

REFORMATION TODAY

rt

- ▶ More Resurrection appearances of Jesus
- ▶ Independency and Inter-dependency: Associations of Particular Baptist Churches yesterday and today
- ▶ The Synod of Whitby
- ▶ Who should represent us?

In Christ All Things Hold Together





11



15



37

Inside this Issue

- 04** More Resurrection appearances of Jesus: an Exposition of John 20:19-31
Bob Davey
- 11** Who will represent us?
Kees van Kralingen
- 15** The Synod of Whitby: Its Necessity, Significance and Legacy
David Woollin
- 24** Independency and Inter-dependency: Associations of Particular Baptist churches yesterday and today
Robert Strivens
- 37** Who should represent us?
- 42** African Pastors' Conference News
- 44** Book Reviews

- ▶ **Editor**
Kees van Kralingen
- ▶ **Founding Editor**
Erroll Hulse
- ▶ **Associate Editors**
 - UK** Mostyn Roberts
David Kingdon
 - USA** Tom Nettles
Michael Haykin
 - South Africa**
Irving Steggles
 - Australia**
John Campbell



Design and Print
www.PepperCollective.com

Editorial

In Christ all things hold together

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

These words from Colossians 1:17 are part of a wonderful passage (1:15-20) describing the pre-eminence of Christ over all things: over creation and over the church. All things were created through him and for him. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. He is also the head of the church, his body.

He has been appointed to this exalted position from eternity (Col 1:17a). This has become manifest in his resurrection from the dead (see the exposition of John 20:19-31 by Bob Davey) and his ascension to heaven where he is now seated at the right hand of God. From there he exercises his rule and applies the benefits of his redemptive work on the cross. Paul brings these great truths together in this bridging statement in verse 17, 'He is before all things and in him all things hold together.' This has major applications, some of which are considered in this issue of *RT*.

For individual believers

As believers we are united to Christ and we have become the children of God. Christ holds all of us together in his hands (John 10:28) and he represents us in heaven always interceding for us (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). We should pay more attention to the tremendous blessings of Christ's ascension and the fact that he is in heaven for us (see article on this topic).

For the church

Christ not only knows us as individual believers, but he holds us together in the church, in what he calls his body to indicate the relationship that we now have with himself and with each other. Christ not only has united us to himself but also

to one another in the church. This is true for the worldwide church of all times and places (1 Cor 1:2) which manifests itself in the form of local churches. Christ also holds all these local churches together (Rev 1:16-20). But how should these local churches relate to each other?

David Woollin shows from the historical example of the Synod of Whitby how this interaction should not be based on political domination, but on the Word of God.

We have good, biblical reasons to emphasise the importance of local and independent churches. But does this mean that churches should operate in isolation? Robert Strivens challenges us to consider seriously the historical, biblical and theological case against such isolation and for inter-dependency and healthy inter-church relationships. This paper was presented at the Carey 2018 Conference covering the theme of 'The Believers' Church'. The other papers of this conference will be published in forthcoming issues of *RT*.


For society

The text of Colossians 1:15-20 also points to the fact that the institutions of this world such as 'thrones, dominions, rules and authorities' have also been created by Christ (see also Rom 13:1). In our sinful world, however, the fabric of society suffers from the terrible damage caused by sin, an example of which is discussed in Mostyn Roberts' article. The message is that Christians and the church are called to work for the good of society following Christ who will ultimately restore all things and will create new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13). ■



Notice to non-UK subscribers:

Please ensure payment of your subscription as soon as possible after receiving the **early** reminder in order to guarantee uninterrupted delivery of your copies of *RT*.



MORE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS



AN EXPOSITION OF JOHN 20:19-31

*The second of two articles
expounding John 20.*

On the Sunday, soon after Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, Jesus appeared to the women who were returning from the tomb. The women had seen two angels inside the tomb who had given them a message for the disciples. With joy and fear the women were going to the disciples (Luke 24:1-9; Matt 28:8) not speaking to anyone as they went (Mark 16:8). Jesus met with them in the way (Matt 28:9-10). This was his second resurrection appearance.

The disciples did not believe the reports of the women and of Mary Magdalene, for 'their words seemed to them like idle tales' (Luke 24:11).

The third and fourth resurrection appearances occurred in the afternoon. Jesus made a resurrection appearance to Peter alone, and to two of his disciples as they were travelling to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34). The fifth and final appearance was in the evening to the apostles and other disciples who were with them (Luke 24:33-36).

John 20:19-31

20:19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' 20When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' 22And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the

sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' ²⁴Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.' ²⁶And after eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' ²⁸And Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' ³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

The fifth resurrection appearance

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, The exact day of the week is highlighted. It was the Sunday, the first day of the Jewish week. Sunday becomes the Lord's Day in the Christian calendar (Rev 1:10).

... when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, That Sunday evening the band of disciples gathered together (Luke 24:33). They met in secret behind locked doors

for fear of arrest by the Jewish authorities because of their association with Jesus. It appears that the meeting was in the upper room where the last supper had been held. The room they met in became the centre for future prayer meetings (Acts 1:13; 2:1; 4:23,24; 12:12). It was also the home of John Mark (Mark 14:51,52; Acts 12:12).

Jesus came and stood in the midst, While the two disciples who met with Jesus on the road to Emmaus were still reporting their experience to the band of disciples, Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst (Luke 24:36). The fact that Jesus appeared suddenly in the room terrified everyone because they thought him to be a ghost or spirit (Luke 24:37).

... and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' The greeting of Jesus was to reassure and calm their fears. As Jesus' last legacy to the apostles had been peace (14:27) so his first word to them after his resurrection was 'peace'.

... he showed them his hands and his side. Jesus showed his disciples that his body was a real, physical body, the same one which he had before. To prove it Jesus said, 'Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' He then ate broiled fish and a honeycomb in their sight (Luke 24:39-43).

Jesus' crucifixion wounds were to be clearly seen, open but healed (20:27). Jesus was not ashamed to have these visible emblems of his crucifixion, and they remain with him even in heaven. They are a perpetual reminder to all of the cost of his victory over sin and death (Rev 5:6).

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Now completely convinced of the resurrection of Jesus and the reality of his physical body, the disciples in the room rejoiced just as Jesus had promised they would (16:22). However, he gently rebuked them for not believing the testimonies of the women who had seen him earlier that day (Mark 16:14).

Jesus ordains the apostles
Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you.' Jesus prepares the apostles to receive the great commission by repeating to them his words of reassurance, 'Peace to you.'

'As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' With the resurrection of Jesus, the New Covenant had come. Jesus therefore officially commissioned the apostles into their apostolic office and work. They were now being sent by Jesus just as he had been sent by the Father. They were to take the gospel to all nations (Matt 28:18-20). The authority of the apostles (sent ones) derived directly from Jesus who sent them. They each shared the commission and had equal authority.

... he breathed (blew) on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Jesus breathed on the apostles. This was a symbolic act of ordination. The symbolism came from the account of man's creation in Genesis, 'The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (Gen 2:7). Just as there was no life in man until God breathed into him the breath of life, so only through the Holy Spirit is spiritual life given. The apostles' ministry would be ineffective without the work of the Holy

Spirit. Three things in particular happened to the apostles when Jesus breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, he was giving them the gift of infallibility by the Holy Spirit when it was needed. Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit to aid their memories, teach them new truths and to guide them into all the truth (14:26; 16:13). This infallibility was given by the Holy Spirit only when it was needed in their apostolic work of preaching, teaching, writing, and governing the Church. Infallibility was not given for other occasions (eg Gal 2:11,12).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles at this time to give them a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The passage in Luke states, 'Then he (Jesus) said to them (the apostles) "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me." And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend (understand) the Scriptures' (Luke 24:44-45).

Thirdly, Jesus commissioned the apostles at this time to preach and teach the gospel to the whole world, under the direction and power of, the Holy Spirit. 'Then he said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things"' (Luke 24:46-48; Matt 28:18-20).

It was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in the fullness of his power. 'Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). When Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, the result was conviction of sin and the conversion of three thousand people (Acts 2:37-41). This does not mean that conversions always result from faithful preaching. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, was fully inspired in preaching in his defence before the Sanhedrin. Yet his words fell on deaf ears and he suffered martyrdom as a result. The prime task of a servant of the gospel is to preach and teach the truth of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Results must be left to God. Pray for God to raise up faithful preachers filled with the love of Christ and the power of the Spirit.

'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.' These words of Jesus have nothing to do with sacraments, priestly absolution, or any church action. No man has power to forgive sins, not even the apostles. There is not a single instance in the Acts or Epistles of an apostle taking on himself to absolve anyone of sin. Nor is there anything in the pastoral Epistles to show that absolution can be given by any person in the ministerial office.

The meaning is that the apostles, in their gospel preaching, must *declare with certainty* that there is forgiveness of sins and a sure salvation for the truly repentant. Hearers of the gospel can be assured that if they have met the

requirements of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus then their sins have definitely been forgiven by God. There is forgiveness of sins and a sure salvation for the truly repentant. Assurance of salvation is part of the gospel message. But it is the Holy Spirit, not man, who gives assurance of salvation to the individual because only God forgives sin and only God knows the true state of a person's heart.

... 'if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' Likewise, the apostles must declare with certainty that the unrepentant, while they remain in that state, will certainly be lost, because their sins are retained (unforgiven).

'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' Jesus was emphasising in his graphic way the awesomeness of responsibility in gospel preaching. Eternal destinies are being determined. A neutral response to the gospel is not permitted by God. Gospel preaching either opens the door to the kingdom of heaven or opens the door to hell. Paul puts it like this. Preachers of the gospel 'are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life' (2 Cor 2:15,16).

'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations' (Luke 24:46,47).

Jesus appears to the disciples with Thomas present

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. Thomas was the only apostle absent when Jesus appeared to the band of disciples on the Sunday evening. Thomas was one of the original twelve apostles (Matt 10:3). He was a good man with a gloomy turn of mind. He seemed to see the worst side of things (John 11:16). This could well explain his absence on the Sunday. As a result he missed the great blessing. It is always unwise to be absent from the assembly of God's people without good cause.

The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' Naturally the ten apostles and the others who had seen Jesus told Thomas the good news that Jesus was alive and had appeared to them. In spite of all their efforts to convince him he could not believe them.

'Unless I see ... put my finger ... put my hand ... I will (definitely) not believe.' Thomas demanded proof. He would not believe unless he saw and felt the wound marks of Jesus for himself. He required absolute, incontrovertible evidence. In his case seeing and touching was believing.

'I will (definitely) not (on any account) believe.' Thomas stubbornly refused to believe. He continued in unbelief until the following Sunday evening. That week would not have been a happy week for Thomas. However exasperating this was for the other apostles, they had to remember the rebuke which Jesus had given them for their own unbelief (Mark 16:14).

... after eight days his disciples were again inside ... the doors being shut. A week after the first appearance of Jesus to the apostles, they met again in the same place and way. Did they expect Jesus to appear that evening? They certainly knew that he would appear again to them some time.

Thomas with them. Thomas' heart told him that the place for him to be was with his comrades. If Jesus did appear that evening then he would be there to see him.

Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst. Jesus did come. And he came in the same supernatural way that he had come before. The difference this time was that the assembled disciples were not terrified and Thomas was present.

... and said, 'Peace to you!' Jesus spoke exactly the same words he had spoken the week before. They were words of greeting, reassurance, and benediction.

Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side.' Jesus turns his attention to Thomas. With loving-kindness and condescension Jesus invited Thomas to inspect his wounds. By using Thomas' own words, Jesus let Thomas know that he knew everything which Thomas had spoken before.

'Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Jesus gave Thomas a loving and gentle rebuke for his unbelief and exhorted him to be believing. Thomas needed

no prompting. He answered with a confession of faith that might be equalled but can never be surpassed by anyone.

The great confession: 'My Lord and my God!'

And Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Thomas needed no more physical proof now. The presence of Jesus and his words were enough. From the heart, spontaneously, he cried out, 'My Lord and my God'. It was now completely out of place for him to touch the wounds of Jesus. If anything, he would have fallen down and grasped the feet of Jesus and worshipped him, like the women had done when they first saw the risen Lord (Matt 28:9).

Thomas recognised Jesus to be his sovereign Lord and his God. For a Jew that was a remarkable confession. Yet it stands as the truth. What a sublime confession of faith in Jesus we have from the lips of Thomas! His is the language of amazement, delight, repentance, faith and adoration, all rolled into one. No doubt the angels in heaven, who had rejoiced at Thomas' original conversion, were rejoicing again at this sublime confession of faith in Jesus made at this time of renewal of Thomas' faith. Everyone in heaven knows that Jesus is fully God as well as fully man.

This confession of faith by Thomas carries with it the very essence of saving faith. Happy the person who can say from the heart 'Jesus is my Lord and my God.' Happier still, if the confession is also made with amazement, delight, repentance, faith and adoration, all rolled into one.

Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed.'

Notice that when Thomas calls Jesus 'God', Jesus does not rebuke him for blasphemy. Rather Jesus commends his faith. However, Jesus does rebuke Thomas gently for his insisting on seeing Jesus alive before believing. It was good that Thomas had come to faith but it would have been better if he had believed without having to see Jesus first.

'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Thomas stubbornly refused to believe. He continued in unbelief until the following Sunday evening. That week would not have been a happy week for Thomas. However exasperating this was for the other apostles, they had to remember the rebuke which Jesus had given them for their own unbelief (Mark 16:14).

And Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus says this for the benefit of those who would come to believe on him in the future, after his ascension into heaven.

Faith takes hold of the truths and realities which lie beyond physical realities. Faith grasps and appropriates things which are not seen, yet are true. It has always been so (Hebrews 11). The promises of God come into this category. Faith is not wishful thinking, as some believe. Nor does faith refuse to appeal to evidence and reason; it is not blind unreasoning faith. However, when a person doubts after proper evidence has been given, God calls that folly. The Gospel of John constitutes proper evidence.

The purpose of John's Gospel

This is therefore the appropriate place for John to summarise and state the purpose of the writing of his Gospel.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. John, under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, had selected his material, as did the other Gospel writers. Much more could have been put in the Gospel by him, but there is enough in it to achieve its purpose.

... but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. The purpose of John's Gospel is to lead people to personal saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and say with Thomas 'My Lord and my God.'

The risen and glorified Lord Jesus says, 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you' (Matt 7:7). 'Come unto me, all you who are labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matt 11:28,29).

'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' (John 3:16,17). ■

Bob Davey is the pastor of Looe Christian Fellowship, having pastored FIEC churches in South London.

KEES VAN KRALINGEN



WHO WILL REPRESENT US?

Introduction

We have been created for relationships. When God created man, he said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.' And God gave man a helper and this became the institution of marriage. The need for meaningful relationships extends to wider relationships in families and communities. Our current (western) culture, however, is characterised by increasing individualism. A simple signal of this trend is the rapid increase in one-person households in many countries.

Our society shows on the one hand a desire for everyone to be treated equally and without discrimination, but on the other hand a demand to be recognised as unique human beings.¹ Our personal needs and their fulfilment dominate what people think, say and do. This causes all kinds of pressure including feelings of loneliness. The Bible tells us that there is an even deeper spiritual issue which is the root cause of our problems. What is it and what is the remedy?

¹ See the article by Mostyn Roberts in this issue.

The spiritual problem

When human beings were created, Adam represented us. But Adam sinned and we with him (Rom 5:12-21). The biblical doctrine of original sin explains why we are all sinners who live at enmity with God. We were created for fellowship with God, but we are now alienated from him. We are without hope and without God. We are alone. In addition, our relationships with our fellow human beings have been affected. The marriage relationship is damaged (Gen 3:16). Our relationships with our fellow human beings suffer the disastrous consequences of sin, as quickly became apparent when Cain killed his brother Abel. The ravages of sin are vividly portrayed in many passages of Scripture (examples are Ps 14, 53; Eccl 7:20; Rom 1:18-3:20). As the world without God develops in these last days these problems will become even more apparent (2 Tim 3:1-9).

We are all held personally responsible and accountable. We are not held responsible for the sins of our fathers (Ezek 18). But this also implies that nobody will be accountable for our sins except ourselves! Not a single fellow human being can save us. Is there nobody who can represent us, and would be willing to take care of our plight? Who could this be?

The only solution

There is only one mediator between God and man: the man Jesus Christ. He alone is the way, the truth and the life. He alone is the Saviour. He suffered and died in the place of sinners so that we could be reconciled to God: 'For Christ also

suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). He restores lost sinners to a relationship with God so that they are now even called the children of God.

It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are brought into this saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Gal 4:6). The key term is that the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ. Calvin used this expression when he said: 'To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.'² The same is also expressed by Sinclair Ferguson in his book *The Holy Spirit*.³ He states that,

'The central role of the Spirit is to reveal Christ and to unite us to him and to all those who participate in his body. Just as the indwelling of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit are two aspects of one and the same reality in the New Testament, so to sustain us "in Christ" (an expression which, with its variants, Paul uses around 160 times) is the heart and soul of the Spirit's ministry.'⁴ Believers are 'in Christ', he is their representative head.

Christ our Representative Head

One of the many aspects of this unity with Christ is that he is called our 'head'; We find this word in several places in the New Testament (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:10,19). As head of the church, he represents us. We look to him as our head, our authority, the one to whom we belong. He is also described as the One who is pre-eminent in everything (Col 1:15-20). He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18);

he is the 'firstfruits' (1 Cor 15:20,23). He is the first to have risen from the dead, and he represents us in the sense that we will follow him in the resurrection. The fact that Christ represents us is expressed in particular by the phrase that he is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45). Where the first Adam has failed, Christ fulfilled everything. As we were all represented in the first Adam, we are now represented in Christ as the last Adam. He gives new life. He has risen from the dead to live for ever. We will join him as he has given us eternal life and we will live for ever to the glory of God.

Christ interceding for us

After his resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God. This is a glorious teaching that deserves far more attention than it usually receives.⁵ He has entered with the sacrifice of his own blood to secure for us an eternal redemption (Heb 9:12). He is there now for us, interceding for us personally (Rom 8:34). Because of everything he has accomplished, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews states that 'Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25). He can sympathise with our weaknesses as one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:14-16). Even shortly before his death on the cross, he did already pray not only for his disciples who were with

him, but also for us who would believe in him through their word (John 17:20). What a tremendous thought this is: Christ, who was about to suffer and die on the cross already thought of us and prayed for us! And he does this now in heaven because he always lives to do this.

What a tremendous thought this is: Christ, who was about to suffer and die on the cross already thought of us and prayed for us!

As McCheyne said, '... if I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.'⁶

Christ's intercession covers all we need promptly as Gary Brady states, 'When they sin, he will plead for their pardon; when they stand accused, he will vindicate them; when they are afflicted, he will obtain relief

for them; when they are tempted, he will pray their faith will not fail; when they perform their duties diligently; he will gain acceptance with the Father for them.'⁷

For us who believe

Christ does this for us personally as Romans 8:34 implies. But he does this not just for me alone; he does this for all those whom the Father has given him (John 17:6,9,11,20). Christ has saved us to bring us to a restored relationship with God. We are adopted as children of God. We will be one family. All believers are united to Christ, and therefore also to one another. We are not saved as a loose collection of individuals but we are made part of the worldwide church of all ages, the community of faith. The New Testament

² Calvin, *Institutes* III, 1, 1, p 538.

³ Ferguson, S B, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 100-113, 144-152.

⁴ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 100.

⁵ See the excellent book on this topic by Gary Brady, *What Jesus is Doing Now* (Darlington: EP Books, 2012).

⁶ Quoted by Brady, p16.

⁷ Brady, p172.

uses several pictures to express this. We are all part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27); a building consisting of living stones (1 Peter 2:5); a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9); the family or the household of God (1 Tim 3:15).

This is why there are all kinds of people in the church, as the New Testament explains in many places (Rom 4:9-12; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:11; Rev 7:9). We are all in Christ; members of his glorious body. Together we enjoy all spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3-14). Together we testify to the great things of the gospel.

Applications

First, knowing that we belong to Christ implies that we can also know that he represents us before God the Father in heaven. This applies to all of us, whether rich or poor, black or white, male or female, young or old. This not only gives us personal comfort and assurance, but it also strengthens and unites us in our identity as Christians. Even though at times we may not feel represented in this world by the relevant authorities, we are represented in the court of heaven by our risen Lord Jesus Christ. And he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18).

Second, knowing that Christ is always praying for us should be a powerful incentive for us to pray. We can approach the throne of grace with confidence (Heb 4:16; 10:19-20). As long as we are in this world, we are still in a time of need, and we continually need his mercy and grace. We need this not only for ourselves, but for the people around us, for our loved ones, for the church, and for the world.

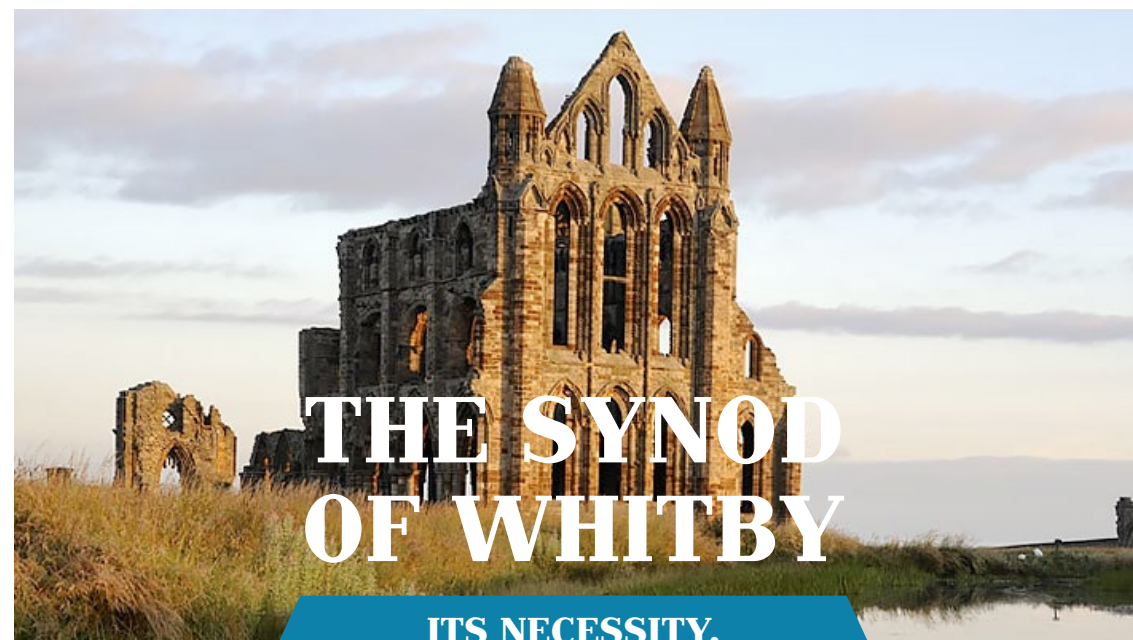
Third, we know that where Christ is, one day we will be with him. The Holy Spirit is also the guarantee of our inheritance (Eph 1:14; Rom 8:16-17).

Fourth, knowing this implies that we can face this sinful and troubled world with the gospel of Christ with confidence. While still in this world, we are witnesses to him proclaiming the gospel of saving grace. Knowing that Christ is exalted in heaven and is interceding for us also implies that we should expect to see the conversion of sinners as Peter links these truths: 'God exalted him at his right hand as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins' (Acts 5:31).

Fifth, knowing that Christ is our representative in heaven also implies that in turn we are now called to represent him in this world. We are the salt and light of this world. This is why Christians are responsible to participate in the affairs of society and to be politically active.⁸

Another example is to provide the biblical antidote to all forms of racism, as has been described in recent articles in *RT* by Ronald Kalifungwa.

Finally, Christ as the head of the church is also referred to as the chief shepherd of the flock. He employs elders as deputy shepherds who are called to shepherd the flock and to exercise oversight but without domineering (1 Peter 5:1-4). Paul emphasises that they need to pay careful attention to all the flock and to care for the church (Acts 20:28-32). They need to exercise the representative headship on behalf of Christ. ■



THE SYNOD OF WHITBY

ITS NECESSITY, SIGNIFICANCE AND LEGACY

As the world celebrated the transition from the year 1999 to 2000, a group of around forty people stood in the cold sea air on top of a cliff on the very edge of the rugged, north-east England coastline at midnight. As they looked down on the famous fishing port, together they sang John Newton's famous hymn, *Amazing Grace*. This writer was among that group overlooking Whitby harbour that night, where in years past Bram Stoker had written his infamous *Dracula* story, and Captain James Cook had set out to discover much of the unknown world. Of more significance though is the scene behind the chilly singers. There you find the English Heritage site of the ruin of

the dominating thirteenth-century Gothic style Benedictine Abbey founded after the Norman Conquest. It was on this very cliff top site in the year 664AD, at Lent, that the Synod of Whitby took place.

Background

The usual reasons and motivations given for calling this landmark meeting are the apparent divisions between two overlapping streams of the church, the Roman and the Celtic. Each group disagreed on the subjects of the date for Easter, monastic haircuts, and other ecclesiastical matters. But that does not paint the whole story.

⁸ See the article by Mostyn Roberts in this issue.

Around two centuries before the events in Whitby the Angles and Saxons had nearly destroyed Celtic Christianity by the sword, driving it back to the western and northern edges of the British Isles. Not many were left on mainland Britain. Those that remained became relatively, but not completely isolated from the rest of the European church. It is certain though that their relationship with Rome suffered not least because of the remoteness of their headquarters on the Scottish island of Iona.

In time, after many changes on each side, the two streams of Christianity began to interact again. Driven by the Roman desire to expand, in the year 597AD a missionary named Augustine arrived on British shores, tasked by Gregory the Great in Rome to bring true Christianity to this distant set of islands on the edge of the Empire. By the year 603AD it was evident that there were problems developing because of those remaining differences between the native Christians and those coming from foreign lands who condemned what they were doing. At the same time they were demanding allegiance to an unknown and unrecognised authority many miles away in Rome. It was a chaotic time as two cultures collided. The Celtic side followed an independent monastic pattern 'rooted in the socio-political structure of Irish society', which was

imported into the north of England by missionary teams. This stood in stark contrast to the approach of Rome which was much more widespread, and in some respects, standardised across Europe. It is interesting to note that on the one side the Celts thought they were being faithful to the historic faith; on the other there was a suspicion that they were heretical, fuelled by their unwillingness to submit to the authority of the newly installed Archbishop of Canterbury, Augustine, or the pre-eminence of Rome. It was said that Celtic Christianity 'belonged in spirit to an earlier tribal age'. The Celtic church with its druidic roots:

At the same time they were demanding allegiance to an unknown and unrecognised authority many miles away in Rome. It was a chaotic time as two cultures collided.

'... affirmed the goodness of creation, encouraged individual freedom of expression, fostered

women's leadership, respected native indigenous traditions, and enjoyed the charismatic vitality of saintly wonderworkers while keeping bishops on hand for necessary sacramental functions.'⁹

In time the Roman missionary endeavour moved north and again began to encounter this different kind of Christianity being actively spread by Celtic monks in the area of Northumbria. In 635AD one of the leaders of this Celtic movement named Aidan began his English mission on the north-east coast island of Lindisfarne, a small, yet beautiful island that at low tide is accessible from the mainland. Thus, Northumbria

had been evangelised by two different missionary waves, which again resulted in a conflict between two fundamentally opposed approaches to spirituality.

Aidan though was highly respected by many as a holy man of God, and it seems that this blunted the desire to address the differences between the two sides until he had died. Bede tells us that 'as long as Aidan lived, people were prepared to put up with the difference, because everybody loved him so'. Once Aidan had left the scene, Colman ultimately became Abbot of Lindisfarne and began actively promoting the Celtic message. This is when the two specific issues that annoyed the Roman side came to a head.

The Topics of the Controversy

Of most importance among the differences was the disagreement over the preeminent Christian festival, Easter, and when it should be celebrated. Interestingly, this was not a new issue, and the Council of Nicaea, convened by Constantine the Great in 325AD, declared that Easter was to be celebrated on the Sunday after Passover. Clearly this had not remained the pattern for both sides. Easter then is the pivotal event in the Christian calendar, and thus in their minds these issues were not just inconvenient. As Bede, writing in the early 8th century, put it: 'This dispute rightly began to trouble the minds and consciences of many people, who feared that they might have received the name of Christian in vain.' Even though there was variance among this remote group, it remains true in general to say that the Celts retained an older way to calculate the date each year determined by the

cycle of the moon, whereas the Roman church, with the help of numerous church councils had now come to a different calculation potentially resulting in dates up to four weeks apart. For the Roman side compromise was not an option, the need for unity was paramount, but on their terms.

Then there was the secondary matter of the tonsure, or the hairstyle for monks. We will see that this does not even seem to have been discussed at the Synod itself, and even the Abbot at that time wrote that 'difference of tonsure does no harm to those who have pure faith in God and true love to their neighbour'.

Another motivation to come to a resolution was political disunity in Northumbria where these problems arose. The king there was called Oswy who followed the Celtic pattern for Easter. But his wife was from the south of the island, and was therefore used to the customs introduced by Augustine of Canterbury. Additionally, he felt pressure from his son who was growing in power, and who disagreed with his stance. Apparently, King Oswy looked ahead and found that on the day he was to celebrate Easter, his wife was celebrating Palm Sunday instead. One was fasting, one was celebrating. This was a cause of embarrassment to the royal family, and Oswy was seriously concerned about the religious differences that were threatening to destabilise both his home and his kingdom.

Strangely, on a more mystical level it is reported that on 1 May 664, there was a total eclipse of the sun, the apparent appearance of the Northern Lights, and

⁹ Arthur G Holder, 'Whitby and All That: The Search for Anglican Origins', *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no 2 (2003) 237.

the first signs of plague were advancing across the kingdom in the north. Some concluded that it was clear that the contentious disagreement between the Celtic and Roman churches as to the proper observance of the most holy day in the Christian calendar had become a source of divine displeasure.

So, these are our two issues, with the first dominating. But the individual matters up for discussion were trivial and somewhat of a Trojan Horse. One historian explains that 'the point at issue was a comparatively small one, but the principle behind it was a big one.' The real issue at stake was the leadership of Iona or Rome. There is a bigger undercurrent to notice as we proceed to look at the events in 664AD. Therefore, for mixed reasons King Oswy and the Roman church wanted the issues finally settled.

1. The Significance of the Debate at the Synod of Whitby

The historian Bede states, 'The controversy being there started, concerning Easter, or the tonsure, or other ecclesiastical affairs, it was agreed, that a synod should be held in the monastery of Streonshalch [Whitby], which signifies the Bay of the Lighthouse, where the Abbess Hilda, a woman devoted to God, then presided; and that there this controversy should be decided.'¹⁰ Why was Whitby chosen as 'the setting for one of the defining episodes in the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon church'?¹¹

Historians tell us that the Whitby headland may have been occupied by a Roman signal station in the third century AD. A few hundred years later in the seventh century a monastery for men and women was founded and ruled over by the renowned Abbess Hilda. It

One historian explains that 'the point at issue was a comparatively small one, but the principle behind it was a big one.'

was known as 'one of the most vital and creative centres of English Christianity in the generation before Bede'. It is Bede himself who informs us that although withdrawn and remote, 'kings and princes came to her for advice', but it was also 'frequented by pious and learned people'. It thus became one of the most important religious destinations in the Anglo-Saxon world. Importantly, this was a second monastic

centre of Celtic Christianity in the north-east of England, located just over one hundred miles south of Lindisfarne. Thus, Hilda was firmly in the Irish monastic tradition with King Oswy, making this prestigious location anything but a neutral venue for the synod.

Most of the information we have on this event comes from the pen of the Venerable Bede. It is he, who in the following generation describes the narrative in what turns out to be a very pro-Roman way. For him the universality of the Church of Rome is a vital issue, 'itself heir to the apostolic tradition of conversion of the Gentile world'. He sets the background to this controversy by saying, 'At this time a great and

frequent controversy happened about the observance of Easter; those that came from Kent or France affirming, that the Scots kept Easter Sunday contrary to the custom of the universal church.' He then follows this by specifically focusing on only the discussion on the date for Easter.

The synod began with an introduction by the king who explained to the attendees the benefits of 'uniformity of custom', and a united faith. The key question for him was, which of these positions is the 'truest tradition'? We are then introduced to the main contenders. On the Roman side were Agilbert, James the deacon now of York, and the dynamic Wilfrid of Ripon. On the Celtic side were Colman of Lindisfarne, Hilda and Cedd.

Each side went on to describe its own practice and crucially its origin. Colman, for the Celts, is recorded to have led with their strongest argument that their pattern 'is the same which St John the Evangelist, the disciple beloved of our Lord, with the churches over which he presided, is recorded to have observed.' The king then turned to the Frenchman, Agilbert, bishop of the West Saxons on the Roman side in order to allow him to speak to 'show whence his custom of keeping Easter was derived, or on what authority it was grounded.' However, Wilfrid pleaded the Roman side because of the language limitations of his superior. He took to the stage in a confident, and sadly insulting and scornful manner. He had travelled to Rome, he had the Roman style tonsure, and was described as 'more Roman than the Romans themselves.' He was a 'clever and resolute man, of great energy and devotion, of wide experience

and restricted views.' Interestingly Wilfrid was educated at Lindisfarne, the Celtic stronghold, and home of his competitors, a place that was suspicious of anything that came from Rome. Maybe that is why some generously call this an argument between friends. He proceeded to outline the pattern followed throughout the rest of Christianity, recounting his own travels. He presented a picture of 'all the world, wherever the church of Christ is spread abroad, through several nations and tongues, at one and the same time; except only these and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who foolishly, in these two remote islands of the world, and only in part even of them, oppose all the rest of the universe.'

Colman responded to Wilfrid by saying that it was strange that they would be criticised for following the Apostle John. By implication Colman seemed to be implying that Wilfrid was in some way slighting the Apostle himself. Wilfrid immediately denied this and sought to explain that John followed a particular calendar because he was 'pursuant to the custom of the law', specifically the Jewish law. Thus, he did not deny the fact that the Celts were supported by John, but rather that he was following, albeit innocently, an outdated system which over time had been replaced. With Wilfrid's example of the circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16:3, it may even be that he was arguing that John followed this pattern so as not to cause a stumbling block to the Jews who were coming to believe. It seems that the Apostle John celebrated Easter on the fourteenth day of the first month, in the evening. This naturally could be

¹⁰ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (Mobile, ALA: R E Publications, 1983) 197.

¹¹ Buy Guidebook: Whitby Abbey - English Heritage, n.d., <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/books-media/books/guidebooks/guidebook-whitby-abbey> (accessed 6 September 2015).

on any day of the week. But referring to the resurrection of Christ that first Easter Day, and pointing simultaneously to Peter preaching in Rome Wilfrid explained that:

‘He (Peter) understood that Easter ought to be observed, so as always to stay till the rising of the moon on the fourteenth day of the first moon, in the evening, according to the custom and precepts of the law, even as John did. And when that came, if the Lord’s day, then called the first day after the Sabbath, was the next day, he began that very evening to keep Easter, as we all do at this day. But if the Lord’s day did not fall the next morning after the fourteenth moon, but on the sixteenth or seventeenth, or any other moon till the twenty-first, he waited for that, and on the Saturday before, in the evening, began to observe the holy solemnity of Easter.’¹²

Powerfully, Wilfrid went on to argue that the Apostle John would agree with this as well as Peter. The point he was making was that Colman himself was incorrect to say that they followed John, whilst at the same time knowingly contradicting Peter. Effectively he was wrong in every respect, following neither the law nor the gospel, unkindly implying that Colman did not know what he was talking about.

Seemingly, in desperation Colman went on to point to examples of godly men in his own tradition such as the revered Columba. His attitude seemed to be that because of their faith, signs and miracles

it would buttress the Celtic argument. Apparently, this placing of good living above doctrine and discipline was characteristic of the Irish. Wilfrid went on to show how one of the men Colman used as an example actually left the Celtic calendar. For the rest he gave two alternatives, that they were unsaved or simply wrong. Firstly, referring to the signs and miracles as evidence of being right he quoted Matthew 7:21-23 saying that they may never have been true believers. Secondly, he says, in a rather demeaning manner, ‘I do not deny those to have been God’s servants, and beloved by him, who with rustic simplicity, but pious intentions, have themselves loved him.’ Columba in Wilfrid’s estimation thus erred because of lack of knowledge. He went on to tell the synod that he believed that if a catholic adviser had come and explained this to them then Columba and his colleagues would have understood and accepted it. However, he did not think it was ‘seriously harmful’¹³ whilst they were unaware of the unity of practice elsewhere in the church. Based on the same reasoning Wilfrid then addressed the Celtic side and told them that now this had been explained to them they would be in sin if they did not conform. He told them that the decrees of the Apostolic See (which has the authority of its founder), the universal church, and the Scriptures all agree. Again, in a belittling manner described as a ‘loud invective’ he said, ‘Do you think that their small number, in a corner of the remotest island, is to be preferred before the universal church of Christ throughout the world?’

Then came the final nail in the coffin as Wilfrid addressed the Celtic side’s most compelling pillar of argumentation, and played his own trump card. He again turned to the Apostle Peter, ‘the most blessed prince of the apostles’, as a supporter of the Roman practice. He effectively asked how even a mighty saint of old in ‘the great man’ Columba on the Celtic side could be compared to Peter, when Jesus Christ said to him in Matthew 16:18-19, ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ Wilfrid here sets up an unfair contest, one on one between Columba and the Apostle Peter. It was at this point that the king ‘cleverly’ stepped in and had both men agree that these were the words of Christ.

At the same time Colman acknowledged that even his best examples did not have this equality of authority. Thus, based on this one agreed point, the authority of Peter alone having the keys of heaven given to him by the Lord, the king used this as the grounds to side with Rome, the universal church, whilst apparently smiling a little according to Bede. They therefore renounced the ‘more imperfect institution’ on the Celtic side, and resolved to follow the ‘better’, that of the universal church. It is suggested by many that the reason for the decision was because the king was literally ‘not prepared to be turned away from the gates of heaven by St Peter’, but there seems to be more complexity involved.

The historian Carpenter brands as unreasonable the final basis that King Oswy gave for this decision because it was an ‘irrelevant and forcible argument’. He says it is ‘trivial and unreal’, and it was a ‘genius diversion’. Another says that ‘many learned arguments were brought forward, astronomical, theological, historical, but, as is so often the case with a primitive people, an utterly inconclusive point at last carried the day.’ Yet another questions the theology behind this decision by referring to a different Augustine, Augustine of Hippo, who took the view that Peter is the church, Christ is the rock and ‘all the apostles are recipients of the keys of the kingdom of heaven’,¹⁴ naturally including the Apostle John.

James Ussher puts it down to the simplicity of King Oswy, and Foxe remarks that the decision turned ‘upon this simple and rude reason of the king’, arguing that the actual points of controversy at Whitby were not very important, but what was important was the enforcement of papal authority. Finally, another historian wonders whether this way of closing the debate reveals that the king’s mind was made up beforehand. He was simply looking for an easy way out. It is not difficult to conclude that Oswy’s declaration is simply absurd, but nevertheless resulted in a landmark victory for Rome. For Bede, possibly showing his own bias, this is a ‘doctrinal dispute within a wider framework, as an issue between orthodoxy and schism, which ends, rightly but tragically, in the victory of orthodoxy’.

¹² Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (Mobile, ALA: R E Publications, 1983) 200.

¹³ ‘Bede’s World, Early Christianity in the British Isles,’ *Road to Emmaus* 8, no 3 (2007) 24.

¹⁴ Arthur G Holder, ‘Whitby and All That: The Search for Anglican Origins,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no 2 (2003) 240.

2. The Legacy of the Synod of Whitby

There are those who question the significance of the events in Whitby as Bede is criticised for investing this event with 'a larger and more entirely religious significance than it in reality possessed'. But many point to this event as the beginning of the Christian era, 'a defining moment for Anglican spirituality', 'a landmark in the history of the church in England', or 'the turning point in the ecclesiastical history of England'. Others assert, 'It is not too dramatic to say that [at Whitby] the spiritual fate of our land was decided', or that it 'determined the future course of the English Church.'

Some argue that because Rome was once again in charge, it gave strength and unity to the church, and resulted in effective organisation and governance. But more significantly it is pointed out that now, 'England brought herself in touch with the blood-stream of the Catholic Church and could henceforth play her full part in Christendom.' Another asserts that, 'The decision at Whitby was to prove momentous, not only for England, nor for Europe, but for the future of the whole Christian cause.'¹⁵ Quite a claim!

Certainly the decision brought the English Church into closer contact with the Continent. Support for the Roman way grew, and the Pope's authority was gradually established over the church in the British Isles. Everything in the church's structure and theological life would begin to change from this point. Lindisfarne, which had been identified

with Irish-Celtic spirituality, had become outmoded overnight and instead York became the hub of theological and ecclesiological thought and activity.

The losers were not punished, but simply allowed to leave in order to conform. This signalled the beginning of the end in some respects, the death knell, or the turning of the tide against Celtic practices. One writer says that, 'although the Celtic churches did not immediately acquiesce in the decision, the council's decree eventually united the English church.'

3. Conclusion

The Synod of Whitby may have been one of the most important ecclesiastical gatherings in the history of the English church. Yes, Wilfrid was victorious but it is noted that he 'lost the affection of the public', because of the manner in which he tackled those who were perceived as brothers in Christ on matters that were of secondary importance in order to achieve an underlying primary goal. Whether right or wrong, this was a disappointing development in the Roman approach too. Years earlier it is recorded that 'Pope Gregory the Great wrote a letter to Augustine, whom he had sent as a Roman missionary to Anglo-Saxons in the south, asking him to respect local customs, but nothing of that spirit characterised the Synod of Whitby.' Though the decision itself was made on tenuous grounds, we can observe that 'even at this early date, the doctrine of Apostolic Succession was wielded with heavy hands, with the threat of being found opposing Peter being a



Whitby Abbey ruins, Yorkshire

terrifying proposition for King Oswy.' But as we saw, even that was a motivation that has been questioned, as some suggest that Oswy was merely using this opportunity as a political manoeuvre where he could unite his court, please his queen, garner support from the Archbishop of Canterbury in his power struggles against the king of Mercia, and outflank his son's potential rebellion, all in one fell swoop. It is true that there were many motivations behind the synod, the decision, and even behind the way it was recorded. We therefore have to be cautious in our conclusions because our perception of its significance may be unduly influenced by a Bede who gives a lot of space in his historical record to an event that happened in his own locality, that ends with a result he agrees with.

The debate about Easter did not die completely in Whitby, and to say that Whitby brought unity for all the church in England is far too simplistic, as is saying this was the end for the Celtic strand

of the church. For good or bad, it was 'influential in bringing England within the mainstream of Christendom with its administrative advantages and theological dangers for the next eight and three-quarter centuries.' It was then that our ever-sovereign God used the Reformer Martin Luther and others to bring a church, that had evolved much in the intervening period, back again to Scripture as the final and sole authority in all matters. Rightly he highlighted that God's perfect Word alone should be the deciding factor in leading the church, not a pope, a clever debater, a mystical monk, or a fickle king. That is the truth, and the only rock we should all be standing on, the beginning and ending point of all debates, however seemingly trivial at the time. It is the only inerrant, infallible, and inspired primary source.

Rightly he highlighted that God's perfect Word alone should be the deciding factor in leading the church, not a pope, a clever debater, a mystical monk, or a fickle king.

David Woollin, a graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, is Sales and Marketing Manager for Reformation Heritage Books, and Assistant to Dr Joel R Beeke. He resides in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

¹⁵ John Foster, 'Synod of Whitby, AD 664: its missionary and ecumenical significance,' *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 189 (October 1964) 312.

INDEPENDENCY AND INTER-DEPENDENCY:

ASSOCIATIONS OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES YESTERDAY AND TODAY

In June 1784 Andrew Fuller was due to preach in Nottingham. He travelled there from his home in Kettering on horseback. Heavy rain had caused flooding and, at one point, the waters seemed so deep that he was reluctant to proceed. 'Go on, sir', said a resident, 'you are quite safe.' Fuller obediently urged his horse into the water, but when the flood reached his saddle, he began to have second thoughts. 'Go on, sir', repeated the man, 'all is right'. Fuller continued and made his way safely out of the flood and on to his appointment in Nottingham.

The event at which he was due to preach that evening was the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist churches. This association had been formed about twenty years previously and covered

churches from an area much wider than just Northamptonshire, extending to Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire in the east, Stafford and Nottingham in the north and west and Buckingham and Hertford in the south. By the time that Fuller was braving the flood waters to preach at the 1784 meeting, the association had been meeting regularly, though not always annually, and had grown significantly in numbers – for the 1774 meetings in Carlton in Bedfordshire, the preachers had the glass removed from a large window in the church so that they could stand to preach in the window space to the crowds gathered outside as well as to those within. At the 1776 meetings, held in Olney, the initial gathering for ministers was attended by forty-six men and the meetings on the following two days, which were open to all, had to

be held in the open air and attracted a congregation of several hundred. On the evening of the final day, the preacher was the evangelical Anglican John Newton, indicating the catholicity of the organisers of the Baptist Association.

The meeting for which Fuller braved the floods in 1784 was to prove particularly significant. Apparently, as a result of his watery journey, Fuller chose as his text for the meeting 2 Corinthians 5:7, 'We walk by faith, not by sight.' He had recently been reading Jonathan Edwards's call to regular united prayer for revival, pithily entitled *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time*, first published in 1747. With this on his mind, Fuller in his sermon issued an appeal for 'earnest and united prayer' for 'an outpouring of God's Spirit upon our ministers and churches', not only the Particular Baptists but on 'all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours', quoting 1 Corinthians 1:2.

As an immediate and direct result of Fuller's sermon, John Sutcliff suggested to the meeting that they had heard the Holy Spirit speaking to them and proposed that they therefore resolve that the churches represented at the meeting begin monthly prayer meetings for the outpouring of

the Spirit – not just in their own churches but, as Fuller had urged in his sermon, on all the churches that belonged to Jesus Christ. Sutcliff also proposed that prayer be made for 'the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe'. Churches of other denominations were to be welcome to join in these prayer meetings. The proposal was endorsed by the churches represented and, as a result, many regular prayer meetings were started up. These meetings were surely a vital factor, in the providence of God, leading up to the missionary work of William Carey and others towards the end of the century.

The events just described are expertly related by Michael Haykin in his superb work, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington:

Evangelical Press, 1994), in which many of the principles expounded in this article are described and exemplified. Haykin's account depicts in a striking manner the depth and reality of the fellowship and love which existed among the Particular Baptists of late eighteenth-century Northamptonshire and the surrounding regions. It is difficult to resist, on reading the volume, that here was something to be sought after and emulated in inter-church relationships today.

1. History

Associations of Particular Baptist churches were not invented, however, in the late eighteenth century. They first came into being in the seventeenth century, not very

THE MEETING
FOR WHICH
FULLER
BRAVED THE
FLOODS IN
1784 WAS
TO PROVE
PARTICULARLY
SIGNIFICANT

long after the emergence of the Particular Baptist movement itself. By the middle of the eighteenth century, they had all but petered out, thus necessitating a restart towards the end of that century.

For many Baptists, views on the church appear to be restricted almost entirely to the autonomy of the local church. Though believing firmly in the church universal, Baptists may tend to the view that the only true and biblical expression of the church is the local church, which is self-governing and over which no other person or body has any power or authority. Thus associations of churches or other bodies in which more than one local church meet have no more than an informal and pragmatic usefulness. Conferences, fraternal, joint training projects, mission agencies, seminaries and so on are all no doubt useful and good things, but have no real foundation in Scripture – not, at least, in any sense similar to the very clear biblical basis for the local church. On this view, it is entirely up to the discretion of the local church, and particularly its pastor and elders, whether to attend or be part of such organisations and events.

The Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century saw things very differently. For them, participation in associations was emphatically not an optional extra; it was an obligation, a duty required by Scripture. As Ernest Payne put it, for our early forefathers, a local church 'must be in communion with other local churches. That is an essential

part of its churchmanship.' He went on: 'Associations, Synods, Unions and Assemblies of churches are not to be regarded as optional and secondary. They are the necessary expression of Christian fellowship, a necessary manifestation of the church visible. The local congregation is not truly a church if it lives an entirely separate life.'¹⁶ This statement, if accurate, demonstrates that in its understanding of the doctrine and practice of the church, the Baptist movement today largely differs significantly from its forebears of the seventeenth century.

Is Payne's statement accurate? Did seventeenth-century Particular Baptists believe that, in participating in their associations, they were not simply doing something good and useful but fulfilling a biblically-mandated duty? The evidence clearly supports a positive answer to that question. The First London Baptist Confession of 1644, agreed between representatives of seven Particular Baptist churches in London, states that individual local churches, 'though distinct and severall Bodies, every one a compact and knit Citie in it selfe; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all meanes convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needfull affaires of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head'. This short statement seeks to preserve the autonomy of each local church – each such church is 'a compact and knit Citie in it selfe' – whilst upholding three vital truths which go beyond the boundaries of any one local church:

- » they are to have unity in doctrine and practice: they are 'to walk by one and the same Rule';
 - » they are to help one another: they are 'to have the counsel and help one of another in all needfull affaires of the Church'; and
 - » they are to act as 'members of one body in the common faith under Christ'.
- » providing advice in doubtful matters and controversies (Acts 15);
 - » relief of poverty (Rom 15:26f.);
 - » sending gifted brethren [ie preachers] for edification of churches in need (Acts 11:22);
 - » joint carrying-on of works common to the churches (2 Cor 8:19);
 - » watching over each other for good in matters of doctrine;
 - » exercise of love and good conversation as members of the same body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12, 29).

These are stated as duties and not as options. Similar statements can be found in the records of the meetings of the associations. The Midlands Association of Particular Baptist churches, at its second meeting on 26 June 1656, adopted a statement that, although 'distinct churches and assemblies of Zion', they were under a 'duty to hold a close communion each to other as the Lord shall give opportunity and ability, endeavouring that we may all increase more and more in faith and knowledge and in all purity and holiness to the honour of our God'.¹⁷ A similar statement can be found in the records of the Abingdon Association meeting of 1653. If associating is a duty, not simply a useful option, for local churches, what objectives are such associations to seek to meet? The statements of the Midlands and the Abingdon Associations, to which reference has just been made, provide a clear answer. The Midlands Association statement of 1656 gave the following list of objectives with supporting biblical texts:

Similar statements from other associations and in the writings of Baptist pastors of the time give remarkably similar lists, with similar proof texts.

How were these principles put into practice? There exist records of association meetings of churches in Wales from 1650, the Midlands from 1655, the West Country from 1653 and Abingdon from 1652. There were also from time to time national meetings of associations. These records show, for example:

- » the establishment in 1689 of a fund for supporting the training of ministers and for the relief of poor ministers;
- » the discussion of theological questions, as well as more practical questions affecting the life of the churches, making clear that the conclusions were not binding upon individual local churches;
- » the appointment of an individual, Thomas Collier, in the south-west, seemingly to be involved in church

¹⁶ E A Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1952), pp 26, 27.

¹⁷ B. White, 'The Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists', *Baptist History & Heritage* 25 (1990): 39-47, 207.

planting and also to exercise some kind of representative role on behalf of the Western Association – presumably in a non-authoritative capacity – in relation to the churches in that region;

- » attempts at the resolution of disputes within a church, for example where relationships broke down in the church at Bromsgrove in 1696, between the pastor John Eckells and the church members; or in the case of a split in the church at Broughton which was referred to the Hampshire Association which interviewed both sides involved and gave its advice.

Other examples from the records could be given. The Abingdon Association in the 1650s considered:

- » whether believers should marry unbelievers and what the consequences and implications of such a marriage might be;
- » how to deal with members under discipline who seek to join another church;
- » whether a particular church with members from a wide geographical area should split into two churches or continue as one;
- » encouragement to churches to meet for prayer and fasting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit;
- » whether churches should pay the tithes required by law to support the local clergy;

- » whether members should be buried in the parish churchyard;
- » whether all the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the NT are still available.

Thus the early Particular Baptists believed it to be the duty of their churches to meet together, by their representatives, in regional and national associations, for defined purposes based on scriptural example from the New Testament

Through careful discussion of these and many other subjects of doctrinal and practical importance, the churches sought to hammer out a common position which would give cohesion to their movement and strengthen their sense of inter-dependence.

Thus the early Particular Baptists believed it to be the duty of their churches to meet together, by their representatives, in regional and national associations, for defined purposes based on scriptural example from

the New Testament. All of this was drawn together in the wording of Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession, paragraphs 14 and 15:

14. As each *Church*, and all the Members of it, are bound to pray continually, for the good and prosperity of all the *Churches* of Christ, in all places; and upon all occasions to further it (every one within the bounds of their places, and callings, in the Exercise of their Gifts and Graces) so the Churches (when planted by the providence of God so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it) ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.

15. In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of Doctrine, or Administration; wherein either the Churches in general are concerned, or any one Church in their peace, union, and edification; or any member, or members, of any Church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth, and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many Churches holding communion together, do by their messengers meet to consider, and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any Churches, or Persons; or to impose their determination on the Churches, or Officers.

These paragraphs refer to churches 'holding communion' together. What is meant by this? Is it simply what we might call 'fellowship', that is informal contacts with more or less regular joint meetings of various kinds, or does it mean formal association?¹⁸ James M Renihan has conducted a detailed historical study of the meaning of the phrase in this context and has come to the unequivocal conclusion that what was meant was indeed formal association. Without going through all the evidence which he adduces, that conclusion is clearly consistent with what has already been seen of the beliefs of the early Particular Baptists as to the duty of associating. Renihan's conclusion is confirmed by the

incidental reference in paragraph 15 of chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession, to the 'messengers assembled', clearly indicating that the framers of the Confession had in mind formal association meetings rather than informal connections.

The Confession in paragraph 14 of chapter 26 thus places on local churches a clear obligation ('so the Churches ... ought') to 'hold communion amongst themselves' (paragraph 14). That obligation is limited, according to paragraph 14, by various practical factors, specifically:

- » geography: 'every one within the bounds of their places and callings';
- » opportunity: 'when planted by the providence of God so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it'; and
- » gifts: 'in the Exercise of their Gifts and Graces'.

Nevertheless, the statement of obligation to associate is clear.

The objectives of such association, or communion, are stated broadly in paragraph 14 as being the churches' 'peace, increase of love, and mutual edification', and in paragraph 15 the resolution of difficulties and disputes, it being made clear that associations have no power to impose any solution on the churches and that any conclusions to which they come are offered by way of advice only. Having said that, it is notable how wide-ranging the remit of paragraph 15 is. It covers not only doctrinal disputes, but differences in practical questions:

¹⁸ James M Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705* (Paternoster, 2008), ch 6.

'Administration'. It applies not only when a number of churches differ among themselves, but also when 'any one Church' is injured in its 'peace, union, and edification', and even in cases within a church where 'any member, or members' are 'injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth, and order'. Any such matter may be thus brought before the assembly and debated by the messengers at the assembly and the advice of the assembly given and, be it noted, 'reported to all the Churches concerned'.

This, to most twenty-first-century Baptist eyes, goes very far. Many today are more used to the idea that disputes in a church are to be settled exclusively within the church and that there is no appeal in the Baptist system against the decisions of the local church in such matters. We fear that anything beyond that, involving other churches, brings us perilously close to Presbyterianism. The difficulty, of course, is precisely that which the Presbyterians bring against Baptists, that is, that danger of local popery – the tyranny of a minister or a small group of elders against which there is no appeal even where they are obviously in the wrong. The framers of the 1689 Confession sought to address this evil by enabling such disputes to have a wider airing, without compromising the principle of local church self-government. Everyone can have their say in a forum which is removed from the dangers of bias, personality and favouritism which may be present in the individual church concerned. The possibility of the findings being 'reported to all the Churches' provides an incentive to comply with the assembly's view, or indeed to find a way of avoiding the matter coming before

the assembly in the first place. All in all, paragraph 15 provides an excellent counter-balance to the possibility of local church tyranny while preserving the biblical principle of local church autonomy.

In summary, then, the Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century believed it to be their duty to meet together in association, with the objectives of:

- » financial support to poorer churches;
- » joint projects for the furtherance of the gospel;
- » provision of preachers to needy churches;
- » doctrinal unity;
- » resolution of disputes;
- » generally acting for each other's good out of love.

2. Bible

This is all well and good, but are these views biblically justified? Does the Bible in fact require churches to meet and work together in some manner?

The argument for a negative answer to this question is that the New Testament nowhere expressly requires this. That is true. Of course, the same could be said of church membership, and often is by those who do not wish to join formally in membership in a local church. In response, the New Testament by implication clearly requires churches in some manner to maintain a membership system: for example, in order to exercise the kind of church discipline which the New Testament envisages, it is necessary to know who belongs to the church and has thus brought themselves under the authority of the church in that regard and for that reason

some kind of membership system is necessary (1 Cor 5:1-12; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:29-30). In addition, the call to Christians to recognise and obey the elders of the local church implies that these Christians have an established relationship to this church (1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17).

A similar argument may be made for associations – not that they have to be called associations or that they necessarily mirror precisely the form of the early Particular Baptist Associations, but that in some manner or other, there ought to exist among local churches what the 1689 Confession calls 'communion', understood as a structured bond between individual churches whereby they act together in certain defined areas.

This is argued from:

First, the high level of communication between the churches in the NT – it is clear that, even in those pre-digital, pre-telegraphy days, before the existence of any organised, regular postal system, the churches across Italy, Achaia, Asia and the eastern Mediterranean kept one another informed of their activities and their needs and that messengers travelled often between them: named individuals at the church in, probably, Corinth send their greetings via Paul when the latter writes to the church in Rome (Rom 16:16, 21-23); the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul in prison in, probably, Rome, when they heard of his needs (Phil 2:25-30);

there was clearly a close relationship between the churches in Colosse and Laodicea (Col 4:16); and so on (eg Acts 14:26-28; 15:3-4; 21:17-19; 1 Cor 16:19-20; Phil 4:21-22; Col 4:7-15; Heb 13:24; 1 Peter 5:13; 2 John 13; 3 John 15).

Second, the examples in the New Testament of joint action or representation between

churches – the early Baptists pointed most often to references to 'the churches' (plural) of, for example, Galatia (Gal 1:2) and Judea (Gal 1:22) and the seven churches of Asia (Rev 1:11); some other letters were also written to groups of churches in a particular region (1 Peter 1:1; Col 4:16). In addition, there is a large number of examples of mutual support and the movement of preachers and other helpers in the work of the gospel between churches (Acts 11:19-30; 15:32-33; 21:10; Rom 16:1-2; 1 Cor 16:10-12, 17-18; 2 Cor 8:16-19; Phil 1:3-5;

2:25-30; 4:10-18; 3 John 5-8) including the collection raised among the churches for the relief of the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-29). And however precisely one understands it, the settlement of theological differences at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

No one of these texts on its own clinches the argument, but the frequency with which some kind of contact between different churches of the New Testament is mentioned, coupled with their acting together for certain specific purposes

ALL THESE FACTORS TOGETHER SEEM TO INDICATE A STRONG, REGULAR, DEEPLY-HELD AND VALUED MUTUAL COMMITMENT AMONG THE CHURCHES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

(often similar to those for which the early Baptists associated together) and the strong impression that, in some sense, the churches of the New Testament viewed themselves as accountable to one another in some degree, belonging to one another such that they should help each other where they could and should join together where they can to help others; and with sufficient interest in one another to keep each other informed of their affairs and, where necessary, meet to try to resolve controversies and differences which arise in church life; all these factors together seem to indicate a strong, regular, deeply-held and valued mutual commitment among the churches of the New Testament, such as is not necessarily seen existing among the Reformed Baptist churches of the twenty-first century.

These objectives need not, therefore, be achieved by means of associations on the model of seventeenth-century Particular Baptist Associations, but the strong mutual interest and inter-dependency which the New Testament churches clearly felt in the first century needs to be taken much more seriously by Baptist churches today, such that they seek in a structured and concrete manner to express a similar bond in their relations among themselves.

3. Theology

But there is more that needs to be said. The subject needs to be examined, not simply from individual texts and passages, but from the whole teaching of Scripture on the nature of the church – in other words, theologically as well as biblically.

All Christians believe in the unity of the church: that there is one church universal of which Jesus Christ is the head. The question is, should that oneness be expressed visibly in any form and if so in what form? This is a question to which John Owen gave some thought and, through his treatise *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, published in 1689,¹⁹ was, it seems, influential on Baptists of that time. Owen was quite clear that there was an obligation on individual churches to find means of expressing in concrete form church unity among them.

Owen adduced a number of inter-connected arguments in support of this proposition. Firstly, he argued from the relationship between the church universal and individual local churches. He wrote, 'True gospel churches ought to hold communion among themselves, or with each other, as unto all the ends of their institution and order, for these are the same in all.' The objective of the church universal was 'the edification of the body of Christ in general', the means by which that edification is to be achieved is, he said, 'committed jointly and severally unto all particular churches'. Therefore, he continued, it must be the case that the individual churches need to act together, in order to fulfil the overall objective of the church universal: 'They are obliged unto mutual communion among themselves; which is their consent, endeavour, and conjunction, in and for the promotion of the edification of the catholic church, and therein their own, as they are parts and members of it.'²⁰

Secondly, Owen argued from the fact that we live in a post-apostolic age. In the New Testament it is the apostles, particularly Paul, who directed the churches, including the joint efforts of the churches to help and benefit one another. However, there are apostles no longer. Thus the only way of 'supplying churches' defects' after the death of the apostles (2 Cor 11:28) is by 'the equal communion of churches among themselves'. Christ has deliberately arranged that no church on its own is able 'always and in all instances to attain all the ends for which they are appointed, with respect unto the edification of the church catholic'. This is so that, just as they are all activated and bound in union by one Spirit, they may be compelled to use their gifts and graces for the good of all. So it is that '*the mutual communion of particular churches* amongst themselves, in an equality of power and order, though not of gifts and usefulness, is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, after the death of the apostles, for the attaining the general end of all particular churches, which is the edification of the church catholic, in faith, love, and peace'. Practical realities of geography and ease of communication restrict the actual exercise of this duty, but even so 'all places being made pervious by navigation', it is not impossible for some visible evidence of worldwide communion to exist. This is the only true Catholicism.²¹

Thirdly, Owen argued from the union of all true churches in the Lord Jesus Christ. The true bond of union between particular churches is (not the pope or the hierarchy or order of an established church, but)

'that they have all one and the same God and Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith and one doctrine of faith, one hope of their calling, or the promised inheritance, one regeneration, one baptism, one bread and wine, and are united unto God and Christ in one Spirit, through the bond of faith and love'.²²

Christ is the head and fount of this union (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19; 2 Thess 1:1). The bond of this union is the Holy Spirit, acting in them 'by faith and love'. 'This is the kingly, royal, beautiful union of the church: Christ, as the only head of influence and rule, bringing it into a relation unto himself as his body, communicating of his Spirit unto it, governing it by the law of his word, enabling it unto all the duties of faith, love, and holiness.'²³

This union is expressed, firstly, in a common faith by the profession of a common doctrine in the essentials. It is also expressed in a common practice, that of prayer, and in the administration of the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Table. All profess a subjection to Christ and his laws. These together express the true communion of the churches. It is, for Owen, clear that such communion is meaningless if it is not expressed in the reality of the lives of the individual churches which are so bound together.

Owen is clear, however, that the means whereby this union is to be expressed is not outward acts of ritual or through hierarchies. The outward acts of mutual communion which evidence the spiritual

¹⁹ John Owen, *Works*, Vol 16 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), pp 3-208.

²⁰ *Works*, 16:183.

²¹ *Works*, 16:184, 185. ²² *Works*, 16:189. ²³ *Works*, 16:190.

union of the churches consist, argued Owen, in advice and assistance. Advice is provided through 'the meetings of diverse churches by their messengers or delegates, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concern unto them all by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them.' The need and basis for actual meetings arise from: the light of nature; the union which churches enjoy (as shown above), so that 'none of them is or can be complete absolutely without a joint acting with other members of the same body unto the common good of the whole, as occasion doth require', which can take place 'no otherwise but by common advice and counsel', which has to involve 'convention in synods by their messengers and delegates' – letters alone are insufficient, actual conference, as in Acts 15, is necessary.²⁴

REFORMATION
IN THIS VITAL
AREA SEEMS
ESSENTIAL.
WHAT THEN
SHOULD BE
DONE?

to place all their emphasis upon the independence of the local church and to relegate inter-church relationships to the optional is a serious ecclesiological deficiency. Reformation in this vital area seems essential. What then should be done?

4. Practical implications

Helpful as they can be, fraternal do not fulfil these responsibilities. Fraternal tend to be focused on the needs of the pastors and others who meet in them. They are not meetings of churches and are not

aimed at the kinds of objectives which were of concern to the Particular Baptist Associations or which John Owen had in mind in his discussion of the subject. Fraternal can be excellent, but they do not fulfil the churches' responsibilities to 'hold communion' among themselves, as the 1689 Confession puts it.

Neither is the answer necessarily to use the seventeenth-century Particular Baptist Associations as a pattern, attractive though that may be. The situation today is very different. The early Particular Baptists emerged in the first part of the seventeenth century from Congregationalism into a landscape where theological differences among Protestant churches were probably less serious than they are today, in many ways, and where ecclesiological lines were much more clearly cut: a church, if not Church of England, would be likely to be fairly

clearly Presbyterian, Congregational or Baptist. Hence it was fairly easy to decide with whom to associate. Today, it is not so straightforward. There was an acceptance for the most part in the late seventeenth century that different views among Particular Baptists over membership and the Lord's Table should not prevent association – sadly, that does not seem to be the case today where, after the intense battles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on the subject, open and closed communion and membership can, it would seem, be more of a stumbling block to close fellowship of the kind under discussion.

Then there is the existence of other inter-church associations among conservative evangelical churches: the FIEC and the Gospel Partnerships are the obvious examples. These are formal arrangements, of differing extent, which seek to meet some, at least, of the aims of inter-church communion which have been explored in this article. These helpfully express the catholicity and non-sectarian outlook which were displayed in the Northamptonshire Association of the eighteenth century. However, it may also be that in such groupings questions of ecclesiology, important to many today, are downplayed too much. This might drive some to determine that the way forward is a true Particular Baptist Association or series of regional associations – open to all Baptist churches which are confessionally Reformed, with no strictures on issues of admittance to the Lord's Table. But is that not simply to multiply associations to little profit?

There is probably no perfect solution. Different people will reach different conclusions as to the best way forward for

them. A practical way forward, therefore, would be:

- » prayerfully to consider these matters from scripture and, if convinced by the argument of this paper, to seek to take action in the local church and with other churches in the same area;
- » and so to join with other churches in the area in a formal, structured manner of some kind, by which something of the wider nature of the Christian church is recognised and some, at least, of the objectives of the Baptist Associations described in this article are met.

One method whereby progress in this whole area may be assessed is by looking at the various objectives which the early associations sought to meet. By way of reminder, the objectives of the Midland Association, according to its statement of 1656, were:

1. providing advice in doubtful matters and controversies (Acts 15);
2. relief of poverty (Rom 15:26f.);
3. sending gifted brethren (ie preachers) for edification of churches in need (Acts 11:22);
4. joint underaking of works common to the churches (2 Cor 8:19);
5. watching over each other for good in matters of doctrine;
6. exercise of love and good conversation as members of the same body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12, 29).

Some of these things, no doubt, are achieved informally and on an ad hoc basis, usually arranged as between

²⁴ Works, 16:195.

the pastors of the churches concerned. This would include the provision of preachers for churches in need (no. 3, above). Some things are done through more formal means, particularly through Gospel Partnership or FIEC groupings: for example, joint teaching programmes or joint church planting exercises (no 4). Through church giving, financial help is provided to needy churches, though again on an ad hoc and informal basis (no 2). Through the exchange of news and joint prayer meetings, churches are aware to some extent of what other churches, particularly those in the same region, are doing, and so show love and concern one for another in that way (no 6). Where there is less activity – indeed probably almost none – is on any question of the doctrine or practice of individual churches (nos 1 and 5). The early Baptists, and John Owen, would have regarded such an attitude as a dereliction of the duty which churches owe one another in the bonds of Jesus Christ and to be of very serious concern. The closest that many churches today come to addressing this is when a church in need or difficulty decides to appoint a moderator to help out, but that falls far short of what the associations envisaged. And in all cases, the approach today tends to be ad hoc, informal and very keen above all else to preserve the autonomy and independence of the local church. In this, Baptists today are undoubtedly falling far short of the practice and attitudes of their forefathers and, it is argued, of the biblical requirements for inter-church relationships.

The pattern of the mid-seventeenth-century Particular Baptist Associations and of the late eighteenth-century Northamptonshire Association is

undoubtedly immensely attractive – and evidently very fruitful for the cause of the gospel, as is evidenced in the latter case by the meetings for united prayer which, among other things, emerged from it, leading ultimately, at least in part, to the missionary work of Carey and others. It is perhaps noteworthy too that these associations, in both the mid-seventeenth and the late eighteenth centuries, flourished during periods when Particular Baptists were especially lively and spiritually vigorous. The comparative lack of interest in associations and inter-dependency today should thus give serious pause for thought.

In conclusion, a revival of something along the lines of the old Particular Baptist Associations across Britain today is surely a worthwhile objective. The theology and heritage of the Particular Baptists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is of very great value. By the grace of God, those churches seem to represent as closely as anything in recent church history the polity and practice of the churches of the New Testament: independent but also clearly inter-dependent, in practice not just in theory: recognising each other's autonomy but also recognising the need of each to be accountable to the others and to work together for the sake of the kingdom of Christ, the spread of the gospel and the building up of the saints. A lively reincarnation of such churches acting in association across Britain is, surely, greatly to be desired. ■

The substance of this article was first delivered as a paper at the Carey Conference, January 2018. Robert Strivens was formerly Principal of London Seminary and is now pastor at Bradford on Avon Baptist Church.



WHO SHOULD REPRESENT US?

MOSTYN ROBERTS

The Grenfell Tower disaster in London in 2017 will long be emblematic of disaster in the heart of modernity – a tragedy in a sophisticated city that should never have happened.

The ferment of debates following it has thrown up some fascinating issues about how we are ruled. The complacency of some in authority over safety, the whiff of corruption, the contrast between poor Tower dwellers and surrounding wealth in Kensington and Chelsea, the high level of immigrants among residents – old problems but coming together in a toxic mix. Sir Martin Moore-Bick, appointed

to chair the enquiry into the disaster, educated, intelligent, experienced and no doubt fair-minded as he is, because he is also white, upper middle class and perceived as privileged, will struggle to gain the confidence of the poor, the immigrant and the socially disadvantaged who constitute a sizeable proportion of the victims of the fire.

This reflects a line of thought that is becoming influential. Sir Martin was of course appointed not elected. But it is an illustration of the same distrust that we see in politics: 'If he is not like me he cannot be expected to empathise with or understand me. If he does not understand me he will not be able to represent me.'

David Cameron once responded to this criticism – 'You can't walk a mile in everyone's moccasins.'

'Descriptive representation' (DR) is the label given to the concept that those who represent me in a democracy need to reflect not only my views but also me as a person (that is, my 'descriptive' characteristics, the things that describe me). Only so can I be expected to trust them. It is not enough for the majority to elect say, a Conservative, Lib-Dem or Labour politician; s/he must also represent the kind of person I am – my colour, race, gender, social class etc if I am to have confidence that s/he will adequately represent me.

The benefits, so proponents of DR claim, will be better government and a more engaged electorate. We have a more diverse and complex voting public now, it is argued, and this needs to be reflected in those we elect.

But what descriptive characteristics do we want to see in our representatives? Those that are 'politically relevant' say supporters of DR. Racial minorities want to see their race represented; feminists want to see not only 'lawmakers to advocate for us; at least some of our representatives must share characteristics and perspectives with us if legislation is to be properly attuned to our needs'. Women must therefore be well up there. No doubt representatives of gender or sexual diversity will be forceful claimants. But what about religious minorities, occupations, age groups? As for socio-economic groups – how many do we recognise? Just what constitutes a 'politically relevant' characteristic; if politics is about everything, where do you stop?

Democracy is a frail flower. In countries where it has developed (and depending on the criteria adopted, numbers vary from 58 to 157 nations) it has developed at varying speeds and by different methods. The British version is parliamentary and representative. It has grown in a slow halting manner over eight centuries or so. Its evolution has been pragmatic but at its heart are Christian principles – in particular, the essential moral equality of human beings. That did mean, for too long, equality for the rich and powerful, for the establishment not for the outsider, for men not women, but eventually universal suffrage was attained. 'One man/person, one vote' is the principle. Some are still excluded – minors, prisoners, lords. But the basic conviction is that if you are free to vote you are participating in government and you obey the laws enacted by the representative assembly. In turn your representative is responsible to represent

you no matter who you are and if you feel he is not doing so he is accountable at the next election.

So is DR an advance in democracy or does it spell danger to our system?

The good side...

1. DR reminds all in political authority of the need to fairly represent all who have voted in their constituency. This is a matter of trust. If it is to be healthy the relationship between governor and governed in any political system, democratic or otherwise, must be one of trust. It is the breach or at least perceived breach of this trust that creates the kind of suspicion we are seeing today.

2. It is a reminder that we are a much more diverse society than in the past. There are more agendas to satisfy. In itself this is not a bad thing; it just makes life more difficult for governments.

3. There is a concern to be involved in the work of government, to be involved in politics. It is said that there are at least five elements of a properly functioning representative democracy: (1) effective participation – the opportunity to take part in democratic processes; (2) equality in voting; (3) informed understanding – access to relevant information and time to consider it; (4) control of the agenda – that it is not monopolised by those in authority; and (5) universal inclusion. For these to function, in turn, we need free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. All individuals and groups within a democracy need to have equal access to all these elements of the process.

But what is happening? Diversity simply means 'difference' but underneath there can be more ominous divisions. 'Fragmentation' is a word people use to describe the process we are observing. There are more groups who see themselves as un-represented or under-represented. Women and racial minorities have been campaigning for equality for some time, with varying degrees of success. 'Gay' groups have made huge strides in the last decade as have disability groups. We are pointedly made aware of pay inequalities, and the numbers of MPs from various groups.

'Equality' is the agenda driving it. We are all equal, so we are all entitled to equal treatment. Note that this is not the same thing as the old Christian 'equality of essence' based on the image of God. The new equality calls (as far as possible) for no differentiation to be made between us on any grounds – gender, colour, sexual preferences, race, disability.

The irony is that while groups are calling for their distinctives ('descriptive characteristics') to be ignored in terms of treatment, access to benefits, facilities, employment, salaries – all that makes up the freedoms and rights of a citizen – they are also calling for those very distinctives to be recognised as the basis on which they should be represented in parliament and government. But why? After all, if my peculiar distinctives as male and white or black and female, heterosexual or homosexual, make no difference in terms of what I earn, whom I can marry or what clubs I can join, why should they make any difference in terms of who represents me in parliament? Why should an MP of

(say) a Sir Martin Moore-Bick would not adequately represent a Somali refugee or a Ghanaian single mum on benefits? The reality of course is that all kinds of MPs represent people from very different backgrounds from themselves and do so very conscientiously. Yet today discontent is spreading.

The problem of course is an issue of trust. 'My group' feels left out, marginalised, discriminated against, and the only way I can see that being improved is if people like me have their hands on the levers of power. It is however not just about trust. The necessity and virtue of obeying the laws enacted by our representatives and respecting them as the laws reflecting the will of the nation as a whole, is a principle of our constitution. The British constitution is unwritten. That is its beauty. It is so because it has evolved organically over centuries, not been written down in a moment of crisis. Its unwritten character also makes it flexible – without having to get a Supreme Court to rule on possible new directions. The element of respecting majority rule is part of that wide-ranging principle we call the rule of law.

Lack of trust in and lack of respect for democratically elected representatives therefore is not just about the contemporary relationship of ruler and ruled; it has an institutional element. It can become a threat to the constitution.

So,

The bad side...

1. DR is symptomatic of a breakdown of trust between ruler and ruled. Either lazy or self-interested politicians and officials

have neglected significant minorities in their charge, or those minorities perceive that to be the case.

2. DR is reflective of a more demanding attitude among minorities. Democracy requires patience as not everything we want can be achieved, and what is achieved may take a long time. Democracy requires tolerance as other groups may want different things from us and may get their way. Minorities are less tolerant today. Part of the answer is that minorities in a 'majority rule' state have to realise they will not get all they want, not even some of it in some cases. But governments elected by majorities, to fulfil their mandate, should provide for the reasonable demands of minorities. This is simply justice.

3. DR is potentially a reversion to tribalism. My group must be represented by people like us. Only our feet can fit our moccasins. This attitude presupposes and assumes that our 'descriptive characteristics' are more politically significant than our essential equality. Putting it another way, the things in which we differ are more important than the things we share. This can only lead to deeper fragmentation, heightened tensions, less harmony.

We are becoming an angry society. Tribalism is both a cause and a symptom of increasing intolerance, the failure to find, in a rapidly changing society, an answer to the question 'how shall we then live - together?'

What should Christians do?

I assume that my readers, as Christians and probably mostly as Baptists, are

interested in the political life of our nation, and are also committed to the essential equality of all human beings under God. I take it too that we dislike injustice, discord and tensions in society and would like to do what we can to relieve them, realising always that life on earth will never be perfect and is not our first priority. I assume in short that we want 'the good' for our fellow humans and ultimately their gospel good, their salvation. In the present context then,

1. Pray for our rulers, that they will live up to the mandate given them, to care for all in their charge and not be justifiably accused of discrimination, neglect or persecution. That, in short, they will practise and pursue justice for all.
2. Be involved in politics if you can and to the extent that you can.
3. Realise that there is no other firm foundation for the concept of essential equality of the human race than the biblical teaching of creation in the image of God. Once that is lost, ideologies and philosophies struggle in vain to establish why we should treat other people as equal when, in regard to descriptive characteristics, we are patently not the same.
4. Do not resort to 'Christian tribalism'. If we claim a right it should be a right for all. Do not 'do as they do' and see ourselves as a particular group in society, demanding treatment on the basis of our peculiar characteristics. Demonstrate that in the

political realm we demand no favours and claim no privileges on the basis of who we are. We are all equal in the eyes of God. Only so can we contribute to some recovery of political health and harmony.

5. The fragmentation of society, which should not be over-emphasised, for there have always been tensions and

disaffected minorities, is nonetheless an observable reality. In the end this is not due in itself to an influx of immigrants or increasingly vociferous minorities. It is due to the loss of 'the centre' which is not holding any more. That centre is the Christian consensus, that broadly Christian-theistic and Bible-based vision of human flourishing that has informed our public life (sometimes more, too often less) for a millennium and

beyond. Realistically that will not be recovered unless there is a widespread revival of faith and spiritual life. Without an intervention of God society will further fragment. Totalitarianism in some form will have to arise to preserve order. Tolerance, patience, respect will dissolve.

6. God may give revival – but what is the motivation for praying for it? Not first for a harmonious society but for the extension of his kingdom and for his glory. 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and' (only then) 'all these things will be added to you' (Matt 6:33). ■

Mostyn Roberts is the pastor of Welwyn Evangelical Church and an associate editor of Reformation Today.

ONLY SO
CAN WE
CONTRIBUTE
TO SOME
RECOVERY
OF POLITICAL
HEALTH AND
HARMONY.



African Pastors' Conference News

This time an extract from the report of a recent APC in Empangeni is included:

Empangeni is a pleasant, small town in a semi-rural area of Kwa-Zulu Natal province. This conference holds many memories for APC – deceased Pastor Erroll Hulse, a founder and Director of APC, preached his last sermon at this conference in 2013, suffering a subsequent stroke and going to glory last year. He is still remembered and sadly missed by many of those who regularly attend this conference.

APC has held annual, two-day conferences at Empangeni Baptist Church for five consecutive years. Pastor Shadrack Khumalo pastors this church and is the very able local conference organiser. An elder of the church, Dr Gavin Charlton, with his wife, kindly accommodated the APC team at their nearby comfortable home, as they have done in previous years. They are involved in a dynamic ministry in the area among orphans and in schools.

The conference attracted 47 delegates, a record number and a great

encouragement to the APC management. The delegates registered themselves as pastors (25), reverend (1), bishops (2), Bible teachers (10), missionaries (1), youth pastors (2), Sunday School teachers (5) and a member (1).

All the talks were given in English and translated into Zulu.

The conference theme was 'Preaching Salvation'. The speakers were Pastor Barnabas Olare from Kenya and Pastor Todd Wilson from the USA. Pastors Todd and Barnabas preached with passion and with great power given them by the grace of the Holy Spirit. They did an excellent job in dealing with their subjects, and the talks were well received by the delegates.

A Q&A session was held at the end of the second day. Most of the questions reveal the doctrinal background of many delegates and the wisdom required by the speakers in answering them:



Browsing the book table

1. How do we help our people to remain in fellowship with a church that speaks the truth?
2. How do we understand the text Romans 9:9-13 concerning the fact that God hated Esau in the light of the fact that God is love?
3. What role does man play in salvation?
4. Do we need to confess our sins to be saved?
5. What can we do for those people whom God does not love?
6. Explain to us the verse John 3:16.

A large selection of commentaries and sound Reformed books and booklets was displayed, all marked very cheaply. Several King James Version Study Bibles had been donated to APC and were made available to pastor delegates – these were promptly snapped up. APC is most grateful to the publishers in the UK and USA who supply our books at large discounts and at times free of charge. The book tables always draw a lot of attention and the large selection to choose from is much appreciated.

APC thanks several churches for various forms of (financial) support: Emmanuel Church, Leamington Spa, UK; Grace Covenant Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills, Alabama, USA, and Lakeside Baptist Church in the USA.

Points for prayer:

- » Pray that the delegates would read the distributed literature and that this, along with the talks and answers to questions will, by God's grace, change the lives and ministries of pastors in the Empangeni area.
- » Pray that the delegates would proclaim the true biblical gospel from their pulpits and that many would come to a saving knowledge and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- » Pray for the work of APC in South Africa and many other African countries. God has greatly blessed this work over the years and we pray that all that is done by APC would redound to the glory and honour of his name. ■

Book Reviews

In this issue I want to draw attention to some books published by Grace Publications Trust (www.gracepublications.co.uk). The purpose of this publisher is well in line with that of *Reformation Today* as is clear from their purpose statement:

'Grace Publications Trust is a not for profit organisation that exists to glorify God by making the truth of God's Word (as declared in the Baptist Confessions of 1689 and 1966) clear and understandable, so that: Christians will be helped to preach Christ; Christians will know Christ better and delight in him more; Christians will be

equipped to live for Christ; and seekers will come to know Christ.'

Grace Publications has been well known for a series of simplified and abridged Christian classics for people who don't have the time to work their way through the originals, as well as for people whose native language is not English. The series is now labelled Grace Essentials and includes works by Luther, Calvin, Edwards and Owen.

The work of this publisher is highly recommended.

2000 Years of Christ's Power

Volume 4: The Age of Religious Conflict

Author: Nick Needham
Publisher: London: Grace Publications Trust and Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2016
ISBN: 978-1-78191-781-7
Pages: 686



The first three volumes in this much acclaimed series appeared in the years 1997 – 2004. The long-awaited volume 4 is now available and will hopefully be followed by remaining volume(s). This series of books offers a rare but

highly desirable combination of a well-researched but eminently readable overview of church history. These volumes are most helpful to obtain a quick but insightful account of particular topics in church history. Volume 4 is no exception.

It covers roughly the period between 1560 and 1740 and deals with the developments following the period of the Reformation in the various streams that emerged from it such as Lutheranism, the Reformed faith and Roman Catholicism. The author pays special attention to the developments in England and Scotland with Puritanism and the period of the Covenanters.

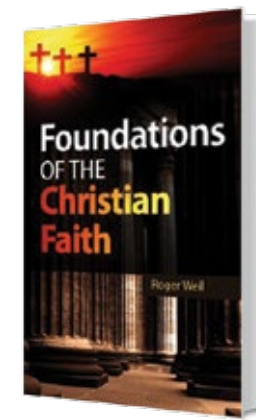
This volume shows how the main streams of the church after the Reformation split into further factions over these two centuries.

At the same time, this period produced the great confessions such as The Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Baptist Confession, as these were drawn up to protect the church from the errors of the time. Apparently there were also divisions within Roman Catholicism. Hence the book's subtitle, 'The age of religious conflict'!

This new volume in this series is highly recommended.

Foundations of the Christian Faith

Author: Roger Weil
Publisher: London: Grace Publications Trust, 2nd ed. 2017
ISBN: 978-0-946462-72-8
Pages: 400 pages



This is a republication of the 2011 edition and is a concise and practical systematic theology written in non-technical style and from a Reformed Baptist perspective. This last fact alone makes this book all the more welcome as the number of systematic theologies written by Reformed Baptists is relatively small.

The author follows a common pattern by starting with the basis for systematic theology grounded in God's revelation in

Scripture. This is followed by the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man and the fall in sin, and the doctrine of Christ. Next comes what is known as soteriology: the doctrine of our salvation in Christ. This part takes about two-thirds of the book. The final chapters deal with the doctrine of baptism and the church, the second coming of Christ, and the doctrine of death, heaven and hell.

The writing is very clear with many useful



headings. It is therefore an extremely useful quick reference guide to the major doctrines together with lots of texts from Scripture to prove the points made. In some cases, one would wish for a little more explanation. Other topics receive a more expanded treatment and the reason can usually be traced to issues relevant to our day and age.

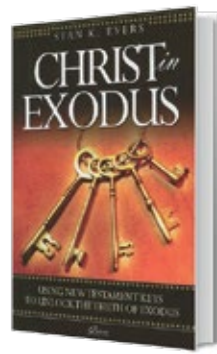
An example is the work of the Holy Spirit which is very well covered. This section includes an extensive rebuttal of the prosperity gospel. With regard to the gifts of the Spirit, the author takes a cautious non-cessationist position. He phrases his warnings against charismatic excesses

in terms of what the gifts really are supposed to be according to Scripture (and in contrast to what is often happening today). He confirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, but his next point deviates from his earlier biblically correct treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity: 'For the purposes of man's salvation the Holy Spirit subordinates himself to them both' (p 176).

The brief treatment of some topics probably accounts for some inaccuracies and minor mistakes, but these do not take away from the very clear and useful presentation of the foundational truths of the Christian faith.

Christ in Exodus

Author: Stan K Evers
Publisher: London: Grace Publications Trust, 2017
ISBN: 978-1-912154-00-5
Pages: 160



Retired pastor Stan Evers offers this book to help his readers to see that Christ is the key to understanding the Old Testament and the book of Exodus in particular. This is supported among others by Jesus' own words in Luke 24:27,44-45. The first chapter explains this principle. In fourteen further chapters the author shows how to apply this principle using a number of key passages in the book of Exodus. He shows how types of Christ

and his work occur in these passages supported by comprehensive references to the New Testament.

This book is a wonderful illustration of how the Bible holds together with God's revelation of his plan of salvation in Christ. It is very well written, illumines the mind and warms the heart. It will edify its readers and prove a safe and useful guide to preachers. Highly recommended.



Subscriptions

General Enquiries:

Frederick Hodgson, 170 Coach Road, Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks., YO22 5EQ, UK, e: fh.reformationtoday@gmail.com

Subscribe Online: www.reformation-today.org/subscription
 Readers can subscribe online from any location using a credit card

UK/Europe:

Frederick Hodgson, 170 Coach Road, Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks., YO22 5EQ, UK e: fh.reformationtoday@gmail.com (£16 for 1-year subscription)

Australia:

Ray Levick
 Unit 25, 61-67 Moverly Rd.
 Maroubra 2035, Australia
 e: rlevick77@netspace.net.au
 (\$25 for 1-year subscription)

Canada:

Janice Van Eck
 52 Paulstown Crescent,
 Guelph, Ontario, N1G 5H7
 e: janicevaneck@rogers.com
 (\$30 for 1-year subscription)

USA:

Tom Lutz
 Edgewood Baptist Church,
 3743 Nichol Avenue, Anderson, IN 46011
 e: tomlutz41919@aol.com
or Chapel Library,
 2603 W. Wright St. Pensacola, FL 32505
 e: chapel@mountzion.org
 (\$30 for 1-year subscription)

South Africa:

Matthews Nkuna
 13 Dick Muller Drive, Norkem Park,
 Gauteng, South Africa 1618,
 Tel +27 72 635 8282
 e: reformation.today.sa@gmail.com
 Cheques to Birchleigh Baptist Church
 (specify – For RT subscription)
 (R130 for 1-year subscription)

Kenya:

Naphtally Ogallo, Grace Baptist Church,
 Eldoret, PO Box 170-30100
 Mob: +254 723 918 943
 e: nandhogallo@gmail.com
 (950 Ksh for 1-year, discount for 5+
 copies to one address)

Single copies

may be purchased. In this case the cost is one-sixth of the annual cost. Postage is included, but please note that we have to charge extra for airmail. A 1-year subscription has surcharge of £5.00 if airmail delivery is required.

Singapore & Malaysia:

Shalom Christian Media
 8 New Industrial Road,
 LHK3 Building
 # 03-01, Singapore 536200
 e: contactscm@shalomrb.com
 (\$35 for 1-year subscription)



Donations

Donations to RT can be made anytime via the above agents. (UK taxpayers may use gift aid. Reformation Today is a registered UK charity – number 1017000).

Please make any cheques payable to 'Reformation Today'.

Donations to APC: These should be sent to Phil Roberts, 121 Hartshill Road, Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7LU. Cheques should be made payable to 'African Pastors' Conferences'. Could UK donors please let Phil Roberts know if they intend to use gift aid.



Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

Grace Publications Trust is a not for profit organisation that exists to glorify God by making the truth of God's Word (as declared in the Baptist Confessions of 1689 and 1966) clear and understandable.

Grace Publications seeks to achieve this among others by publishing books that promote Baptist principles (see Book Reviews inside), and providing the well-known Geneva Bible Notes. The Geneva Bible Notes are issued four times a year and provide daily readings with a devotional commentary. The aim is to help 'ordinary' readers gain a better understanding of the Word of God and how it applies to their daily lives.

For more information
email the editor, Ray Tibbs:
geneva@gracepublications.co.uk

www.gracepublications.co.uk



Next Issue

- ▶ Articles from Carey Conference 2018:
The Believers' Church