "I am the truth, and the way, and the life, – no man can reach absolute reality, except through me. Try and retain your own life and you will be ruined. Give yourself away and you will be saved." He says, "If you are ashamed of me, if when you hear this call, you turn the other way, I will look the other way when I come again as God without disguise."'¹⁴

Together with authority an important characteristic of the Bible is clarity. It is not confined to specialists such as university professors or ministers of religion. It is written for everyone, men and women, young and old, rich and poor. We see this especially in the New Testament letters where all members of the churches are addressed. Also in a number of places it is made clear that everyone without exception is addressed. 'Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares' (Prov 1:20).

5. *The Bible is Unique in its Sufficiency*

The sufficiency of Scripture can be defined as follows: ‘The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words God intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.’⁵

This sufficiency means that the Bible is sufficient for all people at all ages and stages of development. The Bible is relevant in every epoch. It speaks clearly in and to the 21st-century. It has lost none of its ancient power because of age. God is unchanged and man is as sinful as ever. Salvation by imputed righteousness is the same as ever it was. There is no book more relevant than the Bible.

As asserted above the Bible is not a book confined to specialists. Before the 16th-century Reformation the Bible was forbidden to ordinary lay people and confined to church officials. When Paul wrote to Timothy he said that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures which were able to make him wise to salvation. The Bible is for children and adults. Deuteronomy 6:7 says we must impress God’s Word upon our children and talk about God’s words when we sit at home and when we walk along the road and when we lie down and when we get up.

In 2 Timothy 3:15,16, referred to above, Paul describes the all-round use of the Bible. It is ‘useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’

Moses warned the people of Israel, ‘Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it’ (Deut 4:2). The Bible ends with a strong warning that we are not to add to it or subtract from it. Recently I spent about an hour with a young Muslim who assured me that Mahomet was the final prophet and that he corrected the Bible. I asked him how that was possible when Mahomet had a limited knowledge of the Jewish and Christian religions? I asked him how Mahomet could be right when he contradicted the historic fact of the death of Christ by crucifixion?

Joseph Smith added the book of Mormon to the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church added to the Bible the doctrines of the Mass, the infallibility of the Pope and the bodily assumption of Mary.

The 16th-century Reformation was an amazingly liberating event because it took Christians back to the principle of *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone, and so the Church was made free from human enslaving and superstitious traditions. We must never add to the Bible because it is an all-sufficient book.

Some deny the sufficiency of Scripture by claiming the gift of prophecy. According to them prophets can stand up and prophesy like the Old Testament prophets. Much harm has been done by those who imagine that they have a direct word from the Lord. One example will illustrate this matter which has been a curse in some churches for many years now. Henri Cronje, an Afrikaans pastor in Pretoria, tells of a close friend who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. A dedicated experienced believer he was nevertheless deeply shaken by this diagnosis. In the church where he was a member someone stood up and proclaimed that he had a prophetic word from the Lord that this afflicted brother would be instantly healed at that very moment. This message resulted in tremendous spiritual anguish in this afflicted man who died just a week later.⁶

There is a megashift in the New Testament from the authority of the apostles and prophets to the time of their demise when authority shifted from them (apostles and prophets) to church elders (1 Tim 3: Titus 1).

In the New Testament we are instructed how to recognise elders and deacons not apostles and prophets. Prophecy as a gift had a high profile during the time of the apostles (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 14:1). But in 1 Corinthians 13:8 we read, 'But where there are prophecies, they will cease.' The Bible is now all-sufficient and we do not need prophets. This does not mean that God cannot act in extraordinary ways to give supernatural healing or in exceptional circumstances to give guidance in an extraordinary way, but the norm for the universal Church is to live by every word of God (Deut 8:1-5).

Conclusion

To love the Bible is to love Christ. The measure in which we love the Bible reflects the measure in which we love our Triune God. 'Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it day and night' (Ps 119:97). 'Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful' (Josh 1:8).

The Bible consistently presents the case of only two kinds of people, godly and ungodly, sheep and goats, lovers of the Word and those who reject the Word.

Psalm one describes the two kinds. David Preston renders this psalm for singing like this:

HAPPY THE PEOPLE WHO REFUSE

To walk the way the wicked choose,
Who will not stand where sinners meet,
Nor with the scornful take a seat:
The word of God is their delight,
Their meditation day and night.

Trees set along the waterside
Shall yield their fruit at harvest-tide;
Though parched the landscape, bare the sky,
Their leaves will never fade or die:
So prosper those who daily draw
Upon the LORD'S eternal law.

Not so the wicked! What are they
But winnowed chaff that blows away?
When judgement comes, they shall not stand
Among the just at God's right hand:
The LORD protects his people's path,
But godless ways must end in wrath.⁷

¹ Details of progress in Bible translation can be found on Wycliffe.org. For the number of Bibles printed estimates can be made by referring on the Internet to the Bible Societies. The fact that there are many publishing houses round the world that print the Bible makes it difficult to estimate just how many Bibles are printed annually.

² One of the titles of Christ is 'The Word of God' (Rev 19:13). This is because he rules by his Word: 'Out of his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword with which to strike down the nations' (Rev 19:15). I take this striking down the nations to mean that his enemies are set in disarray and barriers to the gospel are broken down. The dramatic breaking down of the iron curtain and the breaking up of the atheistic Soviet Union is a recent example of this.

³ A helpful survey of this subject is by David Dunbar 'The Biblical Canon' in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, edited by Don Carson and John Woodbridge, Zondervan, 1986.

⁴ C S Lewis, *God in the Dock*, Eerdmans, 1970, p. 160.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, 1994, p. 127.

⁶ *Profesie Vandag, Nagedink oor die gawe van profesie*, Henri Cronje, Aktua Press, 2006. The author pleads in this book for the non-cessation position, that is that the gift of prophecy continues. He describes instances of the gift of prophecy in practice and also warns about abuse. I enjoyed reading his book but am entirely unconvinced by his arguments. The examples given of prophecy in action today are feeble. In the matter of seeking guidance he cites the case of George Müller whose custom was to have two columns on a piece of paper and to fill in reasons for a course of action on one side and reasons against in the other column and then make it a matter of prayer. That is the way we should act. With the Bible, prayer and the Holy Spirit to guide us we do not need a special office of prophet.

⁷ PRAISE ! Hymnbook available from Evangelical Press.

News

Mexico

I returned recently from the high mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico. I led a team into an isolated region where 65 unreached indigenous Indian people groups still live. The dearth of gospel labourers in these tough (and often hostile) regions is shocking. One group, the Coicoyan, 25,000 people, living in 13 villages scattered throughout a mountain range covering many square miles. There is only one known believer and one missionary family in the whole region! And we were right in the middle of them after 30 hours of hard 4-wheel driving from Brownsville, Texas.

I sat for three hours praying one morning at an animistic altar. Two feet to my left was a large blood-stained stone with broken images of Mary and Jesus scattered around it. To my right were the remains of an animal (probably a small goat) that had been slit and sacrificed to the spirits. What was left of the carcass was draped over the limb of a tree. Beer cans littered the ground in front of me. What a picture of utter spiritual desolation and desperation! Brothers, these dear people will perish forever if they don't find their way to Jesus Christ. And tribal people won't just "stumble" upon truth. We have the great privilege to win souls to Christ from these people.

I often see in FIRETALK exchanges between USA and Canada churches seeking pastors and vice versa. Please allow me a moment to state a plea for unreached peoples. Thousands of them have never heard a meaningful presentation of the gospel in their language and culture.

We are targeting a dozen places in Papua New Guinea and interior Oaxaca, Mexico where the gospel has never been established in the history of these peoples. We pray and fast regularly as a ministry that the Lord would raise up and thrust out labourers to these gospel-starved regions. It is my hope to train and launch 25 cross-cultural church planting teams to these (and other) places over the next five years. Would you pray with us to this end? Would you send us your young (and older) people to get the necessary training and experience to engage these people groups? Would some of you adopt the missionaries we are presently training and develop long term partnerships with us in order to get them quickly deployed onto the front lines of gospel mission?

As you pray for direction, and counsel others as to where to go in ministry, please consider the regions of the world where the gospel does not exist. The fact is, something like 88% of all the ministers worldwide are working among only about 2% of the world's population. I feel compelled to at least make this plea for those who have absolutely no access to Christ and the gospel in their culture. Please help us go to go and win some of them for Jesus.

David Sitton, President – To Every Tribe Ministries
www.toeverytribe.com

Israel

Following on from the reports concerning the state of the Jewish churches in Israel published in *Reformation Today* 212, July/Aug 2006, my wife and I visited Israel again May/June 2007. I can report confirmation of the features reported. There is solid but not spectacular growth. Everywhere we went there was evidence of a small number of regular conversions. This feature is encouraging as it encompasses most of the land, not just one part. However, we must not underestimate the problems the churches face, particularly the effects of determined persecution and slander they have to constantly endure from the religious Orthodox Jews. The authorities stand by and do little and the general public allow these things to happen without any protest.

We twice visited a particular congregation where the Orthodox picket the services. They confront every attender as they enter and leave. They shout insults and blasphemies right in your face. On the Sabbath between our visits all the car tyres of members were slit. It was done in such a way as to be slow punctures which became evident only as the cars were driven. During the week they picket members' homes. Nothing is done to stop this illegal activity in spite of reporting to the police. Our second visit was the week after the tyre incident. The pickets were there. The congregation was fine and the worship was as normal. We were invited back to a home for a meal and fellowship, where a number of members were present. The fellowship was rich, deep and very informative. They were delighted to know we intend to return in the future, God willing. We were led finally to a period of prayer in which nearly everyone contributed. However, I have to report the ill effects of this campaign of harassment. Many members have ceased to attend the congregation, either out of fear or because they

are weary. This is a matter of grief to the continuing members. Also members cannot invite unbelievers to the services because they know they would be openly insulted or even worse. We must not think this level of persecution is the norm, but neither is it the only case. The authorities are tightening up on issuing or reissuing visas to foreign missionaries.

It is my considered conviction that the gospel foundations already laid throughout the nation, among the Jews, are such, that a ‘Saul of Tarsus’ raised up of God could lead to a major awakening. May it be so, is the my fervent prayer. *Bob Davey.*

South Africa

Homosexuality Dominates Dutch Reformed Church, South Africa, Synod

The Nederduitse Gereformeerds Kerk (NG) is by far the largest Afrikaans speaking denomination in South Africa. Liberal trends in this denomination are similar to trends in other large mainline denominations, the most notable example being the world-wide Anglican denomination.

The General Synod of the NG faces major issues in church unification, land reform, baptism (and re-baptism), crime and violence, pastoral education. However, the issue that received the most attention in their four-day meeting, 4-7 June, was the report about homosexual members and ministers.

In 2004 the last full General Synod created a high-level task force asking it to re-evaluate the church’s policy on homosexual members. That synod also apologised to its gay members and their families who were wounded by the church’s judgments and exclusion. Still, this task force did not come with a clear resolution but a sharply divided report.

Besides the report this synod also had a case to deal with. One of its ministers, Laurie Gaum, appealed against his suspension to the synod. The church had removed Gaum from office on grounds of homosexual conduct. In addition, 500 individuals, most of them members, circulated an open letter, urging synod to receive its gay members as full members. There were five publications in different media, some from committee members themselves, and three of these were given to all synod delegates.

In an executive session the synod also restored the ministerial credentials of Laurie Gaum, mainly on procedural grounds. In the course of the various judgments and appeals the charges had been altered. The synod further declared that since Gaum had been cleared of this charge, he could not be retried for the same incident. The synod's decision also avoided what might have been a lengthy legal battle in civil courts, which Gaum was prepared to wage. Gaum now faces a decision whether to remain a minister, since he has so far declined to pledge celibacy in homosexual relations.

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New Zealand

Grace Reformed Baptist Church

2007 School of Theology

From July, 9 and 13, eleven men gathered in a classroom at Massey University in Palmerston North for the first of what may become an annual School of Theology hosted by Grace Reformed Baptist Church. The men came together from seven churches in New Zealand and Fiji for an intensive week of learning under the instruction of Dr. James M Renihan, the Dean and Professor of Historical Theology at the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies at Westminster Seminary in California. During the course of the five days attention was focused on one topic, Baptist Symbolics: the Second London Confession of Faith (The 1689) which, to Baptists, is symbolic of the Biblical Theology we espouse. Dr. Renihan briefly introduced the historical background to the Confession and then took us chapter by chapter through an analysis of its language and theology with reference to the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration and the First London Confession. Exploring the language as it was understood in the seventeenth century revealed a care and clarity in the Confession which few of us had appreciated before, while opportunities for questions and discussion ensured relevance and practical application to our current day and theological climate.

Next year we hope that Jim Renihan will return for our second School of Theology to be held in Palmerston North from July 7 to 11, 2008. The Lord willing, the week will focus upon Baptist History, considering baptism in the early church and medieval period as well as the history and development of various Baptist groups from the time of the Reformation to the present day. By this year's standard this promises to be a stimulating overview providing fresh insights and practical lessons of relevance to our churches. *Dafydd Hughes – Grace Reformed Baptist Church*

Iraq

Elizabeth Kendal, researcher for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, says Al Qaeda is purging the Baghdad and Basra areas of Christians. On the weekend of 18 April Christians in one neighborhood were given 24 hours to convert to Islam or die. Six Christian families fled but were not permitted to take any of their belongings. Others have been required to yield up their daughters. A fatwa has been issued forbidding Christians to wear the cross or make any religious gesture. In al-Durah (Dora), the ancient Christian quarter of Baghdad, churches have been ordered to remove their crosses or be burned. St. John the Baptist Chaldean Church and the Church of St George were resistant so militants climbed up and ripped off the crosses themselves.

The Church of St. George was later burned anyway. According to Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, 27 churches have been destroyed since 2003 and dozens of other churches and monasteries have been abandoned due to threats and terrorism. Most of Iraq's displaced Christians – at least those who haven't fled to Lebanon, Syria, Sweden or the United States – are now in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. Some international Christian organisations have joined them there, rather than leave Iraq entirely. However, a major conflagration between Turkey, Kurdish separatists and Arab factions may be imminent, and opportunistic Kurds require allegiance from Christians seeking refuge there. Further, Islamic militants operate even in the northern cities. An Assyrian priest, Gassan Isam Bidawed, and three deacons of his church were killed by gunmen on Sunday, 3 June in Mosul.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletins, www.ea.org.au/rlc *Assyrian International News Agency*, www.aina.org *Assist News Service*, www.assistnews.net

Memorising God's Word

Don Whitney

Two brothers were walking on their father's extensive, wooded acreage when they came upon a young tree heavy with fruit. Both enjoyed as much of the delicious fruit as they wanted. When they started back, one man gathered all the remaining fruit and took it home with him. His brother, however, took the tree itself and planted it on his own property. The tree flourished and regularly produced a bountiful crop so that the second brother often had fruit when the first had none.

The Bible is like the fruit-bearing tree in this story. Merely hearing the Word of God is to be like the first brother. You may gather much fruit from the encounter and even bring home enough to feed on for a few days, but in the long run it doesn't compare with having your own tree. Through the disciplines of reading and studying, we make the tree our own and enjoy its fruit. Among the spiritual disciplines we also find the tools of memorisation, meditation, and application, which bountifully increase our harvest of fruit from the tree.

Memorising God's Word – benefits and methods

Many Christians look on the spiritual discipline of memorising God's Word as something tantamount to modern-day martyrdom. Ask them to memorise Bible verses and they react with about as much eagerness as a request for volunteers to face Nero's lions. How come? Perhaps because many associate all memorisation with the memory efforts required of them in school. It was work, and most of it was uninteresting and of limited value. Frequently heard also is the excuse of having a bad memory. But what if I offered you one thousand dollars for every verse you could memorise in the next seven days? Do you think your attitude toward Scripture memory and your ability to memorise would improve? Any financial reward would be minimal when compared to the accumulating value of the treasure of God's Word deposited within your mind.

Memorisation Supplies Spiritual Power

When Scripture is stored in the mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to your attention when you need it most. That's why the author of Psalm 119 wrote, 'I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you' (verse 11). It's one thing, for instance, to be watching or thinking about something when you know you shouldn't, but there's added power against the temptation when a specific verse can be brought to your mind, like Colossians 3:2: 'Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things.'

When the Holy Spirit brings a definite verse to mind like that, it's an illustration of what Ephesians 6:17 can mean when it refers to 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' A pertinent scriptural truth, brought to your awareness by the Holy Spirit at just the right moment, can be the weapon that makes the difference in a spiritual battle.

There is no better illustration than Jesus' confrontation with Satan in the lonely Judean wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Each time the enemy thrust a temptation at Jesus, he parried it with the sword of the Spirit. It was the Spirit-prompted recollection of specific texts of Scripture that helped Jesus experience victory. One of the ways we can experience more spiritual victories is to do as Jesus did-memorise Scripture so that it's available for the Holy Spirit to take and ignite within us when it's needed.

Memorisation Strengthens Your Faith

Do you want your faith strengthened? What Christian doesn't? One thing you can do to strengthen it is to discipline yourself to memorise Scripture. Let's walk through Proverbs 22:17-19, which says, 'Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the Lord, I have taught you today, even you' (NASB). To 'apply your mind' to the 'words of the wise' spoken of here and to 'keep them within you' certainly pertains to Scripture memory. Notice the reason given here for keeping the wise words of Scripture within you and 'ready on your lips'. It's 'so that your trust may be in the Lord'. Memorising Scripture strengthens your faith because it repeatedly reinforces the truth, often just when you need to hear it again. Our church has sought to build a new worship centre. We felt that we

would most honour God if we built the building without going into debt. There were times when my faith in the Lord's provision would begin to sink. More often than not, what renewed my faith was the reminder of God's promise in 1 Samuel 2:30, 'Those who honour me I will honour.' Scripture memory is like reinforcing steel to a sagging faith.

Memorisation and Witnessing and Counselling

On the Day of Pentecost (the Jewish holiday being celebrated when the Holy Spirit first came to dwell within Christians), the Apostle Peter was suddenly inspired by God to stand and preach to the crowd about Jesus. Much of what he said consisted of quotations from the Old Testament (see Acts 2:14-40). Although there's a qualitative difference between Peter's uniquely inspired sermon and our Spirit-led conversations, his experience illustrates how Scripture memory can prepare us for unexpected witnessing or counselling opportunities that come our way.

Recently, while I was presenting the message about Christ to a man, he said something that brought to mind a verse I had memorised. I quoted that verse and it was the turning point in a conversation that resulted in his professing faith in Christ. The same kind of thing happens frequently in counselling conversations. But until the verses are hidden in the heart, they aren't available to use with the mouth.

A Means of God's Guidance

The psalmist wrote, 'Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors' (Psalm 119:24). Just as the Holy Spirit retrieves scriptural truth from our memory banks for use in counselling others, so also will he bring it to our own minds in providing timely guidance for ourselves.

Many times when I have been trying to decide whether to say what I think in a given situation, the Lord brings Ephesians 4:29 to my mind: 'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.' I'm sure that sometimes I misunderstand the voice of the Holy Spirit, but his guidance could hardly be more clear than when he brings to mind a verse like that! But it's the result of disciplined Scripture memory.

Memorisation Stimulates Meditation

One of the most underrated benefits of memorising Scripture is that it provides fuel for meditation. When you have memorised a verse of Scripture, you can meditate on it anywhere at anytime during the day or night. If you love God's Word enough to memorise it, you can become like the writer of Psalm 119:97, who exclaimed, 'Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.' Whether you're driving the car, riding on a train, waiting at the airport, standing in line, rocking a baby, or eating a meal, you can benefit from the Spiritual Discipline of meditation if you have made the deposits of memorisation.

The Word of God is the 'sword of the Spirit', but the Holy Spirit does not give you a weapon you have not stored in the armoury of your mind. Imagine yourself in the midst of a decision and needing guidance, or struggling with a difficult temptation and needing victory. The Holy Spirit rushes to your mental arsenal, flings open the door, but all he finds is a John 3:16, a Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission. Those are great swords, but they're not made for every battle. How do we go about filling our personal spiritual arsenal with a supply of swords for the Holy Spirit to use?

You Can Memorise Scripture

Most people think they have a bad memory, but it's not true. As we've already discovered, most of the time memorising is mainly a problem of motivation. If you know your birthday, phone number and address, and can remember the names of your friends, then you can memorise Scripture. The question becomes whether you are willing to discipline yourself to do it.

When Dawson Trotman, founder of the Christian organisation called The Navigators, was converted to faith in Christ in 1926, he began memorising one Bible verse every day. He was driving a truck for a lumber-yard in Los Angeles at the time. While driving around town he would work on his verse for that day. During the first three years of his Christian life he memorised his first thousand verses. If he could memorise over three hundred verses a year while driving, surely we can find ways to memorise a few.

Have a Plan

There are several good pre-packaged Scripture memory plans available in Christian bookstores. But you might prefer selecting verses on a particular topic where the Lord is working in your life right now. If your faith is weak, memorise verses on faith. If you're struggling with a habit, find verses that would help you experience victory over it. One man told Dawson Trotman that he was afraid that following his example of Scripture memory would make him proud. Trotman's reply: 'Then make your first ten verses on humility!' Another option is to memorise a section of Scripture, such as a psalm, rather than isolated verses.

Write out the Verses

Make a list of the verses on a sheet of paper or write each one on a separate index card.

Draw Picture Reminders

Nothing elaborate here, just a few lines or stick figures beside each verse, but this makes the verse 'visual' and puts 'the picture is worth a thousand words' principle to work for you. One simple picture can remind you of a sample dozen words. This is especially true if the drawing illustrates some action described in the verse. For instance, with Psalm 119:11, you might make a crude drawing of a heart with a Bible inside to remind you of treasuring God's Word in the heart. For Ephesians 6:17 a sketch of a sword is an obvious reminder. You'll find this method particularly helpful when memorising a section of consecutive verses. I realise that you are probably no more of an artist than I am, but no one else has to see the pictures and they can make Scripture memory easier.

Memorise the Verses Word-Perfectly

There's a great temptation, especially when first learning a verse, to lower this standard. Don't settle for just getting close, or getting the 'main idea'. Memorise it word for word and learn the reference, too. Without an objective standard of measurement, the goal is unclear and you may tend to continue lowering the standard until you quit altogether. Moreover, if you don't have the verse memorised exactly, you lose confidence in using

it in conversation and witnessing. So even though memorising ‘every jot and tittle’ is harder in the beginning, it’s easier and more productive in the long run. Incidentally verses you know word-perfectly are easier to review than those you don’t know so accurately.

Find a Method of Accountability

Because of our tendency toward sloth most of us need more accountability on Scripture memory than on other disciplines. And the busier we are, the more we tend to excuse ourselves from this commitment. Some, like Dawson Trotman, have developed personalised means of accountability to this Discipline did keep them faithful. Most Christians, however, are more consistent when they meet or talk regularly with someone else – not always another Christian – with whom they review their verses.

Review and Meditate Every Day

No principle of Scripture memory is more important than the principle of review. Without adequate review you will eventually lose most of what you memorise. But once you really learn a verse, you can mentally review it in a fraction of the time it would take to speak it. And when you know a verse this well, you only have to review it once a week, once a month, or even once every six months to keep a sharp edge on it. It’s not unusual, however, to reach a point where you spend 50 percent of your Scripture memory time in review. Don’t begrudge devoting so much time to polishing your swords. Rejoice instead at having so many!

A great time to review your better-known verses is while going to sleep. Since you don’t need a written copy of the verses before you, you can repeat them and meditate on them while dozing off or even when you have trouble sleeping. And if you can’t stay awake, it’s fine, since you’re supposed to be sleeping anyway. If you can’t go to sleep, you’re pulling the most profitable and peaceful information possible into your mind, as well as making good use of the time.

As we finish this section on the discipline of Scripture memory, remember that memorising verses is not an end in itself. The goal is not to see how many verses we can memorise, the goal is godliness. The goal is to memorise the Word of God so that it can transform our minds and our lives.

Intelligent Design

What it is, and why it matters

Alistair Donald

Are we meant to be here? Or are we just here by chance? For the Christian these questions have a very obvious answer. The universe we see around us is evidence of the Creator's handiwork (Psalm 19:1). In the New Testament we learn of Jesus Christ's role in creation (John 1:3; Col 1:16). And the very existence of the creation means that those who persist in unbelief are without excuse before their Maker (Rom 1:20).

Anyone who has sought to persuade his unbelieving neighbour of these things by appealing to creation will very soon run into a thorny question: has not science explained away God? The TV nature programmes that cause the Christian to marvel and rejoice are usually accompanied by a commentary assuring viewers that purposeless, unguided evolution has done the creating. Design in nature is held to be an illusion, produced by the 'blind watchmaker' of natural selection. Any who dare question the theory are contemptuously dismissed as 'flat earthers'.

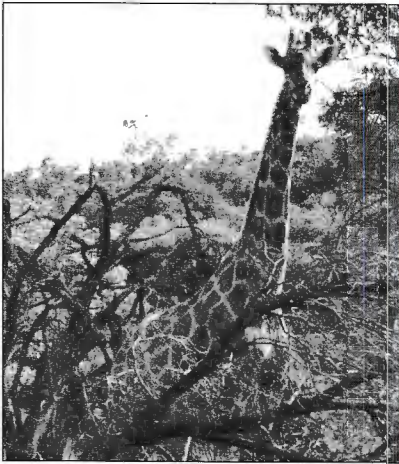
Yet the truth will out in the end. In recent years a growing number of

scientists have become persuaded that, Darwin notwithstanding, the evidence in biology points very clearly to design in nature. This non-evolutionary approach to biology is termed 'intelligent design' (ID). It has caused major waves in education and the media, both in the USA and more recently in Britain as well. So what is the fuss all about?

A scientific hypothesis

ID is an evidence-based scientific theory about life's origins. Its advocates maintain that the more discoveries are made in the natural world, the more they point to design and, by implication, a Designer.

In cosmology amazing discoveries have been made about the way our universe hangs together, that it is amazingly finely tuned. There is an enormous number of 'cosmic coincidences' – intricate balances in forces such as gravity. If any of these fundamental forces were even very slightly different, not only could life not be supported, but there would be no planets or any solid existence at all. No wonder even avowedly non-religious people are forced by the evidence to use language like 'designed' and 'tailor-made'.



An example of intelligent design

ID extends the question of design to the world of biology. Darwin thought that the living cell was just a simple blob of jelly. But we now know that it consists of an enormously complex world of nanotechnology – circuits, sliding clamps, energy-generating turbines and miniature machines, constructed from various protein components. Biochemistry Professor Michael Behe has shown that even a relatively simple machine like the flagellum (propeller) in a bacterium could not possibly have been assembled in a step-by-step, undirected fashion as Darwin's theory requires. Behe's concept of 'irreducible complexity' has generated much criticism from Darwinists, but has not been refuted.

A complementary approach by Dr William Dembski is based on information theory. He has developed an objective test for

deciding whether or not a complex object has required the input of intelligence, or can be explained by law and chance alone. Other branches of science such as forensics and code breaking make this distinction, so why should biology be singled out as different? In the expensive search for extra-terrestrial life, scientists have developed rigorous statistical tests to distinguish between random signals from space and signals that must be the product of intelligence. This has so far been completely fruitless. But when the same tests are applied to the incredible complexity of the DNA content of the living cell, the conclusion is inescapable: the highly complex, specified information in DNA is a clear indicator of intelligent design, having a complexity akin to that of language. It could no more have arisen spontaneously, without the input of a pre-existing intelligence, than could the sentences that you are now reading on this page!

So those who maintain that 'science explains away God' have had their bluff called; rather than a necessary conclusion from the evidence, is not their approach merely a prejudice against the possibility of a Creator in spite of the evidence? When atheist biologist Richard Dawkins defines biology as 'the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose',



Another example of intelligent design

his continued denial of a purpose and therefore a Creator bears the hallmarks of suppressing the clear truth about creation (Rom 1:18-19).

Responding to criticisms

ID is not without its critics, in some ways finding itself between a rock and a hard place. Creationist geologists object that the theory does not go far enough in endorsing the Bible's account, or in identifying the Designer. At the same time atheistic evolutionists chant a mantra that ID is 'not science, but thinly disguised creationism'. How does ID respond to such criticism?

First, identifying the Designer is not a scientific question but a theological one. As the reformed confessions make clear, general revelation can tell us that there is a God, but we

need special revelation, the Bible, to learn about salvation. ID focuses on studying the 'book' of creation rather than the book of revelation. Yet such a project is not a denial of the Bible, but is merely doing what the Bible itself enjoins in passages such as Psalm 19. And of course ID is perfectly compatible with a more fully developed creation science, even if it does not itself entail a particular view of the age of the earth.

To insist as some critics do that 'ID is not science' is to say, unreasonably, that science must only be allowed to follow the evidence where it leads if it leads to the right (atheistic) conclusions. ID's conclusions clearly sit more comfortably with theism than atheism, but those are not grounds for scientists to dismiss them, if science is about following evidence.

Why it all matters

We are all only too well aware of the negative knock-on effects of Darwinism throughout our culture. If, as our secular culture believes, there is no design and no Designer, then there can be no ultimate arbiter as to what is right and what is wrong. So everything is just a matter of opinion, including our ideas of religion and ethics. Such a view breeds moral chaos and increasingly influences our education and laws.

What is exciting about ID is that it has led to a greater questioning of Darwinism in public debate than at any time in the last hundred years. Just within the past two years the issue has been on the front page of *Time* magazine, *National Geographic* and *Nature*. Just recently the UK group Truth in Science caused a huge rumpus by providing DVD resources on the mass of evidence *against* Darwinism and asking that this evidence should not be overlooked in science classes.

Of course the argument from design will not itself make someone a Christian. No apologetic arguments by themselves can do that, only the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet giving *reasons* for our faith is biblical (1 Peter 3:15), and one very high profile defection from atheism shows the power of the design argument. Professor Antony Flew, who

schooled generations at Oxford in intellectual atheism, renounced that life-long belief in 2004. He cited the information content of DNA as being decisive in his change of mind. We must pray that people like him come to see that the One who is behind everything is none other than the personal Word (John 1:1).

Darwinism is not a fact, nor even just a theory. It is a stronghold of our secular culture, a pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and which we should by all means seek to demolish (2 Cor 10:5). Intelligent Design gives us the tools to do just that.

To find out more about Intelligent Design, a good introduction is William Dembski's book 'The Design Revolution'. See also the general and technical articles by Phillip Johnson, Stephen Meyer and Nancy Pearsey on the website of the Access Research Network: www.am.org. Truth in Science is at www.truthinscience.org.uk.

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First EP Conference at Barberton

This conference is 'African' because it is designed to meet the needs of African pastors, in expository preaching to encourage that kind of ministry and in literature to provide books at affordable prices. Most of the books at Barberton were supplied by EP, Banner of Truth and IVP. Without a substantial discount from the publishers this provision would not be possible. Carriage to Africa is an added financial factor.

The town of Barberton is situated north of Swaziland and near the border of Mozambique. It takes four hours to drive to Barberton from Pretoria. To that 30 to 60 minutes must be added for a stop for rest and refreshment at one of the well-designed pleasant 'Petroports'. Concentration in driving is essential. While the roads are excellent a minority of drivers are reckless. Even though the police crack down on speeding this does not seem deter a few. The shorter route from Machadadorp to Barberton winds through mountains of outstanding scenic beauty. The road all the way through the mountains is first rate.

Standing in the conference grounds of Emjindini, in Barberton, I noted that for 360 degrees mountains fill the horizons. Barberton is warmer than Pretoria in winter and certainly mid-winter in Barberton is warmer than UK's summer. Prevailing sunshine and the altitude provide an



The bookshop in the tent at Barberton

invigorating non-humid kind of warmth.

American missionary Karl Peterson has eight years of experience in working alongside Dr Charles Woodrow of Texas in organising the annual pastors' conference in Nampula, Mozambique. That is a three day conference is usually attended by about 180. The uniting language of Mozambique is Portuguese. Expository preaching and reformed books in Portuguese imported from Brazil have established the Nampula conference as the highlight of the year for many Mozambican pastors.

Karl Peterson is a missionary to Mozambique but also senior pastor of the multi-racial Barberton Baptist

Church. Many of the church members were involved in catering and helping to make sure that every part of this First Evangelical Press Conference ran smoothly.

103 pastors and Christian workers arrived. A twenty-page program together with free booklets were given to each attendee. One page consists of a reproof from John Wesley to a fellow pastor for his lack of reading and subsequent poor preaching. 'Reading is for your life: there is no other way – do not starve yourself any longer!'

The visiting preachers were Pastor Jim Eliff of Kansas City and myself. Most of these conferences are served by African preachers so it was a special privilege for us to lead. Immediately following this conference Jim Eliff accompanied by his two sons Benjamin and Bryan flew to Nampula for the annual conference there.

The title for this First Evangelical Press Conference was THE APPROVED WORKMAN, 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15).

One session was devoted to workshops. The options were Ndubisi Obiaeli on 'Rescuing our Youth', Ntombifuthi van Heerden on the Dynamics of Women's Ministry, Deirdre van Reenen on Ministering to Children. Bryan Eliff led a seminar in

How the Believer Understands the Bible. Fifty full-time pastors attended the workshop devoted to expository preaching which I led. Only three pastors indicated that they followed the consecutive method of preaching series of sermons on books or portions of Scripture. That subject was opened up in the workshop.

The music was spontaneous in African style with Ntombifuthi leading and pitching the notes for the descant African style singing.

Attendees were exhorted to fill in an evaluation form. These proved to be overwhelmingly positive but two remarked that the food was not African enough. When put to the vote only two voted for the conference to move to the larger town of Nelspruit. The Lord Mayor of Barberton came and brought his greetings and goodwill to the conference.

It is important that this conference become an annual event. Already dates have been set for next May.

We asked our supporters to pray for this event. There is much evidence of answered prayer.

One of the conferees, Pastor Masuku, invited me to preach at the Alliance Church, Lord's Day morning following the conference. Every one of the 380 seats was filled with some standing at the back. More than an hour was allowed for preaching which was translated into Swazi. Many children of all ages were present and listened attentively throughout the service.

Arminianisms

The term Arminianism originated in the early 17th-century following the Synod of Dort (see RT 217). The formularies of Dort clarified the issues and served the churches thereafter as guidelines to resist both Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism. The issues debated and clarified at Dort however were not new.

The first great public contest over the issue of free will took place in the fourth century with Augustine (354-430) and Pelagius (370-435). Pelagius was a British monk who travelled and taught widely. Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin. He taught that Adam sinned only for himself. Pelagius taught that God chooses man only because he foresaw that man would choose him.

Augustine was the most influential of the early Church fathers. He taught firmly the doctrine of original sin and opposed the teachings of Pelagius. Following the tensions between Augustine and Pelagius there were those who took the middle ground (synergism) and these were called Semi-Pelagians. John Cassian (360-435) was the leader of the Semi-Pelagians.

Gottschalk (804-869) was a German monk who travelled extensively. He taught all the five points that we now summarise in the acrostic TULIP. (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the saints). John Wycliff (1329-1384) and John Huss (1373-1415) of Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) affirmed the sovereignty of God in salvation.

The Synod of Dort more than any other major gathering of Christian leaders in Church history clarified the doctrines of grace. These doctrines are incorporated in the major Confessions of Faith but the formularies of Dort cover the ground in more detail.

Freewill was the doctrine of medieval Roman Catholicism. Martin Luther expounded clearly the central issue of free will and his view on this was endorsed by the other leading 16th-century Reformers. When challenged by the 16th-century Reformers the Roman Catholic Church responded by calling the Council of Trent. Sadly the Council of Trent rejected the doctrine of justification by faith and at the same time endorsed semi-Pelagianism which is another way of describing Arminianism.

In spite of the clear manifesto of Dort Arminianism was soon afterwards widely espoused in the Anglican Church under the leadership of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645).¹

There are different forms of Arminianism. One distinct form is that of Wesleyan Arminianism. John Wesley hated the doctrine of election. In 1739 he excommunicated a man from his society who promoted belief in predestination, and in the August of that year he published his sermon opposing unconditional election which he entitled *Free Grace*. That was against the advice of George Whitefield who was then far away on his first visit to America. Throughout his ministry John Wesley opposed implacably the doctrine of election and the perseverance of the saints. For an outstanding description of the issues involved I recommend the chapter, 'The Collision with Calvinism' in Iain Murray's book *Wesley and Men Who Followed*.²

Professor Tom Nettles suggests that two factors govern Wesley's exposition and polemics concerning Calvinism. The first is that 'the doctrines of grace cannot be true, because they imply reprobation. Reprobation cannot be true, because it makes God unjust. It makes God unjust because it infallibly implies that he punishes people for the commission of sins that must have been caused by his decree.' The second is foreknowledge. 'Foreknowledge' equals absolute and pervasive cognition of all things simultaneously. God's election arises from this and is therefore not causative of the human experience of salvation, but reflective of the eternal awareness that these experiences will happen in time.³ In order to accommodate the idea of free grace John Wesley taught that through the fall all men had wholly lost the power to respond to the gospel but now that capacity to respond had been restored to every man as a gift of grace. The disciples of Arminius at the Synod of Dort (The Remonstrants) maintained that free will had never been wholly lost, and 'total inability had never been a true diagnosis of man's plight in Adam'. Wesley insisted that the capacity to co-operate was itself a love-gift from God to sinners and he agreed with the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin.⁴ A major difference between the preaching of John and Charles Wesley and most Arminians today is that the Wesleys insisted on the necessity of genuine repentance. Like John the Baptist they required fruit or evidence of repentance in practical daily living, whereas the easy believism of our day is superficial in the extreme as is illustrated in Walter Chantry's book *The Gospel Authentic or Synthetic*.⁵

Various degrees of synergism characterise Arminianism. By synergism is meant the idea that God's grace is mixed with human ability. As we have just seen in the case of John Wesley he insisted that the capacity to cooperate was itself a love-gift from God to sinners. Here is the view that God does indeed give grace to respond but ultimately it is the will of man that decides the issue of salvation not God alone. Synergism is the idea that we are saved by grace but mixed with that is the merit of free will. The element of human contribution is preserved intact. I remember an evangelist debating this issue with me. He held up both hands and pointed his ten fingers toward heaven, five fingers on his left as the five points of Calvinism, and then five fingers on his right hand as the five points of Arminianism: then intertwining the fingers of his hands he proclaimed with great satisfaction that this mixture represents perfect truth! What he did illustrate was synergism! One of the purposes of the Synod of Dort was to show the impossibility, if not absurdity, of this notion, and to reject synergism.

It is true that the sinner must come voluntarily to Christ freely in an act of free agency. That is imperative. But according to Scripture that willingness to come to Christ and trust him wholly is in its totality due to the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:1-10). Regeneration precedes repentance and faith as is seen in John 1:12,13. We receive Christ and become children of God having been 'born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God'. Jesus said, 'No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him' (John 6:44). In that drawing there is a spiritual resurrection, a new birth, a change of nature by which the sinner becomes willing to close with Christ. In that drawing there is a regeneration of the mind so that he can now see the kingdom and understand spiritual things. The natural man without this enlightenment 'does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, for they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor 2:14). The mind and heart are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. 'Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts' (Ps 65:4). An unregenerate sinner will never be happy to dwell in God's courts. But when he is born again he will say, 'How lovely is your dwelling place O LORD Almighty' (Ps 84:1).

The matter can be stated like this:

Jesus said, You are unwilling to come to me that you might have life (John 5:40).

1. All are unwilling to come
2. God is willing to receive all who will come
3. Men must be made willing to come

In spite of the theological renewal of the last thirty to forty years in which the Reformed faith has been widely propagated, Arminianism is still common and still prevails in evangelical circles.

No survey of Arminianism up to the present time is adequate without considering the massive impact of Charles G Finney (1792-1875). Finney was an evangelist and leader who held the Westminster Confession of Faith in contempt. He denied original sin and despised the doctrine of justification by faith. He believed in the freedom of the will and held that all that was needed was the right methodology – system of operations set in motion by human contrivance. If his methods were used professions of faith would be multiplied. They did indeed multiply but the fall-out rate soared in proportion.

The reign of Arminianism in the USA

Finney's method of the altar call became stereotyped and institutionalised. A major part of the blame for the decline of the historic evangelical faith must be laid at the feet of Finney.⁶

Billy Sunday was a famous professional baseball player. He was converted in 1886 and soon after was employed by J Wilbur Chapman who was a well-known evangelist. Chapman followed D L Moody another very well-known evangelist who sought to maintain high standards with an emphasis on the enquiry room where those who came forward in response to the altar call could be counselled as to their true condition.

Billy Sunday started his own organisation in 1896. He dropped the practice of the enquiry room. He began to call everyone who came forward a convert. This was damaging to those who were deceived by being told they were Christians merely because they had come forward. It was also a snare to Billy Sunday whose reputation was inflated by the impression of thousands of converts. This practice of implying that those who respond to appeals are real converts has spread all over America and indeed all over the world because the USA has the greatest influence of all nations for good or ill.

With Billy Sunday drama was added by a sawdust trail that was laid down in the aisles leading to the preacher. Sunday used his celebrity status as an ex- famous baseball player to add attraction to coming forward at the end of the sermon. Thus there were mixed motives for his hearers to come walking down the sawdust trails to the front and shake his hand.

Billy Sunday would exclaim, 'How many of you will settle the great question without the delay of another minute, by coming forward to take me by the hand and by doing so confess and accept Jesus Christ as your personal saviour? Will you come?'

This conveyed the notion that the physical act of walking the sawdust trail was an act of saving faith. This is a typical press report: 'Converts rushed to grasp the hand of Billy Sunday. 425 men women and children of all ages and types surged down the sawdust trail to the platform at the tabernacle last night to grasp the hand of Billy Sunday and to be enrolled as professing Christians.'

Sunday used every pretext available to persuade people to hit the sawdust trail. If people from Scotland were present he would remind them that Scottish people are renowned for their courage. He would appeal to railroad workers and wave a green lantern. To a Swedish delegation one night he shouted. 'Come on, Swedes! The Swedes have never been cowards yet! So come on!'⁷

At one time he used a three-fold challenge, 'If you are against booze, and you are for America, and you are for Jesus, then come and shake my hand.' Sometimes the stream coming down the sawdust trail was so great that there would be two lines, one to shake his left hand and the other to shake his right hand.

Billy Sunday's music director for seventeen years, Homer Rodeheaver, resigned, pointing out the dishonesty of these methods. The biblical doctrine of sin is missing in Arminianism.

There was widespread perception that the Billy Sunday practice was superficial and that it takes far more than shaking the evangelist's hand or repeating a penitential prayer to becoming a real born again Christian. G Campbell Morgan, who preceded Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel in London, was contemporary with Billy Sunday. Morgan affirmed his belief in the necessity of careful and diligent

counselling. Although Arminian himself Campbell Morgan was sceptical of the inflated claims made using the Billy Sunday methods.⁸

The altar-call methodology is thoroughly Arminian. It is in stark contrast to the preaching of John the Baptist who was not flattered by the Pharisees who came to hear him. He called them snakes and demanded of them evidence to prove their repentance. When the rich young ruler came running to Jesus to ask for eternal life Jesus gave no indication of an easy way, no signing of a decision card. Rather he probed his motives and told him to go home and sell everything that he had and then come and take up discipleship. If altar call evangelists followed that searching policy it would end their altar call practice forthwith.

These shallow methods and shortcuts stem from the idea that conversion can be achieved by a decision. This is raw Arminianism. Millions in America who show no signs of regeneration believe that they are saved because they have responded at one time or another to an appeal. That is why I have used the heading above: *The reign of Arminianism in the USA*. Millions have signed a card or made a decision. Some have responded many times. If every recorded decision were counted as a genuine conversion then there are more Christians in America than there are people. In the denomination known as the Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest Protestant denomination in the USA, the altar call is tantamount to a sacrament like baptism and the Lord's Table. If a minister does not employ this method week by week of calling people to the front at the end of the service he is regarded as less than evangelical. Professor Tom Nettles told me that when he was a boy he responded to the altar call every week. One day his father said to him, 'Son, you do not have to go forward every week!'

The result of this practice is that there are many churches which have large memberships consisting of people who do not attend services, still less the prayer meetings. A typical example would be 1,000 members but 700 to 800 rarely seen and hundreds are never seen at church for years. If moves are taken to purge the membership of those who are obviously only nominal there is an outcry and the pastor is in danger of being fired.

The idea that using the altar call produces converts is injurious. Think of a preacher going home with the satisfaction that five converts have been made because five came to the front in response to his altar call. In one year there might be about 200 such responses but not one lasting

conversion. It sounds so good for a preacher to be able to report that people responded to his appeal and give the impression that they are all converts. That is deceptive.

I attended a Baptist church where the visiting preacher made an altar call at the end of his very poor sermon. The congregation consisted of about 120 souls. No one responded. Obviously wishing to save face he then called for those who wished to rededicate their lives to Christ to come forward. He cajoled for a while but no one moved. He then called for those who wanted to be healed to come forward. An elderly, frail couple moved to the front. I learned afterward that this couple are in bad health and readily respond to a call for prayer. However, the overall impression of that service was distasteful. The attempt to manipulate the congregation was repugnant.

Correction of the shortfalls in altar call evangelism has been taken by the Billy Graham organisation. The emphasis is threefold, 1. Excellent preaching, 2. Counselling after the altar call and 3. Intensive follow-up by counsellors and churches thereafter. The ecumenical policy used however points to the inherent deficiency of the system. Those counselled are recommended to Roman Catholic or Liberal churches if those are the churches from which they have been directed to the crusade. To cite one example: of over 1,300 Catholics who came forward in the San Francisco Crusade practically all remained Catholic, continued to pray to Mary, went to mass and confessed to the priests.⁹

The idea that follow-up can make up for the failure of decisionism is addressed as follows by Pastor Jim Eliff; 'A great mistake is made by blaming the problem on poor follow-up. In many churches there is every intention and effort given to follow-up, yet still the poor numbers persist. One church followed up "by the book", seeking to disciple people who had been told they were new converts during the crusade of an internationally-known evangelist. The report of the pastor in charge was that none of them wanted to talk about how to grow as a Christian. He said, "In fact, they ran from us!" I have known some churches to go to extreme efforts to disciple new believers. We must do this. Yet, like the others, they generally have marginal success. They have learned to accept the fact that people who profess to have become Christians often have to be talked into going further, and that many, if not most, simply will not bother. Authentic new believers can *always* be followed up, however, because they have the Spirit by which they cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). They have been given love

for the brethren, and essential love for the beauty and authority of the Word of God. But you *cannot* follow-up on a spiritually dead person. Being dead, he has no interest in growth.¹⁰

The pitfalls of the invitation system are illustrated by the experience of Dawson Trotman who founded an organisation called the Navigators.¹¹ Trotman made a typical decision for Christ aged fourteen in 1920. He joined a Presbyterian Church. However there was no change in his sinful lifestyle. He continued to lie, steal, get drunk and use profane language. In 1926 he experienced true conversion and the power of the Holy Spirit to live a godly life. He then witnessed to everyone he met and specialised in giving lifts to hitchhikers. He claimed that everyone he picked up he persuaded to accept Christ. He then began to detect that there was no change in the lives of those he believed he had led to Christ. Trotman did not embrace the reformed faith but he did institute methods in his organisation designed to disciple those who made profession of faith.

Ultimately it takes persevering personal friendship and discipling to establish those who show interest in the gospel. Often it takes years before a believer is truly established in the faith. The reality of the supernatural nature of the new birth is illustrated in the lives of drug addicts and alcoholics. An addict can make a decision in meetings a hundred times but until the Holy Spirit works in power there will be no mortification of sin and no change in his enslaved lifestyle.

To what extent does the Holy Spirit work within the invitation system? In my book *The Great Invitation* I outline the history, development and features of the invitation system. I describe famous preachers who never used the invitation system and discuss reasons for and against using the altar call.¹² A few are saved through the preaching and others through the process of counselling that follows, not merely after the meeting, but in the weeks and months that follow. The proportion of those lastingly converted is small. In the days of Billy Sunday the saying was common in reference to his work, 'two dollars a soul'. In other words the professions made did not add up to very much if it cost the Billy Sunday organisation only two dollars per soul to come down the sawdust trail. By omitting heart repentance going forward is rendered meaningless. There is such a thing as notional faith which assents to truths but does not act on them.¹³

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, is another major propagator of decisionism. Bright's approach is to encourage those who

have made decisions *not* to go by their feelings if there is no change in their lives. As an evangelist Bill Bright made it so easy to accept Christ that 80,000 out of 100,000 at one of his meetings in Russia prayed the salvation prayer. In 1988 in Sudan there were almost a million decisions for Christ.¹⁴ Bill Bright's attitude is to hand over to the Holy Spirit responsibility for the future of those who have made a decision. That is ludicrous. Imagine a pastor saying that he is not going to shepherd the flock as the Holy Spirit will do it! This policy has contributed toward the idea that you can be saved by making a decision for Christ as your Saviour, and later when you believe on Jesus as Lord you gain your sanctification. This two-tier system is a deception because Jesus disowns those who refuse to obey him (Matt 10:37-39).. It is those who build their house on the rock who will stand in the Judgement (Matt 7:24-29). We are back to the fact that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

How long will Arminianism reign in the USA and dominate in evangelical circles in many other countries? My reading of the situation is that as liberal theology has declined since the 1960s so Arminianism is on the wane. Arminianism does not thrive where there is systematic expository preaching. There are excellent Presbyterian and Baptist seminaries in the USA where the doctrines of grace are taught. That is a hopeful sign for the future.

¹ Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans*, vol 2, pp. 315ff cf *Archbishop Laud* by H R Trevor-Roper and *The rise of English Arminianism* by Nicholas Tyacke, OUP, 1987.

² Iain Murray, *Wesley and Men Who Followed*, Banner of Truth, 269 pages hardback, 2003.

³ Tom Nettles. *John Wesley's Contention with Calvinism: Interactions – Then and Now, The Grace of God*, Baker Books, vol 2 p. 318.

⁴ J I Packer, *Arminianisms*, Puritan Conference Papers, 1968.

⁵ Walter Chantry, *The Gospel Authentic or Synthetic?* Banner of Truth paperback.

⁶ Geoffrey Thomas, *Charles Finney and Modern Evangelism*, *Reformation Today* number 143, see also *Finney and the Disappearance of Revival*, Clive Tyler, *Reformation Today* number 18.

⁷ Patrick McIntre, *The Graham Formula, Why most decisions for Christ are ineffective*, White Harvest Publishing, 9967 Hwy 9, Mammoth Spring, AR 72554. McIntre has researched diligently for his book and documented his materials.

⁸ *ibid.*, p 48.

⁹ Erroll Hulse, *Billy Graham, The Pastor's Dilemma*, p 44. This book published in 1967 is no longer in print.

¹⁰ Jim Eliff, *Southern Baptists, an Unregenerate Denomination*. see <http://www.ccwonline.org/sbc.html>

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 56ff.

¹² Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation*, Audubon Press, USA, 2006.

¹³ Pastor Jim Eliff helpfully explains different ways in which faith can fall short of saving faith in his 56 page booklet, *Wasted Faith*, Christian Communicators Worldwide. www.ccwonline.org

¹⁴ Patrick McIntre, *ibid.*, p 60.

Review

Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ

Editors Thomas R Schreiner and Shawn D Wright

B&H Publishing Group 2006, 364pp., hardback

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Bill James

We are indebted to Schreiner and Wright for this major work on believer's baptism. It serves as a response to recent works advocating paedobaptism from a reformed/covenant position, such as Randy Booth *Children of the Promise*, Strawbridge *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, and Wilson *To a Thousand Generations*. However this is not merely a response to the work of others; it stands on its own as a valuable presentation of the baptist position. A symposium has the potential drawback of unevenness, but the advantage that each contributor brings their own expertise, whether it be in Biblical materials, systematics, historical theology, or practical application.

The opening chapters survey the presentation of baptism in the New Testament, building the argument that it is linked clearly with repentance and faith, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Tom Schreiner's chapter on baptism in the epistles is especially helpful.

Stephen Wellum then considers baptism and the relationship between the covenants. This is the nub of the argument, and Wellum helpfully takes us through it step by step in the longest chapter of the book (65 pages). He takes the first 28 pages to explain the paedobaptist position that all Biblical covenants are merely expressions of the one covenant of grace (which is generally seen as established in Abraham). Hence they maintain that the New Covenant is only 'new' in a limited sense of modifying what went before. Essential to this view is that the church is a 'mixed' body incorporating both believers and their children. So the argument goes that just as in the Old Covenant circumcision was applied to infants, only later to be accompanied by faith, so in the New Covenant baptism can be applied to infants too. They hold a purely spiritual view of circumcision



View of mountains from conference centre, see report page 27

and fail to take account of its inextricable links to physical descent and the concept of a nation.

Wellum then proceeds to critique the covenantal argument for infant baptism. He points out that the idea of one covenant of grace is not a Biblical concept. It is true in so far as God has one single purpose; but this unfolds through a plurality of covenants. Not only do paedobaptists tend to flatten the contours of Biblical revelation, but as Wellum puts it they ‘view new covenant membership through the lens of the Abrahamic covenant’ (p.128). We need, rather, to think clearly about the unfolding purposes of God, and see that there are four senses in which we can identify Abraham’s seed. It is first the natural, physical seed. Within that physical seed, there is then the spiritual seed – ie Isaac. The third sense of the seed is the Messiah himself (Galatians 3:16). Now finally in the New Covenant, the spiritual nature of the seed is emphasised. Now the physical links of the former age fall away; we become children of Abraham through faith in Christ. So we are to apply the New Covenant sign of baptism to those who give evidence of this faith in Christ and are true children of Abraham. The New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 is one in which all ‘know the Lord’ – not a mixed multitude as before. Wellum goes on to develop this theme at length, interacting with both paedobaptists and baptists as he demonstrates that the NT church is essentially a regenerate

community. Baptism is portrayed in the New Testament as inseparable from conversion.

We then move on to historical theology, with a chapter on baptism in the Patristic writings. The conclusion is that early church practice was the baptism of believers. Infant mortality, and developing view of original sin led to the increasing practice of infant baptism in the third century. There is then a chapter on the baptismal doctrine of the early anabaptists. The background is set of the Reformation, and the views of Luther and Zwingli. What set Hubmaier apart was not his insistence on believer's baptism (for both Roman Catholics and Lutherans insisted that baptised infants were 'believers'), but 'confessor baptism'. And he maintained not just that baptism was an act of obedience to be completed after conversion, but much more than that, namely that baptism is the expression of the inner reality of a changed heart, which is why as baptists we are not embarrassed by the text 'Baptism now saves you' (1 Peter 3:20).

Shawn Wright has a chapter examining the logic of reformed paedobaptists, looking especially at Calvin, Marcel and Murray. He looks first at their definition of baptism as cleansing, mortification and union with Christ; yet they recognise that these are not true of those baptised as infants. There are then critiques of their doctrine of the church as a mixed multitude, their views of the covenant of grace, their NT justification for paedobaptism, and finally their views on the mysterious saving operations of God in baptised infants apart from faith. The next chapter by Duane Garrett is devoted to the specific views of Meredith Kline. There is also a chapter devoted to the Restorationist Alexander Campbell in the 19th century, with his views of baptismal regeneration.

The final chapter is by Mark Dever, on baptism in the local church. He deals with practicalities such as interviewing for baptism, how baptism is carried out (and when in the service), who should baptise, as well as weightier matters such as the link of baptism and membership and the Lord's Supper. All is simply stated, very briefly – so this is no more than touching on these issues. The one issue which is left untouched is that of children, apart from saying that we should not baptise infants, and that dedications are inadvisable. Some discussion on the place of children in the church, and guidelines on how to proceed with children who profess faith may have been helpful.

This is a very helpful volume, warmly recommended.

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