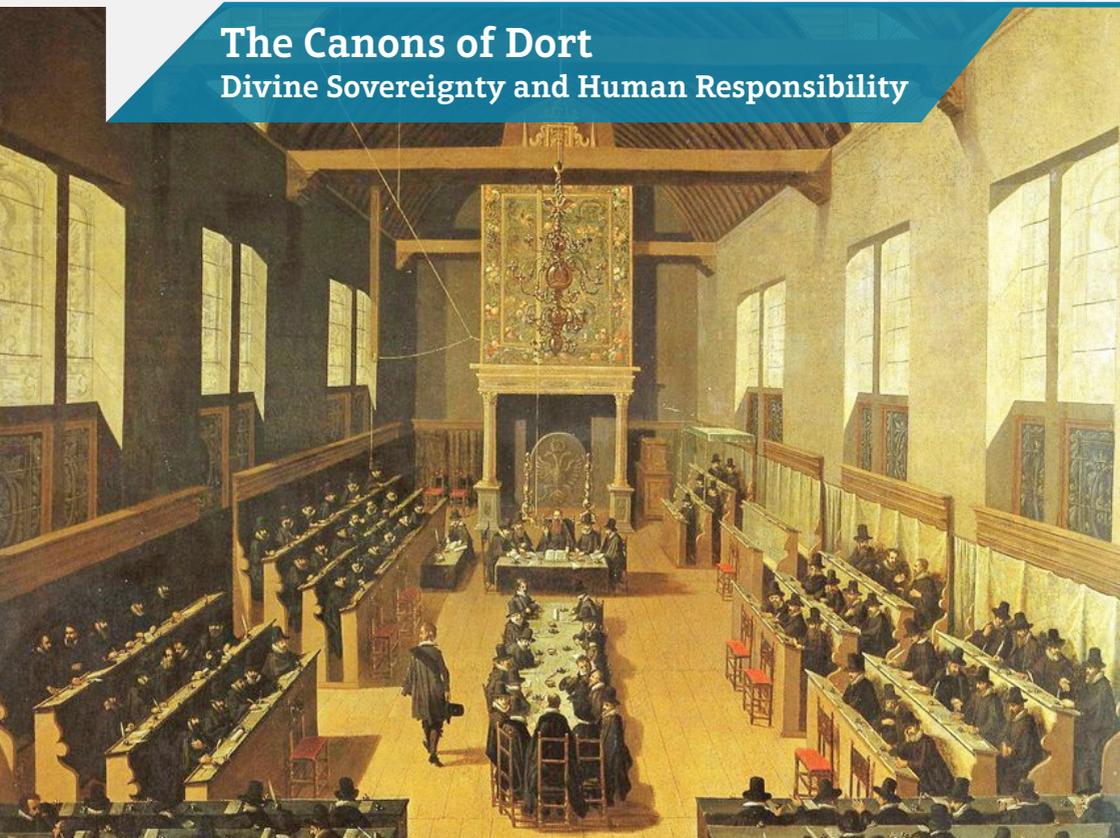


# REFORMATION TODAY

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- ▶ Why should Baptists bother with the Synod of Dort?
- ▶ Pink and the gospel 'offer'
- ▶ God's providence in missions

## The Canons of Dort Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility





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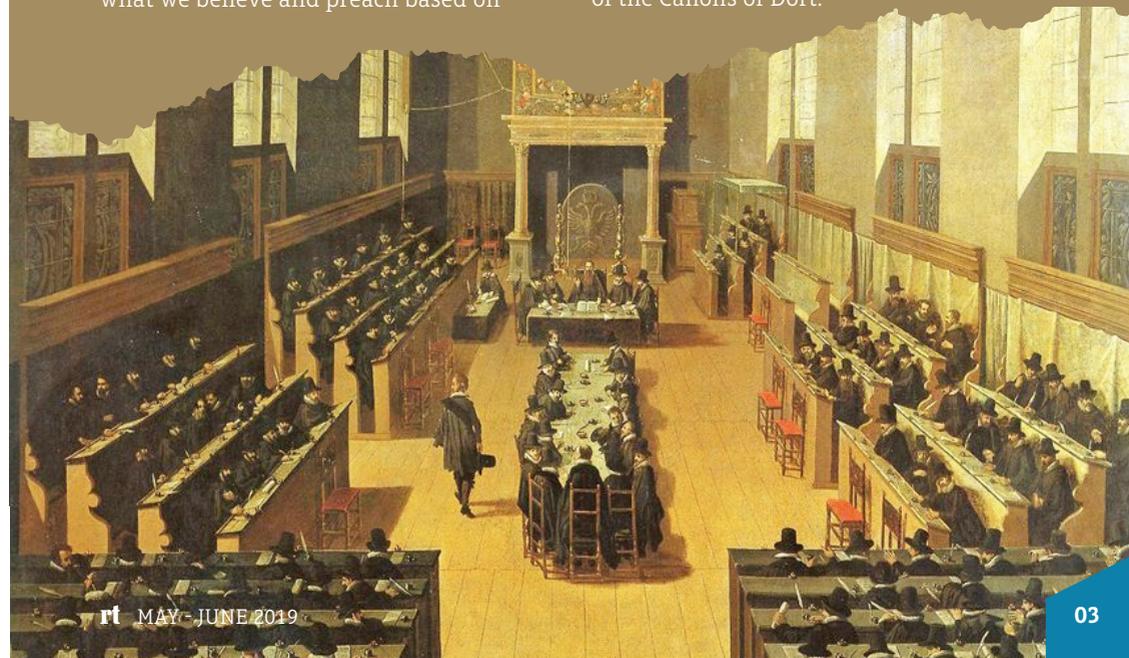
## Editorial

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

# The Canons of Dort

This issue of Reformation Today is largely dedicated to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Canons of Dort. What are these 'canons'? Why should we read them, take them seriously? The reason is that they explain the 'doctrines of grace'. I trust this is still a familiar phrase among us. We often express this phrase as belonging to the essence of what we believe and preach based on

Scripture. But do we understand these doctrines and why they are firmly anchored in Scripture? Robert Strivens explains these matters for us in an article that was first delivered as an address at the Carey Ministers' Conference earlier this year. He rightly draws attention to why we as Reformed Baptists should keep studying and applying the teaching of the Canons of Dort.



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The importance of this is illustrated in several other ways in this issue. First, the teaching of Arthur Pink regarding these matters is re-examined by our Australian brother Brett Lee-Price as part of his studies in the life of Pink.

Second, the Canons of Dort have a lot to say about God's providence. Keith Underhill helps us to see that this is not a topic of theoretical interest only, but that it has major practical implications for our lives. He demonstrates this by discussing the great commission that our Lord gave to his disciples, and by implication to all of us as his church. An experienced missionary to Kenya, our brother offers a vivid illustration of the wonderful truth of God's providence in the missionary enterprise from his own life. Instead of stifling our missionary work, acknowledging God's providence stimulates us to press on with the task our Lord gave us, and to do so full of hope and expectation that our labours are not in vain but that the Lord will accomplish his purposes.

I now want to illustrate the importance of these truths for our prayer life from a brief consideration of Acts 4:23-31.

### **Divine sovereignty, human responsibility and prayer**

We know that prayer is of crucial importance. We also confess that our God is sovereign but this does not nullify human responsibility. What does this mean for the way we pray? We risk going off in one of two wrong directions: we totally rely on ourselves and our effort including prayer. We think that everything depends on how often we

pray and in what way we pray. Or we are so convinced of God's sovereignty that we neglect or reduce the importance of prayer. We prefer to wait and sit back to see what the Lord will do in a particular situation.

If we are not sure about these issues, we can learn a lot from the early church and from what we read in Acts and especially from their prayers as we find them in the New Testament. In Acts 4 we find a great example of the power of prayer to the sovereign Lord in difficult and trying circumstances.

The message of this text is that, rather than inhibiting prayer, our faith in God's sovereignty stimulates us to prayer and adds power to it. This is a wonderful encouragement for us and teaches us how to do this. Three points emerge as we study this prayer by the early church in Jerusalem.

#### *How they approach God in prayer*

When the apostles return to the church and tell them about the pressure put on them by the Sanhedrin to stop speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ, the whole church starts to pray immediately. They address God as the sovereign God. They are filled with praise and they begin their prayer by mentioning three things about him: he creates, speaks and decides/controls all things. They refer to God as the Creator which reminds them of his great power. Faith in God as our Creator is an important reason to expect our help from him as Psalm 146:5-6 shows.

They also address God as the one who has revealed himself: They make a

remarkable statement. He has 'spoken through the mouth of his servant David' (v25a). This is how they view Scripture: it is God speaking through people who have been inspired by God through his Holy Spirit. They cite Psalm 2 and apply this to what happened to our Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 2 is prophecy and they recognise that what is written in this psalm is now being fulfilled in their own time. All were gathered against the Lord: Pilate, Herod, the Romans and the people of Israel. In other words, they hold all these people fully responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

But then in verse 28 of Acts 4 follows something that is even more remarkable. People did this to Jesus, but God had appointed that this was exactly what must happen. We find the same also at the end of Luke's Gospel (see Luke 24:26,44-48). They confess that God is the God of history (his-story) who controls, rules, governs and is sovereign in his purposes and the way he brings them to pass from beginning to end. This applies to his plan of salvation and to the climactic event of Jesus' death on the cross as part of this plan.

The remarkable thing is that the early church confesses BOTH human responsibility AND God's sovereignty!<sup>1</sup> When we reflect on this using Scripture, we can see that both beliefs are essential for the Christian faith. Assume for a minute that only human responsibility is true and God is not sovereign. In that case, the sufferings and death of our Lord

Jesus have only been the result of human action. Did man then thwart God's plans? How could Jesus' death have been the origin of our salvation if it was only man acting?

If we only believe in God's sovereignty and rule out human responsibility, then the act of crucifying the Son of God would not have been sin, as people were only passive instruments in the hands of God. If this act were not sinful, how can it be that all other sins were sinful? In that case, people were not morally guilty. This would imply that they would not have required reconciliation with God. Then the cross of Christ was meaningless as a way of reconciliation with God. So, we can easily see that in both cases we lose the essential meaning of the Christian faith altogether!

We need to believe both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Both are taught in Scripture and they come together in remarkable ways in several parts of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. Examples are Genesis 50:20; Acts 13:46,48; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5.

The believers in Acts 4 were convinced of the need to preach the gospel and at the same time they noticed the opposition. This drove them to prayer and they turned to their sovereign Lord. Taking human responsibility seriously means that we are convinced of the need to pray. Belief in God's sovereignty gives real hope in prayer as we know we address

<sup>1</sup> For much of this material I have made use of Carson, D A, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and his Prayers* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 230pp

our petitions to him who has all power in heaven and on earth and will accomplish all his purposes.

Sometimes it is said that belief in God's sovereignty inhibits evangelism. Nothing can be further from the truth. I once received a letter from a brother from Chester who even until old age was very active in street evangelism among the many people visiting this old, historic city. He wrote to me: 'Evangelism is not going to be easier: people are hardening in spiritual matters. If it were not for election, we would have no hope.' God's sovereignty actually motivated him to vigorous evangelism! A biblical example is found in Acts 18:10-11. Paul has started to preach in Corinth but finds opposition and few results. The Lord encourages Paul and tells him, however, that he has many people in this city. And what does Paul do? Wait and see from a distance what is going to happen? None of this! We find Paul staying there for a year and six months teaching the Word of God.

The biblical view about God's sovereignty rather than taking the fuel out of prayer, actually fires us up to seek our sovereign Lord in prayer! And we have a great example of this in our text. This becomes even more clear in how the people continue in this prayer.

### **What they ask**

It is only now, after having said all these things to worship the Lord, they come to their first petition in this prayer. This is

truly amazing. Their first thoughts in the middle of these challenging circumstances are about God. Only then do they start to pay attention to their needs. Is this how we start our prayers?

Their first request is another striking feature of this prayer. We read in verse 29 that they ask the Lord to 'look upon their threats.' They do not ask God to bring their adversaries to judgment. Not so long ago John and James were quick to ask the Lord to send fire from heaven upon people who did not want to receive the Lord Jesus, a request that led to a stern rebuke by the Lord. Now they do not even ask the Lord to take the threat away; all they ask for is that he looks at their threats.

This is all. It is as if they want to say, these threats are your business, Lord. We must get on with the task of preaching. 'Please, Lord, can you take care of these threats?' This is remarkable, but they can pray like this because of God's sovereignty! The threat is God's business, the preaching and proclamation of the gospel is their task. They are fully aware of what they need to do. They ask the Lord therefore that they may speak the Word of the Lord with all boldness, and that he will continue to do so.

They also ask that God will stretch out his hand to heal and confirm the Word by signs and wonders in the Name of his holy servant Jesus. The emphasis is not on human action or power, but they expect the Lord to do what pleases him. The priority is on the preaching of the Word

(see also 1 Cor 2:1-5). God and his Word are of central importance, not human experience. The focus of their request is that God's plans will be fulfilled.

Please consider how the example of this prayer helps us to pray. Do we jump at presenting our 'shopping lists' to our God? Or do we first acknowledge who he is, and then commit our cares into his hands, only then to be followed by requesting his grace and help for our Christian lives and ministries?

### **The outcome and the results**

We have seen how these believers prayed and first worshipped their sovereign Lord and only then submitted their petitions. What is the outcome? We read this in the remainder of the text.

Three things happen: the place was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. The place was shaken. This is an answer of God, who thereby immediately confirms what the believers confessed in their prayer: He is the Creator of heaven and earth.

They were also filled with the Holy Spirit. Note that this happened again even though we read that something similar had already occurred somewhat earlier as we read in Acts 2. This shows what this expression means: they receive a new measure of the Holy Spirit and his power in order to go on with the work of preaching the gospel. This clearly invalidates second blessing theology. They were filled again. Later, the apostle Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18). This also means being under the authority of the Holy Spirit who guides his

people in the proclamation of the gospel. The consequence is that they are enabled to speak the Word of God with boldness, as we read in verse 31. And even signs and wonders are given to confirm the preaching (Acts 5:12). The preaching of the gospel goes on and on. This is seen clearly in how the book of Acts ends. We read that Paul, even while being imprisoned, is 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ *with all boldness and without hindrance*' (Acts 28:31, emphasis mine).

This also gives hope for us as individual believers, for our children and for the church, for our preaching and teaching, for our witness, evangelism, and mission.

This passage teaches us some wonderful lessons about divine sovereignty and human responsibility and the way these truths not only stimulate us to pray, but also lead to practical advice for our prayer life. This has always been the way people have prayed in the Bible. Examples can be given from the lives of Moses, Daniel and Paul. Please, let me invite you to study their prayers for yourself.

Moreover, let's apply these lessons. The greatest need is still the preaching of the gospel to our contemporary world. The task can only be achieved in the power of the Holy Spirit. Realising this should lead us to pray to our sovereign Lord and to worship him. 'Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen' (Eph 3:20-21). ■

The biblical view about God's sovereignty rather than taking the fuel out of prayer, actually fires us up to seek our sovereign Lord in prayer!

# WHY SHOULD BAPTISTS BOTHER WITH THE SYNOD OF DORT?

*ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE CAREY  
MINISTERS' CONFERENCE, JANUARY 2019*

## **Introduction**

On the face of it, it is not at all clear why a Baptist conference in England in the twenty-first century should have on its programme a paper on the Synod of Dort. That Synod took place four hundred years ago, in another country, as a result in part of the unique political and economic struggles which that country was then experiencing; it was a thoroughly Presbyterian affair: the Synod concerned a Presbyterian confession of faith, was centred on a dispute between Presbyterians and was made up in large part by Presbyterian members and representatives – I say ‘in large part’, because there were a few Englishmen from the Church of England there, but there were definitely no Baptists. Why then should we even bother with the Synod of Dort?

I want, towards the end of this paper, to give four substantial reasons why, as Reformed Baptist ministers, we should certainly be bothering with the Synod of Dort and its conclusions and why, indeed, we can expect great benefit from doing so, for ourselves and for our churches. I will, however, first give a very brief overview of the events leading up to

the Synod. I will then try succinctly to expound the substance of the Canons.

### Events leading up to the Synod of Dort

It is a fact of church history that creeds and confessions are usually hammered out in the midst of bitter theological controversy. The protagonists sometimes seem in the eyes of history to be distinctly unpleasant and to have sometimes conducted their campaigns with less than biblical methods. Too often, as well, political issues have become intertwined with the theological debate, to the benefit of neither.

These features are all present in the history of the Synod of Dort. Theologically, the Reformed were concerned about the attempts of Jacobus Arminius, a professor of Theology at Leiden University, to reformulate Reformed doctrine as it relates to God's sovereignty in matters of salvation. Arminius believed that the classic Reformed view suffered from two fatal flaws: it gave insufficient place in its system to the decisions of the human will and it made God the author of sin. Arminius consequently put forward an alternative understanding of election which effectively placed the ultimate determination as to whether someone would be saved in the decision of that individual rather than in the eternal decree of God.

Politically, there was a drive led by Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Advocate of Holland, for a less strict application of the *Belgic Confession*, which was the confessional standard of the Dutch Reformed churches at that time. He and his supporters argued that more flexibility in the interpretation

and application of that confession would lead to greater peace in the church. They also wanted to see a higher level of control by the State over the church. The Reformed opposed these developments. They believed that the *Belgic Confession* needed to be strictly applied and they desired to preserve a clear separation between church and state, not permitting the state any power to rule in matters related to church life and doctrine.

Johannes Uytenbogaert was the theological leader of the Arminian party after the death of Arminius in 1609. Uytenbogaert, with Oldenbarnevelt's support, drew up the Remonstrance which lay at the root of the Synod of Dort. The Remonstrance called for the revision of the *Belgic Confession*, argued for greater State authority over the churches and sought the acceptance of Arminius's theological views on election. Their core doctrinal claims were set out in five points, the origin of the five points of Calvinism which formed the response to the position of the Remonstrants. The Remonstrance was signed by forty-four preachers of the church and presented by Oldenbarnevelt to the States in July 1610. A proposal for a disputation before the States was accepted by the Reformed, who in the following year (1611) presented their Counter-Remonstrance denying the points of the Remonstrants. The battle lines were drawn.

However, it would be seven more years before a national synod could be called to adjudicate upon the dispute. Political struggles at the regional level continued, affecting churches, councils, preachers and universities. By 1617, it looked as if civil

war might break out. Gradually, however, the Remonstrants began to lose ground politically. Prince Maurits, the Stadtholder, threw in his lot with the Counter-Remonstrants and in August 1618, the Remonstrant leaders were arrested. Oldenbarnevelt was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death, executed by beheading on 13 May 1619.

So it was that, on 13 November 1618, a National Synod was finally convened in the town of Dort (otherwise known as Dordrecht, situated about 15 miles south-east of Rotterdam), to consider the Remonstrance. The Counter-Remonstrants, who were firmly in control of the Synod, intended from the start that the meeting be international. The Dutch representatives were divided into ten colleges – one representing each of the eight provincial synods, one representing the Walloon Church and one for the universities. There were delegations from Germany, Switzerland and Britain. Louis XIII refused permission for Huguenot representatives to attend from France (their absence being marked by an empty bench at the Synod).

The representatives of the Remonstrants arrived at the Synod on 6 December and attention turned to theological issues. At sessions on 13 and 17 December, the Remonstrants presented in a formal document their *Sententiae*, Opinions, expanding on the five points of the Remonstrance of 1610. A significant

procedural issue then arose. The Remonstrants wanted to be treated as equal partners, debating the issues on equal terms. The Synod, however, controlled by the Counter-Remonstrants, decided that they should be treated as the defendants in a court called to examine and judge them on their doctrine. In the absence of agreement, they were expelled from the meetings on 14 January 1619. The delegates then discussed each of the

**The Synod clearly believed that the biblical doctrine of election has to be understood in the context of the fact that everyone is fallen and is in Adam justly subject to God's wrath and punishment.**

five Remonstrant points in turn and drafted and agreed their responses, thereby formulating what became the Canons of the Synod of Dort which were formally confirmed by the Synod in May 1619. The Synod came to an end, after 180 sessions, on 29 May 1619.

With that background, let us turn now to the four reasons which I want to put forward as to why Baptists should concern themselves with the Synod and its findings.

### The Canons of Dort

Let me say a word first about how the Canons are organised. They are in Latin. Several English translations are available. In 2011, the Christian Reformed Church in the USA approved a translation which is available online.

The Canons set out the substance of the theological decisions reached by the Synod under four main heads, responding to the five points of the original Remonstrance. (The reason for the fewer heads in the Canons is that, as

we shall see, the third and fourth points of the Remonstrance were combined and dealt with in the Canons under one head.) Each head is divided into a series of articles setting out the Synod's view of the theological points to which the issue gives rise, followed by a series of points – the 'Rejection of Errors' – refuting the errors of the Remonstrants on the doctrine in question. The Canons have a concluding statement and end with the sentence pronounced against the Remonstrants, with the approval of the States-General and the names of those subscribing to the Canons.

The first head of doctrine addressed by the Canons deals with the subject of election. I will deal with this in some detail, in order to show how the Synod addressed its task, and much more succinctly with the remaining heads of doctrine. This first head, then, responded to the assertion of the Remonstrants that

God's election was not absolute and unconditional but was based on foreseen faith. In the view of the Remonstrants, predestination and election are to be believed and upheld – unlike many present-day Arminians, they were predestinarian in their theology. However, they understood predestination to be of those who would believe and persevere in saving faith and obedience: God's decree to save individuals did not precede his decree to create them, but took into account the question whether the individual concerned would come to

and continue in a state of saving faith and obedience. The Canons categorically reject this view and, in its place, set forth a clear articulation of the doctrine of unconditional election to eternal life, without consideration of foreseen faith. The manner in which the Canons addressed this issue is, however, of great interest. The Remonstrants on this point, both in their original document of 1610 and in their expanded views of 1618, began with election and God's decree. The Canons do not begin there. They begin, rather, with the condition of humanity in sin. The Synod clearly believed that the biblical doctrine of election has to be understood in the context of the fact that everyone is fallen and is in Adam justly subject to God's wrath and punishment. So in Article 1 of this first head, the Canons state, 'God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to

condemn them on account of their sin.' That is the starting-point for the Synod.

Article 2 then speaks of the love of God in sending his Son to save those who believe – it is essentially a quotation of John 3:16. Article 3 then speaks of the preaching of this good news: that God 'mercifully sends messengers' to proclaim the 'very joyful message' of the gospel and to call people to repentance and faith. Article 4 says, as the logical next step, that those who reject the gospel message remain under God's wrath, while those who accept

By asserting that the cause of saving faith is exclusively God's decree whereas the cause of wrath is man's sin, the Synod refuses to place election and reprobation on precisely the same basis, while clearly asserting both.

it are saved. Article 5 makes clear that the root of and blame for unbelief is in humanity alone and 'is not at all in God'; saving faith, by contrast, is 'a free gift of God'. The reason, according to Article 6, why some come to saving faith and others do not finds its root ultimately in the eternal decree of God, whereby he 'graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen'. This, says Article 6, discloses to us God's 'act – unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just – of distinguishing between people equally lost'. It is to be noted that the first mention of election in the Canons is here, in Article 6.

And it is only at this point, in Article 7 of this first head of doctrine, that the Canons set out a full, formal statement of the doctrine of election. This wonderful refutation of Arminian predestinarian theology and tremendous affirmation of biblical predestinarianism reads as follows:

'Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following: Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, he chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. He did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those

chosen, and the foundation of their salvation. And so he decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through his Word and Spirit. In other words, he decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of his Son, to glorify them. God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of his glorious grace.'

The following four articles supply various clarifications: the decree of election is single and applies to both Old and New Testament believers; election is not based on God's foresight of who would believe or of anything else in humanity; rather, election is based exclusively in God's good pleasure; and election is utterly unchangeable.

Articles 12 and 13 address the important question, in this context, of assurance: the elect are given assurance in due time, but in different degrees and at different stages. It comes, not by seeking to peer into God's decree, but by noting the evidence of election in true faith and godliness of life. Article 14 provides guidance on how best to teach the doctrine of election: it must be taught, but 'with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High'. In Article 15, the Synod says that there is such a thing as the decree of reprobation, but defines it carefully to make clear that it is God's decree to pass by and not grant salvation to certain people, thereby leaving them

in their sin and unbelief, because of which sin and unbelief they are subject to God's wrath and condemnation; this does not, stresses the Synod, in any way make God the author of sin (this being one of the principal accusations made by the Remonstrants against the Reformed doctrine). In Article 16, the Synod seeks to provide comfort to the unbeliever who is seeking the truth but does not yet have faith – they are not to think that they are reprobate, but are to continue to use the means of grace to seek the Lord. It is those who are careless and unconcerned about their spiritual condition who should be anxious whether they are reprobates. Article 17 addresses the salvation of the infants of believers and Article 18 closes by quoting Paul's doxology at the end of Romans chapter 11.

I have dealt at some length with the Canons' first head of doctrine, in order not only to bring out the main theological points being made, but also to show how pastorally and sensitively the Synod sought to deal with the issue of predestination. Calvinists are routinely accused today, as they were then, of being harsh, even cruel, in their view of a deterministic God who arbitrarily selects some humans for salvation and others for eternal hell, with no sense of love or mercy – like some kind of celestial lottery draw. By starting from human sinfulness and the fact that we all deserve nothing from God except hell and by then going immediately to God's love in sending his Son to save all who believe, the Synod carefully places the exposition of predestination in the right context. By asserting that the cause of saving faith is exclusively God's decree

whereas the cause of wrath is man's sin, the Synod refuses to place election and reprobation on precisely the same basis, while clearly asserting both. This does not solve the mystery of the doctrine, which is ultimately insoluble by mere human minds, but it does relieve it of the misunderstandings to which it is too often subject. By going on to speak of assurance, the Synod underlines its pastoral, as well as strictly theological purpose in setting out the doctrine in this way. The Canons are not simply a statement of theological truth, but a helpful aid to faith, understanding and Christian devotion.

Much more briefly, the second head of the Canons deals with Christ's atoning death and the redemption of the elect through it. This head answers the Remonstrant assertion that Christ 'died for all men and for every man, so that he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all ... yet so that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer'. The Canons reject this and assert rather that it was God's plan that the 'saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation' (Art. 8). The statement goes on to make clear that 'it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross ... should effectively redeem ... all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith'. At the same time, asserts the Synod in this head of doctrine (Art. 5), the promise of the gospel, 'together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced

and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his pleasure sends the gospel'. The Synod clearly affirmed that a doctrine of definite atonement placed no restriction on the audience for gospel preaching.

The next section of the Canons is entitled the third and fourth heads, as it deals with the next two articles of the Remonstrance in one (as the Remonstrants themselves had done in the *Sententiae* which they had presented to the Synod). It is often said that there was agreement between the two parties on the subject of human sinfulness. Superficially, this is true, as the Remonstrants asserted the universal sinfulness of mankind and their inability to do anything good, including to believe savingly on Christ, without the grace of God. In truth, however, there is a substantial difference, as the Remonstrants asserted that God provides sufficient grace to all people which, if accepted, would lead to their conversion. This grace is not irresistible, however – and so, by implication, there must be something in some individuals, at least, which leads them not to resist God's grace, whereas others do. In other words, under the Remonstrant scheme, some people are, in themselves, better than others.

Against this, the third and fourth heads of doctrine of Dort assert the universal effects of the Fall, so that 'all people are conceived in sin and are born children of

wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin'. It goes on, 'Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform' (Art. 3). Therefore, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is necessary if a person is to come to saving faith. They will never do so of their own unaided, unrenewed will. Furthermore, in accordance with

God's decree, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit without fail brings a person to saving faith. This work takes place in the will, not abolishing the will or treating us like 'blocks and stones' (Art. 16) or acting by force or compulsion, but renewing, healing and reviving the will 'in a manner at once pleasing and powerful' so as to work true saving faith and obedience.

Finally, in the fifth head of doctrine, the Canons deal with the subject of perseverance.

The Remonstrants, following Arminius, were unwilling in their 1610 document to express a definite view on whether a believer could in fact fall away after they had believed, though their *Sententiae* of 1618 seem to make a much clearer assertion that that is possible. The Synod wanted nothing of this uncertainty and set forth the definite doctrine that, although sin continues to dwell in the believer all his life, 'God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the

The Synod clearly affirmed that a doctrine of definite atonement placed no restriction on the audience for gospel preaching.

end' (Art. 3). Again, we see the pastoral sensitivity of the Synod, as it warns against the dangers of temptation and the terrible effects, even for the believer, of falling into gross sin. Nevertheless, the certainty of God's merciful preservation of the saints is re-asserted. Questions of assurance which may arise are then carefully and at some length addressed.

## Four reasons why Baptists should bother with the Canons of Dort

### 1. The Canons of Dort provide a clear exposition of the doctrines of grace, which we are in danger of forgetting.

It has often been said, truthfully I believe, that when vital biblical doctrine is recovered it becomes very important to the generation which recovered it and they are unstinting in their efforts to pass it on to the next generation. The next generation are persuaded by what they receive, but begin to take it for granted: the truths for which the previous generation struggled and at whose recovery they so greatly rejoiced now appear to be commonplace, believed by everyone with whom we have serious fellowship. The truths begin to be assumed. The inevitable happens: they are not handed down with such eagerness and clarity to the generation which follows, which then assumes that they are not so important and forgets them. We are back to square one.

With regard to the doctrines of grace, I fear that we may be already quite a long way down the road which I have just mapped out. The 1950s and 60s saw a widespread recovery of the doctrines

of grace among evangelicals in this country. This recovery followed a lengthy period in which evangelicalism had been sincere and zealous but theologically fairly broad and unconcerned with detailed doctrine. Through the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and others, however, and the establishment of institutions such as the Banner of Truth Trust, the doctrines of grace began to be clearly and unashamedly taught and explained as a significant part of the teaching of Holy Scripture. A generation was gripped by these truths and transformed in their devotional and daily lives by them. They also provoked sharp opposition in some quarters.

Where are we now, however, on this issue? While it is impossible for a minister to know very much about what is preached and taught in churches other than his own, my judgment is that we are not teaching the doctrines of grace with the clarity, enthusiasm and delight which gripped that first generation to which I referred a moment ago. We believe them, I'm sure, but we tend now to assume them and I am not convinced that we are doing a good job at passing them on to the next generation as living and vital doctrines which are biblical, important to the Christian faith and central to a truly vibrant and persistent Christian life and witness. In fact, rather like the generation of evangelicals before the recovery of Reformed doctrine, I believe we are in danger of being preoccupied in church life with evangelism to the extent that questions of doctrine seem of little importance if they have no obvious bearing upon what we regard as the

central message of the gospel. If we choose to continue along this course, the results will, I believe, be disastrous for the church in this country.

It is here that the Canons of Dort can be of great help to us, for they set out clearly and unashamedly the doctrines of grace, in a manner which demonstrates how integral those doctrines are to the central message of the gospel and, more than that, which teach clearly how those doctrines are to undergird and direct the manner in which the gospel message is communicated.

### 2. The Canons address the hyper-Calvinist issue, a perennial issue in any recovery of the doctrines of grace.

Particular Baptist life in England in the middle years of the eighteenth century was stultified by a high Calvinist theology which denied the free offer of the gospel. According to the logic of these high Calvinists, Christ had died only for the elect (as we would affirm); therefore a sincere gospel call can be made only to those elect (which we would deny); furthermore, since the unbeliever is unable without the power of God to put his faith savingly in Christ, there can be no duty upon the unbeliever so to believe (which we would also, I hope, deny). Unsurprisingly, this led to the strangling of evangelistic effort among the mid-century Particular Baptists and

had a deadening effect upon their work.

The Canons of Dort address these issues head on. The question of 'duty faith', as it became known in Particular Baptist circles, is addressed directly in Article 6 of

the second head of doctrine of the Canons of Dort. It is there stated that the fact that many who hear the call of the gospel do not believe but perish is 'not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault'. If those who persist in unbelief are thus 'at fault', the clear implication is that they ought to have believed or, put another way, that they had a duty to believe savingly in Christ. Thus, as the Canons state it, 'The cause or blame for this unbelief ... is not at all in God, but in man.' (First head, Art. 5). On the free offer of the gospel, the Canons make clear, as we have already seen, that the gospel is to be preached indiscriminately to all.

It is much to be regretted that the higher Calvinists among the English Particular Baptists in the eighteenth century – and indeed subsequently – did not pay more sustained attention to the balanced and biblical exposition of Reformed doctrine which the Canons of Dort provide. Let us ensure that we do not repeat their errors – and one helpful way to ensure this is through a careful study of the Canons of Dort.

It is here that the Canons of Dort can be of great help to us, for they set out clearly and unashamedly the doctrines of grace, in a manner which demonstrates how integral those doctrines are to the central message of the gospel.

### 3. The Canons are pastorally useful, to avoid our being theologically arid and unfruitful.

As we have seen, the first five articles of the Canons, under the first head of doctrine, on Predestination, do not mention the words predestination or election (other than in the title). Instead, they preach the elements of the gospel: the justice of God in condemning the world for sin, the love of God in sending his Son into the world to give everlasting life, the mercy of God in sending preachers into the world to preach the good news, salvation for those who receive the news and 'embrace Jesus the Saviour with a true and living faith' and wrath for those who do not believe, for which unbelief and for all sins they alone are responsible. By setting the doctrines of grace in their pastoral and practical context in this way, the Canons of Dort help us avoid aridity and irrelevance in theological debate and controversy – something to which even Reformed Baptists have not proven themselves to be entirely immune. Dort concerned itself not only with the substance of the doctrine to be believed but the manner in which it is to be conveyed.

These same concerns can be seen in the second head of doctrine addressing the question of the scope of Christ's atonement. As with the first head, the Canons do not plunge directly into the question, but begin with an assertion of God's righteousness in punishing sin and the need therefore for an adequate satisfaction for sin, such as Christ has made. They go on to assert the infinite value of that sacrifice, considered in

and of itself, the duty to proclaim the gospel to all, the guilt of those who refuse to believe the gospel and the fact that saving faith is entirely a free gift from God, before finally reaching the question of the persons for whom Christ made satisfaction. It is only at this point, with this thorough preparation, that the Canons assert, as has been seen, that Christ's redemption was effective only for the elect. The Canons do not attempt to argue out this position by way of a strictly logical argument flowing from the doctrine of election alone. Instead, they address the various strands of the biblical data which demonstrate the necessity, biblically and theologically, for a definite and non-universal scope to the benefits of the atonement. Mankind's hopeless condition, guilty for his sin and responsible to God for his unbelief, demonstrates that only an effective redemption of particular individuals – not a general atonement which simply makes salvation possible on condition of faith – is sufficient to save.

The same emphases and approach can be seen in the remaining heads of doctrine. This pastoral and practical emphasis is somewhat unusual in a technical confessional document of the seventeenth century. Yet it is most welcome. Perhaps, again, had the English Particular Baptists of the eighteenth century given more attention to an approach of this kind, they would have been spared some of the more injurious effects of the theological controversies in which they engaged over the course of the that century.

### 4. The Canons of Dort form part of our Particular Baptist heritage - theological and confessional.

English Particular Baptists emerged in the early decades of the seventeenth century largely from congregational settings which themselves emerged from the established Church of England. All these shared a clear Reformed theology. Thus the theological heritage of the early Particular Baptists was a thoroughly Reformed one. Although they held a different position from others on questions of church government and baptism, the Particular Baptists thus saw themselves as an integral part of the Reformed movement of seventeenth-century England. They looked back on the preaching, theology and practice of the reformers and Puritans who preceded them and regarded them as their forebears and viewed themselves as participants in the heritage which those men had bequeathed. The Canons of Dort formed part of that heritage.

Evidence for the shared nature of their Reformed heritage can be seen in the confessional documents which Particular Baptist ministers of the seventeenth century put together. *The First London Baptist Confession of Faith*, of 1644 had as one of its express goals to refute charges that were being made against the Particular Baptists that they were 'holding Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne'. That confession therefore goes to great lengths to affirm clearly and unequivocally the various elements of the doctrines of grace: unconditional election, the thorough-going sinfulness of all humanity, an

effective atonement only for the elect, conversion only by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the perseverance of the saints. There is furthermore an assertion that the gospel is to be preached to all.

The *London Confession* of 1644 thus espouses a clear Counter-Remonstrant position on all the key doctrinal issues addressed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. This is not to say that the framers of the *1644 Confession* were necessarily aware of the Canons formulated twenty-five years earlier, still less that they consciously made use of them in the drafting of their confession of faith. Indeed, the *1644 Confession* appears to derive partly from a confession which predates the Dort assembly: the 'True Confession' formulated by Separatists from the national church in 1596, a document in which God's sovereignty in the salvation of the elect is also clearly set out, though not with the distinctiveness and clarity of the *1644 Confession*. The latter document demonstrates, then, that the early Particular Baptists shared in the theological heritage of their Presbyterian and Independent Reformed brethren, such that on these essential doctrines connected with salvation they desired to make clear to all, especially to those who suspected them of Remonstrant beliefs, that they stood firmly on Calvinistic foundations.

The Calvinistic soteriology expounded in the first edition of the *1644 Confession* was strengthened in a second edition and then again in the Second London Confession agreed by a larger number of ministers in 1677 (republished

in a second edition in 1688 and generally known today as the '1689' *Baptist Confession of Faith*). This latter document is largely based upon the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, though also taking in some of the adaptations made to that confession by the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* agreed by the Independents in 1658. The use by the Particular Baptists of these two confessional documents again manifests their shared heritage as well as their desire to demonstrate in a public manner their agreement with Reformed brethren on the large majority of doctrinal issues. The doctrines of mankind's utterly fallen condition; of the unconditional election of those who will be saved; of Christ's death for the redemption of the elect alone; of the work of the Spirit effectually to draw them to Christ; and of the final perseverance of the saints are replicated in the *1677 Baptist Confession* in almost identical language to that found in the Westminster Confession.

The seventeenth-century Particular Baptists thus stood squarely in the Reformed tradition of the Puritans from whose circles they had emerged. Though they appear not to have cited or made conscious use of the Canons promulgated by the Synod of Dort in 1619, they shared a heritage with those who formulated those measures, such that in their confessions of faith they expressed the same Calvinistic and Reformed doctrines as had been expounded by the Dutch Reformed in response to the tenets of the Remonstrants. Despite cultural, national and doctrinal differences, these early Particular Baptists would have

found little cause to quarrel with the conclusions of the Synod of Dort.

### Conclusions

I hope that my attempt at an introduction to the Synod and Canons of Dort will provide motivation to their study, in this the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Synod's conclusion. But I want to close by suggesting that what we have considered has broader and more general implications of great significance for Reformed Baptists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The factors which I have sought to spell out in relation to the Synod of Dort should, in my view, convince us of the benefits which would accrue, of a serious and substantive recovery of our Reformed, Puritan and confessional heritage. I have argued that this is a very significant part of our own heritage. I hope that there would not be too many dissenters from that view. But how seriously do we really take this? If our interest does not translate into action, then we cannot say that we really are taking it seriously.

If we take this seriously, we will devote time and energy to taking possession of this heritage. This would involve more than the occasional foray into reformation theology and Puritan writings. Rather, it would mean a careful, sustained study of the major writings and the history which constitute this heritage as well as the teaching and passing on of that heritage to the next generation. This cannot be done in a moment. And time spent in study does not guarantee that we will successfully grasp that which we have come into – many of those who have gone down a hyper-Calvinist route have been

assiduous students of the past and very learned. Careful weighing of what is read and studied, against the Scriptures and through conferring with one another, is also required. This will not be achieved, therefore, without serious planning and sustained energy.

Where ever do we find the time and energy for this, however? Ministers already feel overwhelmed with the regular work of preaching, evangelism, visiting, just keeping things going. We have absolutely no time for anything extra. We live in an increasingly hostile society and it is all we can do simply to keep our congregations faithful to the gospel and uphold in some fashion the vital work of evangelism. My response is that the issues addressed in this paper are absolutely necessary, especially if we are to survive and make progress in a

sceptical and hostile society such as our own. Within this heritage are real treasures stored up for us to ransack and make use of in our ministry today. They are the funds laid up for us by our forefathers, on which we are to draw for the benefit and fruitfulness of our service today. If we fail to find a way to make use of them, to come into and truly possess this marvellous inheritance which has come down to us, we and our work will be very much the poorer. This is not just a nice optional extra for those who have the time or the inclination – it is an absolute necessity.

Some, of course, do have more of an inclination than others. It is inevitable and right that, just as we each have different gifts and opportunities, some will be more familiar with this heritage than others. There are those who have spent relatively large amounts of time on this kind of study. The others of us need to learn from them. But the true recovery and apprehension of this heritage for us as Reformed Baptists in the twenty-first

Let us not, in our day and generation, shirk the challenge which that heritage brings us, to study it and apprehend it so as to inform and enrich the work of the gospel in our own day.

century is an exercise to which we all need to be committed, as a body of ministers and preachers. We need together to recognise and affirm the vital importance of such a project. We should make use of what has already been done in our day in this direction and then we should find and agree ways in which we can put time, energy and funds into making this a reality.

The Reformed and puritan confessional heritage of which I am speaking belongs to us, as

Reformed Baptists, as much as it belongs to the Presbyterians or to any other grouping of Reformed believers today. Let us not, in our day and generation, shirk the challenge which that heritage brings us, to study it and apprehend it so as to inform and enrich the work of the gospel in our own day – and ensure that we effectually pass on this wonderful heritage to the generation of Reformed Baptists which succeeds us. ■

*Robert Strivens is the pastor of Bradford on Avon Baptist Church.*

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Books, 2018),  
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- William Boekestein,  
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BRETT LEE-PRICE

# PINK AND THE

# GOSPEL 'OFFER'

‘The gospel is not an “offer” to be bandied around by evangelistic peddlers. The gospel is no mere invitation but a proclamation, a proclamation concerning Christ; true whether men believe it or no.’<sup>1</sup>

It’s probably one of the most infamous quotations from A W Pink (1886-1952) of all time. Appearing in his most well-known title, *The Sovereignty of God*, this quote is seemingly taken to mean that Pink rejected the idea that the gospel is something that ought to be offered to all. It has been used extensively by others; by some to argue that Pink leaned towards hyper-Calvinism, at least at the time of writing *Sovereignty*, and by others, who do embrace a form of hyper-Calvinism, to support their position against evangelism.

Yet, is this what Pink actually meant? Is Pink against the idea of the gospel being ‘offered’ to all? Iain Murray, in his biography of Pink, referencing this quote, writes:

‘Along with hyper-Calvinists, [Pink] still wanted to reject the idea that the gospel invitations are an “offer” of Christ ... Rather, he thought, it was to be presented primarily as a witness and testimony — “no mere invitation, but a proclamation”. Gospel preaching was a statement of facts by which the elect are brought to faith while “God suffers” it “to fall on the ears of the non-elect.”’<sup>2</sup>

It is my intention here to demonstrate that Pink was not against the idea of the gospel being preached, proclaimed,

or even offered, but instead, given the context of this quote in *Sovereignty* as well as the systematic and chronological thought of Pink at the time, that this quote is a statement specifically against the means by how the gospel was, and in many ways still is, being ‘offered’ (thus, Pink’s use of the offer in quotation marks). Rather, Pink exhorted that the gospel by its very nature necessitated its sharing and proclamation to all.

However, before proceeding, I wish to also advise that it is not my intent to go into the theological discussion pertaining to the ‘Free offer of the Gospel’. I don’t believe that this is what Pink specifically sought to engage with, either regarding the quotation or the larger context of the ‘Difficulties and Objections’ chapter from which it is drawn. Although there are certainly, and obviously, implications that one can possibly draw out, I will leave a more in-depth engagement of Pink in relation to that subject to another time.

### Pink and ‘offer’

Pink lived and ministered during a time in which man-centred theology dominated the evangelical landscape. A W Tozer, another preacher who once quipped that he had ‘preached himself off every Bible conference’, made the following assessment of the Christianity during his (and Pink’s) time:

‘Christianity today is man-centred, not God-centred. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men. The image of God currently

popular is that of a distracted Father, struggling in heartbroken desperation to get people to accept a Saviour of whom they feel no need and in whom they have very little interest. To persuade these self-sufficient souls to respond to his generous offers God will do almost anything, even using salesmanship methods and talking down to them in the chummiest way imaginable. This view of things is, of course, a kind of religious romanticism which, while it often uses flattering and sometimes embarrassing terms in praise of God, manages nevertheless to make man the star of the show.’<sup>3</sup>

Whilst Pink’s wholehearted embracement of Calvinism and God’s sovereignty<sup>4</sup> was to leave him outside the mainstream evangelicalism of the time, this was further compounded by Pink’s firm convictions on the nature of the church, the gospel, and salvation. Like Tozer, Pink was utterly dismayed at the state of the church and evangelism. Critiquing the state of ‘so-called evangelism of [his] day’, which was ‘a grief to genuine Christians’, in his article on Evangelism appearing in the July 1948 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*, Pink goes on to attack.

‘[T]hose cheap-jack evangelists who aim no higher than rushing people into

making a formal profession of faith in order that the membership of the churches may be swelled, take those who are inspired by a genuine compassion and deep concern for the perishing, who earnestly long and zealously endeavour to deliver souls from the wrath to come, yet unless they be much on their guard, they too will inevitably err. Unless they steadily view conversion in the way God does – as the way in which he is to be glorified – they will quickly begin to compromise in the means they employ. The feverish urge of modern evangelism is not how to promote the glory of the triune Jehovah, but how to multiply conversions. The whole current of evangelical activity during the past fifty years has taken that direction. Losing sight of God’s end, the churches have devised means of their own.’

Contemporary evangelism, in Pink’s sight, erred in its priorities and miscomprehended the focus of the gospel. Instead of focusing on Christ, it focused on the sinner. Instead of evangelism being a vehicle in which God is glorified through the unadulterated proclamation of salvation to the repentant sinner, it instead emphasised numbers, driving so-called evangelists to attempt a plethora of tactics and theatrics in order to bring forth conversions,

**PINK EXHORTED THAT THE GOSPEL BY ITS VERY NATURE NECESSITATED ITS SHARING AND PROCLAMATION TO ALL.**

<sup>3</sup> James L Snyder, *The Life of A W Tozer* (Christian Publications, 1991), p107.

<sup>4</sup> Some have argued that Pink’s Calvinism was a ‘High’ form. However, whilst Pink was certainly a ‘staunch’ Calvinist as he labelled himself in the 1920s, the Calvinism that he did encounter was largely watered down. This was especially the case in Australia during Pink’s time.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur W Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Baker Books, 1984) p209.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Murray, *The Life of Arthur W Pink* (Banner of Truth, 2011) p320.

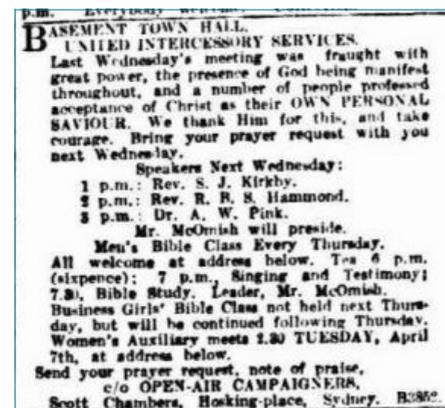
without imparting any real scriptural substance. This often led consequently to many unregenerate people in church holding to a superficial notion of the gospel – people who, in Pink’s experience, believed that they could avoid hell simply by intellectually ‘believing’, without exhibiting any real faith, and all while believing they could retain their carnal and worldly desires.<sup>5</sup>

‘The nature of Christ’s salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day “evangelist”. He announces a Saviour from hell, rather than a Saviour from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the lake of fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness.’<sup>6</sup>

Needless to say, A W Pink’s use of the word ‘offer’ needs to be framed within this context of how he saw evangelism. Pink was not an individual who simply wrote against a practice from the comfort of his own chair. Rather, at the time of writing Sovereignty, and throughout its revisions, he was involved in many different evangelistic outreaches and ministries. In the early 1920s, he was involved with

Tent Evangelism in California and Seattle, had some relationship with the ministry of Open-Air Campaigners whilst in Sydney<sup>7</sup>, and was involved in many Bible conferences throughout the United States, Australia and Britain, some of which had an explicit emphasis on evangelism.<sup>8</sup> However, Pink had a particular distaste for those who he felt ‘sold short’ the gospel. They were nothing more than evangelistic pedlars, doing anything they could do to win converts, all while presenting a vacuous articulation of the truth and, fundamentally, an anaemic God. Such pedlars failed to portray the reality of the sinfulness of sin, failed to bring people to a true understanding of their need of a Saviour, and avoided preaching about a Christian’s ongoing duty of holiness and exercising of faith. Instead, many presented the gospel in a way which potentially tackled some moral or social ill, outlined the possibility of avoiding final judgment, and then invited the listener to make a decision for Christ. The offer was on the table, if only the sinner would take it up.

Pink was determined to push back against this form of decisional evangelism, which lauded man’s ability at the expense of



An OAC event advertisement which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, 1925.

God’s sovereignty and which sought to give men assurance without substance. He instead wanted people to have a clearer understanding of what the gospel was, what it entailed, and what it certainly was not. He wanted to outline that salvation belongs to the LORD,<sup>9</sup> and concurrently dismantle the notion that the onus of someone’s salvation rested on the messenger. This can be noted in his fourth address on Election at Ashfield Tabernacle, given in 1925 (Note the similar use of language as the main quote in question):

‘Most people in this twentieth century are so ignorant they imagine that the gospel concerns sinners. It does not, and the gospel is not about sinners. The gospel is the gospel of Christ! It is about the person and the work of God’s Son! Now listen, I want you to get this very clearly.

The gospel is not an “offer”, the gospel is a proclamation, not an “invitation”. The gospel is a proclamation about Christ, and the gospel, is true even if not one man on earth tonight believed it! My believing the gospel does not make the gospel true. The gospel is true whether I believe it or no, because the gospel is not about me, the gospel is about Christ.

‘Now listen to my next statement, and let it sink in. We are not responsible to bring sinners to Christ. No preacher is responsible to do that. No open-air worker is responsible to bring any sinner to Christ, for there is none of us [who] can do it; we have not got the power. Our responsibility is to bring Christ to the sinner. Did you get that? Our responsibility is to preach Christ to the sinner!

‘How man turns God’s things upside down, doesn’t he, every time, and the awful thing today is, and it is true almost everywhere, that we are far more concerned about the results of the gospel than we are about the purity of it! We are more concerned in the blessing of man than we are about the glory of Christ! Is not that true? Is it not true that the first great question asked everywhere to-day is, What are the “results”? What is the fruitage? How many people have been saved in your church the last year? I am not saying that the question has no importance, but I do say that if that is the first question that is asked, it only shows what a low level we are living on!’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The terms of Christ’s salvation are erroneously stated by the present-day evangelist. With very rare exceptions, he tells his hearers that salvation is by grace and is received as a free gift, that Christ has done everything for the sinner, and that nothing remains but for him to “believe”, to trust in the infinite merits of his blood. And so widely does this conception now prevail in “orthodox” circles, so frequently has it been dinned in their ears, so deeply has it taken root in their minds – that for one to now challenge it and denounce it as being so inadequate and one-sided as to be deceptive and erroneous, is for him to instantly court the stigma of being a heretic, and to be charged with dishonouring the finished work of Christ by inculcating salvation by works! ... Salvation is by grace, by grace alone – for a fallen creature cannot possibly do anything to merit God’s approval or earn his favour. Nevertheless, divine grace is not exercised at the expense of holiness, for it never compromises with sin. It is also true that salvation is a free gift – but an empty hand must receive it, and not a hand which still tightly grasps the world!’ Evangelism, *Studies in the Scriptures*, July 1948.

<sup>6</sup> Signs of the Times, *Studies in the Scriptures*, December 1937.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Basement Town Hall, United Intercessory Services’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1925.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Bible Conference: Emphasising Evangelism’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1921.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 3:8.

<sup>10</sup> Election: Address by A W Pink at Ashfield Tabernacle, 26 June 1925.



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Pink was adamant that the gospel was all about Christ. It was relevant to the sinner, but it was not about sinners. Instead, the gospel was a proclamation of a universal truth about what Christ had done, not something to be simply extended, or offered, to sinners to decide if true. There was, Pink was convinced, an authoritative element to the gospel which meant it had to be proclaimed in an authoritative fashion. It was to be presented in a way in which sinners were still implored to trust in Christ, but with a commanding aspect which emphasised both God's right as sovereign Creator to command sinners to repent and the sinner's obligation to do so. This is evident through Pink's own articulation of what the gospel is, as given in a few lines after the original quote in *Sovereignty*:

'The gospel, in brief, is this: Christ died for sinners, you are a sinner, believe in Christ, and you shall be saved. In the gospel, God simply announces the terms upon which men may be saved (namely, repentance and faith) and, indiscriminately, all are commanded to fulfil them.'<sup>11</sup>

This understanding of both the gospel as an authoritative proclamation as well as man's duty to repent and turn to Christ was to permeate Pink's theological framework in regard to evangelism throughout his life.<sup>12</sup> However, Pink was never to position this understanding

<sup>11</sup> Arthur W Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Baker Books, 1984) p209.

<sup>12</sup> It is likely that Pink was particularly influenced by the apostle Paul's addresses in Acts 17 wherein Paul 'proclaimed' the good news of Christ at Thessalonica (17:3), Berea (17:13), and Athens (Acts 17:23); finishing his proclamation in Athens by stating that God 'commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

in a way which stifled evangelism, but rather he desired to root evangelism in its proper doctrinal bearings, and believed that evangelism was a fundamental duty of all Christians. This conviction was to lead him to struggle with his pastorate at Belvoir Street Particular Baptist Church, in Sydney, between 1925-1927, a church which would rightly be identified as having hyper-Calvinistic tendencies. Writing to a sympathetic congregant after his resignation, Pink states:

'Having discovered that their views of human responsibility were very defective and that they were altogether lac[k]ing in evangelistic zeal, I sought by the Lord's help to remedy this. Seeking grace to be "as wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove", I proceeded slowly and gently. From April to October 1926 I averaged one sermon out of five to the unsaved; the last you heard and endorsed ... on Bartimaeus. The deacons took me to task for this sermon. At the next church meeting, very soon after, the secretary denounced it as a "free-will" sermon.'<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Pink desired individuals to have a correct understanding of God's sovereignty, but in a way which compelled them to evangelism. In his third address on Election at Ashfield Tabernacle, Pink, after outlining that sinners can only come to Christ if drawn by God, aptly challenges his listeners to take mission and evangelism seriously by stating:

'Now the question arises again, why are we to preach the gospel to every creature?

– if God has only elected a certain number to be saved? The reason is, because God commands us to do so. Well, but, you say, it does not seem reasonable to me. That has got nothing to do with it; your business is to obey God and not to argue with him. God commands us to preach the gospel to every creature and it means what it says – every creature and it is a solemn thing.

'Every Christian in this room tonight has yet to answer to Christ why he has not done everything in his power to send that gospel to every creature! Yes, I believe in missions – probably stronger than most of you do, and if I preached to you on missions perhaps I would hit you harder than you have been hit yet. The great majority of God's people who profess to believe in missions, are just playing at them – I make so bold as to say of our evangelical denominations today that we are just playing at missions and that is all. Why my friends, there is almost half of the human race – think of it – in this 20<sup>th</sup> century – travel so easy and cheap. Bibles printed in almost every language under heaven, and as we sit here tonight there is almost half of the human race that never yet heard of Christ, and we have got to answer to Christ for that yet! You have and I have. Oh yes, I believe in man's responsibility. I do not believe in man's "freedom" but I do in man's responsibility, and I believe in the Christian's responsibility in a double way, and every one of us here tonight has yet got to face Christ and look into those eyes as a flame of fire, and he is going to say to

<sup>13</sup> Unpublished Letter to Brooks, 27 December 1927

us, I entrusted to you my gospel. It was committed as a “trust” to you (see 1Thess 2:4). It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.’

‘Oh, my friends, we are playing at things. We have not begun to take religion seriously, any of us. We profess to believe in the coming of Christ, and we profess to believe that the one reason why Christ has not come back yet is because his Church, his body, is not yet complete. We believe that when his body is complete he will come back. And my friends, his “body” never, never, will be complete until the last of his elect people will be called out, and his elect people are called out under the preaching of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, and if you are really anxious for Christ to come back soon, then you had better be more wide awake to your responsibility in connection with taking or sending the gospel to the heathen!’

‘Christ’s word, and it is Christ’s word to us, is “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel,” he does not say “Send ye”, he says “Go ye”, and you have to answer to Christ yet because you have not gone! Well, you say, do you mean by that that everyone of us here tonight ought to go out to the mission field? I have not said that, I am not any man’s judge, Many of you here tonight have a good reason which will satisfy Christ why you have not gone. He gave you work to do here. He put you in a position here. He has given you responsibilities to discharge here, but every Christian who is free to go, and does not go, has got to answer to Christ for it yet.’

“Go ye into all the world.” Well then, you say, Where am I to go? Oh, that is very easy. You say, easy? Yes, I mean it: it is very easy. There is nothing easier in the world than to know where you ought to begin missionary work. You have it in the first chapter of Acts and the eighth verse: “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem (that is the city in which they were) and in all Judea (that is the State in which their city was), and in Samaria (that is the adjoining State), and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” If you want to begin missionary work, you have to begin it in your home-town, and my friends if you are not interested in the salvation of the Chinese in Sydney, then you are not really interested in the salvation of the Chinese in China, and you are only fooling yourselves if you think you are! Oh, I am calling a spade a spade tonight. If you are anxious about the souls of the Chinese in China, then you will be equally anxious about the souls of the Chinese here in Sydney, and I wonder how many in this building tonight have ever made any serious effort to reach the Chinese in Sydney with the gospel! I wonder. I wonder how many here tonight have been round to the Bible House in Sydney and have said to the manager there, “Do you have any New Testaments in the Chinese language, or do you have any Gospels of John in the Chinese language? How much are they per hundred? or per dozen?” And I wonder how many of you have bought a thousand or a hundred, and then have gone round to the houses in the Chinese quarter and have said, “My friend, this is a little gift that will do your soul good if you will read it.”

‘Ah, my friends, we are playing at missions: it is just a farce, that is all! “Go ye” is the first command. Go where? Those around me first. Go what with? The gospel! Well, you say, “Why should I go?” Because God has commanded you to! Well, you say, “What is the use of doing it if he has just elected certain ones?” Because that gospel is the means that God uses to call out his own elect, that is why! You do not know, and I do not know, and nobody here on earth knows, who are God’s elect and who are not. They are scattered over the world, and therefore we are to preach the gospel to every creature, that it may reach the ones that God has marked out among those creatures.’<sup>14</sup>

Pink believed in evangelism and he believed that the gospel was to be preached, proclaimed, and offered to all. Yet, it was to be an authoritative proclamation given to sinners that God would utilise to draw forth his elect. It was God’s means to separate the wheat from chaff through the proclamation of the majestic work, achievement, and glory of Christ.<sup>15</sup> It wasn’t to be a mere arbitrary ‘invitation’ or ‘offer’ extended to sinners to have the final authority to determine

or accept its truth as much as it was a declaration to them of what Christ had done and a commanding imploration for them to believe and receive the ‘gift’ of Christ and salvation.<sup>16</sup>

**It was this firm belief that God was sovereign and would draw sinners which compelled Pink to advocacy for evangelism.**

Pink’s high view of God’s sovereignty was to in no way to curtail or hamper his understanding of evangelism. Rather, it was this firm belief that God was sovereign and would draw sinners which compelled Pink to advocacy for evangelism. He pleased for a robust evangelism fully grounded in and driven by God’s Word, one prompted by God’s command to do so, and

emphasising the tenets of man’s total depravity and God’s total goodness. The gospel was not an ‘offer’ to be thrown around haphazardly, but had to be placed in its proper moorings. To do anything other was to sell short what he saw as the glorious treasure of the gospel. ■

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<sup>14</sup> Election: Address by A W Pink at Ashfield Baptist Church, 13 June 1925.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur W Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Baker Books, 1984) p210.

<sup>16</sup> ‘A slight distinction between receiving and believing. I would express it thus. Believing respects Christ as he is set forth in gospel testimony. When a preacher preaches the gospel he presents Christ to the hearer, if the hearer believes that testimony, he is saved. “Faith cometh by hearing.” Believing has to do with the saved hearer of the gospel testimony. Receiving has to do with Christ as he is presented to us as God’s gift: you believe a testimony, you receive a gift.’ Unpublished Sermon on Exodus 12, A W Pink, 1925; ‘It is also true that salvation is a free gift – but an empty hand must receive it, and not a hand which still tightly grasps the world!’ *Evangelism, Studies in the Scriptures*, July 1948.

# Hungry for the Word:

Training pastors for the global church

## Carey International Pastoral Training

'Most of our pastors around do not have Bible college skill, so we request Carey to come and instil knowledge on the Bible to enhance initiative and proper leadership in their churches. Please help and train us to be ready for the bringing of more lost souls to the King Jesus Christ.'

These words came to me in a recent email from a church network leader in Africa. They represent countless similar requests that I receive almost weekly. There is a hunger for God's Word and for solid theological training throughout the global church. In Western Europe and North America we often take for granted the

easy access that we have to Bibles, quality Christian books, Christian Radio, Bible conferences and seminaries. But, while we enjoy such abundance, pastors and church leaders all around the world find themselves with little or no access to these kinds of resources.

Dr David Livermore states, 'Eighty-five



phrase that has been coined by the Gospel Coalition, most of the world's church is facing 'a theological famine'.

By the grace of God, Carey International Pastoral Training is engaged in this work of theological famine relief. Carey was founded in 1997 by Dr Bob Penhearow after a request for training from a group of pastors in Romania. Today we are active in 20 locations across nearly a dozen countries, including the Philippines, India, Myanmar, Egypt, Lebanon, Cuba and other sensitive regions in the Far East. Our mission is to train spiritual leaders that shape the church and influence the nations. We work at the invitation of church network leaders, to serve them through establishing Bible institutes and training centres.

When we receive a new invitation to a new field, our first step is usually to work with the national church network leader to host a Pastors' Conference. This allows us to encourage and instruct those who attend as well as to develop relationships with the local pastors and learn more about their specific needs and challenges. Out of these conferences, we then work with the local leadership to plant a formal training centre or Bible institute. We work closely with the network leader to name the school, set up the training calendar and identify the level of training that will be most appropriate for the pastors in each region.

Our foundational training level is a certificate programme where pastors are equipped through 10-week-long modular courses in subjects such as Old and New Testament Survey, Biblical Theology, Hermeneutics, Systematic Theology

per cent of churches in the world are led by men and women who have no formal training in theology or ministry.' Some studies report that this percentage is even higher. If we turn this statistic around, what we discover is that only about 1 in 10 of the world's churches are led by people who have ever had the opportunity to receive formal equipping. To use the

Overview and Expository Preaching. Since we work primarily with those who are already in pastoral ministry, our students are able to begin to immediately apply what they are learning in the context of their own local churches and community. In most of our regions it takes the pastors 2-3 years to finish these courses. After completing the certificate programme, pastors can continue to take an additional 10 courses toward a diploma. Thanks to our recognition by the Florida Council of Private Colleges (USA) we are also able, in some regions, to offer both Bachelor of Theological Studies and Master of Theological Studies programmes. These programmes allow pastors who are serving in areas with a higher educational background to study at a deeper level and be equipped to trained up a new generation of Christian leaders in their own communities.

Our focus, however, is not on granting degrees, but rather on equipping and shaping godly and effective pastors and leaders. In order to do this, we send academically credentialed, biblically qualified, seasoned pastors to teach these modular courses. Many of our global teaching team members return to the

same regions year after year. As a result, they not only provide excellent training, but also develop lasting relationships and friendships with the pastors that they are equipping.

As the pastors being trained by Carey go back into their local churches and communities, they are armed with fresh tools to more effectively lead God's people and reach the lost. Yet there's more work to be done. More requests for help come streaming in. There's a hunger for God's Word!

As our work continues to grow, we are looking for more pastors to volunteer as part of our global teaching team. If you are theologically Reformed and have over ten years of pastoral ministry experience together with a minimum of a Master's degree, we would be delighted to hear from you.

To learn more about the work of Carey, request a speaker or ministry presentation at your church, or discover how you and your church can partner with us in training leaders for the global church, visit us online at: [www.careyoutreach.org](http://www.careyoutreach.org) ■



[www.careyoutreach.org](http://www.careyoutreach.org)



# GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN MISSIONS

The *Canons of Dort* are a clear and practical exposition of what has come to be known as 'The five points of Calvinism' although not specifically arranged in that way or order. There are clear statements about God's sovereignty in salvation, but the sovereignty of God embraces all of life, what we call 'providence'. This is one of the most practical doctrines and distinguishes the lifestyle of those who believe it from

others who at best neglect it. One of the first books I recommend to new converts is John Flavel's *The Mystery of Providence*.

In October 2018 Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi commemorated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was privileged to speak on that occasion at which I reflected on so many providences of God during those 40 years and even in preparation for them. Both

before and since 1978 many unplanned things took place without which the church would not have developed as it has done.

The doctrine of the providence of God is such an important one, especially to those of us who call ourselves Reformed, ie heirs of the Protestant Reformation. The *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, section 1 defines it. 'God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.'

It is a doctrine that can only consistently be held by those who believe that God is absolutely sovereign in creation, providence and redemption. It must fundamentally influence a biblical view of missionary work.

## Missions in the New Testament

### Getting out of Jerusalem

Jesus gave his apostles clear instructions in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). There is no evidence that they had planning seminars as to how to fulfil it. How could they? From day one there were 3000 souls to care for. In only a short time that persecution was their lot (Acts 4). They met in homes with no central place of their own to gather. No effort to go outside Jerusalem is recorded. It seems that they only moved when, at the time of Stephen's martyrdom, 'there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem' (Acts 8:1). It was as if they were forced to move. All Christians except the apostles scattered and for the first time we read about Judea and Samaria (8:2, see 1:8). But they did know what to do; they preached the gospel! It was not so much planning but God's providence in bringing persecution that started the wheels of mission in motion to the ends of the earth. Some of those so scattered reached as far as Antioch in Syria (11:19). Exactly who they were and why they travelled in this direction we are not told. But the stage was now set in God's providence for the Gentile mission to be spearheaded by Saul, whom we know as Paul.

### The first missionary journey

It was at Antioch that the gospel was first preached to non-Jews, Greeks (or Hellenists), and there was great success (11:21). Then we read that the church leaders (prophets and teachers) in Antioch were 'worshipping the Lord and fasting' (13:2). Clearly they had something about which they needed help from the Lord. We can only guess

what it was as we are not specifically told. But because the Lord's answer was to choose Barnabas and Saul and send them out 'for the work to which I have called them' (v2), it seems reasonable that they were praying about the Gentile mission. We assume their hearts had been thrilled at the reception of the gospel by the Greeks and they wanted to know from the Lord how that gospel could be taken yet further. The only thing that is recorded is earnest prayer and God's decision. Their two long-standing leaders were to be sent off, Barnabas and Saul. At this early stage we are not even told the specific nature of the work to which they had been called! It seems they naturally went first to Cyprus, probably because this is where Barnabas came from (4:36). Then they went north to the mainland, the nearest land mass away from Antioch, in modern-day Turkey. In city after city persecution was experienced so they had to flee, in Pisidian Antioch (13:50), in Iconium (14:5-6), in Lystra (14:19-20). Why did they turn around and go back after having ministered in Derbe? As they had left hurriedly, they wanted to strengthen the disciples and establish church order (14:22-23). They must have felt it was time to go back home to Antioch and report 'how God has opened a door of faith to the Gentiles' (14:27). The Great Commission was being fulfilled.

### The second missionary journey

The second missionary journey arose out

of a natural desire to see how the churches established on the first missionary trip were getting on (15:36), and to deliver the decisions that were reached in Jerusalem. They first went through Syria to Cilicia (15:41), in which Paul's home town of Tarsus was situated (see 9:30). Then as they tried to go forward the Holy Spirit made it very clear where they were not to go (16:6-7). They were 'forced' to wind up in Troas, for in his providence God had somewhere specific for them to go to –

Macedonia. This was made clear to Paul in a vision (v9). What they were to do was now clear, whether or not they had thought of it before.

### Principles for mission

From these details recorded in Acts we can discern the following principles for missions:

1. God's will for missions is absolutely clear in the Great Commission, variously revealed in each of the Gospels and Acts. This is the church's responsibility until the end of the age. It is not

a matter of resources, personnel or even perceived opportunity. It is a work to which we must be fully committed.

2. Prayer must be earnestly offered for the fulfilment of this commission. Specific needs are brought to our attention in God's providence, through personal contact, local church, internet, etc. There are specific examples of prayer in Acts 4:23ff. where they prayed to continue to speak the Word with all boldness; and

ONE PLAN WE MUST ALWAYS HAVE IS THAT WE WILL PRAY CONSTANTLY AND PREACH THE GOSPEL WHEREVER THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY.



Acts 13:2 where the leaders of the Antioch local church worshipped with fasting.

**3.** God's providence in bringing opportunities (persecution, vision) may be totally unexpected. Open doors are generally to be pursued (1 Cor 16:9, Col 4:3, Rev 3:8), although not always if there are other priorities (2 Cor 2:12). Surely where God purposes to bless is where he will open a door for the messenger of the gospel.

**4.** Grabbing opportunities by faith, not only on the basis of planning or available resources. This is not to deny the need for planning, but rather to bring to the forefront the providence of God. For example, a person representing a specific group in your area walks into the service 'out of the blue', as it were. This may present an opportunity to be pursued with prayer and planning.

**5.** Go where you already have knowledge and contacts, for example Paul to his home area of Cilicia, Barnabas to his home on Cyprus, revisiting previously established churches. God will show the way forward when we are actively pursuing the mission, for example the call to Macedonia only occurred when they were already moving.

**6.** One plan we must always have is that we will pray constantly and preach the gospel wherever there is an opportunity.

### **My experience of God's providences**

I went to Kenya in 1968 directly from college to teach in a secondary school. In 1975 I returned with my wife and baby to help in the ministry of the Bible Fellowship Church in Thika. In 1978 we started Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. Almost all turning points can be seen as a result of specific providences.

### **Getting out of Jerusalem**

#### **Going to Kenya as a Pastor/Missionary**

**1.** *How was it that I wanted to be a preacher of the gospel?* When I went to college (Aberystwyth) my room-mate was a clear Christian, through whom I was converted. How gracious was the Lord to put me with Brian when humanly speaking it could have been with any number of non-Christians. I had been religious as a teenager but had never clearly been taught the gospel in the Methodist Church. Up to that time I would have been incredulous if you had suggested that I would spend my life as a public speaker. I was far too shy and retiring. Yet I obviously had a strength of character that thrust me into leadership roles. So it happened that I found myself preaching in the Methodist Church and leading Bible studies. And some people were converted!

**2.** *How was it that I went to Kenya in 1968 to teach?* In our hall of residence there were many from Africa and, for reasons I cannot remember, I often sat with them at meal times. I joined a Christian Union Prayer Group for Africa. How could one keep on praying for people and needs there and not say to the Lord, 'I am willing to go if it is your will'? I remember one Saturday evening after the meeting flicking through books on

the missionary bookstall (are there such things today?) and on two occasions the word Sudan jumped up from the pages. It was largely unreached with the gospel but was closed to missionaries in late 1965. But I continued my interest in Africa. I sought advice about the way forward. 'Apply to be a teacher in newly independent Kenya and see how you get on there was what' I was told. I found it to be good advice, was sent to a rural Protestant sponsored school and had great ministry opportunities far and wide.

**3.** *How was it that we first went to Thika to minister?* A few years before I even became a Christian (1964) it seems the Lord was preparing the way. And probably before Geoff Thomas knew anything much about Kenya, in 1961 at Westminster Theological Seminary his room-mate just happened to be a Kenyan! It was this contact that enabled us to go to serve the Lord in church ministry in Kenya for the first time in 1975..

#### **The Planting of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi**

**4.** *The relocation to Nairobi.* While in Thika I had often said that we needed to plant a church in Nairobi, the capital city, from where we can spread the biblical truth throughout the country. Sadly, difficulties arose in 1977 and I was summarily dismissed, and it looked like it was all over. But Geoff Thomas knew the then pastor of Nairobi Baptist Church and that church agreed for us to work under them in a newly-developing part of Nairobi, which work was started in early 1978 with contacts both from teaching days and from the Thika ministry.

**5.** *The registration of the Church.* All churches in Kenya must be registered with the government and this is not automatic so, when by mutual agreement we sought for such independence, the application for registration was refused (1979). This was a surprise as the Baptist Church was well known and I believe the Attorney-General used to attend there. On appeal, however, we were directed to discuss things with the National Council of Christian Churches. We have no idea if this was a common way for the government to deal with appeals, but if it recommended us all would be well. As is so often the way in Kenya, if you know someone who knows someone you can seek to get what you ought to get. A good friend of mine 'just happened' to be good friends with the Deputy General-Secretary, and both are fine Christians. The rest is history and the church was registered in 1981.

**6.** *Obtaining a plot and a permanent building.* It has never been our policy to campaign for money. We had a church that sent us to work in Kenya, Alfred Place Baptist in Aberystwyth. It was enough for them to know the situation. But getting a suitable piece of land in the part of Nairobi where we lived (Eastlands) was difficult. The Government provided 'church plots' for free where there were new developments, but although we were the first church in the area, we did not get the one set aside. The Jewish developer of the area had constant visits from us and proved very positive. Eventually they offered us a good-sized plot which had been earmarked for flats on the plan, and at a reasonable price. It was a lot of money in those days. As a small group we did what we could to raise the money



but it was only a tiny fraction. The Lord used our friends and churches, many with whom we had never had any previous contact, to raise all that was needed, so that in 1989 the auditorium was officially opened.

### **Some special ministries begun**

**7. Training of pastors.** In December 1980 I was invited to Kisumu to speak at the gathering of delegates from all over East Africa for the Central Council of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC). Someone must have known me, although I cannot remember who it was. The Bishop of the Church of Christ in Africa (CCA), an African Independent Church, talked with me about the young men he sends abroad to train for the ministry but who never come back to work in the church. I replied that I would help him by setting up a study course for students to come for a few days each month so they need not go abroad. What is now known as the Trinity Pastors' College began. It was extended to contacts in Nairobi and about 150 men have gone

through it over the decades. Although it was something that I knew would have to be done, the Lord chose that it would start in this way.

**8. Church planting outside Nairobi.** Paul became part of the church when we were small and meeting in our house. While he was on leave from work in 1981 I decided to visit him at his home very far away in Thimlich, the south-west corner of Kenya. Little did I suspect that a group of leaders there would request the planting of a church in their area. We later sent Paul back home to lead the church plant and this was the first church planting effort we made. But Paul was untrained and no one in the area had biblical knowledge despite there being so many churches. How could we bring the truth here? Training Paul was one way. But we decided to start the *Grace & Truth* publication, just a two-sided foolscap in the local language, Dholuo. I had to compose it in English first for it to be translated. Hence the English magazine *Grace & Truth* saw the light of day and the most recent issue, 130, had 60 pages. It became all the more necessary as people came into our church in Nairobi and then wanted a similar church back in their home area. Many used articles in the magazine for preaching.

**9. Pokot North.** This is an area in north-west Kenya that began to receive Christianity in the 1970s. The work was founded by some of the sons of George Kendagor (a pioneer local missionary among the Pokot people). When the church with which they were working joined the National Council of Christian Churches they left to form their independent church in opposition

to ecumenism (1980). But they could not get registered with the government and so approached TBC Nairobi to work under us (1990) as they were being threatened with action against them. Why us? Well, one of the sons had visited the UK and one of the churches known to us, and so the connection was made. This was all in God's providence. There are now 13 established churches, more than 300 baptised believers, primary and secondary schools that are sponsored, with six ordained leaders, three of whom are 'missionaries'.

**10. Somalia.** A civil war erupted in Somalia in 1991 and many Somalis began to relocate to Kenya. There are about 3 million indigenous Somalis. As some came to live around us a few of us began to pray for a witness to them, as there are no public Christian churches in Somalia. Then suddenly it happened! When I responded to the knock on the church office door there was Adan. 'Please help me to teach my people English as so many of them are going to America without a knowledge of the language.' I would normally have employed delaying tactics before agreeing to such a request, but I immediately saw the hand of the Lord in this and provided what he needed. He soon professed Christ and was arrested at the instigation of his community on false charges and put in police custody. As with Joseph, they meant it for evil, but God was working for good. The local Imam announced at Friday prayers that a certain sum of money needed to be raised (a bribe) so that the police would proceed to prosecute this our brother who has rejected the faith. Two Somalis named Abdi heard this, were not happy that their religious leader could so publicly promote

bribery and went to visit Adan in the police cell. He directed them towards us and after a while they became Christians. Thus began a ministry amongst Somali refugees who are from a totally Islamic country. A few have professed faith. One of these men now broadcasts the gospel to his people over a very wide area and is very much a leader of Somali Christians worldwide, of whom there are still very few. But the story of God's providence does not end here.

**11. Rendille.** Before he professed Christ one of the Abdis was a heavy drinker, and his 'drinking partner' was Osman, the self-styled leader of the Rendille community in a slum area called Kwa Njenga. The Rendille are pastoralists in north-central Kenya and 20 years ago 90% of them were unreached with the gospel. I had travelled around the outskirts of their land in 1970 in a Land Rover when I was a teacher. I was pursuing my interest in unreached peoples. Now in God's providence they were coming to me, not me to them. Many Rendille men come to towns to work for a while as watchmen. Osman told his kinsmen to come to TBC where they would get all kinds of help – this is how so many view the churches. Many came and easily made professions of faith in the late 1990s. We were not at all convinced of their genuineness until they began to say that they have now come to see they are not Christians. The Lord had begun to convict them of sin. A number were genuinely converted and in the mid-2000s we sent them back to start a church in the main town of Korr.

**12. South Sudan.** A most amazing providence has been in relation to



South Sudan, the place in which I was so interested soon after I became a Christian. This is the story as I have been told it. A group of Christians in the Malakal area, led by their Moderator David decided they wanted to become Baptists, rejecting their Presbyterian background. They called themselves The Trinity Baptist Church of South Sudan and were formally recognised. What was the next thing to be done? Find help from a church outside; so they looked for Trinity Baptist Church in the early 2000s. James was sent all the way to find this TBC in Nairobi. Twenty years ago, with war still raging between north and south, this was no simple journey. James did find us and did some training in Nairobi, although his English was very poor. Eventually in 2010 and 2012 I made two visits to the South Sudan I had only dreamed of decades before. Then war intervened again and is only now subsiding. As I write this I have been communicating with James on Facebook. He is now pastoring a church in Juba. A further providence has occurred. A Sudanese family has been attending TBC Nairobi in the last year. The man works for the South Sudanese government, was on extended leave, and is now back in Juba. This should promote the contact with South Sudan.

## Practical conclusions

1. Local churches must commit themselves to fulfilling the Great Commission, to 'go and make disciples of all nations'. These were our Lord's final words before leaving

the apostles. This was the work he gave them, and through them the church, until the end of the age. The apostles are the foundation of the church, so this is corporate and not individualistic because we are not apostles. It is not that one individual here, and one there, is 'called' to fulfil the Great Commission. The local church is to fulfil it by its ministry of the Word and sending out messengers. The biblical example is Acts 13:1-3. Of course, the Great Commission is not only for far away but also for near. It was Jerusalem as well as the ends of the earth; everywhere. But equally the emphasis must not only be on the near but to the ends of the earth.

2. The local church must pray for the fulfilment of the Great Commission. Our prayers tend to be very parochial. Yet we are commanded to pray, 'Your kingdom come.' Jesus said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest' (Matt 9:37-38). It appears that they became the answer to their own prayers as they were immediately sent out (10:1). Paul urged the Thessalonians to 'pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you' (2 Thess 3:1). Meaningful prayer is not easy without information, detailed and constant information. Gone are the days when Carey had to scour for information from journals like that of Captain Cook; we have a surfeit that is just a click away. How much of our praying as a local church is for the discipling of the nations, including our own?

3. Having faithfully explained the Word and prayed accordingly, the local church must expect the Lord to give specific direction through providences. We do not cast lots for the continent, country and then specific area/people. We do not just do a statistical analysis and make decisions on that basis as to where our interests will focus. As we faithfully serve the Lord through the local church where we are, we can expect things like the following to happen:

- » You will be challenged by reading an article like this one!
- » You will read about another part of the world in a magazine or on social media. It will challenge you because you know your responsibility in the Great Commission (see 4).
- » Someone you do not know may seek to befriend you on Facebook.
- » A visitor walks into your service, especially one from a community that is very hard to reach where they come from. It could be a student, or an immigrant.
- » A new church member joins who has a special experience and interest.

If God is sovereign in his providence none of these things (and many others) is totally insignificant. They may all present opportunities for the spread of the gospel and in prayerful expectation you must 'put your foot in the door' to keep the opportunity open. However, if you are not willing to have your schedule disrupted or experience some discomfort by seeking to

draw near to the sort of people you are not used to, then the opportunity might well be squandered.

4. The local church will encourage involvement according to the various gifts the Lord has given to its members. Ultimately messengers of the gospel must go to the ends of the earth. They will need prayerful and financial support. Carey famously said to those back home

in England, 'I will go down the dark well if you will hold the rope.' There is something everyone can do in this great enterprise as part of the church.

A final challenge. I have heard that I should not expect Christians to go to Kenya to serve the Lord, because they are too comfortable here in the West. Can it really be that a few earthly comforts are more important than fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord who left the glory of

heaven to suffer on the cross for our sins? Specifically, I have heard that it has been said no Westerner should live in a place like Rendile because of the inclement conditions. Then why did waves of missionaries go to West Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to perish in the 'white man's grave'? ■

Can it really be that a few earthly comforts are more important than fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord who left the glory of heaven to suffer on the cross for our sins?

*Keith Underhill preached the gospel in Kenya for 40 years and was a pastor of Trinity Baptist Church Nairobi from 1978 to 2018. He now lives in Liverpool and makes regular visits to Kenya for pastoral training and preaching.*



## A Dutch pastor for Magherafelt, Northern Ireland



📷 From L to R: Gary Brady, Robert Strivens, Alexander Roks, Austin Walker, Jeremy Walker

Magherafelt is a small town in Northern Ireland of eight or nine thousand, largely made up of Roman Catholics but with a significant Protestant community. Some twenty-two years ago a group of believers came together to form the Reformed Baptist Church in the town where they now have an attractive building. The membership is committed and eager to

serve the Lord in their community. Over the years retaining a pastor and elders has proved difficult and the church has often relied on the oversight of other local churches. Initially these were Reformed Baptist churches in America. More recently oversight has been with Maidenbower Baptist Church, Crawley, conveniently situated near Gatwick airport.

In September last year the church was able to call their third pastor and on 25 January 2019 that fact was formally marked with a service of induction. A good number of members and friends from other churches attended, including Reformed Presbyterian Ted Donnelly and John McDermott of Magherafelt Baptist Church, which also is now moving in a more Reformed direction.

The new pastor is Alexander Roks, who has recently finished his theological studies at London Seminary. He and his wife, Roselien, and their teenage children, Daniël and Saralie, hail originally from the Netherlands, where they were members of a Reformed Baptist Church but have now happily relocated to Magherafelt.

The worship service was introduced by Harry McCrory, a deacon in MRBC and included sung praise, prayers and readings; a history of the call, actually a brief history of the church, from another deacon, Sam Gordon; preaching from Pastor Jeremy Walker of Maidenbower on the love of God from 1 John 4; the laying on of hands, in which Pastor Walker was assisted by retired pastor Austin Walker from Maidenbower, Pastor Gary Brady from Child's Hill, where the Roks attended when in London and former Seminary principal, Pastor Robert Strivens, now pastoring in Bradford-on-Avon. Pastor Roks closed the meeting in prayer. Greetings were then received from churches in America and in Wetzlar, Germany, and a lovely tea followed. Do pray for Alexander as he settles into his first pastorate. ■

*Report by Gary Brady*



## Update on African Pastors' Conferences

This time no statistics, but a summary report of one of the conferences held in November 2018 in Mseleni, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

The town boasts the efficient and well-run Mseleni Hospital as well as the Mseleni Children's Home, both run, with local help, by surgeon Dr Victor Fredlund and his wife Rachel. This missionary couple are sent by Serving in Mission and are also APC local organisers, having lived in this rural area for many years. Sadly, many of the local inhabitants suffer from a genetic joint disease. Dr Fredlund is also an elder of the local church, situated adjacent to the hospital, and used annually by APC as a conference venue.

Pastor David Harding, the main speaker, flew to South Africa from the UK and joined the APC team at their base in Midrand. Kabelo Makgabo, the APC Assistant Conference Manager, led the team and Sonwabile Gobololo



**📷 Pastor David Harding, Dr Victor Fredlund and Kabelo Makgabo in the church**

handled the books and admin. Both young men serve Birchleigh Baptist Church in Kempton Park, of which APC is a ministry. They travelled together by road in a vehicle towing a trailer laden with books. They were joined in Mseleni by the second speaker, Pastor Siphon Mfusi, who pastors a church in Estcourt in KwaZulu-Natal.

The 26 delegates were mostly Zionist and Pentecostal/Charismatic. Some follow traditional African religion which includes the worship of ancestors and supposed contact with the dead. Many pastors are not biblical in their doctrine and syncretism is common. The Mseleni area is well known for its involvement in superstition and witchcraft.

Both speakers were well prepared, spoke powerfully but simply and presented

their talks with care, enthusiasm and passion. Common doctrinal errors were dealt with biblically. The talks were well received with positive response. The delegates said that the teaching was clear, biblical and helpful and they were grateful for the good teaching sessions.

APC has begun a new venture – downloading good, Reformed resources such as sermons, videos, books, websites and more onto 16gig SD cards which can be used with a cell phone or a computer. At present the resources are in English and French but hopefully in future will be in Zulu and other languages.

APC thanks Pastor Fred Malone and members of First Baptist Church, Clinton, Los Angeles, USA for their generous support of this and several other APC conferences. ■



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### Further Details

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



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