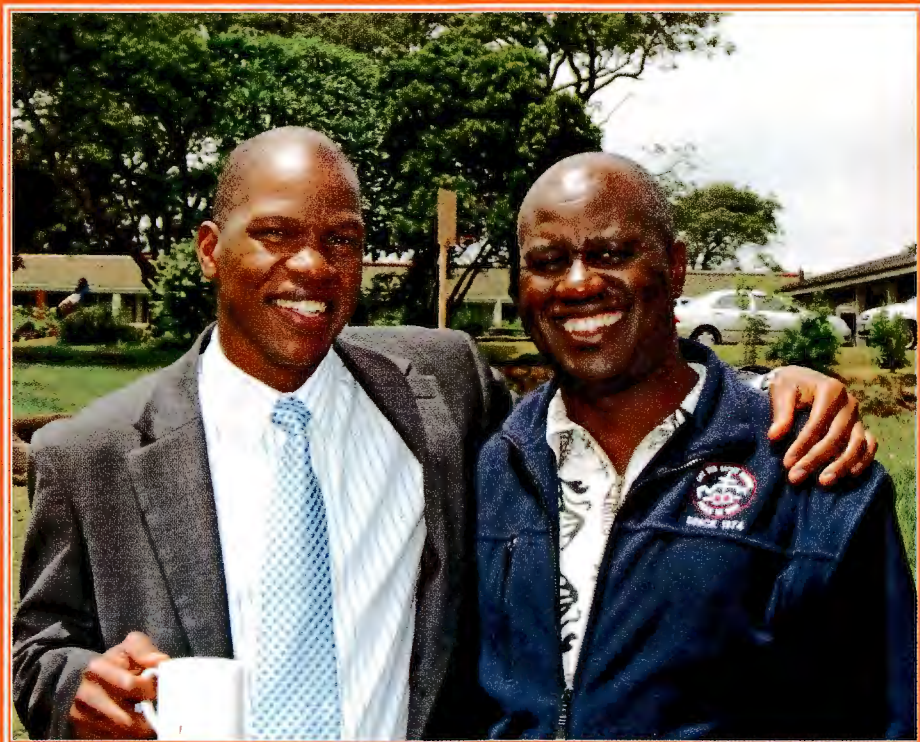


REFORMATION TODAY



MARCH - APRIL 2011

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Websites www.reformation-today.org

The editor's personal website is <http://www.errollhulse.com>

<http://africanpastorsconference.com>



The bookroom at the Koinonia Conference, Kwazulu Natal.

For description of the African Pastors' conferences in January see pages 13 and 14.



Gary Morrison serving in the book room



Committee meeting at Koinonia



Group photo at Koinonia



Venue of first APC in Soweto



Afrikaans Baptist Church, Kempton Park, venue (at the last moment!) for the Ora et Labora APC

Front cover picture – Raymond Zulu and Kennedy Sunkutu of Zambia. This photo was taken at the African Pastors' Conference at Koinonia Conference Centre in Kwazulu Natal.

Editorial

Welcome to RT 240. Mathematically ($40 \times 6 = 240$) this is the 40th anniversary of *Reformation Today* which began in January 1970 as a quarterly magazine. It became bi-monthly in 1974. RT was born out of the theological renewal which spread widely through the publication of reformed literature during the 1960s. That renewal levelled out in the 1980s but which is now spreading in other parts of the world. China and South Africa are two nations described in this issue. The Church in China was designed for extinction by the Communist rulers as described by Bob Davey's 'The Gospel in China – 1953-1966'. But the Lord of the Church had other ideas as can be seen from the article 'Reformed Books in China' and as will be seen as Bob Davey continues his series which is shaping up into a valuable book.

The report of the January African Pastors' Conferences reflects an increasing interest in expository books in South Africa. This is typical of several African nations where the fields are white to harvest. This contrasts with the cynical secular spiritual climate prevalent in Europe.

We always hoped that the theological renewal referred to above would lead to a new spiritual awakening which is desperately needed in the UK and in the EU. Many churches have grown but we have not seen a national spiritual awakening. The following letter illustrates the desire for revival.

A concert of prayer for revival

This letter was sent out to 48 churches. It is noteworthy that in the 1960s these Reformed churches were non-existent – perhaps one excepted.

YORKSHIRE REFORMED MINISTERS' FRATERNAL

8th February 2011

Dear Friends,

A Call to United Prayer

The members of the Yorkshire Reformed Ministers' Fraternal believe that it is right to issue to the churches of Yorkshire a call to urgent

united prayer. We are living in dark and desperate days. The work of the gospel seems largely to have stagnated and the tide of unbelief and immorality rushes in.

Our only hope is in God. We cannot turn the tide. Only an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will enable the gospel to advance with power and the churches to grow.

We are therefore inviting you and your congregation to gather with members of many other churches to cry out to the Lord for his mercy. There are to be two main themes for our prayers: first, that our love for Jesus will be re-kindled, and second, that God will pour out his Spirit in revival blessing. A united gathering for prayer has been arranged for Saturday March 26th at City Evangelical Church, Beeston, Leeds, meeting from 11 am to 1 pm. We have asked one of our members, Erroll Hulse, to lead the day for us. We intend to provide activities for children, so that whole families may be able to come. Afterwards tea and coffee will be provided, and people might like to bring a packed lunch and enjoy further fellowship together.

If it seems right, we hope that this occasion will be the beginning of a commitment on the part of all of us to ongoing serious prayer for revival. Other joint events might be arranged from time to time. We shall also suggest that in certain weeks every church should make this the focus of their praying in their ordinary church activities, perhaps joining with neighbouring churches to pray together.

I do hope that you will support this venture and encourage the members of your congregation to participate on March 26th. If you have any questions or want any further information, please feel free to contact me. Yours in the Lord,

Jonathan Bayes Telephone 0113 8151228

E mail drzhoub@googlemail.com

Contributors to this issue

Bob Davey is a pastor in West Looe, Cornwall. This is his sixteenth chapter on the history of the Church in China, the first going back to RT 220. Gary Morrison is pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, Bolton. Robert Strivens is principal of the London Theological Seminary. John Benton is pastor of Chertsey Baptist Church, Guildford, Surrey, and editor of the monthly paper *Evangelicals Now*. Kevin Roy is pastor of a church at Muldersdrift in South Africa. He teaches Church History at the Baptist College in Randburg.

Reformed Books in China

There is hope that the Communist government in China will continue to ease restrictions with regard to the publication of Christian books. Some are optimistic about this. Others point out that there are great differences in administration from region to region and it is always possible that the Communist regime will suddenly curtail whatever freedom may exist. A strong crack-down is going on at present. The future is very uncertain.

The articles in *Reformation Today* by Bob Davey, especially in this issue, *The Gospel in China – 1953-1966*, provide the historical background to the situation in China today.

The question: Is there a demand for Reformed literature in China and how will such literature be received? The Robert Morrison Project website provides the following material:

‘This is a very complex question because a whole range of factors is at work here. Political, economic, and spiritual issues are involved. To date Christian publishing has just barely scratched the surface of the 100 million member house church. Everything is still so new. Consider some facts: Christian publishing in China began in 2003 and a few Reformed titles began to appear in 2005. In about 2003 the first Christian bookstore opened and today there are about 150 or 200 stores. Christian publishing in China is still so new that some Chinese believers do not even know that it is possible to purchase a legal Christian book. If a book is available, they might not be able to afford it (especially in rural areas). When a copy is purchased, many times a church

member or pastor will have no qualms about making as many photocopies as he needs. On other occasions one copy might be purchased and five to ten people will read it. Sales figures alone do not tell the whole story of how a book is being used.

Considering these logistical and economic challenges, it is certain that the road ahead will be a bumpy one. However, there are many reasons to believe that Reformed literature will be very warmly received. Again and again the constant request from house church members is the desire for solid, in-depth Christian literature. They are continually looking for literature that will deepen their knowledge of Scripture and help them have a closer, more intimate walk with God. For example, in 2005 a biography of John Calvin was legally published, and sales of this book have been so strong that the publisher is already printing its fifth edition.

A larger, more significant question is: How did the Chinese Church develop this hunger for in-depth Christian literature? Recent Chinese Church history provides some answers, for it explains where the Chinese Church has come from and it gives an indicator on where it might go in the future.

When the People’s Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949, the Church had approximately one million members. Soon after that, all foreign missionaries were expelled and in the years that followed the Chinese Church experienced a period of great suffering. But rather than declining, between 1950 and about 1990 the Church grew at a phenomenal rate. Today China scholars estimate that the

church ranges anywhere from 80 to 100 million members and continues to grow at about 9% a year. When one compares what God did in China with other periods of rapid growth in Church history it seems that the best comparison is the 1904-1905 Welsh revival.¹ There is no doubt that the Welsh revival was a mighty movement of the Spirit of God that radically transformed both people and churches. Yet, at the same time the revival was mixed with some unhealthy, unbiblical aspects that limited its influence. This same phenomenon occurred in China. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit transformed the Church in a powerful way between 1950 and 1990, but it was also burdened by false teaching and a lack of shepherds who knew how to guide it faithfully.

The house church movement in China today is very much a product of this crucial 40-year period. True revival creates many lasting influences. One of the most significant is a hunger to know God, to worship him and to have a deeper understanding of his Word. There is also greater spiritual discernment to recognise the difference between man's impotence and God's omnipotent, sovereign power. Consequently, the Chinese Church looks for literature that reflects those truths. The Church in the West, however, has not experienced a large scale revival in over a hundred years (1905 in Wales and 1858 in the USA) and, as a result, desires literature that reflects its limited experience. One measure of a church's knowledge and experience of God will be seen in the types of books that it reads. Due to these differences between the Church in China and in the West it is likely that a large portion of contemporary evangelical literature from the West will have little positive long-term impact in China. Reformed literature, however, has tremendous potential because Reformation theology mirrors what God does in revival.

How should Reformed churches in the West move forward in regard to Christian publishing in China? We would do well to consider the example of the Banner of Truth Trust. In 1957 when the Banner of Truth first started publishing Reformed literature, very few people had any interest in their work. Yet, they never gave up. They persisted and slowly, over time, a love and a passion for the doctrines of grace swept across several denominations and seminaries. There are many reasons to praise God for how he has used the Banner of Truth over the last 50 + years.

The Robert Morrison Project believes that this same approach should be applied to China. Christian publishing is still very much in its infancy and it appears that a rocky road is ahead. There are economic, political, and logistical problems that pose some very significant challenges. At the same time the hunger within the Chinese Church for God-glorifying literature is enormous, possibly greater than what we see in the West. It is our opinion that as the obstacles are dealt with and overcome, Reformed literature can have a vital impact in China. The lesson that we should learn from the Banner of Truth is: Give it time! Don't give up! Government policy in China is continually evolving. Only God knows what the future holds. Our motto should be *Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God* (William Carey). Perhaps 30 or 40 years from now we will look back with wonder and amazement at how God allowed the doctrines of grace to spread far and wide in China.²

¹ For an excellent analysis of the 1904-1905 Welsh revival see Iain H Murray, *Pentecost – Today? The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival*. (Banner of Truth Trust).

The Gospel in China – 1953-1966

by Bob Davey

Fighting for survival 1953-1966

In 1953 the first modern census taken in China showed a population of 583 million. By 1980 the number passed 1 billion.

By the end of 1953 China was a united country where the Communist government's will was enforced. Advances were being made with ambitious infrastructure projects such as flood control of the Yellow River, land reclamation, irrigation, flood prevention, railways being repaired, new roads and railways being constructed and improvement to public utilities in towns. Much of this, to be sure, could only be achieved by large contingents of forced labour, swelled by many who had fallen foul of the 'Five Anti Campaign' (bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of State assets, leak of State economic secrets) of 1952. Inflation was in check, taxes were collected, there was no famine, gangsters and vice were largely eliminated, cities were cleaned, education was vastly extended and widespread efforts were made to improve public health. Land reform had redistributed land to peasants. Laws were introduced abolishing child marriage, polygamy and concubinage. Equal rights for women were also Party policy. Yet there was widespread disillusionment setting in. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ruled over all aspects of the people's lives, including their minds. The country was as closed for exit as it was for entry.

The Protestant Church 1953-1958

By the end of 1958 all denominational structures and organisations had been destroyed by the Three-Self Reform Movement (from 1954, Three-Self Patriotic Movement, TSPM) under the leadership of Y T Wu (Wu Yaozong, 1893-1979). This was all done in the name of unity and patriotism. All foreign financing had been cut off. The goal of the 'Three-Self' was self-governance, self-support and self-propagation of a united Protestant Church. All was under the control of the Communist Party, down to local church level. A separate organisation was set up for Roman Catholics.

The Protestant missionaries had failed to achieve self-governance, self-support and self-propagation for the churches in 146 years of work. Now it was achieved

by the force of the State. Yet, freedom to exercise these liberties was severely curtailed in practice and contact with overseas Christians was forbidden. For the Christians in China the loss of fellowship with the body of Christ overseas would be a grievous loss. But by being thrown on the grace of God and his resources there would be spiritual gain and greater usefulness to God. A qualitatively different Church would emerge 20 years after this period.

It was in August 1955 that the influential evangelical Chinese pastor and leader Wang Mingdao was imprisoned. His noble stand for the independence of the Church from the State, both under the Japanese and the Communists, has been recorded in a separate article in RT 235.

In October 1955 the TSPM issued a decree declaring all Christian activities outside the jurisdiction of the TSPM to be illegal. The government Religious Affairs Bureau conducted a house-to-house search of every Christian home for Christian literature to confiscate. In 1956 The Little Flock, with a membership of 80,000 in 870 congregations was forced into the TSPM. In spite of all, reports showed growth in church membership and baptisms in many places. University Christian students had managed to meet in conferences until 1955. These were stopped, but as late as 1957 a delegate conference from nine universities managed to meet in Shantou (Swatow).

By the end of 1958 city churches had all been brought under the firm control of the government and the numbers drastically reduced, as were their memberships. In Shanghai over 200 churches were reduced to 15; in Beijing 65 to 4; in other cities there remained between 1 and 4 churches. In Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi province, there was only one church left open, with a staff of four. Already, during the land reform campaign, rural churches had been closed down. The Pentecostal sect of the True Jesus Church had conformed, but was now closed down.

20,000 Protestant churches were closed, leaving fewer than 100 show-churches open in all China.

Chinese pastoral leadership over congregations for all practical purposes was removed. Those pastors and leaders who remained were only those who agreed to toe the Party line and submit to its control. Hymns and sermons were all vigilantly vetted by CCP cadres. Various subjects were banned such as the second coming of Christ, the Book of Revelation and the vanity of this world. Teaching about the duty of absolute obedience to Christ came into conflict with government policy. Belief in miraculous healing and in exorcism was distinctly frowned upon by Religious Affairs cadres. Books were censored. No person



*Cultural
Revolution*

under the age of eighteen was to be allowed in church. Evangelism was strictly forbidden.

The consequence of state domination in the affairs of the formal churches was that the great majority of Christians had to withdraw in order to worship and pray in their own homes and in those of fellow believers. The house-fellowships were spontaneous and informal, but very determined in the defence of their faith. These Christians were very fervent in their praying for each other and they supported the persecuted Christians and their families in whatever way they could.

The Little Flock, with its emphasis that the Church was the company of believing people and not a building or ecclesiastical organisation, came into its own. The loss of church buildings meant they could fall back on the flexibility of their numerous fellowship groups in homes. Many house churches today are directly derived from The Little Flock. Many other groups owe a substantial debt to The Little Flock doctrine and practice, for both their survival and beliefs. The Little Flock was non-Pentecostal, yet believed in the possibility of divine healing in answer to prayer. It was also tolerant of glossolalia (speaking in tongues), though it did not believe in it as an article of faith.

The Hundred Flowers Campaign 1956-1957

In May 1956 Mao Zedong allowed some freedom of expression under the banner of 'Let 100 flowers bloom. Let 100 schools of thought contend.' As can

be imagined this campaign led to a chorus of criticisms and complaints against the China Communist Party and CCP officials. Also inland, some religious groups came out in the open during this brief period of respite. An inland pastor around this time was obliged to sell vegetables for his living. He managed to sell all his vegetables during the day and at the same time visit the homes of the Christians to pray with them. Many of the congregation were in prison. However, revival broke out in his mountain church and the number of believers increased from three hundred to three thousand before he himself was imprisoned. Angus Kinnear states, 'In the summer of 1956 there was a widespread awakening among students throughout China, fed by carefully preserved writings of Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee. Many Christian students were taking seriously the question of committing large sections of the Chinese Bible to memory, against a day of trial.' These Christians were being equipped to be future spiritual leaders of believers.

The Anti-Rightist Campaign 1957-1958

The Hundred Flowers Campaign was quickly put into reverse by another campaign by Mao Zedong called the Anti-Rightist Campaign. This was a 'rectification' programme against 'stinking intellectuals'. It led to a lot of people regretting they had spoken out. Several million intellectuals: scientists, professionals, teachers, students, writers and many Christians were sent to labour camps. The Anti-Rightist Campaign led to the loss to the nation of much-needed skills for twenty years.

It was under the Anti-Rightist Campaign run by the TSPM leadership that Marcus Cheng suffered, as did Dr Jia Yuming and forty of his graduates. They were among seven hundred Christians who were imprisoned about Christmas time 1957. Episcopal Bishop Stephen Chang and fourteen other Christian leaders were denounced. David Yang was sent away for a period of 'reform by labour'. What distressed him most was that his own students at the Spiritual Life Seminary were the foremost in accusing him.

Evangelical leaders and the TSPM

Chia Yuming (1880-1964) had his own Bible school, entirely free from foreign support or direction. He continued to run it until 1954 when he was chosen as a vice-chairman of the TSPM. A quiet Confucian-type man, he was a book-loving scholar. His focus was always on gaining knowledge and maintaining a daily quiet time of Bible meditation and prayer in order to be Christ-like in character. For him the presence of evil within the Church was no ground to leave it. In 1956 his 15 volume *Commentary on the Bible* began to appear. His Bible

college, the Spiritual Life Seminary, was re-opened in October 1956. But not for long. He fell foul of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and was stripped of his licence to preach and imprisoned. He died in 1964 still in fellowship with the TSPM.

David Yang (Yang Shaotang, 1900-1969) of Shanxi owed much personally to the work of foreign missions. From them he received his Christian home, education and conversion, as also his theological and church training and early ministry. He was always close to the China Inland Mission and it was to him they entrusted the premises of the Free Christian Church in Shanghai, on their withdrawal from China. With such connections David Yang, as an evangelical theologian and leader, was always in line as a prime target for an accusation meeting. He was ejected from his pastorate at his old Nanjing Church. Great pressure was brought to bear on him to work with the TSM, a pressure to which he yielded with a certain amount of reluctance. It did not help that he was used for propaganda purposes by the TSM and then the TSPM, as it was renamed. Finally the TSPM's patience ran out with him for being 'two-faced' and he spent time being 'reformed by labour'. After that he was denied freedom to do any ministry at all. He returned to his ancestral home at Quwo in the province of Shanxi (Shansi) in 1964. He died of a heart attack while doing hard labour in freezing weather on Chinese New Year Day 1969. His tombstone in Quwo reads 'God's Servant Pastor Yang Shaotang'.

Marcus Cheng (Chen Chonggui, 1884-1963) of Chongqing (Chungking) Theological Seminary surprised many by throwing in his lot with the TSM 'hook, line and sinker'. He joined the Communist Party and was one of the six vice-chairmen of the TSM. He also wrote extensively for *Tianfeng*. Like David Yang he was very useful to the TSM and then the TSPM for propaganda purposes. Nevertheless he was regarded by the leaders of the TSPM as a wolf in sheep's clothing and on sufferance. In March 1957 a speech Cheng made was reported in the *People's Daily*. In the speech Marcus Cheng defended the Church against abusive acts by Party officials. For this action he was hauled before an accusation meeting. There his comments were condemned by Y T Wu as 'the greatest defamation ever made against the Communist Party, the People's Government and the vast people of our nation'. Cheng was severely punished and was forced to live in unbearable and humiliating circumstances until his death in March 1963. His funeral service was taken by Y T Wu.

Allen Yuan (Yuan Xiangchen, 1914-2005) of Beijing was converted in 1933 and then trained at the evangelical Far East Theological Seminary in Beijing. He attended the Christian Tabernacle and his ministry paralleled that of Wang Mingdao as to beliefs and practices. After the war with the Japanese he opened a prayer room for his ministry. Every year saw him baptise 20 to 30 people. Yuan

refused to join the TSPM and was imprisoned in 1958 until 1979. During those years his wife and six children suffered very much and he was subjected to torture, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Up north in the region of the Russian border, conditions in the labour camp were very hard, 'but' he said 'I came back alive, many did not. I also had no Bible for 22 years, nor met any other Protestant Christian, though I met four Roman Catholic priests who had refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.' On his release he refused to join the TSPM to his dying day.

Samuel Lamb (Lin Xiangao, b.1924), son of a Baptist pastor, was born in Macau. He pastored a church congregation with a membership of 400 in the Dongshan District of Guangzhou (Canton). Though he half-heartedly joined the TSPM at one stage, he was a marked man. Lamb was first arrested in September 1955 and then again in May 1958 when he began a twenty-year prison term. This was largely spent in a coalmine in Shanxi province. Since his release in 1978 he has gained international fame for maintaining a prominent unregistered house church in Guangzhou.

Moses Xie (Xie Moshan, b.1918) became a Christian at the age of fourteen. Born in Jiangsu province he has spent much of his life there and in Shanghai. As director of the Chinese Mission in Shanghai he refused to join the TSPM and so was arrested in May 1956 and was cruelly tortured. He remained in prison until 1979 and has been imprisoned again twice since then.

Li Tianen (b.1928) was to become one of the most influential leaders of the house-church movement. He was born in the Fangcheng County of Henan province into a Christian family (his grandfather was converted under the preaching of Hudson Taylor). Li was converted in the 1940s and had a theological training at the Huazhong Baptist Theological Institute. During the 1950s he was an independent house-church evangelist and pastor in the Pudong area of Shanghai. Arrested at the height of the Great Leap Forward campaign in 1960, he served a ten-year sentence in a labour camp in Anhui province. Bizarrely, two prisoners in the beds either side of him had the duty of reporting any movements of his lips in prayer while he was in his bed at night. Punishment was for him to stand against a wall in the open with arms and legs out-stretched, without wearing a shirt, for hours on end, even in winter.

Surviving Christian leaders of this generation have been given the honorary title of 'patriarchs' within the house-church movement. Their principled stand not to compromise the gospel, as well as their willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ, has been profoundly influential on the younger generations of Christians.

The Great Leap Forward 1958-1960

Mao Zedong was dissatisfied with the economic progress that had been made so he introduced in May 1958 a radical programme. It was the Second Five Year Plan, 1958-1962, termed the Great Leap Forward.. This was Mao's commitment to a permanent revolution. Everything was nationalised. The people in the countryside were marshalled into communes, work-brigades and production-units. By 1960 over 95 percent of the peasants in the countryside lived in about 25,000 communes, each averaging 5000 households. Organised along paramilitary lines as self-sufficient communities, the commune had communal kitchens, dining-rooms and nurseries. Apart from anything else it was a determined effort to destroy the institution of family on ideological grounds. All organised Christian life in the countryside was now impossible. Christians were forced to carry on their Christian worship at irregular intervals in secret. Deprived of institutional church and pastoral leadership, they were on their own.

In 1958 the Communists boasted Wenzhou, on the coast in Zhejiang province, to be an achieved 'religion free' zone. Wenzhou thus became China's first officially atheist city. Henan province was another area declared to be an achieved 'atheist zone'. Ironically, now Wenzhou has the greatest number of Christians of any city in China and Henan has the greatest number of Christians of all the provinces of China! Behold the mighty acts of Christ building his Church!

The Great Leap Forward produced economic breakdown and was abandoned after two years. Disruption to agriculture led to the death by starvation of 20-30 million people. Despite the domestic setback, China flexed her muscles in the foreign field. This was a sign of growing self-confidence. A Tibetan revolt in 1958-59 was crushed and the Dalai Lama fled to India. An aggressive propaganda campaign declared the intention of liberating Taiwan and was backed by a massive artillery bombardment of off-shore islands. In 1959 the alliance with Russia cracked under the pressure of mutual suspicion. Under Khrushchev the Russians reduced economic aid and withdrew technicians and advisers from China.

A partial economic recovery 1961-1966

As a result of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward Mao Zedong stepped down from his position as chairman of the People's Republic but he retained his position as chairman of the CCP. More moderate leadership headed by Deng Xiaoping set about corrective economic measures. Policies of the Central Committee's Secretariat met with some success, yet by the end of 1965 forty million 'intellectuals' and students had become farm labourers.

Mao Zedong began a fight-back to regain absolute power. The Socialist Education Movement of 1962-1965 was Mao's campaign to restore ideological purity, re-infuse revolutionary fervour and intensify class struggle. He called on the CCP and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to unite behind his call to make 'Maoist Thought' (later, the Little Red Book) the guiding principle of thought for the future. A thorough reform of the school system along 'Maoist Thought' lines tightened control for Mao. In a further move against the moderates in 1964, Mao abolished the United Fronts Work Department and everything under it, including the Religious Affairs Bureau and the TSPM. By the end of 1965 Mao was ready to strike and strike hard.

Outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966

In June 1966 Mao Zedong let loose the Cultural Revolution. Religion in any and every form was banned and attacked viciously by the iconoclastic youthful Red Guards. All remaining churches were closed down and their buildings secularised. Bibles were burned. All Christian literature was banned and destroyed. Searches were made in homes and people found with any Christian literature were severely punished.

By the end of 1966 religion was officially dead in China. Silence fell on the Christian scene for ten years. Marxism appeared to have triumphed. Survival of the gospel in China seemed impossible. It was indeed midnight darkness for Christians in China, yet in their extremity, the grace and mercy of God were with them. It was not the end of the story. What followed was one of the most amazing revivals in the whole of Church history, and it is still in progress to this very day. This we must leave until next time to describe.

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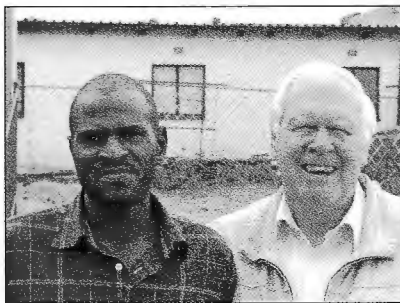
African Pastors' Conferences – January 2011

This Report by Gary Morrison

Eight conferences took place during January. The first was in Port Elizabeth. This is a three-day event. Dr Paul Stoltz and his excellent team from the Bible Institute of the Eastern Cape organised the details. A major saving was brought about by using a local church as the venue. The speakers were Dr Errol Wagner, Kennedy Sunkutu from Zambia and myself. The subjects centred on the local church: Christ as Head, its nature, elders and deacons, the role of women, membership and discipline. Attendance was up on last year. Book sales were well below those of the other conferences. This is a cause of concern.

The second conference was different being a youth conference. This was hosted by Hillcrest Baptist Church. About 40 attended. The books were especially aimed to meet the needs of the youth. The place of this ministry and its potential together with our limited human and financial means to meet this challenge is the subject of ongoing prayerful consideration.

The third conference was a three-day event which took place in the picturesque setting of Koinonia a few miles outside Hillcrest in an area known as the Valley of a Thousand Hills. Sixty-one registered. This was the fifth Koinonia conference. A most encouraging feature is to observe the spiritual unity and bonding of the pastors that has increased over five years. Erroll Hulse, Alan Levy, Raymond Zulu, Kennedy Sunkutu and Sechaba Legoete were the preachers.



The editor with one of the pastors in Soweto

Again the focus was on the Church and also the doctrines of grace which were presented by Erroll from Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 8:28-30. There are many advantages at Koinonia. However means that this is the most subsidised conference. How to share this expense more is on the agenda with the local organisers led by chairman Ernest McAmbi who is pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Durban.

The fourth conference was 'a first'. This was hosted by 'Crusade for Christ' at Port Edward about 60km down the south coast of KwaZulu Natal. The extreme humidity did not dampen the enthusiasm that the delegates exhibited toward the teaching they received. We were earnestly requested to return next year. About 35 attended.

The fifth was also a new conference. Soweto is the best known of the South African townships and reputedly the largest. Two memorable days were spent in Soweto, this being the first APC there. Sechaba Legoete, Erroll and Irving were the preachers. A nearby church supplied

the meals. Helpful contacts have been made and a foundation has been established upon which we can work for next year. Part of pioneering is that the local pastors need time to make sure that we do not have a hidden agenda. The hosting pastor remarked that he was 'not so sure' about us at first, but since he heard what we were teaching he can whole-heartedly endorse us and recommend his entire fraternal to attend in 2012! What an encouragement! All the books available are top quality and it was evident that the value of these books is appreciated by the pastors.

The sixth conference was held in Newcastle which is in mid-Kwazulu Natal. What a shining light and outstanding model for all the conferences! Pastor Japie van Kampen is a very warm host. The Newcastle Baptist Church covered all the catering costs for the two days themselves. No fee was asked of the attending delegates. Instead they were encouraged to use the money to buy books. Approximately 65 attended. Book sales are going up each year.

The seventh conference was a one-day event in Welkom in the Free State. Even though it rained almost non-stop, nothing could affect the wonderful spiritual refreshment enjoyed by about 35 pastors. I believe this conference has a wonderful future ahead. The organising pastor told me that a local fraternal had been strongly influenced by this annual conference and how the standard had been raised. Again we were asked if the conference could be extended next year to a two-day event.

There is a story behind the eighth and last APC. The road to the former conference site called *Ora et Labora* was damaged by heavy rains so as to make it dangerous. In addition further obstacles were deemed

insuperable. A new venue had to be found. The pastor and members of the Afrikaans Baptist Church at Kempton Park near Johannesburg International Airport opened their church and their homes at short notice. Irving Steggle spoke on the biblical theology of both church membership and church discipline. Sechaba Legoete passionately opened both Mark 5 and Ephesians 6 with powerful applications. I expounded on the basis of the local church as the body of Christ with Christ himself as Head. Musa Similane preached the conference sermon. About R7000 of books were sold. With the sad history of South Africa it was moving to see a large group of black pastors enjoying the hospitality of an Afrikaans Baptist Church whose pastor and members made them so welcome.

Altogether during January Raymond Zulu and I drove 3,500km. Gayle and Peter Staeggeman provide a Gibraltar-like base having converted their double garage into a store-room for all the books. Gayle and her friend Kathie catalogue and prepare the books for each venue and then check them all again when the books are returned from each conference.

Preparations are now underway for conferences in Manzini, Swaziland, (May 11), Barberton, (13 and 14 May) and a very important one-day first time conference in the large township of Kabokweni, (May 15). Choolwe Mwetwa from Zambia has agreed to be the principal preacher for these conferences.

Financial support. Cheques should be made out to African Pastors' Conferences and posted to treasurer Rachel Rothwell, 4 Hall Close, Bramhope, LS16 9JQ, UK Charity Trust No 1017000.

The Father of Eternity – a child with four titles

Editor

Isaiah 9:1-7 is set in the context of the invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Assyria. The prophecy has its roots in the aftermath of 734-2 BC when Assyria had defeated Israel and annexed much of its territory. When much of Europe was over-run by the Nazi armies there was much which made the peoples forlorn. That was similar to the sad state of the northern territories under Assyria. In the midst of that Isaiah tells of a better future for the faithful remnant.

This is how the prophecy reads:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

Oswalt in his commentary on Isaiah translates the last of these lines as follows:

*For every boot, stamping in rhythm,
And every cloak rolled in blood,
Shall be for the burning,
Fuel for the fire.*

In his wrath Yahweh gave the Northern Kingdom of Israel over to the Assyrians. But this prophecy is about a future blessing. The main feature is the brightness of the light which will shine. It will not be gloom but a bright light. The specific areas named are Zebulun and Naphtali. With the coming of the Messiah there will be great joy for the faithful likened to the joy of harvest time or the joy when the invading Midianites were defeated. The fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy is stated by Matthew when he describes Jesus moving north to Capernaum in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (Matt 4:12-17).

With this background in mind we turn now to Isaiah's description of the child that is to be born.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Already Isaiah had intimated that a virgin will give birth to a son, 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel' (7:14). Isaiah emphasises the child aspect. This highlights Yahweh's firm grip on history and the guidance and protection of his Son from childhood onwards. The glory of Christianity is the incarnation, God manifest in the flesh. When the child is born he is given the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. This child is the Father's love gift to us as we read in John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

Born of a woman he will have a human arrival on earth. The deliverance of mankind will not be by military might or by armies but by the wisdom and grace of God. Everything about Jesus' coming into the world was humble. He was born in a cattle shed and placed in a manger.

That he is a king is intimated by the fact that the government will be on his shoulder. 'On him will devolve the responsibilities of maintaining the security of Yahweh's people and providing for their needs. The burden will no longer be on their shoulder (9:4) but on his' (Mackay).

The titles given to this child are unique to him:

Wonderful Counsellor
Mighty God
Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace

Each of these titles consists of a noun and an adjective. E J Young excels as an exegete of the Hebrew text. He opens up the words as follows:

PELE yoetz EL gibbor abi AD sar SHALOM

WONDERFUL counsellor
GOD omnipotent
ETERNITY father of
PEACE prince of

In the first two names the designation of deity is first. In the last two deity is expressed in the second part of the title.

We might read the words like this:

He is wonderful – he is the best and wisest counsellor. He is our heavenly Solomon. None like him.

He is God – he is mighty in omnipotence.

He is Eternity – he is the Father of eternity.

He is Peace – he is the Prince of peace.

We can venture further with more detail as we contemplate these titles

1. Wonderful Counsellor - He is divinely wonderful as counsellor

There is an account in the book of Judges in which Manoah the father of Samson and his wife are visited by the angel of the LORD. When Manoah asks to know the name of the angel the Hebrew word *pele* meaning wonderful is given (Judges 13:18). Then when Manoah offers a sacrifice of a burnt offering the angel ascends up in the flames of the sacrifice. Manoah and his wife are awe-struck by this supernatural event. The angel indeed is divine. His name *pele* means something that transcends human understanding. He is Wonderful and here his title is Wonderful Counsellor.

The word counsellor is in a participial form. In other words he is active in his counselling. We understand Solomon to be the wisest man but from whom did Solomon derive his wisdom? The Messiah is the repository of all wisdom as we see in the text:

By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth (Prov 8:15-16).

As believers we have direct access to him in our daily quest for wisdom.

2. Mighty God – He is God who is mighty in omnipotence

This second title given to the child is one which tells us that he is co-equal with the Father with regard to power. He is fully equipped for the government which is upon his shoulders. He is able to represent to the full all the needs of his people. The Son who is given is 'The Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever' (Rom 9:5).

Omnipotent power is seen in the creative miracles of Jesus such as turning the water into wine, the feeding of the 5000, the instant calming of a violent storm on the Lake of Galilee, and raising Lazarus from the dead.

When he needed to escape from his enemies he had the power to do that as we see when he preached in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth. ‘All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way’ (Luke 4:28-30).

Philippians chapter two describes the laying aside by Jesus of his divine power in order to give himself to the propitiatory death of the cross (Phil 2:7-8).

3. Everlasting Father – He is the Father of eternity

The text says that this child is from eternity. Jesus is not created. It will be difficult to find any better description of Jesus’ Godhood than this one. This is well expressed in the introduction to the Gospel of John, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made’ (John 1:1-3). He is transcendent. It is wrong to understand this title in terms of fatherhood or adoption. The Father is pre-eminently our Father who orders all things and who protects and cares for us as our Father. That is the explicit teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. It is biblical to think of Jesus as ‘the good shepherd’ (John 10:11, cf Ezek 34).

4. The Prince of Peace – He is Peace and is the Prince of peace

The Hebrew word *Shalom* means much more than the English word peace. It designates prosperity as well as tranquillity (Harman). Peace (*shalom*) here is ‘a total security which transcends and eclipses the social, political and economic achievements of a merely temporal government’ (Mackay). The New Jerusalem of eternity is the City of Peace.

The gospel brings good news of peace with God and this comes as a gift to us when we are united to Christ by faith. 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God' (Rom 5:1-2).

Verse seven describes the manner in which the Prince extends his reign of peace and this provides us with the practical application of the truth set before us in verse six.

This child has been given the throne of universal dominion as the text declares:

*Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this (Isa 9:7).*

There will be no end to his reign. His government is permanent. We need have no fear that there will be another fall into sin or that an alien power will rise to overcome the one of which we are a part. This is the assurance of eternal life. We are secure in our union by faith with the Christ of God. He is our eternal security (John 3:36). We note too that 'increase' points to the fact that from a small beginning his kingdom increases numerically and geographically until 'the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Hab 2:14). That this work of such magnitude starts with a humble beginning is seen from language used by Isaiah in chapter 11:1-9, 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a branch will bear fruit.'

‘What this child inaugurates is a seemingly small beginning but it has within it potentialities of growth well-nigh unbelievable’ (Leupold).

‘It shall be an increasing government: it shall be multiplied, the bounds of his kingdom shall be more and more enlarged, and many shall be added to it daily: the lustre of it shall increase and it shall shine more and more brightly in the world. The monarchies were each less illustrious than the other so that what began as gold ended in iron and clay and every monarchy dwindled by degrees: but the kingdom of Christ is a growing kingdom, and will come to perfection at last’ (Matthew Henry).

‘In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever’ (Dan 2:44).

The guarantee that all this will come to pass is that ‘the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this’.

If we compare the extent of Christ’s Church in the 272 nations of the world today with the extent 200 years ago the difference is staggering. 200 years ago the gospel was only beginning to enter most of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Robert Morrison, pioneer missionary to China baptised the first Chinese convert in 1814. Today efforts are made to estimate in tens of millions the number of Chinese Bible-believing Christians.

Wisdom and power unite in Christ’s person so that he is able to save his people to the uttermost. As God almighty he constantly broadens and extends his kingdom.

The kingdoms of this world are all temporary. They eventually totter and fall. Extensive empires have come and gone. Daniel describes four great empires. Jesus was born under the fourth during the reign of the Caesars when the Roman empire extended over the then known world.

Jesus is the rightful king of the Jews and true heir of King David's throne. Amazingly he was rejected by the Jewish leaders, condemned by Pontius Pilate, even though the latter declared him to be innocent, and given over to crucifixion. When they crucified him they placed above his head the written charge against him in Latin, Aramaic and Greek: THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (John 19:19-20). That took place by the determinate will of the Father in order that propitiation could be made for our sins. By his resurrection from the dead he was declared with power to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4).

John Calvin lived in times of extreme peril for evangelical believers. Commenting on Isaiah 9:7 he wrote:

‘Though the kingdom of Christ is in such a condition that it appears as if it were about to perish at every moment, yet God not only protects and defends it, but also extends its boundaries far and wide, and then preserves and carries it forward in uninterrupted progression to *eternity*. We ought firmly to believe that the frequency of those shocks by which the Church is shaken may not weaken our faith. Amidst the violent attacks of enemies, the kingdom of Christ stands firm through the invincible power of God.’

The four titles given to this child and the projected outcome as described above encourage us to develop our lives of intercession. Our prayers are interwoven with God's purposes. He has condescended to use us in spite of our weakness.

Since ‘the zeal of the LORD Almighty’ will accomplish the worldwide extension of his kingdom then surely we should be enthusiastic for his cause as the apostle Paul exhorts us: ‘Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain’ (1 Cor 15:58).

News



Group photo of Russian Conference

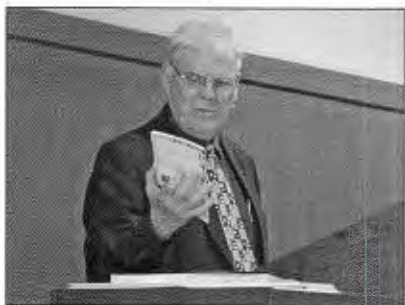
Evangelical Press – Russian pastoral conference

The eleventh Evangelical Press Russian language pastoral conference was held on 4-5 November 2010 near Moscow. It was an encouragement to see nearly 90 delegates drawn to the conference from several countries within the former Soviet Union. Some travelled for 50 hours from Kazakhstan to get to the conference, such was their appetite for the Word of God and for fellowship. Many of those attending came from isolated and challenging situations. For them, the opportunity to hear the doctrines of grace expounded and to share their concerns and pray was a particular blessing. The keynote speakers were EP authors, Derek Thomas of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi and Philip Eveson former Principal of London Theological Seminary.

John Rubens welcomed the delegates on behalf of EP and we were again privileged to have Pastor Georgi Viazovski of Minsk bring the opening address. He brought a challenge regarding our true spiritual state, based on the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18.

Of special interest to all readers is Philip Eveson's exposition of Deviations from the truth of justification by faith alone by imputed righteousness and how this relates to Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic doctrine. He also dealt with the 'New Perspective', showing clearly how it deviates from biblical truth and might be attractive to the Orthodox and Roman churches and create significant dangers for Evangelicals.

After each session, the speakers took detailed questions based on their papers, which really stimulated debate and helped reinforce the understanding of the truths expounded. The



Martin Holdt recommending books from the pulpit

concluding time of prayer was a further time of blessing. Many of us will already be looking forward to next year's conference, Lord willing. *John Norris*

South Africa

After two periods of seven and eleven years as senior pastor of Constantia Park Baptist Church, Pretoria, Martin Holdt is retiring. Willem Bronkhorst has accepted the call to replace Martin. A veteran pastor in South Africa declared that this appointment is the perfect provision. Martin will continue to fulfil the role of rector of the Afrikaans Baptist Seminary, lead the annual Grace Conferences and work with a church plant which veered off course and is in need of experienced leadership. Martin is due to be a main preacher at the Banner of Truth Conference at Leicester this coming April 11-14 and at the Banner Youth Conference preceding that (8-11 April).

The Augustine bookroom directed by Elsabe Holdt is housed in the CPBC building. An amazing number of books are sold – R250,000 monthly

(£25,000). Martin reviews and recommends a book or books at every service.

USA

Joel Beeke of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, reports as follows: We now have 160 students from 17 foreign countries and 30+ denominations. We have four full-time tutors and 35 visiting tutors. (30 students are 'long-distance'.) We have just accepted six more students at our monthly meeting this morning. The Lord has blessed us beyond our wildest imagination, just as Ephesians 3:20-21 promises.

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic reputedly has the largest Reformed Baptist Church in the world. Other RB churches are being planted as this report indicates.

'We give thanks to the Lord for the blessing that has been granted to the city of Cotui, of having a second Reformed Baptist Church, located in a populous neighbourhood called Liberty. Brother Diogenes Ayala had solicited pastor Rubén Darío Gómez from Cotui Bible Church, that he might help to establish a church according to the biblical model in that sector and by the grace of God, the work was prospered and blessed by the Lord. On Saturday the 29th January of this year, *The Chosen in Christ Bible Church* ordained Diogenes Ayala as its pastor, after having established a properly disciplined membership according to the London Confession of 1689.'

The Importance of Reading

Robert Strivens is Principal of London Theological Seminary. This article is based on the lecture given by the author in April, 2010, at the opening of the new site of the Evangelical Library.

If you were on death row, awaiting execution, how would you want to spend your time?

The apostle Paul found himself in that position. What he wanted to do was to read. He wrote to his friend Timothy asking him to come to see him and to bring with him Paul's cloak and reading material.

About 1500 years later another man was in prison for his faith. He also suspected that he was due to die soon. He too, like Paul, wanted his books. A letter from this man, probably to the prison governor, asks for warm clothes in case he has to endure the cold winter that was approaching, but this was not his main concern:

But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study.

The writer was the famous English Bible translator, William Tyndale, exiled from his homeland because of his desire to translate the Bible into English. He wrote this letter from prison in Vilvorde, just outside Brussels, in 1535. We can imagine him, alone like Paul, with friends far away; with winter approaching, he is feeling the cold. He also recognises that the prison may be his last earthly dwelling-place. But, like Paul, his main concern was not for his own physical comfort.

Here were two Christians, whose end was near and whose useful public ministry was at an end – and what they wanted was books!

Christians have always loved books. First and foremost, of course, we love the Bible. This was Paul's priority, as it was Tyndale's after him, and it should be ours. If we have time to read nothing else, we should read the Bible. We should seek to read all of the Bible, not simply our favourite passages or books, and for this purpose some kind of reading scheme is useful. As well as reading through the Bible, we should be regularly studying some part of it in more depth. We thereby provide our soul with the nourishment it needs, deepen our fellowship with the triune God, find instruction on questions of faith and living and help prepare ourselves for the corporate worship of God's people on the Lord's Day.

However, in this article, I want to focus on the reading of literature other than the Scripture. I do so because we are surrounded by an enormous wealth of literature, particularly in the English language. How do we decide what will be helpful to us? How do we assess its value? Where do we begin? I want to try to offer some help, to enable us to make the most of our reading, and to do so I shall pose three straightforward questions: Why should Christians read? What should Christians read? How should Christians read?

Why should Christians read?

There are two answers to this question and we need to give attention to each of them.

Firstly, we read because we are human

The love of reading is universal. Wherever we go people are reading. Reading is God-given: that is clear – ever since man was created, it seems that he has wanted to write and therefore to read. Wherever you go in the world, people are reading.

Readers have always placed a high value on their books. Isaac Barrow, 17th-century English mathematician, put it like this:

He that loveth a Book will never want a faithfull friend, a wholesome counsellour, a chearfull companion, an effectual comforter. By study, by

reading, by thinking one may innocently divert, and pleasantly entertain himself, as in all weathers, so in all fortunes.

Reading is not an unnatural or un-human pursuit; it is not, as some assert, an evolved skill. Reading has always been with us - as we can see from the fact that the revelation which God has given us is in writing.

Reading provides information; it satisfies interest and curiosity; it can transport us away from ourselves into another world, either fictional or real. Books have great power - they have changed how people think and altered the course of history:

*But what strange art, what magic can dispose
The troubled mind to change its native woes?
Or lead us willing from ourselves, to see
Others more wretched, more undone than we?
This Books can do - nor this alone; they give
New views to life, and teach us how to live;
They soothe the griev'd, the stubborn they chastise,
Fools they admonish, and confirm the wise.
Their aid they yield to all; they never shun
The man of sorrow, nor the wretch undone:
Unlike the hard, the selfish, and the proud,
They fly not sullen from the suppliant crowd;
Nor tell to various people various things,
But shew to subjects, what they shew to kings.*

Consider how privileged we are to have so much written in English! Professor Daniell, the biographer of William Tyndale, argues that his translation of the Scriptures into English and the resulting dominance of the Bible in English was the 'switch' which moved written thought and expression in England from Latin to English. What riches we have as a result!

Reading, then, is universal: 'Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body' and we all need exercise.

Secondly, the Christian particularly treasures reading

Christians through the ages have testified to the power of reading in their own lives.

Augustine is a famous example. In his *Confessions* he recounts how a child's voice helped him at a time of great spiritual struggle, to 'take up and read' - leading him to Paul's warning in Romans 13:13-14 to flee from sin and to put on the Lord Jesus.

Nearer our own day, one of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' daughters described the great preacher's reading, in *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Man and his Books*. She says of her father, 'He read lovingly, regularly and a lot.'

Reading is not essential to the Christian life but it is a huge help. And becoming a Christian often feeds the desire to read.

What should Christians read?

'Of making many books there is no end' (Eccl 12:12). So we have to choose. In order to choose well, we require criteria. I want to suggest some *categories* of books that we may want to read and then some *principles* to help us select specific reading.

I commend that our reading should be drawn from four categories of books and that we should, over time, be reading some books from each category. I do not claim that these categories are perfect, or that they are the only kinds of helpful book.

We should read, firstly, for edification

The Christian must be constantly feeding his spirit and soul. The essential place to go for this is the Bible. But is the Bible sufficient for our edification? In an absolute sense, yes it is. It is the Book which alone is 'breathed out by God' and profitable 'that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work'. But there are also books which help us to understand the teachings of Scripture better. They are also useful, though not in the strictest sense necessary.

So books which inform us about the history, culture and geography relevant to Bible narrative and teaching should be read. Commentaries, of all kinds and sizes, can teach us something about the language and meaning of the text we are studying and help us to understand it better.

Beyond that there are books which enable us to learn from the experience and knowledge of other believers. Such reading might include:

- sermons and other devotional material: choose the best preachers and writers – Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, A W Tozer.
- theology and doctrine: there are some good, readable books of orthodox, biblical doctrine available, for example John Thornbury, *System of Bible Doctrine* (EP) or Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (IVP).
- biography and history: an excellent way of learning about the Christian faith through the lives of God's people and his dealings with his Church through the ages.
- ethical and practical: books on the Christian life (marriage, work, illness, death) and on moral and ethical challenges (euthanasia, embryo research, sexual orientation).

We should read for education

A great deal of our reading is likely to fall into this category (edification of the soul is bound to include educating the mind; however, the emphasis here is on feeding the mind, rather than the soul). We are all interested in different things. Allow your interests, then, to shape your reading - whether it is jazz, science or local history.

Christians sometimes worry that reading books that are not directly related to the Bible or the Christian faith is a waste of time or even sinful. It is true that in all things we are to be moderate and self-controlled and everything we do is to be subordinated to the great aim of living for Jesus Christ and pleasing him. However, we have a false view of true Christian spirituality if we think that this restricts us from reading books on non-spiritual subjects. We live in the universe which God has created. It

should be our delight to find out more about it, according to the interests and inclinations which he has put within each of us.

We should read for our encouragement

Books can remind us why we do the things we do and why we believe the things we do – they motivate us and spur us on to greater things. When we are discouraged, they can pick us up. When we feel deflated or defeated, they can set us on the road again.

Some of the best books in this category are biographies, especially those which tell us of their subjects' struggles and failures as well as their successes.

We should read books for straightforward and simple enjoyment

We all need to rest and relax at some point. Books can be an excellent way of finding the mental and physical refreshment we regularly need. Find a book that you really like, sit back and simply enjoy it. It may be the storyline, that grips you; or it may be the author's use of language which attracts you. Whatever it is, read it to enjoy it. Our mental faculties, just like our bodies, need to be relaxed as well as stretched. To have one without the other is to court disaster.

Six principles for deciding what to read

The historian G M Trevelyan warned: 'Education ... has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading.' Here are six principles for deciding what to read.

1. Read broadly so as to expand your knowledge and understanding and keep the mind fresh and resilient. Avoid the temptation only to read books that are of direct and immediate relevance to a particular task. The most useful books in the longer term may be those which feed our background and general knowledge, not necessarily of any direct relevance to current work. 'The business of books is to make one think.'

2. Choose books that really interest you: ‘A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good.’ Samuel Johnson may go a little far there, but there is a great deal in what he says; as far as possible, go for things you love.
3. Go for quality, not quantity. Speed-reading a large number of books on a subject is not usually the best way to become acquainted with it. Heed Richard Baxter: ‘It is not the reading of many books which is necessary to make a man wise or good, but the well-reading of a few, could he be sure to have the best.’
4. Avoid reading only books which you know you will agree with. Favourite theories need to be tested by opposing views and arguments. At the same time the Christian is well advised generally to avoid books which teach error.
5. Maintain balance and variety. Avoid reading books on one subject only; equally, avoid reading just one author. It is good to continue to try new authors and new areas of study and interest.
6. Read book reviews. They will keep you informed of books that you might like to read - and will sometimes save you the trouble of reading them at all.

How should Christians read?

Having chosen your book, how should you read it? Start at the beginning and carry on until you reach the end is the obvious approach. However, different kinds of books need to be read in different ways. Here are some thoughts:

- Be discerning as you read: only the Bible is infallible. Use your judgment and test all things by Scripture. ‘Reade not to Contradict and Confute; Nor to Beleeve and Take for granted; Nor to Finde Talke and Discourse; But to weigh and Consider.’ (Bacon, 1597).
- Be disciplined in your reading: make plans to read - provide for it in your schedule, daily if you can. Be persuaded that reading is

important – if you leave it to odd moments, you are unlikely to do very much.

- Reading is your servant, not your master: there is no law that requires you to finish a book that you begin! Avoid reading a book because *everyone else has*, or because it is supposed to be *the* book to read.
- There is no law against cherry-picking - it is fine just to read the parts of a book which interest you, or to start at the end and read backwards, or just to read the index and the footnotes if you wish. Read a book in whatever way is going to be the most useful, interesting and enjoyable for you. ‘The art of reading is to skip judiciously.’
- Read most books with questions in your mind, which you hope the book will help you to answer. This gives focus and interest to your reading.
- Think as you read. The aim of reading is more to form and stimulate your own thinking than to remember everything you read. ‘Reading is sometimes an ingenious device for avoiding thought.’
- Keep a record of your reading. Make brief notes of essential things – of important facts, but especially of the main line of the author’s argument and his or her principal reasons for holding that view.
- Read prayerfully.

In conclusion

- Keep reading, all kinds of books.
- Buy books, borrow books, use libraries.
- Above all, read the best book – the Bible.

This article is available in unabridged form including the source references. It was printed in the Evangelical Library magazine. The cost is £1.50. A CD is also available for £2.00. The address: Evangelical Library, 5/6 Gateway Mews, Ringway, Bounds Green, LONDON, N11 2UT.

The Carey Conference – 2011

Memorable Anniversaries

This year sees the 250th anniversary of the birth of William Carey, the Northamptonshire cobbler who began the modern missionary movement.

So, understandably, the 2011 Carey Conference (the 40th) held at Swanwick January 4-6, kicked off with a biography of the great man. Mike Tindall gave an exceptional paper which provided huge insight into Carey's life. Everything from his strength of concentration, tenacity and deep humility to his weaknesses as a husband and father and the sadness of his wife cracking mentally under the strain of living in India were fully exposed and lessons considered. Carey was not the first missionary to India, but his major contribution was that he took the ideas behind an overseas trading company and applied them to world mission. Thus the age of missionary societies arrived which proved an enormous breakthrough.

Growing churches

The Carey Conference always provides momentum to look outward in mission and evangelism. Barry King exhorted his hearers to see that a chief challenge for contemporary churches is to



Matthias Lohmann who has agreed to present a biography of Johan Oncken, the great church planter of the 19th century, at the Carey Conference 2012

identify gifted, hard-working evangelists (Epaphras, Colossians 4.12, was the model) and having identified them to train, equip, encourage, support, pray and do whatever is necessary for them to fulfil their calling. Barry introduced the conference to Daniel, a Karen man from Burma, who is being used by God to grow a church in North Watford.

Ray Evans of Bedford, in a stimulating session, looked at the challenges facing a leadership when their church expands. Very often growing churches plateau or even

begin to decline because the issues have not been thought through. One memorable scenario which Ray unfolded was as follows. Growth leads to change. Change causes complexity. Complexity can lead to chaos. Chaos raises concern. Concern leads to conflict. He pointed particularly to Acts 6 to help with problem solving and highlighted Acts 20 to press the need for an active eldership who will visit from house to house, teach publicly and care for the people.

Spirit-Anointed

Professor Bruce Ware, from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky opened up the Scriptures on the theme of Jesus the Spirit-Anointed Messiah. In particular he explained, both with clarity and infectious enthusiasm, how Jesus lived his life as a human being empowered and resourced by the Holy Spirit. This led into some discussion concerning whether or not Jesus' miracles point to his deity or simply to the presence of God's kingdom. But as empowered by the Spirit the great encouragement is that Jesus becomes the prototype and role model for how we are to live the Christian life.

With participants from around 15 countries bringing news of gospel labours there was much else which was good including Dr. John Ling

on the challenges of contemporary bioethics and Val Archer leading the women's sessions on growing godly women.

On the last morning of the conference, Keith Walker of SIM brought his reflections concerning worldwide mission having recently attended the Lausanne event in Cape Town. He pointed to the fact that with the extraordinary recent growth of the church the centre of gravity of Evangelicalism has shifted away from the Northern hemisphere and the West to the South and East. Are Western Christians ready to receive missionaries into our countries from the Southern hemisphere? The West is now very needy. Is there a pride and even a racial prejudice among us? Having been the ones who sent missionaries in the past and taught the gospel will we be humble enough to accept help and learn from others? Or will we be like the Jews who having launched Christianity into the world \leq such great difficulty in receiving Gentiles into the church? *John Benton.*

Next year's conference is from 3-5 January at Swanwick. Recordings of this year's ministry are available and are highly recommended.

Book Reviews

Fire from Heaven - Times of Extraordinary Revival

Paul E G Cook

142 pages, Evangelical Press, 2009.

In 1984 at the annual Westminster Conference in London Paul Cook gave a paper with the title *The Forgotten Revival*. In that paper (I remember well the stir it created) he defined what he meant by revival. He pointed us to the book of Acts. 'I regard the thirty years of the Church covered by the book of Acts as a period of continuous revival in which all the spiritual life and divine power characteristic of revivals was manifested, together with associated aberrations and excesses which frequently arise from such visitations.' He went on to suggest that most evangelical Christians think in terms of the great 18th century evangelical revival, (1735 onwards, the time of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and the Wesleys), as being the first evangelical awakening, and the second being that which began in New York in 1857 and spread throughout America and then in lands beyond, which we think of as the 1859 revival or the second great awakening. The purpose of his paper was to demonstrate the inaccuracy of that thinking. He documented convincingly that in fact the period from 1791 to 1840 was a time of extensive powerful revival. It has been dubbed 'The Forgotten Revival'. That time should be called the second great awakening and the 1859



the third. There is good reason to regard the time of 1900-1910 as the period of the fourth great awakening.

Fire from Heaven is a book which documents the claims made in the 1984 Westminster Conference paper. Gripping in its style the author begins with the place of prayer. First God pours out the Spirit of grace and supplications. Prior to the second spiritual awakening pastors and church members participated in a concert of prayer. This was inspired by a short book written by Jonathan Edwards. This treatise calling for a concert of prayer was written in 1747 (the year that David Brainerd died in Edwards' home). It surfaced later in England in

1784. John Erskine, a Presbyterian minister in Scotland posted a copy to John Ryland (Jr) who in turn passed it on to John Sutcliffe. Interest was aroused and about twenty churches in the Northamptonshire association of pastors agreed to set aside the first Monday evening every month for specific prayer for revival. The association comprised of churches much more widely distributed than Northamptonshire. This concert or Union of prayer, as it came to be called, was embraced by Congregationalists and Methodists.

Paul Cook points to the first answer to these intercessions which came in Bala in Wales in 1791. The explosive power, suddenness and extent of this revival was awesome. From pages 33 to 100 he describes revivals in different parts of the country. Detailed descriptions are given of revivals in Cornwall and Yorkshire. Accounts of spiritual awakening is several towns such as Dewsbury, Birstall and Hull are included. The population of Hull was only 15,000 yet in a few weeks in 1794 hundreds were converted and added to the churches. Research into the extent of this revival by an historian would provide material which will fill a large volume. The statistics show that the evangelical proportion of the nation rose to an amazing ten percent. Even as far afield as Burma pioneer missionary Adoniram Judson was baptising numbers of British soldiers 40,000 of whom were serving in that country. Quickening belief in and creating a longing for such times of spiritual awakening to return is admirably achieved by these pages. Is there

anything we can do toward a recovery of biblical religion in the UK and across the EU?

Surely prayer is the answer. The Psalms are full of prayers representing God's people in all kinds of need, or in desperate plight as we see in Psalm 107. There are many examples of prayer preceding renewal and revival. Jonathan Edwards expounded Zechariah 8:20-23 as a base from which to urge his call for prayer under the extended title: *An Humble Attempt to Promote an Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People thro the World, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion, and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promise and Prophecies Concerning the Last Times*. [Inspired by Edwards, I wrote the book *Give Him No Rest* (188 pages, EP, 2006). The title is derived from Isaiah 62:6-7 which shows that we have a biblical command to plead with God for revival. In doing so we appeal to his promises].

As the long description by Edwards of his call to prayer suggests, there are two main thrusts. The first is the appeal for an International Concert of Prayer. The second is the prospect of the coming millennial kingdom on this earth. Most Evangelicals do not believe in the second. However there is irresistible growth of Christ's Church taking place in nations such as China in spite of every effort to suppress it. Also by one means or another, sometimes radio and TV, seemingly impregnable nations are being reached. Whatever our eschatological views the fact is that biblical Christianity is now a growing

worldwide phenomenon which looks more like a literal fulfilment of the promises than a spiritualising of them.

In the concluding chapter Paul Cook calls us to rethink our ideas of revival. There are dangers. What if no answer comes? Will that not leave us more discouraged than before we began? The answer to that is we do not give up prayer meetings when times are barren. We must resist the notion that nothing can be done until a spiritual awakening is given. Evangelism in season and out of season is essential. Noah did not give up preaching while he was building the ark. Jeremiah and Ezekiel did not cease to minister when dark clouds of God's displeasure filled the skies.

Our focus must always be the glory of God. It is for his praise that we seek his acts of power, not miracles which dazzle, but transformed lives. The secular atheistic 'no hope' establishment cannot explain that. The gracious work of our triune God in conversions silences the critics. That is what took place in Romania at the time of the revolution and evangelical revival there.

A Way to Pray

A Biblical Method for Enriching Your Prayer Life. By Matthew Henry, edited and revised by O. Palmer Robertson.

Banner of Truth Trust, 417 pages
£14.50. ISBN 978 1 84871 087 0

I first came across Matthew Henry's *Method of Prayer* in the writings of Hughes Oliphant Old. That was many years ago and I have been reading it ever since. There have been many

editions of the book but this revised and updated version is exactly what I have been looking for.

We all know Matthew Henry's commentary but did you know that he never completed it? He interrupted writing it so that he could give time to writing *A Method of Prayer*. In the work, Henry gathered together hundreds of Bible verses and categorised them so that they could be used in prayer. In fact, these compilations were themselves prayers. There are prayers for almost everything you would ever need to pray about. Prayers before meals. Prayers for expectant mothers. Prayers about going on journeys, and so on. They are all rich in theological truth, and so the book is also a prayer manual. Reading it you became aware of how you should pray and what you should pray.

On the struggle with indwelling sin as an example, Henry writes: *Lord, you have removed sin's guilt from us so that we will not die as a crime. Now break sin's power in us so that we do not die from it as a disease. Help us put sin to death. Rom.8:13*

The book comprises nine chapters. These include chapters on praise, confession, petition, thanksgiving and intercession, as well as one dedicated to particular occasions. A helpful chapter teaches us about how to conclude our prayers.

O. Palmer Robertson has modernised the language and made the subdivisions of a particular topic more concise, giving the whole book a fresh

feel. He has also provided a very fine index for quick reference. Pastors will use this book constantly. All Christians would benefit from becoming prayer students with Henry, perhaps working through the book over one year.

Baptists might object to the occasional prayer in this book. Some might also have scruples about prayer books in themselves. But this book is not a mere prayer book. It is a book that 'pleads the promises of God' back to him in his own words. How we all need help in doing that! I heartily recommend this edition and hope it becomes a standard book on prayer. *Matthew Brennan.*

Taking Hold of God

Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer. Edited by Joel Beeke & Brian Najapfour.

Reformation Heritage Books 2011

ISBN 978-1-60178-120-8

In *Taking Hold of God*, you will enter the treasury of the church of Jesus Christ and discover some of its most valuable gems on the subject of Christian prayer. The writings of the Reformers and Puritans shine with the glory of God in Christ, offering us much wisdom and insight today that can make our own prayer lives more informed, more extensive, more fervent, and more effectual. Six contemporary scholars explore the writings and prayer lives of several Reformers and Puritans-among them Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Perkins, Matthew Henry, and Jonathan Edwards-guiding us to growth in prayer

and a more grateful communion with God.

Commendations of this book come from Jerry Bridges and Derek Thomas: 'Taking Hold of God is a veritable gold mine on the subject of prayer. Beeke and Najapfour have brought together in one volume the teaching on prayer of the giants of the Reformation and Puritan eras: Luther, Calvin, Knox, Perkins, Bunyan, Henry, Edwards, and others. I was personally encouraged and stimulated to take my own prayer life to a higher and hopefully more productive level. All believers who have any desire to pray effectively will profit from this book.' – *Jerry Bridges, author of The Pursuit of Holiness.*

'Together, Beeke and Najapfour have produced a marvelously helpful and instructive volume on prayer drawn from such giants as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, and Jonathan Edwards. It is a veritable potpourri of spiritual insight and godly advice. Books on prayer often induce more guilt than help. *Taking Hold of God*, as the title itself suggests, aims at doing the latter. It beckons us, allures us, into the challenge of prayer itself: laying hold of a gracious Father who longs for our presence and delights to commune with His children. If you aim to read just one book on prayer this year, choose this one.' *Derek W H Thomas, Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS.*

Who are the Baptists?

The 16th and 17th centuries were a golden age for the gospel in England. It was a time that produced some of the most sincere, devout, scholarly and fervent Christians the world has ever seen. One only has to think of the 16th century Reformers who were willing to suffer martyrdom by burning for the sake of the gospel – Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, Cranmer and many others. Within the Reformed Church of England there developed a body of men who were characterised by their deep commitment to the Holy Scriptures and a fervent desire to promote purity of doctrine and life in their homes, their church and their nation. Their very desire to live pure lives before God and to promote purity of worship and teaching in the church according to the Word of God earned them the nickname ‘Puritans’.

Most of these Puritans remained within the National Church, patiently seeking further reforms according to the Word of God. There were others who despaired of achieving their goals within the National Church and separated from it in order to establish Reformed churches outside it. Still later in the 17th century, a large number of Puritan pastors were ejected from the National Church on account of their scriptural convictions. Out of all these movements emerged three major bodies: the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and the Baptists. Congregationalists were those who were convinced that the local church is autonomous and not subject to external authorities such as state or bishops. They maintained that Christ rules his Church

by his Word and by his Spirit, and that each church is competent, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to manage its affairs according to the Word of God. The members of these churches would meet together to appoint their officers – pastors, elders and deacons – as they felt guided by the Holy Spirit and in accordance with Scriptural guidelines. These Congregational churches would usually form Associations with other churches of like faith and convictions for purposes of cooperation in the furtherance of the gospel. But these Associations in no way diminished the essential autonomy of each local church.

Some of these Congregational churches became convinced that baptism ought not to be given to infants, but only to those who were able to profess their faith in Christ and request baptism as a testimony to that faith. This was the beginning of Baptist churches, and in the first half of the 17th century, Baptist churches began growing in numbers in England. So along with Presbyterians and Congregationalists, Baptists are a product of that great Puritan movement that so profoundly influenced the religious life of England in the 17th century. There were truly spiritual giants in the land in those days. Their names include the mighty theologian, John Owen, sometimes called the Calvin of England; Richard Baxter, the extraordinary pastor of Kidderminster; John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the great spiritual classics of all time; Matthew Henry who wrote the greatest Bible commentary of all time. These are just a few among a

galaxy of stars – mighty spiritual leaders, pastors, writers, preachers and evangelists. Their legacy continues to play a powerful role in the Church of Christ to this day.

There is another movement that significantly contributed to the Baptist movement worldwide – the Evangelical Awakening of the 18th century. At the beginning of the 18th century the deadening influence of rationalism had put many churches of all persuasions into a spiritual sleep. Beginning among the Anglicans, this spiritual revival brought new life and power to Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists. It also spawned a new denomination – the Methodists. ‘You must be born again’ was one of the clarion calls of this awakening, as men and women were called from a mere nominal adherence to Christianity to a personal knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In America this revival was known as the Great Awakening, and was associated with the names of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and other outstanding heralds of the gospel. This was a time that saw the Baptists begin a rapid numerical growth in America, so much so that the Anglican Whitefield once commented: ‘My chickens seem to be all turning into ducks!’ Both the Methodists and the Baptists grew rapidly in 19th century America, and today the Baptists are the largest Protestant grouping in the USA. Throughout the world, Baptist churches have multiplied greatly to become one of the largest, if not the largest Protestant body worldwide.

It would be foolish to pretend that the Baptists have been without fault down the years. Some of the Baptists in the early 18th century became Arian and even

Unitarian. Many American Baptists supported slavery in the 19th century. Baptists were found among the leading Liberals and Modernists in the 20th century. But despite these defects and failings, it is probably true that among the classical mainstream denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist and Baptist), Baptists have maintained the greatest fidelity to the gospel of Christ.

Baptists may or may not be right in their convictions concerning believers’ baptism. But their baptismal views are not the most important thing about Baptists. Their most valuable assets remain their Puritan and Evangelical roots. The Puritan concern was that we should order our lives and our churches according to the teaching of God’s inspired Word. Puritanism was the application of the great Reformation principles: that we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone and to the glory of God alone. This Bible based, Christ centred and God glorifying faith has changed the lives of millions and continues to do so.

Alongside and completely in conformity with the Puritan roots is the evangelical emphasis on the importance of the new birth, conversion to God, the knowledge of forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life. All these are the gracious gifts of God to those who come to Jesus in repentance and faith. This is the good news according to the Scriptures. This is the faith and message of all evangelical Christians. It is also the faith and message of Baptists.

Kevin Roy

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