

# REFORMATION TODAY



NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2012

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**Websites** [www.reformation-today.org](http://www.reformation-today.org)

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

<http://africanpastorsconference.com>



*Church at  
Mzimba – see  
Conferences in  
Malawi,  
page 23*

### **Carey Conference 2013 Jan 8-10**

Speakers: Mike Reeves, Jonathan Bayes, Steven Curry, Andy McIntosh, David Skull, John Stevens and Kath Peterson (Women's track)

For details [www.careyconference](http://www.careyconference)

For eight page conference guide contact Conference Secretaries Hugh and Lois Collier, the Manse, 47 Long Street, Great Ellingham, Norfolk NR17 1LN [HughCollier@talktalk.net](mailto:HughCollier@talktalk.net) Phone 01953 453347

### **The Sola 5 Baptists in the Netherlands**

The Sola 5 Baptists in the Netherlands will have their annual conference from 2-3 Nov in Ede, the Netherlands. The theme of the conference is 'God speaks! The Living Word of God for the 21st Century'. 170 have registered, more than double than in previous conferences. See [www.sola5baptisten.nl](http://www.sola5baptisten.nl)

The main speaker is Conrad Mbewe from Zambia. Following the conference Conrad will engage in a preaching tour in the Netherlands.

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Front cover picture. *Ordination service in Tanzania. See report by Stephen Nowak, page 23.*

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## Editorial

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THIS 250<sup>th</sup> ISSUE OF *REFORMATION TODAY* CAN BE REGARDED AS AN ANNIVERSARY. THE FIRST ISSUE WAS published in January 1970. That issue and the commencement of this journal were mainly concerned with clarifying our Reformed Baptist identity.

Since our doctrinal beliefs are firmly rooted in the legacies of the Reformers and Puritans we have unity with Presbyterians and Congregationalists whose principal beliefs are identical to ours.

The only difference is believers' baptism and how we understand the continuity and discontinuity of the Old and New Covenants. David Kingdon's book *Children of Abraham* (now out of print) was outlined in RT issue one. He drew attention to the considerable difference in the administration of the Abrahamic covenant and the New Covenant as described in Hebrews chapter 8:7-13.

Subsequent to the times of theological renewal of the 1960s and 1970s. Reformed Baptists (RBs) have multiplied in many countries. Eldership in lieu of pastor/deacons has been instituted in many churches. In that sense RBs are Presbyterian even though they are associational and not synodical in organisation.

Have any changes taken place with regard to baptism since the 1970s? Presbyterians often claim to have the edge historically. *Baptism in the Early Church* by Stander and Louw<sup>1</sup> documents that early church practice was to baptise believers by immersion. 'Baptism was a matter of personal belief, – while immersion seems to have been the regular practice, the mode was never a real issue' (page 185). The recently published study by Everett Ferguson is an important resource. His 963-page work flies under the same title *Baptism in the Early Church*. It has the sub-title *History, Theology and Liturgy in the first five centuries*.<sup>2</sup>

'The most plausible explanation for the origin of infant baptism is found in the emergency baptism of sick children expected to die soon so that they would be assured of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. There was a slow extension of the practice of baptising babies as a precautionary measure. It was generally accepted, but questions continued to be raised about its propriety into the fifth century. It became the usual practice in the fifth and sixth centuries.' Everett Ferguson, page 857.

A new paperback by Dr Robert Letham contending for infant baptism has been published by Christian Focus.<sup>3</sup> This is reviewed in detail by Dr Gary Crampton whose book *From Paedobaptism to Credobaptism* was published in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Dr Crampton is an enthusiastic believer in the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, he maintains that he cannot find any reference in the Bible to infant baptism. Whether Paedobaptist or Credobaptist you will find this book compelling. Even at midnight you will want to read on into the night. Dr Crampton's background as a paedobaptist ideally equips him to review Robert Letham's book.

Unity is vital. The principal reason for the original publication of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith was to demonstrate that Calvinistic Baptists hold the identical framework of belief with Presbyterians, infant baptism excepted, together with the implications of that in church government.<sup>5</sup> The 1689 has fifteen paragraphs on the Church to six in the Westminster Confession.

The doctrinal foundation of the African Pastors' Conferences is the Westminster, the Savoy and the 1689. The recent APC in Bulawayo was hosted by the Presbyterian Church. The chairman of the Yorkshire Reformed Ministers' Fraternal is Kevin Bidwell who is Presbyterian.

Reformed Baptists have multiplied in many countries. When it comes to the doctrines of grace they are often well ahead of Presbyterians in the promotion of the Reformed faith. This is not a matter of competition. Viewed from the perspective of the world of Bible believers Presbyterians and RBs together form a minority. We must work together and in the *Concert of Prayer* for spiritual awakening we pray together.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof Hendrik F Stander and Prof Johannes P Louw, *Baptism in the Early Church*. 192 pages, paperback, Carey Publications and ARBCA, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church – History, Theology and Liturgy in the first five centuries*. 963 pages, hardback, Eerdmans, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Letham, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Baptism: A Water that Unites*, Christian Focus Publications, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> W Gary Crampton, *From Paedobaptism to Credobaptism*. A critique of the Westminster Standards on the subject of Baptism. 126 pages paperback, 2010. RBAP 1694 Wrights Landing Road, Owensboro, KY 42303. [rb@rbap.net](mailto:rb@rbap.net) [www.rbap.net](http://www.rbap.net) ISBN-13:978-0-9802179-6-4

<sup>5</sup> *Our Baptist Heritage. Issues Facing Reformed Baptists Today*. Edited by Erroll Hulse. 117 pages, paperback. Available from Chapel Library, [www.mountzion.org](http://www.mountzion.org) chapel@mountzion.org



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## The Wonder of Adoption

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*Joel Beeke*

**J**OHN BEGINS THE THIRD CHAPTER OF 1 JOHN WITH A CALL FOR BELIEVERS TO DROP EVERYTHING AND CONSIDER THE great doctrine of adoption. ‘Behold!’ is John’s opening cry; ‘Look at this!’ The apostle is so overwhelmed with the wonder of God’s adoption of believers that he is determined to direct everyone’s attention there. He asks us to gaze with him upon this wonder: ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!’ (v.1). It is as if John asks, Do you know the wonder of this precious truth? Have you, by faith, comprehended this magnificent doctrine of adoption?

John’s sense of astonishment is more evident in the Greek, which implies, ‘Behold, from what country or realm does such love as this come?’ Matthew 8:27 uses similar phraseology to describe how astonished the disciples were when Jesus calmed the winds and the sea: ‘What manner of man is this (literally, ‘from what realm does this man come’) that even the winds and sea obey him!’

God’s adoption of believers is something unparalleled in this world. John is saying that this fatherly love has come upon us from another realm. The world does not understand such love, for it has never seen anything like it. It is beyond the realm of the ordinary.

John is astonished because God showed such amazing love even though we were outcasts, rebels, and enemies against him and his kingdom. God ‘calls’ us sons of God; that is, he brings us into his family, giving us the name, the privileges and all the blessings of his own children. He invites us to know him as Father and to dwell under his protection and care, and to come to him with all our cares and needs. John is overwhelmed at the thought of being a full member of God’s family.

Have you ever considered what a stupendous wonder adoption is? Wilhelmus à Brakel put it this way: ‘From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God’s favour, from being a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to

the highest felicity—this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration.’<sup>1</sup>

Do you stand in awe at this wonderful love of the Father? Holy wonder and amazement are an important part of Christian experience. One of the devil’s tactics is to dull our sense of wonder, convincing us that we only feel such wonder in the initial stages of becoming a Christian. It is true that the sinner experiences a special sense of joy and wonder when he first comes to know Christ. We often refer to that time as one’s ‘first love’.

But John is writing here as an elderly man who has been a believer for more than sixty years. Yet his heart is still filled with amazement at being a son of God. His initial sense of wonder at God’s fatherly love has never receded. He is still asking the question: ‘From what realm does this amazing love come that has broken in upon my soul and made me a child of God?’

Has the wonder of your salvation and adoption in Christ Jesus grasped your soul? Do you, too, cry out in amazement?:

*And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain – For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

The psalters, hymns and poems of our forefathers, especially in seasons of revival, were often filled with this glorious sense of wonder. Such wonder is the heart’s response to the saving truths of the gospel. It is evoked in us through the Spirit’s sanctifying grace as we meditate upon and embrace the glorious truths of sovereign grace (Ps 104:34). Often God’s people experience too little wonder and awe over the gospel because their lives are so rushed that they do not stop long enough to wait upon the Spirit as they meditate on the glorious truths of the gospel.

We must meditate on Scripture and all that accrues to us in Christ Jesus – including our adoption – if we would have our hearts burn within us. That is what the pilgrims on the way to Emmaus said to each other after Christ had opened Scripture to them. ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?’ (Luke 24:32) they asked in astonishment.

The way to a burning heart is through diligent meditation upon the Word of God. Scripture is the primary means of grace that God blesses by His Spirit. Is it any wonder that some believers have lost their sense of wonder and

amazement over the gospel when they so seldom study the Bible prayerfully and meditatively?

### *The Trinitarian Foundation of Adoption*

All the members of the Trinity are involved in our adoption. Adoption is the gracious act of God the Father whereby he chooses us, calls us to himself, and gives us the privileges and blessings of being his children. God the Son procured those blessings for us through his propitiatory death and sacrifice, by which we become children of God (1 John 4:10). And the Holy Spirit changes us from children of wrath, which we are by nature, into children of God by means of regeneration, or the new birth.

Believers are not sons of God by nature. In our tragic fall in paradise we lost the status and privileges of sonship. Adoption is only made possible when God's gracious choice calls us into all the privileges and blessings of being his children. When we are born again, God delivers us from Satan's slavery. By his astounding grace we are transferred to the Father's sonship. He calls us sons; we are adopted into his family.

Adoption in the time of John usually took place in adolescence or adulthood, not infancy. Under Roman law adoption was a legal act by which a man chose someone outside of the family to be an heir to his inheritance. Likewise, believers become children of God through the gracious act of God. The Father chooses them to be his heirs (Rom 8:17).

Sometimes adoptive parents announce receiving their son with words, 'chosen son'. God the Father, dear believer, set his heart upon you while you were a stranger and rebel, no member of his family. He called you, drew you to himself, brought you into his family, constituted you to be his child, and now reserves for you your eternal inheritance of the kingdom of God.

The story is told of a king who finds a poor man's child, takes him out of the gutter, and makes him a prince in the royal household with all its status and privilege. This gospel story is not fiction, however, for, like that king the Almighty God and Father has set his heart upon you, raised you up out of a horrible pit (Ps 40:2), brought you into his home, and given to you all the privileges and blessings of being his child.

'Beloved, now are we the sons of God' (1 John 3:2). This is not merely legal language. We believers are, indeed, God's chosen ones, as Ephesians 1:5-7 says. How astonishing that we as God's adopted children share the same

privileges that belong to God's only-begotten Son! Have you grasped the stupendous truth of what Christ expresses in John 17: 'The love with which thou hast loved me, thou hast loved them'? This love is the essence of God's fatherhood. It shows us how far God is willing to go to adopt us into his family.

Now we become children of God, i.e., God becomes our Father, by substitution or as John calls it, propitiation: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10; cf. 1 John 2:2). Propitiation may seem like a strange term to us, but it is a vital term, for it contains the heart of the gospel.

Let me explain. We are not sons and daughters of God by nature. Many live under this false idea. They think that everyone is a child of God, coming from the same Father. It is true of course that we are all creatures of the one Creator, but the Bible nowhere tells us that we are all children of God by nature. Rather, it tells us that by nature we are children of wrath. We are the objects of God's wrath, anger, and judgment by nature. As Thomas Watson writes, 'We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us; therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.'<sup>2</sup>

God has only one Son by nature and that Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now God's amazing love to sinners lies in the way he makes children of wrath to become the sons of his love. His only begotten Son is the Son of his love. The Father loves the Son, but in the astonishing substitution that God made in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the wrath of God which was directed to us was now poured upon his only begotten Son who thereby became the propitiation for our sins. The way by which we who were sons of wrath became the sons of love, is that the Son of God's love and the Child of his glory became the Bearer of his wrath on the cross. All the judgment of God was poured out on him in order that we, dear believers, might be made the children of God and sons of his love.

This is the astonishing biblical doctrine of substitution. Jesus Christ who deserved eternal heaven bore my eternal hell as an ungodly sinner (but now by grace a believer), so that the gates of hell may be eternally closed for me and the gates of heaven be eternally thrown open. Oh, what a price Christ had to pay to accomplish this task! He had to hang in the naked flame of his Father's wrath and be cast into outer darkness, crying out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' – all so that God could take us, for Christ's sake, who are



by nature estranged and rebellious sinners, and bring us into the family of God and constitute us as his children.

This is the only way to become a child of God – only through Christ being the propitiation, the sacrifice, the substitute, the atonement of God, for our sins. Only for Christ's sake does God become the Father of his people. What country does this love come from – a love that would cause the holy God of all eternity to make this transaction on behalf of poor, hopeless, hell-worthy sinners – like we are?

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God – we who deserve his judgment, dethroned him from our lives, spurned his love, and defied his laws. We can never earn God's love, yet he graciously lavishes love upon us in Christ. Here, surely, is the great assurance of the child of God, that he was not chosen for any good in him but that God the Father loved him when he was bound for hell. God loved the sinner who had no thought of God in his heart, and God adopted him to be his. Oh, what wonder is the assurance of the Father's words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3)!

John refers to this new birth in 1 John 2:29, explaining the relationship between regeneration and adoption. If in adoption we would only receive the privilege and status of being God's children, something would still be missing. The adopted child retains the nature of his natural parents, not the nature of the adoptive parents. God, in his amazing grace, not only gives us the status and privileges of being his children by adoption, but he also gives us the nature of God, which abides within us by Spirit-worked regeneration. The Holy Spirit implants God's nature within us. As 1 John 3:9 says, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin (i.e., no one born of God goes on committing sin); for his seed remaineth in him (i.e., for God's nature abides in him).'

Are you a child of God? Do you know what it means to have a new nature that cries out for the living God and lives under his fatherly love, fellowship, and protection? Have you been transferred from Satan's slavery to the Father's loving care by God's astounding grace?

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2:419.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullerton, 1845), 160.

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## Concert of Prayer and C4M

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ON 6<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER FROM 10.00am TO NOON AFTER A BRIEF INTRODUCTION FERVENT PRAYER FLOWED AT CITY Evangelical Church, Leeds. This volume of prayer included grief over the ever worsening moral state of our nation, spiritual lifelessness and powerlessness in our churches, and the heart-breaking knowledge that Western Europe of which we form a part is increasingly reprobate. The downward spiral described in Romans chapter one is obvious. Yet at the same time in many other parts of the world – Africa, the Americas and Asia astonishing evangelical growth is taking place. To cite just one example read Stephen Nowak’s report on Tanzania. We struggle to meet the demand for Bibles and Reformed literature.

One British response is to give up and view the Concert of Prayer for spiritual awakening as futile. The opposite of despair is to study the history of revivals. This month I have studied revivals in South Africa. All of them were born out of prayer. All spiritual awakenings according to J Edwin Orr have been preceded by Concerts of Prayer. The Great Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was preceded by a widespread movement of prayer known as the *devotio moderna*. But if we search hard enough we can find instances where the churches were so weak that not even a remnant could be mustered with enough spiritual energy to pray in any organised fashion. Yet in spite of that the Lord poured out his Spirit and turned things round. And what about Nineveh? Even in that Old Covenant time of the exceedingly wicked city of Nineveh the Lord showed mercy and Yahweh poured out the Spirit of repentance on a grand scale.

Here I will concentrate on just one part of the Concert of Prayer, October 6, when we prayed very specifically and most fervently that WE WILL WIN THE BATTLE over same-sex marriage. Who is stronger? – David Cameron or our Triune God?

*Same-sex marriage – and our responsibility to speak out*

Recently a representative of the Coalition for Marriage (C4M) was speaking with an evangelical from Norway. This believer deeply regretted the fact that when the Norwegian government introduced same-sex marriage many



*An artist's impression of Pentecost*

Christians did not speak out because they believed that it was 'inevitable'. It is a fundamental tactic in war to sow doubt and fear – to ensure that the opposition surrenders. That is what the government and a vociferous gay rights lobby has wanted to do with regard to same-sex marriage. They hoped that getting this into law would meet no resistance. When resistance was voiced, the next tactic was to smear it with the labels of 'bigotry' or 'religious fanaticism'. Those who resist are said to be an outdated minority – and selective opinion polls are used to try to 'prove' that point.

But the introduction of same-sex marriage is only 'inevitable' if we believe the propaganda of those who are committed to seeing it enacted. If we fail to speak out while there is still time, we will find ourselves in the same situation as our fellow-evangelicals in countries such as Canada – where fundamental religious freedoms are compromised in the name of 'equality'.<sup>1</sup>

A regular reader who represented the Coalition for Marriage at the recent Conservative Party Conference reports as follows:

'Manning the C4M stand at the conference was a strange experience. Many party members and councillors came up to express support, and to speak of their perplexity that Mr Cameron was introducing this unnecessary measure (unnecessary because Civil Partnerships provide gay and lesbian couples with all legal and practical rights without tampering with the institution of marriage

itself). Every time a member of the government came by, their ‘minders’ lined up to prevent them coming anywhere near our stand – or even making eye contact with us. This is a measure being imposed from the top downwards. Mr Cameron is holding his own party members and the electorate in contempt. There is still everything to play for – and it is vital to express opposition through the right democratic channels – emailing or writing to your MP, your constituency chair-person, and Mr Cameron himself. We hear that the government has been shocked at the level of opposition to this move – and we need to keep up that pressure.’

The Coalition for Marriage has an ongoing petition to maintain the legal definition of marriage as between one man and one woman for life. To date more than 605,000 have signed. The aim is to reach a million as quickly as possible. This petition is not just for Christians – but for all citizens who see the importance of maintaining man-woman marriage as a fundamental building block in our society. It can be signed online or paper petitions can be downloaded from the website and taken round your neighbours and friends: <http://www.c4m.org.uk/downloads/petition.pdf>

For useful conversation starters and answers to commonly asked questions, we would recommend downloading ‘Ten reasons why the government is wrong to redefine marriage’:  
<http://c4m.org.uk/downloads/10reasons.pdf>

In the United States, despite similar propaganda and opinion polls which purported to ‘prove’ that a majority endorsed same-sex marriage, 32 out of 32 states that have voted on the issue have voted to uphold the definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

To say that the introduction of same-sex marriage is ‘inevitable’ is untrue – and it betrays a lack of belief that God may yet, in mercy, choose to hear and answer prayer. This threat to society, family and freedom is moving many believers to pray for our nation with renewed fervour. Jeremiah called on God’s people to ‘seek the peace of the city’. In our own day we too should pray and work for the good of our society. That ‘good’ includes the gift of marriage, which God has, in his common grace, given to societies and cultures across time and across the world.

*Editor*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Coren, ‘Canadian Crackdown’, *National Review online*, [www.nationalreview.com/nrd/articles/300942/canadian-crackdown](http://www.nationalreview.com/nrd/articles/300942/canadian-crackdown)

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## Christian Exclusivism

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Gary Crampton

CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVISM<sup>1</sup> WHICH HAS BEEN THE VIEW ADHERED TO BY THE REFORMED AND ORTHODOX church through the centuries, is that teaching which maintains that (1) Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, and (2) that it is essential for one to believe in him in order to be saved. This view is admirably set forth in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q 21), the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (10:4; 14:2) and the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q 60)<sup>2</sup> as follows:

- The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q 21).
- Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature [general revelation], and the law of that religion they do profess. And to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious, and to be detested. (Westminster Confession 10:4).
- But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. (Westminster Confession 14:2).
- They who, having never heard the Gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved...neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone, who is the Saviour only of his body the church. (Westminster Larger Catechism Q 60).

There are a number of biblical passages which teach Christian exclusivism. Four of the very strongest are John 3:16-18, 36; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and 1 Timothy 2:5.



John 3:16-18, 36: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*

These verses could hardly be clearer. Those who believe in Christ have everlasting life, and those who do not believe in him are condemned. Faith in Jesus Christ is a *sine qua non* of salvation. One cannot be saved without this faith.

John 14:6: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.' Here in Christ's own words we are taught that he is the only way to the Father. 'No one comes to the Father except through' Jesus Christ. Once again, words could hardly be clearer. Those who do not know Jesus Christ cannot be saved. According to William Hendriksen, in this verse, 'both the absoluteness [exclusivism] of the Christian religion and the urgent necessity of Christian missions are clearly indicated.'<sup>3</sup>

Acts 4:12: 'Nor is there salvation in any other [than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must [dei] be saved.' Peter's words, as recorded by Luke, are as straightforward and exclusivistic as those that we read in the Gospel of John. Christ is the only Saviour. In the words of Simon Kistemaker:

*The word must [dei] reveals a divine necessity which God has established, according to his plan and decree, to save us [the elect] through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this word [dei] signifies that man is under moral obligation to respond to the call to believe in Jesus Christ and thus gain salvation. He has no recourse to salvation other than through the Son of God.*<sup>4</sup>

1 Timothy 2:5: 'For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.' Here in the words of the apostle Paul, just as there is only *one* true and living God, there is also only '*one* Mediator between God and men', and that Mediator is 'the Man Christ Jesus'. In other words, there is no other way that man can be saved except through Jesus Christ. Stephen Charnock writes:

*Christ is said to be the one Mediator in the same sense that God is said to be the one God. As there is but one Creator of man, so there is but one Mediator for men. As God is the God of all that died before Christ came, as well as of those that died after; so Christ is the Mediator of all that died before his coming, as well as of those that saw his day. They had Christ as their Mediator, or some other; some other they could not have, because there is but one. They might as well have had another Creator besides God, as another Mediator besides the Mediator Christ Jesus... There is but one God from eternity; but one Mediator, whose mediation has the same date as the foundation of the world, and runs parallel to it.<sup>5</sup>*

Although the true church of Christ has always held to the view of Christian exclusivism, there have always been those who demur. Sadly, the opponents of Christian exclusivism, even within the alleged Christian camp, are on the increase today. Says Ronald Nash:

*Once upon a time Christians were identifiable by an unqualified commitment to Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour of the world. But the unity of [alleged] Christians has disappeared. Today many people who claim to be Christians choose among three fundamentally different answers to the question, 'Is Jesus the only Saviour?' These answers can be stated succinctly: No!; Yes, but...; Yes period!<sup>6</sup>*

The negative answer ('No!') is given by those called pluralists. Pluralists, such as John Hick,<sup>7</sup> deny both that (1) Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, and (2) that it is essential for one to believe in him in order to be saved. Salvation, say the pluralists, may come by any one of a number of the world's different religions, and by any one of a number of different saviours. Hick explains: 'There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation...taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions.'<sup>8</sup>

Suffice it to say, that the position adopted by religious pluralists is so obviously out of accord with the teachings of Scripture, that it cannot rationally be considered a 'Christian' view at all. That is, if John 3:16-18,36; 14:6; Acts 4:12; and 1 Timothy 2:5 are truly the teachings of Scripture (which they are), then there is no possibility that there is another Saviour than Jesus Christ. And if Christianity is the one true religion (which it is), then all of the other religions are false. It is as simple as that. 'Christian pluralism' is an oxymoron. Pluralism is anti-Christian. Jesus says it this way: 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters' (Luke 11:23).

There are, however, a growing number of alleged Christian thinkers, such as Gavin D'Costa,<sup>9</sup> Clark Pinnock<sup>10</sup> and John Sanders,<sup>11</sup> who answer the question 'Is Jesus the only Saviour?' with a qualified affirmative, 'Yes, but...' This group adheres to what is known as 'Christian inclusivism'. Inclusivists maintain that 'yes' Jesus is indeed the only Saviour, 'but' they say that it is not necessary for persons to know about Jesus Christ or to believe in him to receive the benefits of his redemptive work. That is, as Nash correctly says, inclusivists 'distinguish between the *ontological necessity* of Christ's work as Redeemer and the separate claim that Christ's redemptive work is *epistemologically necessary*'.<sup>12</sup> [Ontological has to do with the nature of being and epistemological has to do with knowledge and law]. Inclusivist John Sanders explains:

*The unevangelized are saved or lost on the basis of their commitment, or lack thereof, to the God who saves through the work of Jesus. [Inclusivists] believe that appropriation of salvific grace is mediated through general revelation and God's providential workings in human history. Briefly, inclusivists affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ but deny that knowledge of his work is necessary for salvation.*<sup>13</sup>

Inclusivism is progressively becoming the predominant view in Roman Catholicism. As Nash points out, this movement is one of the legacies of Vatican Council II (1962-1965), where it was concluded: 'They also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God, and

moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience [general revelation].’<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, then, God’s self-revelation by means of general revelation is crucial to the inclusivists’ theory. For this is (allegedly) the means by which God leads some to saving faith apart from belief in Christ. So too, say the inclusivists, there is a necessary distinction between ‘believers’ and ‘Christians’. The former are saved because they have put their faith in God. The latter, on the other hand, are saved because they have put their faith in Christ.<sup>15</sup>

There are several difficulties here. First, the Bible makes no distinction between believers and Christians. That is, believers are called believers because they have ‘believed’ in Christ (John 3:16-18, 36). Further, we are taught in Scripture that ‘whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; [but] he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also’ (1 John 2:23; see also John 5:23). Saul of Tarsus is one example of a ‘believer’ in God, who was so diligent in his Judaism that he denied Christianity to the point of openly persecuting Christ’s Church (Acts 9:1-3; 22:1-5; 26:1-11). He was confronted by Jesus Christ and converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18). After his conversion he considered himself to be the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:12-16; see also Phil 3:3-16).

And second, Scripture teaches that although general revelation reveals God as Creator, thus leaving men without excuse (Rom 1:18-21; 2:14-15), it does not reveal him as Saviour. Scripture is necessary for redemptive knowledge (Romans 1:16-17; 10:17). As taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:1):

*Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the*

*flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary.*

These things being so, the theory of the inclusivists is completely obviated. The Bible denies inclusivism, and clearly teaches Christian exclusivism: 'He who believes in him [Christ] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God.... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' (John 3:18, 36). Simply stated, inclusivism, like pluralism, is not a Christian view at all. Denying the straightforward teachings of Scripture, it is anti-Christian.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

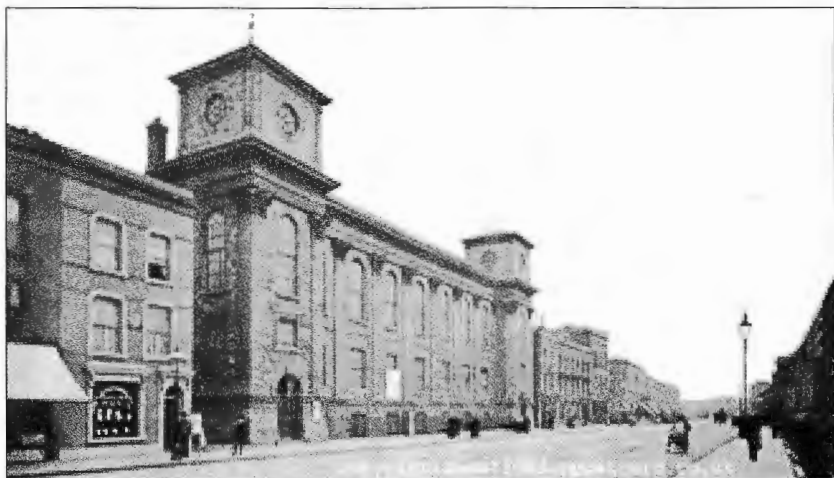
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- 1 This essay, with some minor changes, was first published, in W G Crampton, *Christ the Mediator*, Rowlett, Texas: Blue Banner Ministries, 2000, 'Appendix: Christian Exclusivism'.
  - 2 All references to the Westminster Standards comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms* are from *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994. The English has been modernised.
  - 3 William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Baker, 1953, 1954, II:269.
  - 4 Simon J Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostle*, Baker, 1990, 156.
  - 5 Cited by the editor in John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Vols. I-XXII, Baker, 1981, *Commentary on 1 Timothy* 2:5n.
  - 6 Ronald H Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Saviour?* Zondervan, 1994, 9. Although the present writer does not agree with everything taught by Dr Nash in this book, he has found it to be extremely useful in dealing with this subject. A number of Dr Nash's insights have been incorporated into this Appendix.
  - 7 See John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, Westminster, 1982, and *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, St. Martin's Press, 1985.
  - 8 Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 34.
  - 9 Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Basil Blackwell, 1986.
  - 10 Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, Zondervan, 1992.
  - 11 John Sanders, *No Other Name*, Eerdmans, 1992.
  - 12 Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Saviour?*, 23.
  - 13 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 215.
  - 14 Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Saviour?*, 108-109.
  - 15 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 224-225.



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## What is Evangelicalism?

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*East London Tabernacle as in the time of Archibald Brown.*

*What is Evangelicalism?* Joel Beeke. Evangelical Press, 78 pages, 2012 ISBN – 13: 978-0-85234-9

*Kenneth Brownell*

ANYTHING WRITTEN BY JOEL BEEKE IS WORTH reading and this book is no exception. That it is so short is not an indication of its importance and usefulness. In a mere 70 pages without the endnotes (would that there were more such short books!) Beeke distils a vast amount of theological wisdom from his own experience and thinking as well as from older and more contemporary writers in dealing with the crucial question of evangelical identity. A

notable feature is the very eirenical spirit in which the book is written. While unashamed of his own Reformed convictions, Beeke appreciates that true evangelicalism is broader.

He begins by looking at a number of answers notable writers have given over the past 30 years or so, including DM Lloyd-Jones, David Wells, Albert Mohler and Daryl Hart. He engages briefly with Hart who famously thinks there is no such thing as evangelicalism and that it is a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century attempt to make fundamentalism more appealing and less strident. While accepting that much that is called evangelical is shallow and that the term is slippery, Beeke nevertheless believes the label

is worth defending. As he goes on to explain, that is because Christians are gospel people.

But there needs to be a definition of evangelicalism which Beeke says must be biblical, historical, confessional and practical. Using the image of a tree, Beeke explains how the roots of evangelicalism are in the biblical gospel, its trunk historically in the rediscovery of the gospel at the Reformation as articulated in the confessions of that period, and its branches in the denominational traditions that have developed out of the Reformation. He gives us a fine outline of the well-known solas of the Reformation that sum up the theological heart of classical Protestantism. Because of that core theological commitment Beeke believes that evangelicalism cannot be restricted to the Reformed faith, but must also embrace Lutheranism, the evangelical Arminianism of John Wesley and those Pentecostals who, while confused about the sufficiency of Scripture, treasure the biblical gospel. He is very helpful in this section on the problem of doctrinally minimalist statements of faith and the way they fail to protect churches from false teaching such as open theism as well as fail to do justice to the richness of God's revelation in the Bible. However, evangelicalism is not only a matter of doctrine, but also of practical godliness.

How then does Beeke define evangelicalism? Here is his definition (page 46): *'Evangelicalism is gospel-driven Christianity, recognisable by*

*the biblical fundamentals of the gospel of Christ, and the practical fruit of the Spirit of Christ.'*

The last section of the book is entitled 'Experiencing Evangelicalism'. I suspect most people associate evangelicalism with a certain kind of conversion experience and some see this as a weakness. Drawing upon the riches of the Reformed evangelical tradition Beeke shows the experiential depth of genuine evangelical Christianity. It is nothing less than 'experiencing the heavenly majesty of God', Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Basing his thoughts on the threefold structure of the Heidelberg Catechism, Beeke unfolds evangelical experience in terms of the misery of sin, the mercy of Christ and the magnitude of gratitude. Woven through this section is a brilliant summary of Romans that is worth the price of the book. Here's a taster: 'The teachings of Romans about the grace of Christ are solid logs of evangelical truth designed to burn bright and hot in our hearts' (page 62).

I wholeheartedly recommend this fine little book. It would be worth buying several and giving copies to fellow-elders or church members to reinforce their evangelicalism or to ministers or Christians whose evangelicalism may be a bit flabby. Beeke's eirenic tone wedded to his firm doctrinal convictions rooted in the Reformation make this a very appealing book that can do much good in restoring the evangelical faith.

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## Spurgeon and Prayer Meetings

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Tom Nettles

*Prayer meetings*

VITAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF VIBRANT SPIRITUAL LIFE IN A CHURCH, AND ALSO TO ITS revival, is the discipline of corporate prayer. Spurgeon made sure that each service of worship in the church was preceded by a prayer meeting. Often prayer continued by some individuals meeting in a special place, usually in a room under the auditorium, during the service. In September 1881 he mentioned that 'The special prayer-meetings before our week-evening lecture have not only been well sustained all through the past month, but have increased in number and grown in fervency, and we are already reaping the firstfruits of what will, we trust, prove a good harvest of souls.' In 1886, an elder reported the blessings of having such a time of prayer before the week-day (Thursday) service, attended by around two thousand people. 'From this prayer meeting,' elder G E Elvin wrote, 'The Pastor ascends to the Tabernacle, evidently greatly refreshed, and as much in the Spirit as on the Lord's Day.'



*C. H. Spurgeon in a characteristic pose*  
by courtesy of Dr. Craig Skinner.

Monday evening prayer meetings fuelled all the ministries and other services of the church. Spurgeon described the atmosphere of these meetings in 1881 as 'seasons of unusual power' and thus a precursor to 'a blessing of an unusual extent'. From all over the world requests which had come to the Tabernacle for prayer were soon followed by statements of praise for answers. 'These have tended to keep the meetings real and earnest, for there has been actual business to do with the Lord that heareth us.' Each meeting had a distinct flavour, but 'all are remarkable seasons of fervent devotion'. Frequently over fifteen hundred people were in attendance. Spurgeon believed that the 'key to the non-success of churches, and the small progress of individuals' was directly attributable to lack of prayer.

On an August Monday in 1881 Spurgeon spoke on the theme that permeated his view of biblical prayer, 'Why we have not'. Based on James' statement,

‘Ye have not because ye ask not’, Spurgeon analysed the lack of spiritual power, lack of conversion, and lack of additions to many churches, and concluded that the answer is found here – ‘Ye have not because ye ask not.’ Churches prosper when many of its members know their way around the rooms and halls in the house of mercy. ‘If we are not at home in prayer everything is out of order’ and one may easily get lost in the halls through lack of familiarity with the place of entrance to the mercy-seat. ‘Familiarity’, therefore, ‘with the mercy-seat is a great point in the education of a child of God.’

Prayer is not a second-rate activity, but is a grand cement for unity of purpose, the proper discernment of gifts, and the submissive appeal of the children of God before the throne of his power for those ends that he judges most conducive to his glory. In prayer the child of God shoves aside self-confidence and absorption in worldly wisdom and finds greater conformity to the sovereign wisdom of his Redeemer. God intends to receive glory to himself through answered prayer and the urge to pray for the health of those that are sick, for the health of the church through the success of its various ministries, and for one’s own spiritual advancement will receive answers from God according to his promise. It may seem a self-evident truth, and thus tautologous, but it opens clearly one of the central issues of Christian living to contemplate that prayerlessness finds no source from which to glorify God for answered prayer. Leaving oneself in the position of having little reason to glorify God for present care and present condescension to human need, leads to barrenness of spirit as well as fruitlessness in church life. They must pray, therefore, for the continued support of the ministry extensions of the church. ‘Commend them all to the Most High,’ he urged, ‘for whose glory they exist.’

Spurgeon asked particularly for prayer for himself in the abundant opportunity to preach before so many on Sunday and at the week-day service for he trembled ‘lest the opportunity should be lost in any measure’. Proclamation without divine blessing would always be fruitless, no matter how structurally sound and theologically straight the message appeared. ‘Do pray that I may preach with power,’ and for ‘the Holy Ghost to convert these eager thousands.’ Within reach of his voice were ‘persons of all nations, ranks, ages, and religions’, increasing the stewardship of agony in prayer that they may be saved.

For his own strength in his heavy and distressing responsibilities he begged their prayer and for the sake of their own spiritual well-being he again asked their prayer for him.

If I have been useful to you in any measure, pray for me; it is the greatest kindness you can do me. If the word as spoken by these lips has been a means of grace to your children, plead for me that others of the young may be brought to Jesus by my teaching. If you would find my ministry more

profitable to your souls, pray for me still more, and let it not be said of your minister that you do not profit by his preaching, and that you have not because you ask not.

A year later Spurgeon described two prayer meetings on Monday evenings at the Tabernacle to demonstrate of how much variety they could consist. Hymns, including new hymn tunes, requests by letter for special prayer, verbal requests from the congregation, prayers by appointed individuals, brief hortatory comments from the pastor reflecting some element of a prayer request, involvement by the orphanage children's choir in one of the meetings including a new song from a Sankey song book ('Oh, What a Saviour that He Died for Me') all made for real interest and genuine spiritual enjoyment. One man prayed that 'the Lord would knock all the nonsense out of the pulpits'. Spurgeon editorialised that he agreed, and that it seemed strange to him that men could preach entire sermons with no Christ in them. Crafty and clever though they be, they contained not enough gospel to save the soul of a mouse. Spurgeon commented that the woman who was so ignorant that she thought her minister was saying Jesus was our meat and physick when he actually spoke of a Christian metaphysick had far more sense than the minister. The record of these prayer meetings showed, according to Spurgeon, that a healthy variety in such meetings did not exclude there being an equality of power.

The next month he included the record of two more prayer meetings. On October 9 Spurgeon set forth the cross as his theme throughout and summarised the evening with the observation, 'Eight brothers had spoken with the Lord on our behalf, five hymns had been sung, and several short addresses given, and the hour and a-half was gone all too quickly.' For October 16 special attention was given to the Sunday School Union and other such organisations to encourage universal prayer for Sabbath-school work. Participating with Spurgeon in one season of prayer was Mr. Wigney, 'the conductor of separate services for children on Sunday morning'. In schools connected with the Tabernacle over seven thousand children were involved. The entire Ragged School movement had taken over three hundred thousand children off the streets of London. Spurgeon reminded the hundreds of workers gathered that the prevalence of irreligion, poverty, wretchedness, sin, superstition, and evil literature still present in many parts of London make this movement all the more necessary. The results for good should encourage all workers. The end of all their labours should be the salvation of the children. He related the story of the apple in the bottle to illustrate how important early formation was to the well-being and piety of the future adult population of London. The meeting closed with special prayer for all workers.

This is an extract from a new 800-page book by Tom Nettles to be published by Christian Focus with the title *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*.



### Christian Books Worldwide (CBW)



### BRING THE BOOKS

CBW is engaged in combating theological poverty in the developing world. CBW started three years ago. Considerable progress has been made in translation of Reformed books into Urdu, Punjabi, Amharic and Malayalam. In the latter translation has begun of Roger Weil's excellent volume *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Roger wrote this systematic theology in simple language with the express purpose of being translated for the Eastern Bloc countries. The biggest demand has been for Chinese books (250,000 copies).

We recently sent 2000 Nepalese copies from India, where they had been printed, to Nepal. They went missing for three months but then Samuel Rai located them in customs. We encourage prayer that he may

receive them without further delay or cost. Samuel is currently working on some commentaries from the 'Let's Study' series.

In the last year we have published books in two languages in Burma. The Burmese edition is now being checked, and we hope to have a Falim Chin edition translated in the coming months as also the Hmar language in India.

We have published approximately 30 books in Swahili with the competent labours of Sukesh Pabari in Nairobi. A recent donation paid for two tons of books in Swahili to be printed and dispatched to Tanzania. See report by Stephen Nowak, page 27.

### Forthcoming African Pastors' Conferences

Following APCs in Louis Trichardt and Soshanguwe (both first time APCs) and Bloemfontein in October, two first time APCs are planned in Kwazulu-Natal, namely at Empangeni (6 November) and Phoenix [Indian] (7 November), after which a further APC is planned for Mseleni in the north on 9th November. Ronald Kalifungwa, Conrad Mbewe and Raymond Zulu are the principal preachers in a series of APCs throughout January 2013.

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## Conferences in Malawi

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*Mike Marsland describes the recent African Pastors' Conferences in Malawi*

**K**ING DAVID WROTE, 'DO GOOD TO ZION IN YOUR GOOD PLEASURE; build up the walls of Jerusalem...' This remains our commitment to our wonderful Saviour as the recipients of his amazing grace. God has enabled us to set up conferences in various parts of Southern Africa. And now we have pioneered in Malawi.

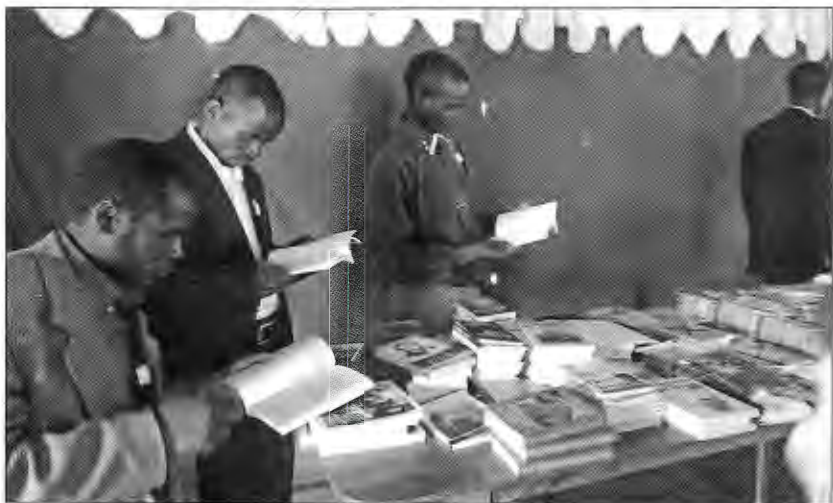


*Mike Marsland*

A team of four left South Africa on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012, in two vehicles packed with books and equipment for the three-day drive north through Botswana and Zambia arriving in Lilongwe on the 14<sup>th</sup>. At least one of the days involved a 17-hour journey. We were joined later by another three who flew in to assist us with two of the conferences, on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The team operated extremely well together. I am the only staff member. The others are volunteers. Our team was made up of Pastor Newton Chilingulo who was our guide and liaison with the Malawian contacts. A Malawian he has spent several years in South Africa; Derek Janse van Vurran was the driver of the second vehicle. Derek has experience in church planting and leadership training in

Malawi. His knowledge of the terrain kept us out of trouble. Tim Phillips is an ex-cab driver from Wiltshire, England. His ability to navigate and remember routes in town helped us enormously. Tim also helped with computer technical problem solving. Later we were joined by Irving Stegges, one of our APC directors. Irving's cousin Joyce and Lucy Rogers also flew up to help implement a new computer program to run the book sales.

It takes a large number of people with different skills to launch a project on this scale. If we take into account all the workers including those who work in England and those who maintain the warehouse in South Africa, the computer experts and those who organise accommodation, the total number is twenty-seven. We



*Pastors examining books at Mzimba.*

are grateful to God for all their selfless efforts and for all our donors.

We held conferences in Lilongwe, Monkey Bay and Mzimba. We had to cancel one conference in Zomba because it simply was not possible to reach the levels of preparation necessary.

We ministered to 118 pastors from various denominations. Each man received five books free. Though the books we sell are generously discounted, not so many purchased books because they were simply too poor to do so. This was especially true in Monkey Bay and Mzimba. Each conference was held for one day. We were very well received and there were repeated requests for us to return next year. We also met ministers and missionaries to discuss

the possibility of working together next year. In the process we learnt a great deal about Malawi and the state of the churches there. In spite of wide-spread mission work biblical truth is in a chronically weak condition. The presence of Islam is unmistakable.

Our two main speakers were Lichawa Thole, pastor of a congregation in the poor suburbs of Lusaka, and Albert Ngoma, pastor of an assembly in Chipata, Zambia. Both men know the region and were well prepared on their subjects. They were joined by Irving, Newton and myself speaking on various aspects of our conference theme which was 'The supremacy of Christ in all the Scriptures'.

This subject is of vital importance. It enabled the pastors to interpret and

apply the Word of God. The Lord's help was very evident. His presence was sensed. For me a highlight was Pastor Lichawa's clear pastoral application of the OT narratives. His opening up of the epistles was glorious. As it turns out his native language is Tembuka and he has family connections in the northern part of Malawi. This proved most helpful, especially because we had to use translators at the two rural conferences. Pastor Lichawa intends to return to Monkey Bay and Mzimba to run seminars and workshops for the pastors. This perfectly fits the aim of the APCs.

Another highlight for me was Irving's opening up of the book of Isaiah. The pastors asked pertinent questions and showed a keen interest to learn.

One lesson we did learn, in Mzimba especially, is that the right foundations need to be laid before certain truths can be addressed and unnecessary contention be avoided. Though some of the men had received seminary training or biblical education from institutions like the famous African Bible College of Malawi, many have received almost no training and do not even own many books.

Now, you cannot come into a region like this and travel 6500km without having the real African experiences. We had much of that, eating lots of 'shema' (maize staple diet) and fish whose name I cannot pronounce and

goat meat. In villages the roads were so bad that they defy description. Often I needed to drive at less than 5km an hour to avoid deep trenches. Another problem was the shortage of fuel.

We were saved from a number of accidents. Goats, donkeys and cattle often decide to walk out into the road without any regard for danger at the most inconvenient moment. More than once a child stumbled towards the car. On one occasion a herd of kudu leapt in front of Derek's car and right over the back of his vehicle.

Harassment at borders is always an ominous reality. Recently we were barred from entering Swaziland when we refused to hand over a large sum of money. This time we crossed three borders in order to get into Malawi. We prayed before each crossing. Each one went smoothly. We were conscious of enablement even down to the smallest details, such as remembering to get a stamp on our documents that would later smooth the way for us. We always take opportunities to give away Christian literature as we engage with many officials at these crossings.

We were helped enormously by the generous hospitality of missionaries. In Lilongwe it was arranged for us to occupy an empty house. To all who support us and pray for us we say Thank you!

*Mike Marsland, APC Manager*

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## Letter to the Foreign Secretary

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Rt Hon William Hague MP  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 2TT  
LONDON  
29 August 2012

Dear Foreign Secretary

I write to you on behalf of our readers around the world. I write to you because we hold you in high esteem.

When many Christians in Homs were killed by invading insurgents we wondered why this was never referred to in the media? It also gave us an early insight as to why there is such a bitter conflict between the invaders and the ruling Assad regime.

The media constantly portray the Assad regime as evil and we certainly observe that they do not qualify for sainthood. Yet for a long period of time Syria was the one place that Christians could live in peace. A large number of Christians fled out of Iraq to find refuge in Syria.

Who are the insurgents? Syria has become a magnet for international jihadists and terrorist organisations including al-Qaeda in Iraq, the alNusrah Front, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, the al-Bara Ibn Malik Martydom Brigade, the Omar Farouq Brigade and dozens more. Syrian Sunni jihadists who have been fighting with al-Qaeda against coalition forces in Iraq are now returning home in droves.

In Iraq British soldiers give their lives fighting terrorists. Yet when these terrorists move to Syria where Christians are on their menu they are encouraged and supported and called 'rebels' and 'opposition forces'.

This week the President of France said that France would support a new government made up of those fighting the Assad regime.

If that pipe dream did materialise what kind of murderous mob would that be? These terrorist groups are all intent on advancing their own agendas.

It is obvious to all that this is a civil war in which neither side take any prisoners and many innocents are killed in between. We do not have a solution but we are *not* impressed by the bias of the media. *It is troubling that this bias appears to have the support of, or indeed reflects the view of the government.*

*Why is there not more objectivity and why is Christian blood shed without any voice of complaint raised by your government?*

Yours faithfully,

Erroll Hulse      editor



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## Tanzania

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*Iziwa church.*

*Report by Stephen Nowak*

**W**ITH MUCH THANKFULNESS TO GOD I WRITE THIS DESCRIPTION OF MY THIRD MISSIONARY trip to Tanzania. All our prayers have been answered and I could say that our Saviour does exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. To him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

I thank all those who have participated in this ministry such as To Sukesh Pabari and his team of translators in Kenya, the financial supporters who made the printing,

shipping and distribution of 733 sets of books possible. Michael Taylor at Christian Books Worldwide (see page 22) who organised the printing and shipping with great precision and patience is warmly thanked. My home church supports me enthusiastically as does my wife.

My departure was on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> of September and arrived 54 hours later in Mbeya, Tanzania. Seven thousand two hundred books had arrived safely. All these were in Swahili. I had 18 days in which to make sure they were distributed wisely. There were ten titles: four commentaries on the Gospels, two others on holiness and communion with God by J C Ryle, one on the

work of Christ in Salvation and another by John Piper expounding the work of the Spirit in salvation. Included in this selection were abridged versions of Richard Baxter's classic, *The Reformed Pastor*, and *The Evils of Sin* by Ralph Venning. This made a complete set of ten books to help pastors, evangelists, Bible College teachers and students. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is being translated into Swahili. We are fully aware of the need for scrupulous care in translation.

Two conferences lasted two days each and another was a one-day event. Five pastors' fraternals were arranged. I was given opportunity to give a two-hour exposition on any topic of my choice. Most of the ministers who came were Moravians. A few Anglicans, Lutherans, Independents and Baptists were present. One of the conferences was arranged by a Pentecostal group and 130 pastors came for the whole day. In addition I preached to 13 different congregations in a variety of settings.

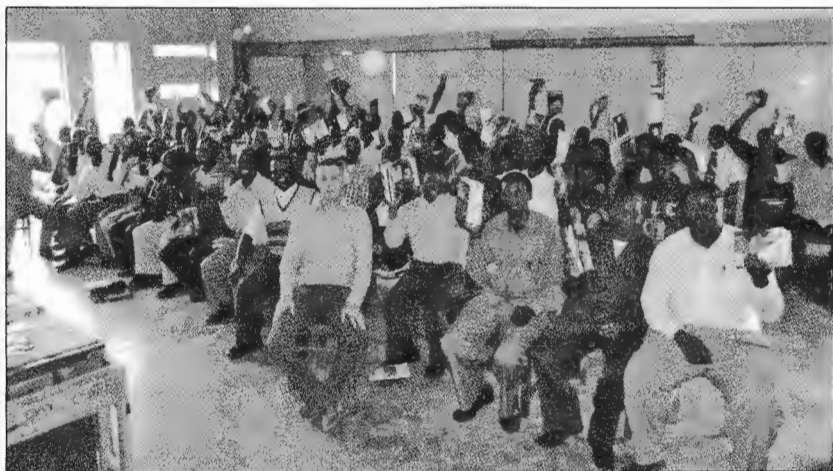
Two days were spent teaching in two different Moravian Bible Colleges and an afternoon in a Baptist Bible College. I visited schools and orphanages and was invited to preach to all present. I was also asked to give a short word at the opening ceremony of a new health clinic and had the joy of providing a Bible for every bed in the clinic.

An evening was spent in teaching and answering questions from forty Moravian ministers who were preparing for ordination. A few days later I attended the ordination (see front cover picture) and spoke briefly about the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant and that ministers were to point people to the spiritual blessings of God that can only be found in Christ. There was opportunity for me to briefly address a youth leaders' conference and a Sunday School leaders' conference. Again it was a pleasure to be able to give books to all attendees.

Three translators shared the work of translating for me. Sometimes six hours a day were spent in travel over rough roads. A driver called Bony did all the driving. He has become a good friend. Every day was well organised.

Major questions not only in Tanzania but all over Africa are, How effective are the books? Are the truths contained digested? Surely you can recall books that had a formative influence upon your life. It was obvious that the books given last year had been read. The Bible Colleges that I had visited last year had made it mandatory for all the students to read the books, write a report and answer a number of questions related to each book.

The educational level, theological climate, culture and lifestyle in Tanzania are vastly different from



*Rejoicing over the books at Lutengano.*

ours. Missionary work has focused on social and humanitarian needs such as hospitals, schools and orphanages. All are commendable, but a theological vacuum has been left. Urgently needed, as I have shown, are resources for pastors. In some areas even the publication and distribution of the Bible has been neglected. There is a large percentage of regular church attendees who can read but do not have a Bible and are not really encouraged to purchase one. We always provide hundreds of Bibles at discounted prices.

I kept detailed notes of each day's activities and noted that I had given 733 sets of books. This included four sets to four Moravian bishops, ten sets to the provincial and district board members, 21 sets to Bible College teachers, 199 sets to Bible College students, 453 sets to senior pastors, 22 sets to youth

leaders and 24 sets to Sunday-school superintendents.

I am convinced that these books are making a major impact. The four Moravian bishops, provincial and district board members, denominational leaders, pastors, teachers and students have all expressed profound gratitude in ways beyond anything I have seen in my ministry so far. The spiritual impact of these books under God is beyond description.

Plans are underway for my next visit. We have identified the areas we would like to visit and contacted denominational leaders. The plan is to move out of the Mbeya Province into the Rukwe and Rungwa Provinces. An inter-denominational two-day pastors' conference in the capital city of Dar es Salaam is being planned.

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## About Contributors

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**J**OEL BEEKE IS THE PRESIDENT OF AND PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC Theology at Puritan Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is also one of the pastors of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

Mike Marsland is the full-time manager of the African Pastors' Conferences.

Tom Nettles is professor of Church History at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, USA. He is an associate editor of *Reformation Today*.

Ken Brownell is senior pastor of the East London Tabernacle, the fame of which has recently been enhanced by the excellent biography of Archibald Brown by Iain Murray. Lord's Day visitors can enjoy the comforts of the newly refurbished sanctuary.

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## Paedobaptism or Credobaptism

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### A Christian's Pocket Guide to Baptism: A Water That Unites

By Robert Letham. Christian Focus, 2012.

Reviewed by Gary Crampton

**D**R. ROBERT LETHAM IS A PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR AND THEOLOGIAN WHO IS PRESENTLY A SENIOR LECTURER IN Systematic and Historical Theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology. He is a competent and well respected scholar who is the author of a number of books and articles, and is well qualified to write a book such as the one under review.<sup>1</sup>

Following the author's 'Acknowledgements', the book consists of three Parts, a section with Endnotes, and a Bibliography.

Part One: 'Foundational Principles' (1-38) contains four chapters. Dr. Letham begins by stating that 'baptism is a matter often fraught with discord and strife. One popular book describes it as "the water that divides".' He goes on to comment that 'this is a tragedy, since it [baptism] is the sign of our union with Christ and his church.' He continues by explaining what the 'foundational principles' are when it comes to the study of the biblical sacrament of water baptism. He makes it clear from the start that the only proper guide in such matters is the Word of God. He then explains what the chapters in this Part will cover (1-3).

Chapter 1: 'Interpreting the Bible: The Text and Its implications' (5-8). The author correctly maintains that 'the teaching of Scripture is rich and multi-layered and is found in two distinct, but inseparable ways.' As taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6),<sup>2</sup> in the Bible there are explicit statements and there are also implicit teachings that 'by good and necessary consequence may be deduced' from the explicit statements. The latter are logical 'implications' and are every bit as much the Word of God as are the explicit teachings. Dr. Letham has touched on a very important and often misunderstood biblical principle. He concludes by stating that 'when thinking about baptism we should deal not only with the express statements of the Bible but also with the wider sense of Scripture that is entailed in these pronouncements.'

Chapter 2: 'Interpreting the Bible: The Old and the New' (9-16). In this chapter Dr. Letham makes clear that there are 66 Old and New Testament

books in the Bible, not just 27 New Testament books. He cites Augustine's well-known comment: 'Grace concealed in the Old Testament, is revealed in the New.' He continues by asserting that 'the New Covenant fulfills the Abrahamic covenant.' There are not two covenants of grace in the Word of God; there is only one. 'The covenant of grace has a unity in both Testaments, while its administration differs.' This being so, we must 'consider baptism canonically, in the light of the whole of Scripture – Old Testament and New Testament – not from the New Testament alone'.

Here is one of the places where paedobaptists such as Dr. Letham tend to err when it comes to the subjects of water baptism. There is indeed a unity of Holy Scripture between the Old and New Testaments. There is a continuity which runs throughout the 66 books of the Bible. But there is also a discontinuity between the Testaments. The apostle Paul, for example, says that he is the minister, not of the Old, but of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6). He also writes that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper by saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood' (1 Cor 11:25). The author of Hebrews likewise says that we are living under a New Covenant (8:8). It is a 'better covenant', with 'better promises' (8:6), which has a profound effect on the membership of the New Covenant. Hebrews 8:8-12 makes this abundantly clear. In these verses we have one of the strongest arguments against infant baptism.

The passage reads as follows:

*But finding fault with them, he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbour and none his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.'*

Under the Old Covenant administration unbelieving Jews by right (*de jure*) were a part of the nation of Israel. But in the New Covenant community it is different. As the author of Hebrews, citing Jeremiah 31:31-34, writes, the New Covenant is not like the covenant that God made with the Old Testament fathers (8:9). In the New Covenant they 'all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them' (8:11). In the New Testament era, says Jesus,



‘they shall all be taught by God’ (John 6:45; compare Isaiah 54:13). The inclusion of infants in the New Testament community is hereby prophetically rescinded by the Old Testament and corroborated by the New. The New Covenant community is to consist of believers, those who have the law of God written on their hearts (Heb 8:10). They are all taught by God, from the least to the greatest (Heb 8:11).

This is not to say that persons under the Old Covenant administration did not ‘know the Lord’. Clearly, there were many who did. There were numerous persons who had their sins forgiven (Ps 32:1-2), the law of God written on their hearts (Ps 40:8; 119:11; Isa 51:7), and who had professed saving faith in the Messiah to come (John 8:56; Heb 11:24-26). But the great majority of the Old Covenant community did not possess such faith (1 Cor 10:1-11); and membership was not restricted to those who ‘know the LORD’. The Old Covenant was a breakable covenant, whereas the New Covenant is not (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-12).

Neither is this to say that everyone who professes belief in Christ in the New Covenant era is genuinely converted. Such is not the case (see Acts 8:9-24). But as a community the New Testament people of God are a body of professing believers. As noted above, in the Old Covenant non-believers were a part of Israel *de jure*; in the New Covenant non-believers may exist in the church, but only *de facto*. This is taught in 1 John 2:19, where the apostle writes: ‘They went out from us [the true church], but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.’ Those church members who apostatised and left the true church were merely *de facto* members of Christ’s church. They were participants in the visible church but not the invisible church. They were never, said John, true members of the New Testament covenant community.

Chapter 3: ‘Promises and Sacraments’ (17-28). Chapter 3 begins by asserting that ‘at each stage of covenant history God reinforces his promises by material signs by which he assures us of the truth of what he has said and done’. Christianity, we are told, ‘is not something confined to the ‘spiritual’ dimension; it involves the whole of life’. The life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which ‘lie right at the heart of the Christian faith’, are proof that these things are so. Further, God has been pleased to use material signs throughout the history of redemption to reinforce his promises. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the rainbow in the Noahic covenant, and the Old Testament sacraments of circumcision and Passover, are examples of such material signs. So are the New Testament sacraments of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These sacraments ‘reinforce God’s covenantal promises’.

Moreover, the author tells us that the sacramental signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper 'point to the reality of God's covenant'. They function as 'signposts [to] direct us to a destination'. The sign and that which it signifies are distinct, but 'the sign is appropriate to the reality' because God has appointed it to be so. The signs and that which they represent take on a special relationship when properly administered. They are as 'visible sermons' which point to something 'spiritual'.

Dr. Letham accurately avers that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are primarily about what God does, not what man does. Hence, when we are dealing with the doctrine of water baptism we must recognise that it 'is first and foremost a divine activity. God is at work and he honors his promises given in connection with it.'

Chapter 4: 'The Individual and the Corporate' (29-38). In chapter 4 the author points out that the Bible stresses both 'individual responsibility' and 'corporate' solidarity. There is 'an inseparable connection' between them. This is obvious from as early as Genesis 1 and 2 where we read that God created an individual male and an individual female in his own image and told them to become one flesh in the bond of marriage. The same is true in God's plan of redemption. Dr. Letham points to Acts 2:38-39, Acts 16, and Acts 10-11 as examples of 'the individual and the corporate'. In these passages we read (respectively) that God promises salvation to 'you and your children' (in Peter's Pentecost sermon), to the Philippian jailer and his family, to Lydia and her household, and to Cornelius and his household. The 'message of salvation is for individuals and the household to which they belong, not to individuals in isolation.' We must see 'baptism' we are told, 'as part of our place in God's saving purposes, in its corporate context'.

Reformed Baptists would agree with the author at this point, with the understanding, of course, that we read the passages in their context. A careful reading of the texts cited will show that in Acts 2 the promise is for all who believe the gospel when it is preached. In Acts 16 we are told that the Philippian jailer and his household believed before they were baptised, as did Lydia and her household ('the brethren'; see Acts 16:15, 40). And in Acts 10-11 we read that Cornelius and his household were baptised after they had believed. In other words, those who were baptised were those who believed the gospel that was preached.

Part Two: 'What Baptism Signifies' (39-89) also contains four chapters about the meaning of baptism as the New Testament presents it to us.

Chapter 5: 'Cleansing From Sin' (43-53). The chapter begins by addressing the question as to 'how much water is needed' in baptism. Dr. Letham writes that 'apart from the [Greek] Orthodox [church] and many credobaptists, there is general agreement that the mode of baptism is not the most important thing and that it can be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion'.

As to 'baptism and cleansing from sin', he refers to Acts 22:16, Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5, and 1 Corinthians 6:11 as examples of water baptism relating to 'cleansing from sin'. He notes that 'baptism is the entry, the place at which a decisive transfer occurs from sin to faith, from being in Adam to being in Christ, for it is the moment when discipleship begins, in accordance with Jesus' last words to his apostles.' (NB: How the claims of this last sentence can be asserted regarding an infant is a real conundrum to this reviewer, unless one holds to some form of presumptive election or presumptive regeneration.)

In the study of 'baptism and the reception of the Spirit' we are told that there is an intricate and inseparable relationship between them. Acts 2:37-39; 9:17-18; 10:34-48; and 1 Corinthians 12:13 are noted as proof-texts for this teaching. When we come to 'baptism, union with Christ and salvation' the same must be said: there is an intricate and inseparable relationship between them taught in the Bible. 1 Peter 3:18-21 is the text used to make this most explicit. In these verses Peter says that 'baptism now saves you...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ'.

The final part of chapter 5 addresses the question 'Is baptism purely symbolic?' The short answer is No! The next two chapters deal with this subject.

Chapter 6: 'Union with Christ' (55-68). As the title indicates, this chapter studies the apostle Paul's doctrine of water baptism and union with the Lord Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. 'Baptism,' says the author 'is a sign and seal of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as it comes to expression in his covenant.' As a 'sign' it signifies something beyond itself. As a 'seal' it functions as a 'mark of ownership'. As a sign and seal of the covenant of grace it has to do with 'engrafting into Christ', and 'thus of regeneration, renewal, and resurrection'. The person baptised is a member of Christ and his body, the church. According to Dr. Letham (in agreement with the Westminster Standards), water baptism not only 'exhibits' the grace of God in Christ to those who rightly receive it, it also 'confers' grace to them. He writes: 'Baptism signifies, seals, and exhibits the grace of God, while the Holy Spirit powerfully confers that grace of union with Christ.'

The author is quick to tell us that this grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* ('by the work working') as in Roman Catholic dogma. In the Reformed doctrine God's saving grace is not tied to the act of water baptism itself. Rather, God's grace is conferred by the Holy Spirit only to those to whom the grace belongs, i.e., those to whom God is pleased to bestow it. Saving faith is always necessary. This caveat, however, does not in any sense deny the biblical teaching that the grace conferred by the Holy Spirit 'does not occur independently of baptism but rather in and through it'.

The author concludes the chapter by pointing out that the Apostle Paul ties 'the material [water baptism] and the spiritual [Holy Spirit]' together in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where we read: 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.'

Chapter 7: 'The Teaching of the Protestant Confessions' (69-78). Chapter 7 deals with the subjects of water baptism. According to the Bible, who should be baptised? Dr. Letham begins the chapter by asserting that 'the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is the most comprehensive statement of Protestant and Reformed theology on record.' Regarding the doctrine of water baptism he cites chapter 28 of the *Confession* ('On Baptism')

The author overviews the teaching of this chapter while at the same time speaking against the abuse of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. He then writes:

'The Reformed confessions are clear on the connection between baptism and regeneration. They consistently oppose the Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opere operato*, which asserts that the sacraments are efficacious by the fact of their use. On the other hand, they are equally severe on those who would reduce baptism and the Lord's Supper to merely symbols.'

Dr. Letham is correct.

The balance of the chapter contains a summary of a number of Reformed confessions and creedal statements.

In summary of what he has taught, Dr. Letham avers:

'The external power of baptism is as a seal. The promise, however, is joined to a condition of faith and repentance—so the grace is not sealed except to those who believe and repent. However, baptism is more than a sign and seal, for it exhibits and confers the promised reality, due to the promise of God and

the life-giving Spirit. It is in reality the laver of regeneration, which has perpetual efficacy.’

In conclusion the author says: ‘Baptism is related to the whole of salvation, including regeneration. Instead of avoiding this connection we should understand it biblically and appropriately.’

Chapter 8: ‘The Individual and the Household’ (79-89). The chapter opens with the following words: ‘In chapter 4 we discussed the relationship between the individual and the corporate in both the Old Testament and New Testament. This has direct relevance to the question of who is to be baptised.’ In this review we have already seen the error of paedobaptist thinking on this point - see this reviewer’s comments in chapter 4. But this much will be restated: I agree with Dr. Letham’s teaching on the individual and the corporate as long as it is rightly interpreted. I concur with the author that ‘we should see baptism, as part of our place in God’s saving purposes, in a corporate context’, as long as the ‘corporate context’ aspect of it involves the saving response of the ‘corporate’ element to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Letham continues by asserting that ‘baptism and faith are inextricably linked’. He is correct, and this is why credobaptists maintain that water baptism should be administered subsequent to the recipient’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

In the balance of the chapter, for the most part, the author focuses on the Abrahamic covenant and its continuance in the New Covenant era. Here again this reviewer is in agreement with Dr. Letham. But this also needs to be seen (primarily) in the New Testament context. So when the author contends that ‘whereas credobaptists rest their case on the New Testament in isolation from the Old Testament’ he has overstated the matter. Credobaptists do, however, put the *main* emphasis on the New Testament because water baptism is a New Covenant sacrament, not an Old Testament sacrament (as paedobaptists would agree). An elaboration follows.

Chapter 28 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* accurately states that water baptism is a New Testament sacrament. Hence, it should be studied mainly from a New Testament perspective. This is how we approach our study of the New Covenant sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Even though we are taught in Exodus 12 that Old Testament Israelite children partook of the Passover ordinance (which foreshadowed the New Testament ordinance of the Lord’s Supper), we know from the teaching of the New Testament that participation in the Lord’s Supper is more restrictive. First, there is no positive or direct New Testament command to include infants or small children in this covenant

feast. And second, in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 there is the clear biblical mandate that one needs to examine himself prior to partaking of the sacrament, lest he eat and drink unworthily and bring judgment on himself.

Now if the New Testament regulation is sufficient to determine the participants of the New Covenant sacrament of the Lord's Supper, why should it not also be sufficient to determine the recipients of the other New Covenant sacrament: water baptism? This does not mean that we are not to bring the Old Testament teaching to bear on the subject. But it is an agreed upon hermeneutical principle, as stated by the *Westminster Confession* (1:9), that 'when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture...it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly'.

Moreover, when the author adduces Acts 2:38-39 in his section on 'the household and the covenant' he makes a fundamental error. The 'promise is to you and your children' statement of Acts 2:38-39 is often claimed by paedobaptists as referring to the Abrahamic covenant and the inclusion of infants in the covenant of grace. This is gratuitous reasoning. There is no reference in Peter's Pentecostal sermon of Acts 2 to any other texts than Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110. A faithful biblical hermeneutic, studying the passage primarily in its immediate context, would find the 'promise' spoken of in the passage in verse 17 (see also verse 33) where Peter cites Joel 2. It is the promise of the Holy Spirit to be given to all who repent and believe (see verses 38-39). There is not a word about the promise given to Abraham and his generation to come.

Moreover, the Acts 2 passage tells us exactly who was baptised at Pentecost: 'Then those who gladly received his [Peter's] word were baptised' (verse 41). The persons who were baptized were those who received God's Word, i.e., professing Christians. Who are the children Peter is referring to in verse 39? They are the ones mentioned in Joel's prophecy cited in verse 17; they are the 'sons' and 'daughters' upon whom the Holy Spirit will be poured out and who prophesy. Infant baptism cannot be rationally found in this text. Infants cannot prophesy and they cannot 'gladly receive' the preached Word of God. The 'you and your children' terminology of Acts 2:39 echoes the universality of the gospel propagation found in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-19. It does not teach that infant children should be baptised.

Near the end of this chapter Dr. Letham properly notes that in the Bible 'God's grace precedes faith.' Credobaptists would agree with this Biblical truth. This is why they believe that only those who have experienced saving faith by God's grace should be baptised. This is the case with every instance of water



baptism that we read of in the New Testament, and here the credobaptist rests his case.

Part Three: 'Conclusion' (91-105) consists of one chapter.

Chapter 9: 'Children, Covenant, Church and Sacrament' (93-105). In this final chapter we return to the question of the subjects of water baptism. Does the Bible teach paedobaptism or credobaptism? 'What does the Scripture say' (Romans 4:3) on this subject? Whereas Dr. Letham comes down on the side of paedobaptism, this reviewer demurs.

The author asks the question 'Are the children of believers members of the church?' His answer, along with that of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:2) is yes. The credobaptist answer, along with that of the *1689 London Baptist Confession* (26:2),<sup>3</sup> is no, unless the children have been converted. The reason that credobaptists take this position is that every example of someone joining the church in the New Testament writings is that of persons who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ.

At one point in this chapter Dr. Letham makes the following comments concerning the credobaptist viewpoint regarding the children of Christian parents:

'If children born in a household with a believing parent are guilty in Adam and inherit original sin, it follows on credobaptist assumptions that they are to be treated as unbelievers requiring regeneration and repentance. If they are guilty sinners there is and can be only one way out of their predicament, through faith in Jesus Christ. It follows that parents and pastors are responsible to urge them to repent, just as they would an unbeliever or a person from an entirely pagan background. These children have no special claim on God's grace. As individuals they are accountable and guilty.'

When this reviewer first read this paragraph I was stunned. My response to this statement is of course credobaptists believe that 'as individuals they ['these children'] are accountable and guilty'. Of course they believe that 'they ['these children'] are to be treated as unbelievers requiring regeneration and repentance'. How could one not believe these things? We are told in the Bible that infants even in the womb are guilty of sin. Psalm 51:5 says 'I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.' In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul tells us that all persons are 'by nature children of wrath'; they are 'dead in trespasses and sins' (see also Romans 3:9-18). Children of believers as well as children of non-believers need to repent of their sin because they 'are accountable and guilty' before God.

To follow up on this, Reformed Baptists have a view of children which is covenantal in nature.<sup>4</sup> They believe that the children of professing parents have a status within the visible church, not as members of the church, but as members of their respective families. The family is the primary ‘covenantal’ institution which God has ordained (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:24; Ephesians 5:22-6:4), and families together go to church, hear the Word preached, and so forth. Thus, the children of believing parents are covenantally related to the church through their respective families. They are not to be considered ‘outsiders’ in their relationship to the church, but in the privileged position as associated with the church through their family. Then, if and when they give a credible profession of faith in Christ, these children are to be baptised and join the church.

What should we conclude with regard to *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Baptism: A Water That Unites*? First let me say that there are many good things said in this monograph. It is well written and the author’s scholarship is evident throughout the pages of the book. Second, perhaps the endorsement statement of Michael Haykin sums up this reviewer’s thoughts on Dr. Letham’s book, and serves as a fit conclusion:

Rightly does Letham seek to understand the issue of baptism within the canonical framework of Scripture. He is hopeful that this is the way forward beyond the impasse that has stymied the Church for centuries regarding this precious ordinance. While I agree wholeheartedly with this approach and believe that an excellent case for the paedobaptist position has been made by Letham, I remain fundamentally unconvinced by this argument, being assured that the New Covenant contains a newness only satisfactorily explained by Baptists. But if you are searching for a well-argued, and irenic, approach to this subject from the vantage-point of infant baptism, this is the book for you.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Letham, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Baptism: A Water That Unites* (United Kingdom: Christian Focus Publications, 2012). The pagination found in the body of this review is from Dr. Letham’s book.

<sup>2</sup> All references to the Westminster Standards comprising the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms* are from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernised.

<sup>3</sup> References to the *1689 London Baptist Confession* in this review are from *Things Most Surely Believed Among Us* (Sterling, Virginia: GAM Publications, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 7 (‘Of God’s Covenant’) of the *1689 London Baptist Confession*.

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