

ISSUE
29/2

PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND & WALES



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND?



**REFORMATION IN
EUROPE TODAY**



**THE GREAT SYNOD
OF DORDRECHT**



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“ EDITOR'S NOTE

This year is the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordrecht, which gave a definitive response to Arminian error, in the Canons of Dort. We are grateful to Professor Hans Maris of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands who has written an article about this for the Presbyterian Network.

The people of the Republic of Ireland have just voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed the unborn the right to life, and which therefore made abortion illegal unless the mother's life was threatened. It was appalling to witness crowds revelling at the prospect that they would soon be free to destroy unborn babies. On page 12, you can read about the Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre which seeks to help women considering an abortion to recognize the preciousness of the baby in their womb.

Observant readers may have noticed that the cover picture of the last issue was a light-bulb globe supporting various symbols of world cities – the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum etc. Rio de Janeiro was represented by its statue of Christ the Redeemer, and as such it was accurate enough. However, in the rush to produce the issue on time, we did not notice that it was there. We wish to stress that we do not agree with making statues or pictures of Christ. Let the cover picture serve to remind us of the world's need for Bible truth. ○

📍 SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

📍 BARRY

The people in the town of Barry, as in many other areas of the land, are in great need of hearing the glorious gospel of our God. We continue to pray that our current ministries will reach needy men, women, boys and girls, and that God will guide us to further opportunities for outreach. The 'Toddler Time' continues to be well attended. However we have yet to see any of the carers or children come to our worship services on the Lord's Day. We pray for those who lead this work, and that God may speak to those who attend.

Pastor Drew Goodman and family travelled to the United States in late May, for three weeks. He had a busy schedule. The trip also gave an opportunity for the grandparents to meet their new grandson Timothy Andrew Goodman. In the summer months we are expecting a visit of young people from the First Presbyterian Church, Columbia. The purpose is to help run a summer holiday club in the church. We pray that God will bless this work.

Many of our members have known ill health in recent months; yet despite these difficulties, we have been encouraged by the evidence of their faith and trust in their Lord. 'Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!' (Psalm 27:14).

📍 **Brendan Hope**

📍 BERLIN

Christ, the head of the church, is faithful to his promises. When we started with regular services in 2014, we saw our need of families in the congregation. God answered that prayer within half a year, and sent a new family. This year in May we received eight new members, three of whom are children. Christ is not only building his church, God is adding covenant children. We now have to think through ways to catechize those little ones and to help the families to raise the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. As the Lord is adding families and new-born babies to our church, we realize that we need an older generation too. Most of the members and regular visitors are in their late 20s to 30s. We see the need for older, wiser and more experienced men and women, fathers and mothers in the faith, who are able to help the young families and who will encourage the younger generation to be faithful to the Lord. Please join us in prayer, that the Lord will send people of his choice to us.

📍 **Johannes Müller**

📍 BLACKBURN

Our church building, well over 100 years old, was found to have extensive dry rot. We are thankful that we have been able to attend

SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

to this, and the necessary re-decoration.

We are grateful for the spirit of unity and sense of the Lord's presence among us. There are some in the congregation with terminal illnesses, and our minister has been attending to visitation. We have been encouraged by the influx of new people, especially in the morning services, including the unconverted. Thought is being given to re-commencing open air preaching, and with young children now growing up in our church we are considering beginning a Sunday School work.

We covet the prayers of the Lord's people in these matters. The need for confessional Presbyterianism in these parts, preaching the doctrines of free and sovereign grace, has never been greater.

 Norman Green and Kevin McGrane

BURY ST EDMUNDS

We are thankful for God's faithfulness to us over the last few months. We have seen a few new people, who have been an encouragement to us. We pray that as they settle in the church we will be an encouragement to them as they are strengthened in the faith.

One of our ministers (Benjamin Wontrop) and his family were away in the United States for 8 weeks during March-May, visiting financial supporters. We are so thankful that the Lord has again provided all that we need so that Benjamin can continue to serve here.

As we look towards the summer, plans are intensifying for our summer Mission Week (30 July-4 August). Please pray that the Lord would be preparing the hearts of those whom he would have come to the holiday Bible club, the evening preaching and meals.

 Benjamin Wontrop

CAMBRIDGE

As usual, over the summer a number of our members will be leaving Cambridge. This will include the leaders of one of our home groups, several of the young people, the leaders of the young adults group, and some leaders of our children's club. Some of the youth group leaders will also be stepping down. Please pray for us as we seek replacement leaders for these groups. Rev. Doug McCallum would like to start Christianity Explored courses in the autumn.

A number of our members continue to suffer from ill health.

 Annabel Haylett

CARDIFF: BETHEL

The women's work continues with a recent craft evening enjoyed by many visitors, invited to the church by Christian friends. This gave an opportunity to try new skills but also to hear an evangelistic address

SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

given by Deborah Woolley, based on the life of Corrie ten Boom.

Two separate women's Bible Studies are held once a month, one in the day, the other in the evening, but they study the same book, based on *Women of Faith*.

Our minister, Mark Johnston, has concluded his Sunday morning series on Joseph and also Zechariah on Sunday evenings. During his time away fulfilling other preaching engagements, we have been blessed with sound ministry from visiting preachers, including Peter Naylor, Immanuel Church, Gethin Jones, IPC, Philip Haines, Ely Presbyterian Church, and Bob Letham, Bethel.

We have also welcomed two new members, Samuel and Julie Karasek, both transferring memberships from their previous churches in Cambridge and Prague respectively.

Preparation for our children's summer camps is progressing and we value prayer for these as we liaise with members of First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, who will help us in the summer.

 Patricia Stowell

CARDIFF: IMMANUEL

During recent months, the regular ministry has focused on the book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Prophecy of Isaiah. We also have a meeting during the week in which we have started a course on Christian Theology, beginning where the Westminster Confession does, with the doctrine of Scripture.

In April, a small group of members attended a public meeting with the First Minister of the Welsh Government, to express our concerns about his plans to criminalize parents who smack their children. We oppose the proposed change in law because it will remove from parents the freedom to bring up their children in accordance with the wisdom of the Bible and impose on us a humanistic ideology. During May, we rejoiced at the baptism of a covenant child. At the same time, we received news that one of our oldest members, who came to Immanuel in his late 70s and was converted, has cancer and is very unwell.

At the end of May, we had our annual church holiday in Sidmouth, with studies in the books of Ezekiel and Job. This year once again we were so glad to welcome friends from other congregations, both within and outside the EPCEW.

 Peter Naylor




SPOTLIGHT on the Churches


CHELMSFORD

We were delighted to host the EPCEW Conference in Chelmsford at the beginning of March. In spite of dire weather – which meant that some re-arranging of speakers had to take place – we welcomed visitors from as far away as Spain, and it was a time of encouragement and fellowship for all who attended.

We had been praying for more children in the church, so that we could start up the Sunday School again, and we are so thankful that this prayer has been answered with the arrival of two new families. We now have an enthusiastic group of younger children and three able teachers who take it in turn to lead.

As a congregation we were greatly encouraged when Charles, a student at Anglia Ruskin University, was baptized this term, and it was a joy to welcome him and four other adults into membership, along with two covenant children. We also celebrated the baptism of Craig and Becky Taylor's daughter, Elliot Hope, with their family and friends. This was followed by a fellowship lunch.

We have heard first hand about the work of various missionary societies this term, including EMF, Pamoja and Innovista. It is good to hear of the work God is doing through those who serve him in other countries, and this gives more focus to our prayers and support. Renate Heij is currently visiting her sister and brother-in-law who are missionaries working with children in Borneo. Iris Heij is going to join the EMF Go-Europe team to Portugal

this summer. In addition a number of our congregation will be serving in children's camps.


 Ruth Ferguson


CHELTHENHAM - NAUNTON LANE

Please remember us in prayer as we continue to look to God for a new minister to replace Rev. Andy Young who will be leaving to head the new church plant in Oxford. Andy's last Sunday with us will be 1 July. A team of seven from the church, led by Stephen & Audrey Johnston, will be at the Presbyterian Church in Mangalia, Romania, 24-31 July. Unlike previous years, there will be no building work, but the focus will be on children's work both in Mangalia and at the church plant in nearby Limanu.

We had to meet in a school for two consecutive Sunday mornings in May, as some much-needed renovation work was being carried out to the church hall. We look forward to a more secure ceiling, brighter lighting, and new chairs, carpets, and paintwork. The church building has given more than 103 years of gospel witness in the area and we pray that the renewed hall will continue to be used to the glory of God.

James and Joshua, sons of Seb and Sally Hurcombe, were baptized on Sunday, 27 May.


 Tai-Tuck Yu


SPOTLIGHT on the Churches


CHELTHENHAM - WHADDON ROAD

We have been encouraged by increased numbers in our morning services over the past couple of months. It is a joy to see and hear the children participating in worship with us. On the Lord's Day mornings we are working through 1 Samuel, in the evenings we have started a series in Psalms 90-100 and we are going through Mark's gospel in our midweek meetings. Our children's choir have a concert at the church on 20th June where there will be food and a brief evangelistic message.

Larry and Mandy Wilkes (*Mission to the World*) are nearing 80% of the funds they need in order to join us in the work; please pray for help in what remains of the process leading to their coming. In all of this we are very conscious of the need for God's blessing and help. Without him we can do nothing.


 David Pfeiffer


DURHAM

The story of God's workings in China has been an amazing one. We saw how missionaries were received in the 20th century before being thrown out of the country. We saw great persecution against the Lord's people in that land. But in more recent times we have seen how the church in China has grown in its millions. This is not only happening within China but among Chinese people throughout the rest of the world. Even in Durham.

Our congregation ('DPC') had the great privilege of seeing Benjamin Jie Zhang baptized in May. Ben came to us through the witness of our Zambian student Kabwe. The first time he attended a service, the preaching was on the first census in Numbers. This is perhaps not the most obvious of evangelistic texts, but he kept coming. After taking a Christianity Explored course and being faithful in worship for a period, Ben expressed the desire for baptism. He had been called by God from darkness to light.

A number of other Chinese students who have recently come to faith through the ministry of churches in Durham joined us in the service and it was a joyful occasion. We give thanks for the mercy of God in Ben's life and look for more such conversions over the coming years.


 Phil Baiden


GATESHEAD

We are thankful for the Lord's sustaining hand as we reach the final few months of our minister's absence. As we near the end of this changeful year, we have a sense of thankfulness and of security in him. Our members have served with great love in Bill's absence.

We give thanks that Nathan Hilton has graduated from Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary after five years' study. Please pray for the Hilton family as they spend the summer in the United

 **SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches


States making partnerships for the church planting work in Sunderland. Please also pray for Nathan as he works through the licensure exams for Presbytery. Gateshead, Hexham and Durham Presbyterian Churches enjoyed a joint fellowship walk on the May bank holiday. We give thanks for our unity as friends and in the gospel.

The student work continues to grow with a weekly student Bible study. We pray for wisdom in shepherding the souls which have been led to us from around the globe.

 Nathan Hilton

 **HEXHAM**

'Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing' (1 Thess. 5:11). Hexham certainly has much cause to give thanks for encouragement received over the last few months. In February we welcomed Benjamin Mitchell from Gateshead as an assistant to the minister. Benjamin has been a very welcome and blessed addition to our church, as have the many students and visitors he has brought with him on Sundays to worship and fellowship with us.

Hexham was also much privileged to host the May bank holiday walk for the Gateshead, Durham and Hexham Churches. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to return some hospitality and fellowship to those who have been encouraging and supporting us. We are very thankful for the wonderful weather on the day, which allowed over 70 people to enjoy the walk and ensuing BBQ at the Rieger's house. Truly this has been a season where we have been enabled to 'encourage one another and build one another up.'

 Joshua Rieger


 **SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches

 **HULL**

The Lord in his grace and power is keeping and sustaining the church in Hull. We continue to make his word a priority by the preaching on the Lord's Day and teaching in the Wednesday meetings. There are only two churches in Hull which are of a Reformed character. We in East Hull are the one, and the other is in West Hull. Men from the presbytery and local men are fulfilling the valuable task of preaching on the Lord's Day, while we wait for God to raise up a man for the vacancy of a minister here.

A summer club is planned for local children providing we have an indication that a reasonable number will attend. In March, two people who attended our church died. Their family members, some of whom are believers, are in need of God's comfort.

Attendance remains steady and we have seen great answers to prayer regarding illness of members and their families.

 Chris Lawson

 **OXFORD**

On 31 May the first church planting Bible study for Oxford EPC was held. We give thanks that 14 people gathered, including some visitors from the USA. We plan to hold more of these in the coming months and then, God-willing, to start morning and evening services in September.

Please pray that God would continue to gather a core group of people interested in,

and committed to a Reformed, confessional and warm-hearted Presbyterian Church in Oxford. Please also pray that the Lord would clearly provide a place for our worship services to start in.

One small thing that you can do is 'like', 'share' and 'follow' our Facebook page - www.Facebook.com/oxfordepc. This will help us spread the word about this new church plant and let people know what we are doing in Oxford.

We have also shot a few videos - the first explaining more about the new church plant in Oxford, the second a brief gospel-presentation. To see these, check out our website: www.oxfordpres.co.uk. Please pray that the Lord would use these to promote the work in Oxford and to bring sinners to Christ. We plan to make more in the near future so keep an eye on the website and Facebook pages for these as they come out!

For more information please contact Rev. Andy Young: andy@oxfordpres.co.uk and 07963 139683.

 Andy Young



**SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches**SALFORD,
MANCHESTER**

We are looking forward to the work becoming established as a church. Since January, we have been gathering every Lord's Day for morning and evening services. Many weeks we have had newcomers, including locals. We are especially glad to be here for those who would not otherwise hear the Word. Pray for conversions, and that those who have begun to profess faith would prioritize regular Sunday attendance.

Our committed Christians are growing in faith. Chris is preaching through Jonah and John 13-16. At midweek meetings, he has catechized us through the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. We are now considering the church, the sacraments and membership.

We long for more committed Christians to invite others, and for continuing fruit from Chris's local outreach. We are glad to contribute to the work of Salford University CU, Manchester City Mission (whose homeless shelter is in Salford) and the Globe Café for Salford's international students, through which several have come to church.

Rosemary Statter

**SHEFFIELD**

The main news is that the building work is progressing – to increase the building space of Hill Top Chapel by around 60%. Our building being completed in 1629 is an aesthetically beautiful worship space and a Grade II listed building. Therefore the work comes under very close scrutiny by the planning authorities and this adds extra work and responsibility. We hope it will be completed by September 2018 and it is likely that the congregation will be able to continue to worship in the Chapel as the back extension is completed.

Our burden in prayer is for wisdom that as new people come, peace, unity and joy is upheld as a congregation. The Christian Sabbath is our delight and priority, something that takes priority over all other church activities, such as a missions emphasis week which we will have in June. We are planning more of these outreach events in the next 12 months, to ensure that we maintain a healthy outward looking approach as a church family. We have begun a new series on the gospel of Mark in the morning service and the book of Esther in the evening service, along with the Ten Commandments from the Westminster Larger Catechism in the Lord's Day catechism class. We look to the Lord to raise up more office bearers including ruling elders in the future season.

Kevin Bidwell

**SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches**SOLIHULL**

We thank God for the means of grace each week; both on the Lord's Day and for our midweek Bible Study and Prayer meeting. We continue to see a flow of visitors from the area, but long to see more come regularly and ultimately come to faith.

We have been greatly blessed by receiving new members into our fellowship: Gareth Williams, Rob Duguid, and Philip and Lynn Robinson, with their four children. We have also had the joy of new life with the birth of baby Hosanna to Arun and Eshtan Sahu. Our elderly sister Valerie Tipple went to be with the Lord in April. We give thanks to God for her and for her testimony to her Lord and Saviour.

We are excited to be developing our relationship with Sovereign Grace Church, North Carolina, and look forward to our summer mission week, when some of the members from this church will join us for fellowship and evangelism. Please pray for much spiritual fruit from this venture. In preparation for this we also hope to begin door-to-door visitation. Please pray that God would guide us to those who are his, but as yet have not been saved.

Falko Drijfhout

**TRANÅS, SWEDEN,
IMMANUEL**

At Easter, there is a tradition for the churches in Tranås to invite people to an 'Emmaus walk', based on the discovery of the risen Christ which the men walking to Emmaus made. The believers gather at an outdoor place in town, and then take a walk through the town, with short stops at perhaps six places to read Scriptures, pray, and then get some thoughts for meditation and discussion as we walk to the next stop. This year our church arranged the walk. Some 50 people participated, members from different churches as well as a few non-members. It was a good day and we are glad for this fellowship time together.

In our Sunday morning services, our pastor David Bergmark is now preaching through the Gospel of Luke and in the evenings Joshua. We are in a process of improving our communication in the church as well as updating and clarifying our vision and mission. We hope that this will encourage and strengthen our fellowship so that we can be faithful in the town where God has placed us

Sune Jäderberg

HELPING WOMEN CONSIDERING ABORTION



DR CHRIS RICHARDS



Over 200,000 unborn babies are killed each year in the UK by abortion. The parents of many of these are under pressure or ignorant of the seriousness of what they are considering. Christians must do all we can to stop this onslaught in our midst.

Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre (www.tyneside-pregnancy.org.uk) is directed by Dr Chris Richards, Ruling Elder at Gateshead Presbyterian Church. Since 2008 it has been helping women in a crisis pregnancy with directive advice, an opportunity for an



ultrasound scan, and on-going support. Each year about 100 women in crisis pregnancy attend the centre.

The ultrasound scan is so helpful. At just 3 weeks 6 days after conception the heartbeat is visible on scan. Witnessing new life has a huge impact on a parent; it often leads to a recognition of the responsibility to love and protect a little one that God has entrusted to them.

The Centre is planning to expand to provide a satellite service in nearby Sunderland. We have also been helping to train Mrs Maria Bidwell, who will soon start to provide an ultrasound service in Sheffield (www.sheffieldpac.co.uk), in addition to the advice and support already offered at the centre.

In order to provide for the expanding services, both TPAC and the Sheffield centre excitedly anticipate the arrival of new ultrasound machines (£18,500 each) in June. Please pray for protection for both centres, especially as we navigate the regulatory hurdle of registration with the Care Quality Commission for Sheffield and Sunderland. o

NEW WEBSITE ON RELATIONSHIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Lovewise is a charity whose aim is to help parents, youth groups and schools by providing teaching from a Christian perspective on marriage, sex and relationships.

The charity has recently launched a website www.LovewiseOnline.org. Through the regular posting of thought-provoking and informative articles, the website encourages young people to make God-honouring choices in relationships and marriage, when there is so much to tempt them to compromise with the world. Please recommend this website to your young people!



REFORMATION IN EUROPE TODAY

On 22 March, 1552, Thomas Cranmer wrote to Calvin, Melancthon, and Bullinger, seeking a general synod of the Reformed Churches in Europe, so that they might come to unity of mind concerning the Lord's Supper. He knew that, at that very time, their adversaries at the Council of Trent were confirming their errors.

John Calvin replied in April 1552 that it is indeed 'just and wise, that in the present disordered condition of the Church, no remedy can be devised more suitable than if a general meeting were held of the devout and the prudent, of those properly exercised in the school of God, and of those who are confessedly at one on the doctrine of holiness.' Then he penned the famous words:

'And would that it were attainable to bring together into some place, from various Churches, men eminent for their

learning, and that after having carefully discussed the main points of belief one by one, they should, from their united judgments, hand down to posterity the true doctrine of Scripture. This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided. Thus it is that the body of Christ lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it.'

John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Jules Bonnet, tr. David Constable, Banner of Truth, Vol. 5, p. 345

Those who share Calvin's desire for such a unity of mind may well be encouraged that the European Conference of Reformed Churches has recently met for the seventh time.



Conference of Reformed Churches

A record of the conference and copies of papers delivered are available on the website (www.eucrc.org). But we can take note of the following points.

1. PROGRESS

Reformed ministers are working in many countries (e.g. Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Albania, Turkey) to bring the gospel and to establish a biblically sound Reformed church. It is encouraging to hear that the Reformed faith is seeing some progress in France and the German-speaking countries. In this connection, we are glad of the work in Berlin.

2. SUFFERING

One Reformed minister, Rev. Andrew Brunson, has unjustly suffered imprisonment in Turkey since 2016. He needs our prayers, that he might be upheld, cleared of the false charges against him, and set at liberty swiftly.



3. A SETBACK

Many believers in the Netherlands are going through a period of turmoil, following the decision of the Reformed Churches Liberated to ordain women to the offices of minister and elder. This unbiblical step reflects an underlying departure from the right way of interpreting the Scriptures. For more than 10 years, other Reformed churches have urged them not to go in that direction, but all pleas have fallen on deaf ears and now we face the reality that the Liberated churches, so precious to us in the past, will no longer be able to play a part, as members, in the conference.

For these reasons and more, the opportunity for ministers working in Europe to meet together to consider crucial matters of doctrine and practice is vital. We thank God for it.

God willing, the next European Conference will be held in 2020, probably in the Netherlands, and the International Conference of Reformed Churches is to take place in 2021 (in India or Australia). o



DR HANS W. MARIS

*Retired professor of systematic theology
in the Theological University of Apeldoorn*

The Great Synod of Dordrecht 1618 – 1619



INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

In the second century after the Reformation began, two major church assemblies were held, which were of great importance in fixing the standards of Reformed theology and practice. Both have been influential far beyond the national borders of their own participants.

Of the Westminster Assembly of 1643-1649 sufficient knowledge exists within the United Kingdom, and indeed a number of important publications about this Assembly have appeared in the Netherlands, and other countries, until our own time.

But this year marks the four hundredth anniversary of the National Synod of Dordrecht. 'The Great Synod of 1618' was another name given to it. As a matter of fact it went on till 1619, before the entire business was finished. Preparations have been made to hold large commemorative meetings, and for commemorative publications, in the historic city of Dordrecht (also called Dordt or Dort). And attention will be paid to these in the Netherlands, but also by Reformed and Presbyterian churches in many countries within Europe and abroad.

The synod had an international character. King James I of England and Scotland sent quite a delegation, led by George Carleton, Lord-Bishop of Llandaff (near Cardiff). The great issue before the synod was to decide the Arminian disputes. Several of the British participants were more or less sympathetic towards the Arminian position, and in the end were not too happy with the decisions the synod made. But 30 years later, the Westminster Assembly was certainly most positive about the Synod of Dordt!

Several cities and regions of Germany and Switzerland also sent their delegates, and, in general, with their oral and Scriptural advice, played an important part in the synod.

POLITICAL FACTORS

In the Netherlands, in the midst of the war against the Spanish domination oppressing the Protestants, a 12-year truce was agreed. This period gave room to deal with serious issues within the Reformed Church, most of all because of the influence of Jacobus Arminius' ideas. Arminius had died already in 1609, but his followers formed the important group of the 'Remonstrants' in the church and in the state. It was the government that decided to summon a synod to settle the issue. The government also paid for the considerable costs. In spite of the war against Spain, the 'Golden Age' had begun, during which the Republic of the Netherlands became one of the most powerful and richest countries of the world. But our main interest now is in the conflict within the Reformed Church.

CONFLICT ABOUT GRACE AND THE CHOICE OF MAN

Reformed doctrine, which confessed the sovereignty of God in his creation, and also in his decree of salvation, had come under criticism. It was considered to be an offence against man and his ability to choose for himself to serve God or to refuse to serve him. *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) came under attack, which taught that we by nature are prone to hate God and our neighbour (Q&A 5) and that consequently, from the very beginning, everything that would lead to our redemption was caused

by the grace of God alone. The Reformed Church said that in Adam all his posterity fell into perdition and ruin. The very root of redemption, then, according to the *Belgic Confession* (1561), lies not in any decision or inclination of man, but in God's eternal and unchangeable counsel. God is merciful as well as just. He is merciful, 'since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works: just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.' (Article 16).

As in our age, so also in the 16th and 17th centuries, this confession was considered an offence by many people. The gospel of grace alone, *sola gratia*, is not easily accepted.

In essence, this discussion was already an issue in the time of Augustine, 12 centuries earlier, when he had to fight against the ideas of Pelagius. Pelagius was convinced that the good works of man could certainly help him to be saved.

It appears that through the ages the church has had to resist the tendency to downplay the meaning of sin, as well as to maintain the necessity of grace. And it is understandable that the dispute between these opposing positions were hostile. An atmosphere of war often



Reformed doctrine, which confessed the sovereignty of God in his creation, and also in his decree of salvation, had come under criticism. It was considered to be an offence against man and his ability to choose for himself to serve God or to refuse to serve him.



It appears that through the ages the church has had to resist the tendency to downplay the meaning of sin.

dominated the church and the people, and even politics. Theologians wrote reams of libels and booklets against each other, indicating how serious the errors of the other party were. Hence everyone felt the need of a national synod that would clear the air once and for all, and that would give a biblical statement of what really was the truth that was to govern the church and that would be a guide for the proper preaching of the gospel.

This task was not an easy one. There was tension in the great church in Dordrecht when on 13 November 1618 the synod was opened. The chairman was chosen, Rev. Johannes Bogerman, who certainly was able to chair a meeting as complicated and full of dissension as this one. When discussion arose on the question of what the standard would be by which the synod would judge the Arminian teachings, it was clearly decided that only the Word of God would be the rule, and not the Belgic Confession nor the Heidelberg Catechism or any other writings of men. With this decision at the very beginning of the synod, the church accepted the task to formulate the doctrine of the church in a new confession that was built upon the Word of God alone. So it was clear from the outset that the writing of a confessional document – the *Canons of Dort* – had to be the outcome of this synod.

In a subsequent article I intend to give a summary of this most



important result of the Synod of Dordt. It makes sense, however, to mention a few more things that were decided upon in this synod, that were no less impressive and of lasting significance.

A NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION

A most important item on the synod's agenda was the preparation of a new translation of the Bible. This was decided in the first week of the synod. The synod took notice of the advice of the British delegates, who explained in a letter the principles by which the English King James Version (of 1611) had been prepared.

In the Netherlands a few Bible translations were already in use, but there was a

common conviction that these translations in general did not sufficiently render the true meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments into the Dutch language. Very quickly the synod came to the conviction that a revision of an existing translation would not be sufficient. A thorough and new translation of the original text was required. A number of theologians and professors of Greek and Hebrew were appointed. As soon as possible after the close of the synod, their work had to begin, and it was expected that not more than four years would be required. It was also expected that the government would pay for the considerable expenses of this project. All went according to plan and the new translation was provided, although after quite a number of years' delay, partly for political reasons. It was not until 1637 that the first Bibles were printed.

The chosen name was the *Staten-Bijbel* or *Statenvertaling*, meaning that this Bible was translated according to the decision of, and with the help of, the government.

As with the King James Version in the English-speaking world, it is hard to overestimate the significance of this new Dutch translation. Not only were many now able to read the Word of God in a modern, contemporary translation, but also this translation contributed to the unity of language in the Netherlands. Of course, the development of a language, the meaning and emotional value of words underwent changes during the following centuries. And for that reason, several changes were introduced in new editions. Nevertheless, the *Statenvertaling* has been immensely important in the course of time, and has become dear to the hearts of many. This is reflected in the fact that in recent years an independent committee, from several denominations, has been working on a revision of this translation, perhaps comparable to the New King James in the English world. Discussions about changing older words to address the Lord (You instead of Thee and Thou) are taking place in the Dutch churches just like in the English-speaking world. And the popularity of the Revised *Statenvertaling* is proof of the importance of the work done in the 17th century.

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Not only were many now able to read the Word of God in a modern, contemporary translation, but also this translation contributed to the unity of language in the Netherlands.

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The Synod of Dordt did a most important job to provide a complete, well - considered Church Order, that set out a pattern of how to organize the various responsibilities in the church on a biblical foundation.

CHURCH ORDER

In the course of the 16th century - in fact since about 1570 - the organization of the church and its officers underwent quite a development. Calvin's influence from Geneva certainly played a part. The Synod of Dordt did a most important job to provide a complete, well-considered Church Order, that since that time in the Netherlands, and in many other countries too, set out a pattern of how to organize the various responsibilities in the church on a biblical foundation. For example, it established a form of government in which several local congregations would come together in a *classis* (a presbytery), and then in regional and national synods. In this order, no local church shall exercise power over another local church, and no office-bearer shall exercise authority over a fellow officer. When churches come together even in the broadest way, in a national synod, it is still the local churches that together make the decisions. As a matter of fact, in this order, the consistory in a local church is the highest and most decisive meeting in the church. Of course this is only one item, though an important one, in the Church order of Dordt.

A number of other decisions were reached in this great synod, but the most important was definitely the issue with the Arminians. I intend to give some more information about that in a second article. ○



THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS IN GERMAN



REV. JOHANNES MÜLLER

The church in Berlin is one of just a few German-speaking Presbyterian churches in Germany. This situation leads to some unique problems. We often need to explain where the name Presbyterian comes from, what it means, and why we named our church this way. The biggest challenge however is to teach doctrine without the benefit of a proper translation of the Standards. Most German Christians do not know the Westminster Standards (nor indeed do most Christians worldwide) and they do not have the opportunity to get a good copy in their own language. Therefore we decided to have them published in a good quality German edition.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

As I started this project, I was a little naive. We have three translations of the confession and one of the larger and shorter catechisms. I wanted to use them but I soon discovered that it is more work than expected. The catechisms are very good translations. We tried to improve the German in a few places and added proof texts to the larger catechism. But the translations of the confession are not very good. You sometimes find wrong translations of a paragraph, or the rendering

is very difficult to understand. The original English of the Confession is not always easy. We accept that because it is about doctrinal accuracy and not easy language. In the German translation you get the impression that the translators did not even try to make it understandable, at least from time to time. They produced a word for word translation, which is very close to the original, but it is not good German. The same is true of translating the other way. A simple German sentence like 'Ich werde morgen in den Supermarkt gehen', in a word for word rendering would become 'I will tomorrow in the supermarket go'. You may understand, but it is hard to read.

This is what we face when putting the Westminster standards into German. I have now started from scratch, aiming at the best translation possible, which is understandable and preserves doctrinal accuracy.

This leads to the challenges we are facing.

THE CHALLENGE

When we first thought about this project, we thought we might encounter problems such as who will design the format, who will print it, and how we shall fund it. None of these things are issues any more. God in his abundant grace provided all of that. We only have to deliver the translation. That is the big challenge. We are not dealing with a novel, where we might translate with some



These are the doctrinal standards of our church, which require great accuracy, as one little doctrinal error will lead to a theological disaster. This is the work of the theologian.

freedom, or a devotional book, or a volume of the Puritans. These are the doctrinal standards of our church, which require great accuracy, as one little doctrinal error will lead to a theological disaster. This is the work of the theologian, and it has fallen to me alongside the regular tasks of the pastoral ministry. But I am not complaining: it allows me to go deeply into our faith, and that helps me as I teach the church. However, it does mean that the work is painstaking and slow. Some sections take weeks to translate.

THE NEED

While challenged, I am nevertheless very encouraged. Members of the church have offered help in proof-reading and checking the translation. One American woman offered to test our work by translating it back into English. And the whole church is reading to check if the German of the translation is understandable.

We are in need of God's gracious help. We had hoped to publish the Standards this summer, but we now see that that is impossible. However, the sooner we publish the Standards the sooner the church will be able to read their doctrinal positions.

Please pray that we will be enabled to prepare a good German version of the Westminster Standards, that the work would be accomplished soon, and most of all that this would be used to help renew the Reformed faith in Germany, to God's glory. ○



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND?**

 REV. CHRIS STATTER

As we seek to establish a new church in Salford, the fact that 50 years ago there were two Presbyterian congregations within our locality of Broughton gives pause for thought. What happened to them? In 1972, the Presbyterian Church of England became part of the United Reformed Church, and Presbyterianism largely

disappeared from England, but that is only part of the story.¹

A good place to begin is Drysdale's *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline, and Revival* (1889).² As has been documented,³ from the 1570s a growth in Presbyterian convictions culminated

with the production of the Westminster Standards in the 1640s. However, attempts to implement Presbyterian church government were frustrated, and then curtailed by the Restoration and the Act of Uniformity in 1662. All those who were unable to comply with the rites and ceremonies of the established Church became non-conformists. In reaction to such compulsion in religion, and in line with Enlightenment thinking, the Presbyterians became less insistent upon their own doctrinal Standards. By 1719 and the Salters' Hall controversy,⁴ there was such a desire for liberty that the majority, while Trinitarian, were voting not to require ministers to affirm statements of faith in the Trinity. There began a slide into Unitarianism. A century later, John Henry Newman could remark, 'Had I been born an English Presbyterian, perhaps I should never have known our Lord's divinity.'⁵ But what about Drysdale's 'Revival' of Presbyterianism?

In the late 17th and early 18th century, the broader Evangelical revival reinvigorated faithful English Presbyterian congregations and essentially Scottish churches south of the border. Increasing migration from Scotland also boosted the numbers of Presbyterians in England. Following the Lady Hewley case (1830-42),⁶ the Unitarians, while allowed to keep Presbyterian buildings, found themselves disinherited of many endowments, which were returned to those with orthodox Trinitarian convictions. In Cumberland and Lancashire, the Presbyterian cause was sufficiently strong that by 1836 the congregations could form a Synod, which was soon bolstered by London congregations of the Church of Scotland, such as Regent Square, from which Edward Irving had been deposed. In keeping with the Scottish Church, the English Synod adopted the Westminster Standards unreservedly.

This movement had a clear purpose: 'We desire to spread Evangelical Christianity in its Presbyterian form, not only among Scotchmen and Irishmen resident in England, but among the English themselves... Christianity, whatever be its outward form, is adapted to every soil in the world: in its Presbyterian form it has flourished in England before, and it may flourish in England again.'⁷

The English Presbyterian Church aligned itself with the Free Church of Scotland. The Free Church was founded in 1843, when over a third of the ministers of the Church of Scotland withdrew, seeking to maintain historic, Scottish Presbyterianism by repudiating state interference in its spiritual life. Sympathetic to the Disruption, the 'Presbyterian Church in England' declared its independence from the Church of Scotland. Many leaders would come from the Free Church. One example was Oswald Dykes, probably the most influential figure in shaping the English Presbyterian Church. Dykes had ministered in Edinburgh alongside Robert Candlish, who recommended him to Regent Square.

The Presbyterians in England had a healthy interest overseas. This would include involvement in establishing the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System. There were works in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and present-day Bangladesh, involving missionaries such as William Chalmers Burns and James Laidlaw Maxwell.

There were significant financial supporters. The English Presbyterian College received a substantial endowment from cotton trader Robert Barbour, who had upheld the cause of Home Missions. Later, its relocation to Cambridge as Westminster College would be facilitated by the

generosity of the Smith sisters, Agnes and Margaret, remarkable also as travellers and scholars. Meanwhile, in Salford, a gift from banker John Stuart built Higher Broughton Presbyterian Church; Dykes preached at its opening in 1875.

By 1876, the Presbyterian Church in England had grown to over 150 congregations. That year, owing to Dykes' diplomacy, the Presbyterian Church of England was established by the union of the Presbyterian Church in England with the English Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, which added about 100 congregations and adhered to the same Standards, albeit less strictly.

By 1926, the Presbyterian Church of England had 350 congregations with 85,000 communicant members. Carruthers published his 'Fifty Years, 1876-1926: Being a Brief Survey of the Work and Progress of the Presbyterian Church of England Since the Union.'⁸ The work was progressing, but in which direction? Westminster College boasted professors such as John Oman, whose chief influence was Schleiermacher. It became the ministerial training-ground for both the missionary Lesslie Newbigin and philosopher John Hick. Women were admitted to the ministry, only theoretically at first, and there was an increasing commitment to a broad ecumenism.

By 1972, when the United Reformed Church was formed, the Presbyterian Church had declined to about 300 congregations and dipped below 60,000 communicants, but there was optimism that joining with the larger, yet likewise dwindling,

Congregational Church in England and Wales would lead towards greater union with Anglicans and Methodists. There would be smaller unions and initiatives such as Churches Together and Local Ecumenical Partnerships, but such a grand union has never materialized.

Membership has plummeted, and the denomination is openly struggling to find its *raison d'être*. A recent, well-received critique, written from the inside, is titled 'Ecumenism in Retreat: How the United Reformed Church Failed to Break the Mould.'⁹

With hindsight, it is clear that the Presbyterian Church of England was in difficulty long before it was subsumed into the United Reformed Church. Arguably, the Church lost its bearings even before Drysdale wrote at the end of the 1880s.

The crucial, wider development in the 1880s was the acceptance

of Higher Criticism. In summary, 'England from 1880: the Triumph of Wellhausen.'¹⁰ In his *History of Israel* (1878), Julius Wellhausen had advocated the Documentary Hypothesis, assuming that the biblical faith developed like other religions, and relying heavily upon modern literary analysis to date portions of Scripture. The new dates were asserted and, since they differed substantially from those in the text, contributed to doubts about the Bible's trustworthiness. Wellhausen's ideas were popularized in Britain by William Robertson Smith, a professor in the Free Church of Scotland, which, while retaining its reputation for orthodoxy, had developed a taste for academic respectability. Although Robertson Smith was removed from his



With hindsight, it is clear that the Presbyterian Church of England was in difficulty long before it was subsumed into the United Reformed Church.

post, he was not found guilty of heresy. Such views were tolerated, and spread, including within the Presbyterian Church of England.

During the Synod of 1883, Dykes had successfully advocated a committee to consider the Church's relation to its Standards. He wished to accommodate office-bearers who were adapting their understanding of Scripture according to Higher Criticism. One opponent was Verner White, an Irishman involved in the Ulster Revival, who ministered in Liverpool and then South Kensington. White asked whether those in support had considered 'where such a movement once set-a-foot would lead to, or how it could be stopped.'¹¹ Few stood with White, who submitted his reasons for dissent: '1st. – Because it is a step towards the abandonment of all confessions and creeds in general, and especially of the Westminster Confession ... one of the most perfect summaries of Bible truth the world has ever seen. 2nd. – It is practically a surrender of that which every office-bearer of this church has publicly assented.'¹² The Committee led to an alteration of the Formula of Subscription in the ordination vows to affirm the Confession as 'now more briefly expressed'¹³ in Twenty-four Articles. Consequently, the Standards would be interpreted through this lens which, while still recognizably Reformed, accentuated God's love and, in reorganising the doctrine around the Trinity, relegated Scripture down to nineteenth from first place. While maintaining much, the Articles did not straightforwardly affirm that the Bible 'is the Word of God.'¹⁴



In recognition of women's contribution in the workforce during the Great War, there was growing belief that every role, including within the church, should be open to all.

As White had foreseen, gradual doctrinal loosening followed. The Church asserted that spiritual independence included the right 'to interpret, alter, add to, or modify her constitution, law, subordinate standards and formulas',¹⁵ then revised the Model Trust Deed to weaken ties to the Confession, then added a Preamble to qualify the Articles, and then further relaxed the requirements for elders and deacons. The Articles were discarded, and by 1956 the Church settled for 'A Statement of the Christian Faith' which retained only that which could be reconciled with Higher Criticism and reflected the beliefs which now prevailed.

The lifetime of the Presbyterian Church of England was affected by external events also. In recognition of women's contribution in the workforce during the Great War, there was growing belief that every role, including within the church, should be open to all. During World War II, many buildings were severely damaged, including Higher Broughton Presbyterian Church and Regent Square; Church House, the Presbyterian Church's administrative headquarters, was destroyed, and the General Secretary among those killed. After the wars, the baby boomer generation so valued personal freedom that, in the 1960s especially, England rapidly became more secularized.

Yet there has been a 'Reformed recovery'.¹⁶ It was stimulated in part by the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel (1939-68), gathering pace through the publisher, Banner of Truth Trust, and its Ministers' Conferences begun at Leicester in 1962. As early as 1958,

John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary had addressed in London an Evangelical Presbyterian Fellowship initiated by layman Peter Collins, yet such enthusiasm for Biblical Presbyterianism would not yet establish churches. Another impetus came through Francis Schaeffer, founding L'Abri and the International Presbyterian Church, which planted its first congregation in England in 1969. Meanwhile, at Banner Conferences, like-minded ministers discussed a Presbyterian church in England, and, guided by Free Church minister John Nicholls and others, the London Presbyterian Conference was held in 1986. This led to the Presbyterian Association in England and, with the assistance of David and Barbara Cross of Mission to the World¹⁷ and with the support and interest of congregations in Wales, to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales.

What might be learnt from this brief history? In 1886, Verner White wrote

a pastoral letter¹⁸ to the members of Islington Presbyterian Church in Liverpool, after the death of his brother Patrick, who had succeeded him as minister there. He recalled Patrick's 'catholic spirit' and his 'uncompromising attachment to Scriptural and Reformation Truth', such that 'what he taught in the opening years of the ministry he held firmly to the end. Christ in the heart, Christ only, Christ always, Christ for all, as revealed in the Word, received by faith, and applied by Spirit, constituted the joy of his own heart and the unvarying theme of his preaching.' White then exhorted them: 'You have now come to a critical period in the history of your congregation in the choice of a successor... I beseech you to do it for His glory, in His name, and under His direction: "see that ye fall not out by the way.'" May we, as church members, continue to rule out ministry that would deviate from those old paths. May the Lord raise up for us ministers like Patrick and Verner White. ◦

¹ The Presbyterian Church of Wales had its own history.

² Alexander Hutton Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline and Revival* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1889).

³ Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁴ The Salters' Hall controversy concerned how to deal with ministers who would not declare their faith in the deity of Christ, and whether to require subscription to any creed other than the Bible.

⁵ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1865), p. 322.

⁶ Lady Sarah Hewley (1627-1710) belonged to a Presbyterian congregation in York. She had no surviving dependents, and left her estate in trust, with the intention of benefiting the ministry of the gospel.

⁷ Peter Lorimer, "An Introductory Lecture", in Rev. Peter Lorimer, Rev. James Hamilton, and Rev. Hugh Campbell, *The Introductory Lectures Delivered at the Opening of the English Presbyterian College, November 1844* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1845), p. 6

⁸ Samuel William Carruthers, *Fifty Years, 1876-1926: Being a Brief Survey of the Work and Progress of the Presbyterian Church of England Since the Union* (London: Publication Office of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1926).

⁹ Martin Camroux, *Ecumenism in Retreat: How the United Reformed Church Failed to Break the Mould* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

¹⁰ John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984) pp. 273-289.

¹¹ *The Outlook* (11 May 1883), p. 292.

¹² Verner M. White (his son), *Memoir of the Rev. Dr. Verner M. White* (London: George Philip, 1894), pp. 48-49.

¹³ Samuel William Carruthers (ed.), *Digest of the Proceedings of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1876-1905* (London: Publishing House of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1907), p. 24.

¹⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter I, Of the Holy Scripture: IV.

¹⁵ Samuel William Carruthers (ed.), *Digest of the Proceedings of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1906-1920* (London: Publishing House of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1923), p. 2.

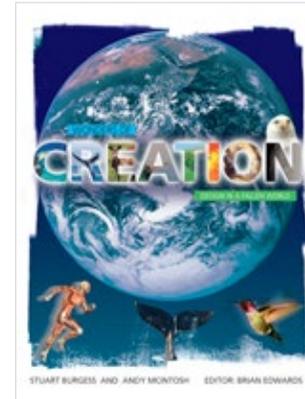
¹⁶ John J. Murray, *Catch the Vision: Roots of the Reformed Recovery* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Mission to the World is the global missions-sending agency of the Presbyterian Church in America..

¹⁸ *Obituary Notices, &c., of the Late Rev. Patrick White* (Liverpool: 1886), pp. 3-5.



RECOMMENDED READING



WONDERS OF CREATION. DESIGN IN A FALLEN WORLD

Stuart Burgess and Andy McIntosh
(Day One Publications, 2017)

This book is tremendous. It helps us to see the wonderful handiwork of God in creation. It also shows how unscientific, and how impossible, are the various ideas of evolution. When I read the short chapter on 'horses', it immediately produced in me a desire to give thanks and to worship God, the great Creator.

The authors' position is in agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: 'It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein, whether visible or invisible,

in the space of six days, and all very good.'

Each chapter is quite short (2 to 4 pages long), clearly written, beautifully illustrated, and most important of all, highly informative.

It is very helpful in showing that the theory of an 'old earth' – one that took millions of years to reach its present state – is undermined by the facts.

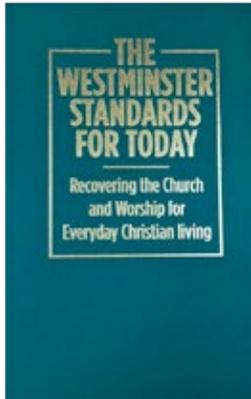
This book is ideal for reading as a family. It equips children with material that will enable them to see through the falsehoods of evolution, which are pumped out by the media, as well as in most schools. ◦

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✉ darrenmoore@chelmsfordpres.co.uk
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