

PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

Spring 2013

Issue 24/1

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Due to rising costs, it has become necessary to increase the annual subscription.

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www.epcew.org.uk

Cover Picture: Stock xchng. Oak Tree. Brian Norton has used this as a symbol for the EPCEW's growth.

From the editor

An apology

During the second half of 2012, we were unable to produce the *Presbyterian Network* (due December) or *Pray For One Another* (due September). Our apologies to all readers. We hope to make up for this in the present year.

This issue is unusual

Twenty-five years ago, a conference was held in London, motivated by the desire for a sound Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. This gave birth to the EPCEW. In October 2012, a second '*London Conference*' was held to mark the first 25 years. It was well attended. The present issue of the *Presbyterian Network* contains the addresses. This makes it somewhat unusual: for example, the papers are longer than usual. In future issues, there should be a return to normal.

Ethics for today

Some time ago, our Presbytery decided that the *Network* should carry articles *setting out the church's position on ethical questions*. This has become a necessity in our time when morality is being turned on its head. On pages 40-48, you will find part two of an article on homosexuality. This is particularly relevant in Europe and America where law is being redrafted to sanction 'homosexual marriage', contrary to the Word of God.

Writings coming from the EPCEW

Several EPCEW men have contributed chapters to a book that should be appearing in print soon, examining the ideas of Timothy Keller.

• Editor, 20 February 2013

ICRC 2013

Rev. Richard Holst

At the end of August, the Eighth *International Conference of Reformed Churches* will come to the UK, hosted by the EPCEW. Hosting it is an honour and an opportunity to become acquainted first hand with the Reformed community from around the globe.

What is the ICRC?

It is a gathering of Reformed churches united by a common set of confessions and common aims.

Its constitution is deliberately brief and reflects the fact that it is a conference and not a church court. Its decisions are advisory.

Member churches outwork unity, fellowship, co-operation, encouragement and common witness informally, through personal contact and formally, through denominational fraternal relationships. This way constructive aims can be pursued while lines of demarcation are kept clear.

Membership is open to *churches* adhering to the Reformed Confessions but not to individuals or other organizations such as missionary bodies. The basis of membership is the Holy Scriptures as confessed in the Westminster Stan-

dards (for Presbyterian churches) and the Three Forms of Unity (for 'Reformed' churches).

If a church wishes to join the ICRC, it must provide evidence of its confession, and of such things as its Form of Government. It must be sponsored by two existing member churches.

It is not possible to be a member of the ICRC and a member of the World Council of Churches or another organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the basis of membership.

At the present time, the conference consists of a number of moderately sized denominations with a preponderance of smaller ones, as the EPCEW, for example. This shows an openness to small and often financially impoverished causes, especially in developing countries.

A list of member-churches can be found on the ICRC website:

icrconline.com.

The ICRC is run on the basis of very modest funds. Each church is asked to pay an annual contribution in proportion to the number of its members, taking into account the average annual income of the

country where it exists. This means that smaller churches in poorer countries are subsidized by larger ones. This works well for impoverished churches.

When did it begin?

The ICRC began with a preliminary meeting held in 1982 in the Netherlands between the Free Church of Scotland, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) and other parties.

The first conference proper was held in Scotland (1985) followed by Canada (1989), the Netherlands (1993), Korea (1997), the USA (2001), South Africa (2005), and New Zealand (2009).

The next conference will, the Lord willing, be at the University of Glamorgan Conference Centre, just outside Cardiff, 28 August–4 September this year.

Who looks after arrangements?

Responsibility for planning is in the hands of a committee of six: a Chairman, who moderates the meetings each day, a Vice Chairman, a Corresponding Secretary, who maintains contact with member churches, a treasurer, who deals with all the financial arrangements, a Recording Secretary, who keeps a record of all proceedings and arranges to publish them as a book, and a member of the Mis-

sions Committee. The ICRC has a Missions Committee that is active mainly in the Far East and South Pacific, especially in gathering and disseminating information about persecuted churches.

What does the ICRC do?

By its very nature the ICRC is really quite inconspicuous.

A four yearly conference of a worldwide membership is unlikely to be noticed very much in the day to day life of the churches.

What then does it do? Its aims are stated as follows:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage co-operation among the member churches in the fulfilment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Bear in mind that practical co-operation between denominations rarely impinges directly on the life of local churches, but maybe it should – at least more than it does

and perhaps this is what this article is really about - *breadth of vision* and *horizons of interest*.

Many folk are interested in what happens beyond their 'parish' boundaries, whether contact with local churches in this country or prayer, encouragement and financial support for particular congregations abroad. Our Durham church, for example, has a long-standing interest in a Presbyterian work in Uganda. Blackburn is involved in supporting an orphanage in Kenya. Bethel in Cardiff maintains supportive contact with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, North East India (a contact initially made at the ICRC in Korea, 1997) and also is supportive of the Reformed Church in Spain, a contact again made at the ICRC. Immanuel Cardiff has contact with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Malawi, currently seeking membership of the ICRC and doubtless there are others. The point is that an organisation like the ICRC can enrich the life of local congregations and feed into their prayer life and practical support through contacts made at the conference.

The ICRC is effective on a wider front too, for example in promoting unity of faith through its confessional basis. It provides a periodic forum for churches already in some kind of relationship to exchange

information and offer counsel and for new ones to tap into the process.

One result of co-operation between member churches is the emergence of the European Conference of Reformed Churches. Through the ICRC churches are able to learn about, discuss and understand major issues and trends not only in our part of the world but elsewhere. In 2009 in New Zealand, the Conference theme was the challenge of the Charismatic Movement. In 2013 the emphasis is to be on the importance of preaching at a time when societies across the globe are becoming more visually oriented and less enamoured of the sermon.

At the ICRC we expect to receive *delegates* (of member churches), *observers* (of churches that have applied for membership), *visitors* (from other churches), and *advisers* from some of the member churches. Delegates, up to two per church, attend at the conference's expense. Others attend at the expense of their home churches.

Please visit the ICRC website and also our EPCEW website 'News and Events' page, where you can read more information.

Most sessions are open and we can encourage believers who are within range to attend, especially the evening sessions.

Building Christ's Church

Rev. Dr Robert Letham

In Ephesians 2: 11-22 (the passage read today), Paul unfolds the panorama of salvation from eternity, with election in chapter one, through redemption by the blood of Christ on his cross in the course of human history, on into the endless future, in one great sweep. And central to that panorama, that salvation, is the church. Paul, in effect is saying here, as he does by implication elsewhere, that just as you cannot have the church without Christ, you cannot have Christ apart from the church. The great goal of salvation, as he says in chapter one verses 10, is that God is going to head up all things in Christ, 'things in heaven and things on earth', all created reality, and at the heart of that is his purpose for his people which he unfolds later on in chapter five by saying among other things, that Christ loved the church, gave himself for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without

blemish. That is the great goal of our salvation, this divine marriage between Christ and his church. Here in chapter two verses 19 to 22, Paul explains four basic foundational features for the church in God's purposes, four attributes which need to be taken together and held in tension as a whole.

1. Catholicity (2:19)

So then he says, speaking to the Gentiles, who were previously estranged from Israel, having no part in God's covenant purposes, being without Christ, without God, without hope in the world, in contrast to Israel which had God's covenants and revelation and the prophets and the law. 'You Gentiles', he says, 'were without any hope, but now you are no longer strangers and aliens, you have been reconciled, you have been bought into the same company as the believing Jews; you are fellow citizens.' Now in the first century, Roman citizenship was highly prized. We know that the city of Philippi boasted of being under the protection of the Roman law and this is

therefore political imagery indicating that these who were once estranged now belong to the government of Christ. He goes on to say that you are members of the household of God, which is familial imagery; you are inhabitants of God's house, members of his family, and adopted. Chapter 1:5 says 'he chose us in him before the foundation of the world having predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.'

'We belong to God's family, we have the mark of Christ upon us, we are co-heirs with Christ: 'once you were far off, now you have been bought near' (2: 18). And so the Christian church is 'catholic' – that is, it is found throughout the world. We are 'catholic' and if we deny that fact we are cutting ourselves off from the church. No, we are not Roman Catholics. For Rome, the catholicity of the church is found by being in communion with the Bishop of Rome; and for the Orthodox it is being in communion with your Bishop, in a whole series of basically equal dioceses and sees throughout the world. No, the foundation of the church and the basis of this catholicity is found elsewhere, Paul will tell us. But we are 'catholic.' The first century barriers between Jew and Gentile which divided them – and there were none greater – have been 'broken down' (2: 14)! And

those distinctions which once were so important are now irrelevant, they have been erased, they have been wiped out, because a greater reality has emerged: the one new man created in Christ Jesus.

Someone I know recently wrote that he has more in common with an Asian Christian than with an English atheist. I wonder if that is your experience? You can substitute other nationalities for English if need be – but this is the hallmark of the catholicity of the church. 'We both', Paul said in 2:18, 'have access in Christ by the Holy Spirit to the Father'. In the sight of God, Jew and Gentile, black and white, European, Asian, African, Latin American – whatever distinctions you care to bring in – in Christ those distinctions have been erased. So we are catholic.

2. Apostolicity

Second, the foundation of the church is apostolicity (2: 20). 'We are built' he says, 'upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets'. The imagery has switched now to architecture. The foundation of course is vital; if the foundation is off, the whole building will collapse sooner or later. And this foundation, he says, is the apostles and prophets. Paul is probably referring to the New Testament prophets. This is the meaning

found in chapter three verse five; 'to the prophets has been revealed a mystery hidden from previous generations' and in chapter four verse 11 where, talking of the gifts given to the church, he lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And here he is talking about the one new man which has been created in Christ Jesus. Right from the very first, the church gave itself to the apostles' doctrine. The apostles and prophets were both occupying a teaching function. And so Paul is saying that doctrine lies at the very heart of the foundation of the Christian church.

The apostles are of course linked to Christ. They were his commissioned representatives, he gave them his authority, they were his ambassadors, and their teaching was the equivalent of his, as we read in many places in the New Testament. The foundation once laid cannot be repeated. That foundation has been laid, and it is the foundation of the apostle Paul; the apostles and taking into account at that particular time the New Testament prophets. Truth lies at the heart of this. The great American theologian J. Gresham Machen argued against the liberalism of his day, that foundational to the Christian faith is not the life we live, although that of course is vitally important, but that does not come

first. It is truth which comes first, it is doctrine. If that is wrong, everything else is wrong. There is a great danger in those who wish to introduce experience into the very warp and woof of the teaching of the church, because that can ultimately lead astray. Historically, of course, liberalism emerged from pietism where there was a focus upon experiential religion. The apostles and prophets and their teaching, *but* – and this is a very important 'but', which we cannot ignore – Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone, the very first stone which is laid before even the rest of the foundation is put upon it. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul elsewhere says no other foundation can be laid than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3: 11). In that very same letter he goes on to say, 'I delivered to you what is of first importance'. What is of first importance, what is it? If we are to go from this place today, what is the most important thing, the number one thing above all others, which we must take with us? It is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15: 3-4) – in continuity with all that the Old Testament had foretold – and that he appeared to the apostolic witnesses. Wherever the

New Testament has an evangelistic sermon, it always has witnesses involved, the apostles. In the very matrix of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the whole of the outworking of our salvation follows. We are made right with God, we are sanctified in union with Christ, in his death and resurrection; in justification, he was delivered up for our offences, raised for our justification.

That is the foundation that, may I say, is the number one task of the Christian church to proclaim, including the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. It is to preach Christ, to preach Christ boldly in a day when Christians all over the country and the western world are hiding themselves, cowed sometimes into fear by the hostility of militant secularism. We preach the word in season and out of season, when it is convenient and when it is not, when it is easy to do so and when it may prove costly. We preach it wisely, we preach it lovingly, and we preach it faithfully, in accordance with the teaching of the apostles and prophets. For we do not find any other Christ than the one who is set down for us in the apostolic writings. So catholicity then is based upon apostolicity. We are catholics because we believe that the Christian faith is rooted and

grounded and governed by the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, by the prophets and apostles, and ultimately that points us to Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

3. Unity

Not only is there catholicity and apostolicity, there is unity too. In Ephesians 2: 19-21 we read, 'you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows...' Continuous, dynamic activity is involved here. The verb means to fit together in a coherent and compatible manner. All the elements are joined together in a continuous ongoing process forming the structure of this great building to which Paul gives his attention in what follows. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, black and white, brown and yellow, big and small, are joined together in this movement of growth and unity, a unity which is, as we note here, 'unity in diversity'. It is not the kind of monolithic unity you found in Marxism, it is not the bureaucratic uniformity which some political organizations (which I will

not name) have and which they seek to impose upon others.

This is a unity which allows the differences which God has created to flourish. God has built unity and diversity together in his creation. He himself is three persons, one being. The world as we look around has order but immense variety. If we were to take a photograph of ourselves today we would note that while each one of us was formed in the image of God, we are each one different. We all have different backgrounds, personalities, and gifts. We look different but recognize our common humanity, made in God's image. And so for the church, there is but one church, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body of Christ. There are not, mark you, 100,000 bodies of Christ. The church is not split into 275,482 fragments; there is only one church and Jesus Christ prays that this be realized and visible in this world. In John 17: 23 he prays that 'that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me'. This is a visible unity, it is a recognizable unity, it is not hived off into some far off eternity, nor ethereally floating around in the sky, invisible to the naked eye. It is a unity which Jesus our Lord prays to the Father maybe realized in this world so that the

world may know and believe. If we have problems with that, we should take it up with our Lord and with the apostle John at some stage. Now of course that unity comes in a context of apostolicity, does it not? It is not a unity built upon foundations that will crack from the word go. The unity and catholicity of the church exist in combination with, and in organic relation to, the apostolicity. May I suggest this must find expression in some way if we are to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ? It is of course a long process, partly aspirational. But look at the great cathedrals – Durham Cathedral, York Minster, to start off with the north – they took hundreds of years to build. Kings College Chapel, Cambridge, was done in a blink of an eye, just over a century. They took a long time and so too does the church.

But surely it is important to reach some form of expression. That is why we have an Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. We recognize that, for example, on the one hand hierarchically oriented churches do much damage and can be captured by those who secure power in the hierarchy. There is no need for me to go into any particular details on that; I am sure we are all aware of those dangers. But equally, on the

other hand, the unity of the church needs to find concrete expression, which I would submit Independence cannot do. Independent churches have done a great deal of good. They can plant churches and do, but usually it is within the same area or region as the parent church is located. Planning for reaching parts of the country which do not have effective biblical witness can only really be achieved by concerted, co-operative and collegial action. Unity in diversity – God has built it into creation and it should find expression too in the church. I wonder how your church expresses this and I wonder too how on the personal and family level perhaps you might do so? It is an encouragement I think to work on that, is it not?

4. Holiness

Then finally there is holiness. This church, this great structure, being joined together grows – and the image now changes to the cultic (the idea of worship) – into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, in the Lord, in Christ, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. In other words the church is not an ecclesiastical club. It is the place where the living God, 'the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28: 19), has chosen to make his dwell-

ing. Just as in the temple, the holy of holies, was the place where the LORD (YHWH, Adonai) and Israel, through the person of the High Priest, encountered one another on a regular basis, so the church is that place now. The book of Revelation portrays Christ as moving amongst the seven churches, knowing their condition, diagnosing the problems, warning of the dangers, encouraging the weak, but living and active in blessing and in judgment.

We read about the great growth of the church all over the world and we say, 'Yes, God is blessing his church.' We see churches close down; Christ is acting in judgment. He is alive, he is active; we deal with him on a day-to-day basis. It is the living presence of God. And note again it is Trinitarian. But note this: Paul's customary word to refer to the Father is the Greek word *theos* which is normally translated God. So when he says here, 'in him' (2: 22) in Christ you are being built together for a dwelling place for God by his Spirit, it is in Christ that the Father is dwelling in the church by the Holy Spirit. The church is indwelt by the Trinity. At the very start of this statement we have the other Trinitarian comment: "in Christ we both have access in the one Spirit to the Father" (2: 18). They are like

'bookends'. They define what Paul has been saying in this section. We have to deal with God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the living God on a daily basis. The church is holy, it belongs to God. It is Christ's church. It is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have access to the Father in the indivisibility of his eternal being. We live and breathe and move in a Trinitarian atmosphere.

This is in fulfilment of that covenant promise that occurs time and again, 'I will be their God and they shall be my people' (Heb. 8: 10). So Paul says you are being built together. The verb implies that there is coalescence between that which is being built and some other entity. Previous distinctions, as we pointed out, do not count. We are defined by our relation to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Sometime later the church, in recognizing publicly at Constantinople that the one God who has created the universe and has revealed himself in Holy Scripture is indivisibly the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, confessed 'we believe in one holy Catholic, apostolic church'. It is rooted here in Ephesians 2. They were simply expressing their understanding of the overall teaching of the Bible.

All these four factors are needed:

catholicity, apostolicity, unity, and holiness. Not only are they needed, they are realities. We all recognize that in the past liberal churches stressed the unity and catholicity of the church at the expense of apostolic doctrine, and quite rightly many, and indeed most, if not all, evangelicals were highly sceptical at best of the twentieth century ecumenical movement. But on the other hand there is an equal danger: that is so to stress the apostolicity of the church that we neglect the unity and catholicity of the church. We become enclosed upon ourselves, regarding everything outside with grave suspicions. We do not have a church then, we have a sect. Just as the neglect of apostolic doctrine is fatal to the church, striking at the very foundation, so too sectarianism is a perilous and dangerous error.

We have to deal with the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and with the words of Paul in Ephesians 2. Both the dangers just mentioned are deadly, deadly beyond words. The balance, the tension that exists is not always easy to work on, but these four poles are built into the nature of the Christian church as God has arranged it. So then I would encourage us, and I am sure we all would desire it, to pursue the apostolic doctrine, to share in some measure the mind of Christ in

transcending boundaries of race and background and express the true catholicity of the Christian church, to recognize its unity and to work towards it within those bounds of apostolic doctrine, and to understand indeed that the church is the dwelling place of God by the Spirit.

But what about the reality, the scandal, the sin? There are so many divisions in the church which are the basis often of mockery, ridicule from atheists and sceptics, and then there are the awkward people, you know, the awkward people in the church, difficult to get on with! Sometimes it is a mess. The day to day reality appears so different from what Paul is sketching out here, how can we reconcile the two?

Well, of course we are living in a world still affected by sin and we ourselves bear in our own personalities the marks of sin still. It is a process as Paul has said here; the structure is being joined together and growing. Christ is working on that, beautifying the church and washing it with water and the word. The best analogy I can think of is from the third movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in B-flat major, Opus 18, No. 6 - which I am sure you are familiar with - composed in 1800. Beethoven had the viola and cello playing in regular

3/4 time, whilst the first and second violins were playing in a syncopated 6/8 time. Now that means, simply put, that he arranged it so that the quartet was at war, civil war with each other, which in 1800 was a dramatic, even a scandalous thing to do; it shocked. Indeed, listening to it for the first time you can sense something of that, even over 200 years remote. And surely for most people it would have been a disaster, a real disaster, to set the ensemble at odds with each other, at loggerheads...but Beethoven was a genius and the result is spectacularly good.

Here we have a far greater genius than Beethoven. We have a God who uses, as someone once put it, "crooked sticks to draw straight lines." We have a God who is working together in the midst of the mess, the discord, the dysfunctionality, the division, working all things together to beautify his church and bring it to that position where it will be a beautiful church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, when all things will be headed up by Christ after his return. So let us draw courage and strength. This is the map which God has presented to us, the goal, the purpose, the end of his great and wonderful and amazing plans and let us join together, join together collegially in seeking to

spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, boldly, faithfully, wisely, lovingly, rooted upon the doctrine of the apostles, reaching out to all and sundry, whatever their background may be and seeking to express on

the personal level, on the church level, the unity to which the church is called, that unity and diversity, expressing it practically and in terms of polity as well.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God our heavenly Father, we give thanks to you for your great purposes of grace in delivering us from sin and wrath and granting us through Jesus Christ your Son, everlasting life. We thank you for your church. We ask that you would build it up particularly in this country but beyond, throughout the world. Enable us to grow in harmony and in unity with one another, by your grace following faithfully your Word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Challenges and Opportunities of Church Planting

Rev. Dr Kevin Bidwell

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his

harvest." Matthew.9:35-38.

This passage that is recorded by Matthew, one of the Twelve, wonderfully answers many questions that we face in England and Wales. Our land is a mission field with multiplied millions, not just thousands, who know very little of the content of the gospel, the unique claims of Jesus Christ as God's Redeemer and the certainty of final judgment that is appointed for every human being. The knowledge of the fearful wrath of God

that will be revealed at the Second Coming of Christ, combined with a God-given love for lost souls is sufficient motivation for us to be burdened about the spiritual condition of our nation. The title of this brief session is simply 'The challenges and opportunities of church planting.' Let us first turn to my chosen text and the state of affairs in Judea in the time of the Lord Jesus before we then consider some applications.

1. Christ's Compassion

We find in the text of Matthew 9:35 that Matthew, the converted tax collector, simply records what our Lord was constantly doing at this time in his earthly ministry around the area of the Sea of Galilee. He is teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and, as God's promised Messiah, he is healing every disease and affliction. There had never been anything like this in the history of Israel. I would like to draw our attention to the two activities that Christ engaged in which were teaching and proclaiming. Imagine what it must have been like to have listened to the Man who was the Second Person of the Trinity, and who had become flesh, expound the truth concerning God in a way that was simple, lucid, clear and irresistibly compelling.

To teach means to explain in such a way that what is being conveyed is understood. If the students do not understand something, then a teacher needs to repeat the exercise until a topic is comprehended. However, to proclaim is something altogether different, though it is connected to our Lord's ministry. To proclaim the gospel of the kingdom is a public announcement in the manner of a herald. A herald would deliver a message on behalf of another and this is what proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom is about. It is to herald the good news of the forgiveness of sins with the command to repent and believe this gospel. Failure to obey God's command will lead to eternal punishment from God himself. Kenneth MacRae once explained that there is a 'bright side to the gospel and that people love to hear this', but that there is another side to the gospel which is not so bright and we must preach both: the love of God but that God is also a judge. Christ was faithful as a merciful High Priest to deliver the whole will of God for our salvation. He did this throughout all the surrounding cities and villages in their synagogues.

There were crowds that followed him, and we learn something of Christ that we must never forget. 'When he saw the crowds, he had

compassion for them.' Christ was not mechanically performing his duties but his whole being including his emotions were bound up with his task. Our Lord had compassion, he felt sympathy, he was moved inwardly by the poor spiritual state of the people of God in Israel and Judah. This revelation of Christ's compassion is central to the way he conducted his mission and likewise it is intended to be the way the disciples were to pray, preach, and disciple us.

2. Christ's Vision

Our Lord Jesus had a spiritual vision to discern what is really going on in a situation while the disciples were sometimes oblivious. The compassion that our Lord had for the crowds was because he could see their desperate plight and spiritual neglect. Christ would preach the good news in the synagogues which would make the 'common people' glad but once he left for the next town they would have to suffer under the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. These men were frankly false shepherds who cared little for the welfare of these people. Our Lord's vision zeroes in on three things.

Harassed and Helpless

First, these people were 'harassed and helpless'. Both descriptions are to be seen with the imagery of a

flock of sheep in our minds which are under the rule of a bad shepherd or a careless shepherd, and to imagine what state of distress the sheep would suffer. However, the situation of these people is worse than that because our Lord describes them as having no shepherd. While walking in the Peak District, I like to observe the behaviour of sheep in the fields, and one thing is for sure, the only defence mechanism a sheep has is to run. Without the help of a farmer they would be defenceless against the winter weather, wolves, diseases, and the search for food. God has created sheep to be dependent upon a human shepherd. Sheep are God's image for the people of God.

The harsh treatment by the scribes and Pharisees in the synagogue had left them 'harassed' which means disturbed and bothered. They were left 'helpless' which means a rejected state or condition, as sheep would be if they were left to their own resources. Sheep are not designed to be self-feeders who need no help, direction, leadership or care. They were in a pitiful condition which Christ the great physician diagnosed.

Like Sheep without a Shepherd

Christ has diagnosed the sickness and now he points to the cause with penetrating insight. The help-

less and harassed condition is because they have no shepherd to care for, feed, and nurture them spiritually. What a sad state it was in our Lord's day! We sometimes get discouraged at the state of our land; but look at things at the time of Christ's coming to this world. This imagery is used in the Old Testament in Numbers 27: 17 and also in 1 Kings 22: 17.

The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few

I have heard it said that the first step to solving a problem is to realize that there is a problem. This does not mean that the ingathering of the harvest will be easy, that it will not take hard work, or that everyone who is harassed and helpless will be brought into the Lord's barn.

3. Christ's Answer to the Problem

Labourers who are Shepherds

There was a spiritual problem in Christ's day and so there is in ours. With the Great Commission always in view, the task will continue until Christ returns. The answer to the problem is for men to be raised up, armed with the Apostles' doctrine, men called by God himself, men who are called to feed and care for God's sheep and God's lambs. For us this forms the basis for what we

believe is a biblical vision for the planting, establishing and strengthening of what we believe is a biblical and apostolic pattern; the Presbyterian pattern. We do not view Presbyterianism with rose tinted spectacles but we do believe this is God's plan for the expansion of his church. This means churches which have a regulative principle for worship, doctrine, and church government.

Pray earnestly for these men to be raised up and sent out

Once we become clear on this, then it helps us to know how to pray! Here is the imperative, which is to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. The harvest is God's not ours, but we are to pray. We must pray and pray earnestly to this end while ever we have breath in our lungs. James teaches us that 'you ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly' (James 4: 3). We are confident when we pray earnestly for shepherds to be thrust out that we are praying according to God's perfect will.

The planting and strengthening of churches for the harvest

I am not interested in planting churches but I am interested in planting the right kind of churches – churches with caring pastors and elders where sound doctrine is upheld and preached, churches where

worship is regulated by the Scriptures for the honour of our Lord, churches which are governed by elders in a regional Presbytery pattern to guard against the inadequate checks and balances that can arise through Independency, a pattern ordained by Christ, practised by the apostles, and required to be established in every generation until Christ returns.

I have been given a map of England and Wales from a member of our church planting committee with our strategic vision to plant churches with a 50 kilometre grid, an area in which people do not have to travel more than 25-30 miles to get to an evangelical and confessional Presbyterian church. Is this needed? Is this possible? Let us pray earnestly. The church planting map identifies the need for church planting from Berwick upon Tweed in the North to the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands in the South, from Ipswich in the East to Aberystwyth in the West, not forgetting the cities in between, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Oxford, Southampton, Exeter, Plymouth, Derby, Carlisle, Stoke, Wrexham. The need is huge but our God is infinite. Let us pray earnestly for men, people, resources and courage to move forwards by faith.

And what of London itself? We

earnestly desire and pray for the planting of churches in London. We have a map of suggested locations for church planting in London from Watford to Orpington, from Woking to Romford. Millions of people! A city where the Westminster Standards were produced! We recognize that there are some Presbyterian churches already in London with the IPC, but we long for more, as God wills.

Conclusion

Let us pray earnestly that the Lord would give us men in EPCEW who have been raised up by himself to pastor the sheep in England and Wales. Let us pray earnestly that the Lord of the harvest would help us to train men for this task of church planting. Let us pray that the Lord of the harvest would open a wide and effectual door for us to walk through to plant churches.

May the grace of God, the help of the Holy Spirit, the courage of the saints, the wisdom given to our elders, cause us to look back in 25 years time, if Christ tarries, and be amazed at what the Lord has done by 2037.

May God be glorified and Christ exalted, Amen.

Thus far the Lord has led us: the past 25 years

Rev. Brian Norton

Why should we look at history? It is the present that concerns us, isn't it? Surely the answer to such a question is that, while it is wrong to live in the past, it is dishonouring to the Lord to fail to recognize his goodness to us. It is he who has led us. Such an awareness, a right concern for our history, helps us understand what we are and provides valuable lessons for the present. It is important from time to time to do this: to stop and consider what we are and what we are really about. In the first place we are a small sector of biblical churches proclaiming the good news of Christ. Second, we are, with others, convinced that only a Reformed understanding truly portrays that gospel as set out in Scripture. Third, our concern in particular has been to establish confessional, connectional and covenantal churches. Hopefully what we are doing today will help all of us to see where we come in the whole picture.

Where should we begin in reviewing the story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales? The obvious place is

the formation of the Presbyterian Association in England in 1987. But we have to go back at least to the London Presbyterian Conference of November 1986, which led to the formation of the Association and later the Presbytery, where John Nicholls set before the Conference his dream of a Presbytery in England showing unity in diversity. Yet if we do that, we have to delve deeper and ask how that Conference came about, and the context in which it did so. Things start to get more complicated.

A Parable

There is a logo that has been used for the EPCEW – that of a green tree. Never officially proposed or approved, it began with David Cross and has gone on being used. Consider the EPCEW as that tree. John Nicholls described his dream, today I want to give you a 'parable': the parable of the oak tree, and of its growth. The visible part of a tree is the trunk with its mass of branches, which increase in number as the tree grows. If the existing Presbytery is the trunk, then it has grown out of a stock,

which was the Presbyterian Association and the London Presbyterian Conference, and the branches are the particular churches we see today. But a tree has its less visible roots, as well as the soil it has grown in, to be considered. So what of our tree's roots below the ground, below its obvious starting place? If we are to understand the growth of this EPCEW tree, we need to dig deeper.

I want to go back a long way in order to make the point that Presbyterianism is not a 'foreign' transplant (the oak incidentally is quintessentially the southern British tree). One of our tree's roots, indeed you might say its taproot, is the Westminster Assembly and the Westminster Confession of Faith drawn up there. It consisted mainly of English theologians meeting between 1643 and 1647 within the Jerusalem Chamber of the Palace of Westminster in London. Their theological lineage can be traced back to the Continent and to the teaching of John Calvin at Geneva, where their predecessors in the previous century had sought refuge from the persecutions of Queen Mary. When they returned in Elizabeth's reign they continued to press for the reformation that had been begun under Edward VI. They were known as 'Puritans' and for a while there was an uneasy toleration of them.

Though this tap root reaches so far back, the tree growth, at first very vigorous, was cut back brutally by the Act of Uniformity of 1662, and again by the disease of Unitarianism at the beginning of the 18th century. There was a nurturing of it back to life in the 19th century but it was further stunted by another equally virulent disease, that of modernism, at the end of that century. With the union of Presbyterian and Congregational churches into the United Reformed Church in the 1970s, it seemed as if it were finally dead.

However that brings us to another of the roots. When Presbyterianism in England was all but extirpated at the beginning of the 18th century, only a couple of decades later a separate growth sprang into life in Wales with the Methodist Awakening. The churches that arose in Wales took a Presbyterian form and flourished there until after 1904, when they too gradually succumbed to modernism. So our tree has an English root and a Welsh root. These events may sound far off for our present day, but these indigenous origins need to be recognized and understood.

Recent History

Forest trees often depend on a symbiotic relationship with a network of fungal strands in the soil,

which transfers nutrients to the roots and acts like an extension of them. Those networks are vast and can be linked to and benefit many different trees. These 'shared root-extensions', if I can call them that, are extremely important even though most people are totally unaware of them. It is this image I want to use. In the late Forties and early Fifties a reawakening of interest in Reformed things began to occur in England and Wales. It was particularly associated with the work of Dr Lloyd Jones and with the work of the Banner of Truth Trust formed in 1957. (A good account of this is to be found in John J. Murray's book *Catch the Vision*, Evangelical Press, 2007.) Interest grew in Puritan writings and later Reformed literature produced in Scotland and America. As a result, a Reformed 'network' arose which in turn nourished the growth of Reformed churches. At first in England this was within Baptist and Independent Churches. These later contributed to the development or growth of the EFCC, FIEC, and Grace Baptists. (Both the 1689 Baptist Confession and the Independent Savoy Declaration are based on the Westminster Confession.) Some people within the Anglican Church were also influenced. The Reformed network was nourishing growth in a number of different

contexts. In Wales, where there had been a more recent conservative Presbyterian past, it contributed to a growing number of evangelical Presbyterian Churches. In time, awareness of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms and the growing influence of more recent Presbyterian writings meant that eventually a nucleus of people in England, as well as in Wales, were drawn to a Presbyterian understanding.

One small group that came into existence in England in the late 1950s was the Evangelical Presbyterian Fellowship associated with the enthusiastic Peter Collins. It didn't survive a period of ill health on his part. A second development was the International Presbyterian Church (IPC) planted in England in 1969, associated with the L'Abri Fellowship. Although the influence of Francis Schaeffer was another input into the wider network in the Reformed reawakening, his work was a dominant influence in the IPC, which at that stage had churches elsewhere in Europe and was linked to the English L'Abri at Liphook in Hampshire.

But then there was a third development in the 1980s. A small number of ministers at the Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference met together and expressed a need for a re-emergence of an evangelical

Presbyterian church. This third development was to give rise to a small shoot. Those ministers and others of similar conviction, including some from the earlier Evangelical Presbyterian Fellowship, met as a committee under the enthusiastic direction of Rev. John Nicholls. At that time John was minister of Cole Abbey Free Church of Scotland London Congregation. The committee arranged a Presbyterian Conference at Cole Abbey in November 1986. Two hundred or so people met there to hear papers given by John Nicholls, Donald Macleod and Ed Clowney. At the end, an opportunity was given to sign a motion calling on the committee to co-ordinate groups and churches that would be interested in the formation of a Presbyterian Association. About 10 different groups expressed interest. John Nicholls visited these groups and, in the end, five of them together with the original committee formed the Presbyterian Association in England twenty five years ago in 1987. Another conference was held in 1988.

Churches

So those 'underground' influences became visible as a very small shoot sprouting from the old historic rootstock. We can liken it to the sprouting of a dormant, pol-

larded or coppiced tree. Would it survive? One group in the end decided that they were not themselves viable. The minister of another decided his future lay elsewhere. So only three of the original groups, Cambridge, Durham and Hull, continued as churches. All three were without a supported church planting minister. How did the PAE proceed? It sought help from Mission to the World – the missionary arm of the Presbyterian Church in America. David Cross, who had been working in Australia in setting up the Westminster Presbyterian Church there, came over to an exploratory meeting. The result was that David, together with his wife Barbara, agreed in 1990 to come over to start a work at a suitable location. That location was Chelmsford, which when they arrived became the fourth group in 1992. Not long after this the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland responded to a call to start a work in Accrington, Lancashire, which later relocated to Blackburn. They, to their credit, agreed to do so only if it were linked with the PAE. About this time the Cambridge Church was able to call a minister. The tree had five branches and though two others had as it were died back, these two new ones grew to replace them

The group of five was still an As-

sociation with many of the original London Presbyterian Conference committee playing a governing role. But as the groups became established churches, there was a concern to be presbyterially governed. To meet that aspiration, some creative structuring was developed to allow the committee men to continue to be involved in the Association, while enabling the representatives of the churches to form an interim presbytery in 1991. Eventually in 1995 that became the Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, consisting of three churches, Cambridge, Durham and Chelmsford, plus the EPCI work in Lancashire, which for a period had dual membership. Hull, one of the original groups, had withdrawn for a time but later came back in. At this point the title 'Association' ceased to be used.

The Presbytery takes shape

An important part of the work of the Presbytery at this stage involved extensive discussion as to the shape of a church that would be appropriate to the situation in England and Wales. Although Presbyterian churches all look to a common Westminster Confession of Faith, there are considerable differences as to how they do things, even in the type of subscription to

the Confession. Together the churches in this Presbytery worked through what was of the essence of Presbyterianism, formulated a set of principles to operate on, and in time produced a Book of Order. The concern here was not simply to copy what is done in other bodies elsewhere but to produce something appropriate for contemporary England and Wales, learning from the lessons of history. We took seriously what Professor John Murray had stressed in his paper given to the earlier Evangelical Presbyterian Fellowship in 1958. 'There is much room for variety, and the church of Christ is under the necessity of devising and adopting better forms of procedure and organization than those which tradition may have established.' He also said 'Every sound and solid movement must begin with the declaration and propagation of the principles upon which it is founded and which it seeks to promote.' He was at pains to stress the parity of elders, for he warned of the danger of ministerial autocracy and the curse of clericalism, saying, 'This evil which has marred the witness of churches professing Presbyterian government only illustrates the need for constant vigilance lest the elementary principles of Presbyterian government be violated and desecrated. It is not only by erroneous

theory that presbytery is prejudiced but also by practice which subtly annuls the theory professed.'

During early discussions in the Presbytery it was particularly evident that recent English and Welsh experience of centralized denominations meant that it was important to keep clear of an over-centralized structure. In this we followed PCA practice in recognizing the responsibility of congregations for the ownership of buildings and the remuneration of ministers. Years later, when addressed by Rev. Angus Macrae of Dingwall, we were again reminded of the need to be biblical, and to be distinctly English and Welsh.

Growth

The work of church planting continued. Tim Horne, working with MTW, originally had intended to work in London but the location was switched to Cheltenham. Two other works failed to take off: one in Oxford and one in Balham. There were however two other churches that had earlier shown interest in the EPCEW: Bury St Edmunds and Cardiff. In 2000, the two Cardiff Churches, Bethel and Immanuel, both of which had emerged from Ely Presbyterian Church in Cardiff, came into the Presbytery. The tree now had eight branches. Bury St Edmunds later

formed the ninth.

From the beginning, the work of church planting was integral to the very idea of the Presbytery. A long-term plan of a network of churches to cover the whole of England and Wales was drawn up, focussing on strategic centres. Some 70 centres in England were identified, with a further 15 in London and 15 in Wales. Such a network would provide a reformed church within reasonable travelling distance anywhere in the country.

In 2002 the work in Cheltenham began. This was followed in 2005 by Solihull in Greater Birmingham. Early in 2009 services were started in Gateshead in South Tyneside. This in turn was followed late in 2010 by Sheffield in Yorkshire. Both these Northern works had been preceded by a preparatory Bible Study group. This year, 2012, a similar small exploratory Bible Study has started in Blyth in Northumberland.

In 2011 a church in Barry near Cardiff under the care of the Rev. John Cook, which had growing links with the Cardiff churches, applied to and was accepted into the Presbytery.

Each time a church becomes part of the Presbytery, or a minister or other elder is appointed, it changes the dynamic and contributes to its development. All of our churches

have ministers at this point.

Wider Vision

Missionary work among Turkish people was for a time conducted by Rev. David Winch from the mid 1990s until he retired, and from 2004 Paul Austin worked in the African Bible University in Uganda. Dr Sebastian Smolarz is supported by the Immanuel Church to work in Poland. A certain amount of diaconal involvement in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Malawi has recently been undertaken.

There is however also a different kind of overseas involvement. A Reformed Presbyterian work in Tranås in Sweden sought oversight from the Presbytery and was admitted in 2009. It has a church planting Bible Study in Stockholm. In 2012, at the request of a group of German Christians made to Kevin Bidwell, a church planting Bible Study was started in Berlin.

The tree has grown to 14 branches with three more beginning to develop.

Relationships have been maintained with other denominations. That involves membership of Affinity with links to over 1400 conservative evangelical congregations in Britain and Ireland. Internationally we are linked with the International Conference of Reformed

Churches. There are ongoing direct relations with Reformed denominations such as the International Presbyterian Church, in Ireland the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, in Scotland the Associated Presbyterian Churches, the Free Church of Scotland, and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in America the Mission to the World arm of the PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in the Netherlands the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated).

Other Fruit

What other fruit has been produced? The true fruit is to be seen in the lives of men and women. However there are other products.

Almost from the beginning a magazine was produced, the *Presbyterian Network*. The Publication Committee has added to that a prayer letter and a number of booklets including a reprint of the Evangelical Presbyterian Fellowship lecture given by John Murray in London in 1958.

Many will remember with affection the family holidays that the Fenne family ran at Cloverley Hall. Though these eventually came to an end because of constraints on their time, those conferences have, I suspect, served as a model for simi-

lar conferences run by others. Later a Youth Camp was held for several years, organized by the Cardiff churches, and in more recent times an annual Youth Camp has been held in the North, attended by young people from four of our churches.

At present we have men in training for the ministry. In addition four or five men from our congregations have been trained and now serve in congregations elsewhere.

Conclusion

A consideration of history is always worthwhile, but the particular reason for our reviewing the past 25 years or more is to thank God for what he has done. We need to see what God has brought about. We may be small and few but what

God has done is not insignificant. It is significant for us and significant for the wider church in our land and beyond. Christ's command to Peter was to feed his sheep. Our churches by God's help have played a part in feeding Christ's sheep. He also told his disciples to go into the whole world, preaching the gospel. Men and women have heard Christ's gospel proclaimed and by God's Spirit been brought into Christ's church and discipled to follow the Lord. As we look to the future we must learn from our history and never lose sight of our purpose, nor a complete dependence on the Lord for all we do. This tree may still be a small sapling but it is growing and we must give God the glory for it.

Warm hearted Presbyterianism

Rev. Ian Hamilton

In Romans 11: 33-36 Paul comes to the climax and conclusion of his magisterial exposition of 'the gospel of God', as he calls it in the opening verse of the opening chapter, and he concludes thus:

Oh, the depth of the riches and

wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through

him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Warm-hearted Presbyterianism. Now maybe you are thinking, 'Warm-hearted I understand, and Presbyterian I can have a stab at, but, Warm-hearted Presbyterianism? What do these two have in common? Is it not a little oxymoronic?' At its best, however, Presbyterianism is natively and compellingly heart-warming. Let me explain what I mean.

If I were to ask you what is the dominant motif of Presbyterianism, I wonder what you would answer. I think some would say, 'Well, it is a concern for God-honouring order in the church.' That would get you a B minus in Bob Letham's class at WEST. Others might say, 'It is rule by elders.' That might get you a C+ in Bob Letham's class. Others might say, 'No, essentially it's about collegial church government.' You might aspire to a B minus in Bob's class. All of these things are distinctively Presbyterian concerns but I have no hesitation in saying that not one of these, nor all of them together, expresses what is the animating pulse beat of Presbyterianism.

The dominant motif, or the dominant pulse beat, of biblical Presbyterianism is the truth that is captured in the opening question and answer of the Shorter Catechism of

the Westminster Assembly: 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.' That is the theological, experiential, animating, pulse beat of biblical Presbyterianism.

I want for a few moments to reflect on the two notes that are struck in that opening question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. First, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God.' God's glory and not my pleasure is the pulse beat of authentic Presbyterianism. As we will see in a moment the two are actually conjoined; you cannot have the one without the other. God's glory is the foundation that gives birth to my pleasure. But principally and foundationally the dominant motif that characterizes authentic, biblical Presbyterianism is the desire, the longing, the yearning to glorify God. That is not simply a theological notion. It is a yearning that is palpable. Any form of Presbyterianism that does not glory in God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is counterfeit Presbyterianism. Any church that claims to be Presbyterian should be marked above and before anything and everything else about it, not by having elders and deacons, presbyteries, books of order and discipline, all of which are important, but by being marked by worship that glorifies God and

that glories in God. God centred, God glorifying, Christ magnifying, Holy Spirit shaped, informed and quickened worship is what Presbyterianism is essentially all about.

If a Presbyterian church therefore does not pulse with delight in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is not a Presbyterian church. However much it espouses the plurality and the parity of elders, however much it proclaims the need for wider Presbyterian collegiality, if it does not pulse with the glory of God, it is counterfeit Presbyterianism. Now, I am not saying of course that only Presbyterianism is concerned with God glorifying, Christ magnifying, Holy Spirit animating worship. Far from it! I am saying that, where this primary note is absent, a church may have the name Presbyterian but not truly be Presbyterian.

Man's chief end is to glorify God; that is, or should be, the driving passion of every Presbyterian Church in this land. But conjoined with glorifying God, we are to enjoy him forever, and this is where the warm heartedness comes in. Is it possible to glory in God, to glorify the God of our salvation, Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit and not have our hearts overwhelmed with wonder that causes us to be lost in wonder, love and praise? Is it possible to sing of the

revealed mystery of the Godhead, the glorious covenant dealings of the Godhead, one with another and with humanity; is it possible to sing or preach of the sovereignty of God's grace, his amazing love, his unfailing faithfulness, his tenderness, his mercy, his awful purity, his astonishing generosity, and not be overwhelmed with heart-stopping wonder? Why, O God, such love to me?

Presbyterians have their hearts warmed not by eclectic worship but by glorying in the God who is, for he is our God. He is from everlasting and he is to everlasting, the God who was, who is and who is to come, the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob, the God of the prophets and the apostles. He is our God, by the grace of his love in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus did not come to buy the Father's love for us, he came as the gift of the Father's love to us and we can never get over the wonder of it. We who were damnable sinners, who were sunk in sin, blind to God and his glory, dead, as the apostle tells the Ephesians, in trespasses and sins, to us he came and in unfathomable grace declared his love to us in his son Jesus Christ. This is where our hearts are warmed, in the wonder of who God is and what he has done. That is why we read those words in Romans 11. Paul has been

so astonishingly expounding the gospel of God, as he calls it in the opening verses of the first chapter. He also calls it 'my gospel', but it is his gospel because first it was God's gospel. He has shown us the depths of human depravity and then he has shown us the heights of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who himself is the grace of God. And he has shown us how God has devised in his Son a way to justify the ungodly. Then he has opened up to us the privileges that are ours in union with Jesus Christ and then taken us on an astonishing tour of the sovereignty of God's grace in his dealings with Jew and Gentile. As Paul comes to the end of this exposition all he can say is, 'Oh the depths, oh the depths'.

He is actually confessing that he is out of his depth, that he does not have all the answers. Who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been his counsellor, who has ever given to God that God should repay him? He says God's ways with us are past finding out. We know but the outskirts of his ways. It is a confession of adoring ignorance. 'Oh the depths', he says. It is that little word 'Oh' that I think captures the heart of biblical Presbyterianism. It is a little word but actually it says everything that should be said about a church that claims to be Presbyterian, 'Oh the

depths'. At our best – and we are not always at our best – but at our best our churches should have that little word punctuating our every gathering: 'Oh'. Should we not always be lost in wonder, love and praise?

Of course we believe that Christ's church should be Presbyterian and not independent. Why? Because we believe the Bible teaches that. We believe it should be governed by pastors and elders. Why? Because we believe the Bible teaches that. We believe the church should confess its faith *confessionally*. Why? Because we are persuaded the Bible teaches that. We believe that the Presbyterian church and churches should be apostolic, catholic and united as we were hearing so helpfully this morning from Bob Letham. But above all, above everything else and before everything else, we believe that Presbyterian churches should throb with the wonder of the triune God and of his heart-stopping grace to us in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, heavenly session, reign and return of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Presbyterians talk much about order. All things, as the apostle said, should be done decently and in order. But you can have order in a graveyard and too many churches that bear the name Pres-

byterian more resemble a graveyard than a congregation of Spirit-filled, Christ-adoring, heavenly-Father-magnifying worshippers. In a sense that is the one thing I wanted to say this afternoon: our hearts are warmed when we discover the glory of God. One of the most encouraging statements regarding my ministry was one I heard this past week. One of our students, a fourth year engineer, who heads up our student work, was talking to some new students in the church and he was saying a little bit about the kind of ministry that they could expect to get in Cambridge. He said, 'One of the features or notes of Ian's ministry is that he's more into theology than application.' Now how would you feel if you heard someone say that about your pastor? Would you say, 'Oh boy, that's not so good; we need application'? I must confess that my heart rose to bless God when I heard him say that. The grace and glory of God in Christ is itself the greatest of all incentives to live a godly life. Are you discovering that the glory of God is itself the great application? When people say, 'We need more practical application', I know what they mean. But actually what they mean is that we need the kind of preaching that lifts up God and says, 'Behold your God', for how else would you want

to live except to please this God who is so glorious and so great and yet so generous and so good in coming to us in his Son Jesus Christ?

I suppose there are many other things that could be said but I want deliberately to end on the same note with which Bob Letham began. If you remember, his opening point in his exposition in Ephesians 2 was that the church was catholic. Heart-warming Presbyterianism means that who and what we are in Christ spills over to other brothers and sisters in Christ. The last thing we want is to be like the disciples in Mark 9, is it, who say to Jesus, 'We saw a man casting out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us'. And Jesus rebuked them for their narrow-heartedness, saying in essence to them, 'He may not have been one of yours, but he was certainly one of mine'. I am reminded of John Calvin's famous letter to Archbishop Cranmer (April 1552). Calvin wrote: 'This other thing is also to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, namely that the churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute among us, thus it is that the members of the church being severed, the body 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.'

One of the features of the Magisterial Reformers was their breath-taking catholicity; they saw beyond Geneva or Zurich or Basel or Canterbury or Edinburgh and they sought to embrace one another even as God in Christ had embraced them. Calvin ends that letter to Cranmer, 'Adieu, very distinguished Archbishop, deserving of my hearty reverence. May the Lord continue to guide you by his Spirit, and to bless your holy labours.' Now Cranmer was not Rowan Williams. Calvin did not agree with everything that the Anglicans were doing. He could speak pointedly to them but as a brother who had embraced them in Christ. Warm-hearted Presbyterianism sees beyond itself and seeks to embrace all whom God in Christ has embraced. That is not easy. You do not leave aside your distinctive; you do not become fuzzy at the edges. You can even speak pointedly and be straight, because people know that they are as embraced by you as family, even as they have been embraced by the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So what is warm-hearted Presbyterianism? It is Christianity that glories in God, and because it glories in God it cannot but enjoy him and delight in him and have that

delight manifest itself in worship and in service. This is what we are about in the EPCEW; we seek to glory in God, we seek to make known Jesus Christ. If you are not already part of it, pray for us, help us start new works where God will be glorified and people will see what *Biblical Christianity* is.

A Closing Prayer

Lord, you are glorious, glorious in what you are as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You are glorious in all that you do, for all that you do is wise and good and right and just, and we worship you. We worship you, Lord, because you have come to us in your Son, by the power and grace of your Spirit. You have delivered us from death. You have rescued us from the power of darkness. You have brought us into the Kingdom of the Son of your love. You have made us heirs, together with Christ, of the glory of God. We ask you, Lord, to remember us for good, to forgive the multitude of our sins, for they are very many and not few, and help us, gracious God, to be a Presbytery that is consumed with a longing that your glory be known to the ends of the earth, for you are the Lord, the Living One, and you are ours in Christ. Receive us, Lord, Remember us for good. We ask it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

Spotlight on the Churches

News from around the Presbytery

Church planting works in focus

We are commissioned to preach the gospel to every person (Mark 16: 15) and each generation in turn must be called from darkness to light. Going to places where there is no established witness can be daunting work, testing our faith. Sometimes a work begins with a few people meeting for Bible Study and prayer. This is happening in Berlin and Blyth (for Blyth see Durham's report). These reports come first because they need earnest, continual intercession.

Berlin

There are monthly studies in Berlin where the aim is to see a confessional Presbyterian church established. These began in September 2012 and they will continue until the summer of 2013. Around 11 people attend each month; it is growing numerically as well as spiritually. One of those attending has set up a German website (www.epkd.de).

Berlin

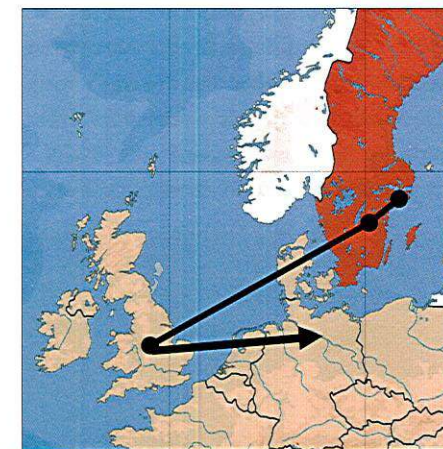


The Westminster Standards in German have been produced and are used in the study. Please pray for wisdom for the Durham session and the EPCEW church planting committee for decisions that may need to be made.

◆ Kevin Bidwell

Sheffield

As we look back on the progress of the work in the last 12 months there is real cause for thanksgiving. Every aspect of the church has grown, not least



the stability and rootedness of the majority of the members. There have been some pastoral challenges but this is Christian ministry 'at the frontline' as it were.

Prayer for the year ahead: 1. for the church to reach a critical mass in all of its meetings; 2. for peace and unity as things hopefully continue to grow; 3. for the Lord to raise up elders and deacons or men who could be trained for office; 4. for further church planting opportunities in the large cities of the North of England.

♦ Kevin Bidwell

Solihull

We are thankful to God that he raised up Dr Falko Drijfhout from within the congregation to be an elder. Falko was ordained on 25 November 2012, when Rev Andrew Young preached on 'Elder Essentials' from Acts 20. The Lord is good!

Last year has seen a major effort in

evangelism, through the patient and persistent work of Chris Statter, our community evangelist. Thousands of pieces of literature have been put in people's hands or homes, hundreds of conversations have been had on the doorstep. We are able to revisit and build relationships with a few dozen people based on those gospel conversations.

For all that, a response of new people at worship or even of conversion to Christ has still to materialize. Only one family has yet come to an ordinary service as a result. At our Christmas Carol Service four people came as a result of the visitation work. It is a reminder that this is a long, slow, patient work in a culture that is largely apathetic to the gospel.

In 2013, we invite you to pray with us for an abundant harvest to follow this continuing cultivation.

♦ Stephen Dancer

IN SWEDEN

It is a cause for great thanksgiving that we can read about a Reformed work in Sweden. This is very much a mission work.

Immanuel Church, Tranås

A joyous event took place this autumn (or fall) when the Methodist congregation handed over the church building, as a free gift, to Immanuelskyrkan. We are very thankful to the Lord, and to the Methodist church, for this tremendous gift.

Several individuals and families are considering membership in Immanuelskyrkan. They are trying to learn more about the Reformed faith and Presbyterian church government, since these things are unfamiliar to most Swedish Christians. Our hope is that they will feel at home in our congregation.

Stockholm

The mission group in Stockholm continues to meet together weekly. A couple of new families have started to come regularly. Every other week there is a worship service in a church building nearby and every other week there is a Bible study in one of the families' homes.

David has conducted three baptisms lately, two in Stockholm and one in Tranås. We are grateful for healthy children and the growth of the church.

♦ Sune Jäderberg

IN WALES AND THE SOUTH WEST

Barry

We give thanks to God for his great mercy to his people here at Barry in 2012. We have found a warm welcome since joining the EPECW in March, and have made many new friends. We've truly appreciated the prayers of our brothers and sisters in the faith. We continue to value support from the Immanuel and Bethel congregations. Both Pastors and Elders have preached God's word in our hearing.

The children have been studying the life of Moses and the redemption of God's people Israel from the bonds of slavery, and in this we have been able to direct the children to our great redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ.

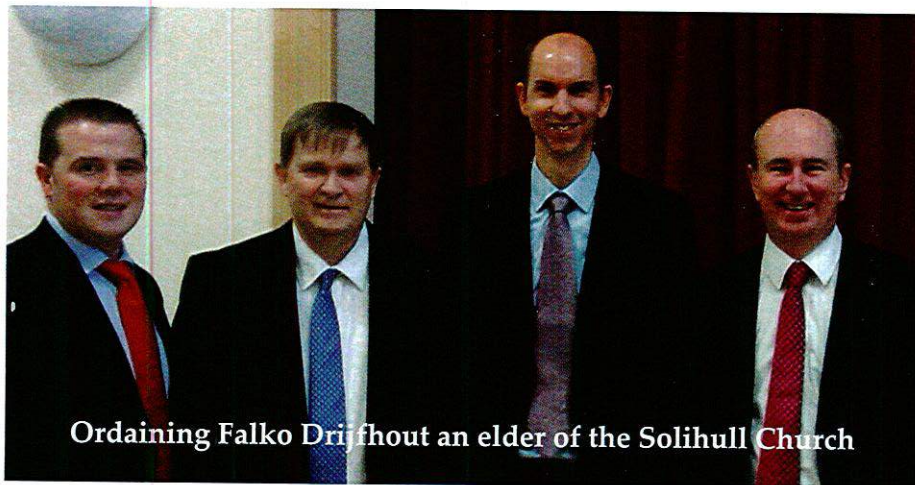
We have a burden to re-engage with the neighbourhood, and God willing we will seek to go door to door with a gospel tract and an invitation to come to our Easter services.

We give thanks to God for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

♦ Brendan Hope

Bethel, Cardiff

The children's work has continued to thrive, with another Sunday School class added. The Catechism Club, set up by Ben Holst, has also grown, with extra support now needed due to its popularity and the lively and enjoyable way that catechism has now been



Ordaining Falko Drijfhout an elder of the Solihull Church

taught. It is a blessing that not only are children of the covenant being trained in this way but also the grandchildren of some members are attending Sunday School and Catechism Club.

Legal confirmation of the adoption of two young boys by James and Natalie Hepburn led to their baptism at the end of September, followed by a celebratory fellowship meal with friends and relatives. Their integration into family and church life has been a blessing to us all.

Home study groups have been set up once a month to allow parents of young children to enjoy fellowship with one another and study a selected book or DVD.

James Hepburn was elected unanimously to the office of elder and after he was examined by Presbytery, he was ordained on the 15 December.

One of our deacons, Doug Stowell, had an operation on his foot for arthritis and has been in a plaster cast for three months.

Illness continues to affect members of the congregation with two ladies now being diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). We pray for their battle against long-term health problems.

Numbers in the congregation fluctuate and we pray for more to join us, particularly from the surrounding area in which the Lord has placed us. We are blessed with sound ministry from our minister and have also enjoyed the

ministry of visiting preachers from other evangelical churches in Cardiff.

♦Patricia Stowell

Immanuel, Cardiff

During the summer, brothers and sisters from Amersfoort (the Netherlands) visited us – our contacts began 25 years ago! They came to work, improving the building. At last we can lay a carpet – and just in time! because during 2013 we anticipate the privilege of hosting the *International Conference of Reformed Churches*, together with Bethel, Barry, and Cheltenham.

The church began the New Year by holding a week of prayer.

We are looking forward to 1 July when, God willing, Rob and Ashley Dykes will join us for Rob to do a two year internship. Rob desires to become a minister of the EPCEW serving in Wales. He is just completing a four year course at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina.

Since our last news, we have had some trials. Terry Bees' wife, Annis, suffering with cancer, suddenly passed away; our comfort, that she is with the Lord and we shall be together again. Several others have suffered. Teg Holst was brought safely through shoulder replacement surgery. Vito Plebiscito is currently waiting to hear what treatment he can receive for a serious brain condition; meanwhile he cannot work, but, with three small children, urgently needs a larger house.

Outreach efforts continue. We hold two Christianity Explored Courses each year, now a pattern. Mums and Tots, Sunday School, Youth Group, leaflet distribution, services at two homes for the aged, and evangelistic carol services, have all been part of our outreach approach this year. This February, two of our members, Arthur Trask and Gaynor Davies, will begin to make visits to Cardiff Prison to speak to prisoners about the Lord.

Our eyes are upon the Lord, until he has mercy on us. Thank you, all who remember us in your prayers.

♦Peter Naylor

Cheltenham

The arrival of Kaitlin Tippin (MTW) in July has helped greatly with the work amongst the university students and the newly started youth group.

David and Bethan Pfeiffer and family have settled in well and the sale of

their house in Cambridge has proceeded smoothly. We rejoice with them on the safe arrival on 12 August of daughter Gwennan Ruth, who was baptized during the harvest service in late September. David has taken on the leadership of the young people's work and also an increasing share of preaching.

We rejoice with Jonathan and Jennifer Greenald on the baptism of their son, Jonah, in October.

We continue to develop contact with parents from the Mums & Tots. Some of them came to the informal meeting during the run-up to Christmas where the Gospel was simply presented. Now in 2013, we cherish your partnership in prayer for the tots who have 'graduated' to the JAM club.

♦Tai-Tuck Yu

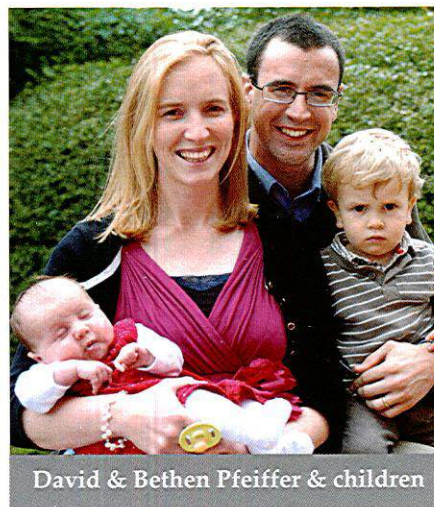
IN THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND

Cambridge

Paul Garner. One of our members, Paul Garner, who works with the Biblical Creation Society, returned to full-time study in September, doing a one-year course at University College London, leading to an MSc in Geoscience. Despite the heavy workload, he's enjoying the challenge and will possibly do his thesis on dinosaurs. Pray that Paul will continue to do well with his studies and that they will be useful in his future ministry.

www.biblicalcreationministries.org.uk/b/index.php/about-our-speakers

Parenting meetings. Ian Hamilton is



David & Bethan Pfeiffer & children

planning to hold four monthly meetings for anyone interested, to explore what the Bible understands by 'Christian parenting', in order to encourage and help parents to be ministers of God's grace and love to their children. We will be looking at general principles, reading with our children, praying with our children, and disciplining our children.

Carol Service. A carol service was held at All Saints church on 22 December. Several non-Christian friends attended.

Adventurers. This past term, numbers at Adventurers more than doubled to nine, about half from outside the church. The children have listened well, and it is thrilling and humbling to see the youngest ones with no church background really 'getting' what is being taught. Please join us in praying to have 20 children by Easter and for wisdom in knowing how to advertise in the area. Pray also that we will be able to connect with whole families and to use Adventurers as a means of contacting new people.

Youth group. Our youth group has had a profitable term studying the life of Joseph. We are thankful for the addition of several new young people since September. Bible studies this term will be on Hebrews 11. Pray that the unsaved young people will come to faith in Christ. Several young people are taking exams. Pray also for Sarah, Nicolaas and Alex who are away at

university.

New babies. We rejoice in the recent safe arrival of two new babies: Adah to Fheron and Emily Cheru (please pray that Fheron will soon obtain a visa to enter the UK) and Leo to David and Sarah Illman.

Elderly folk. Please pray for several of our elderly folk who are finding life more challenging at present.

♦ Annabel Haylett

Chelmsford

It was a joy to welcome Darren, Glad and Josiah Moore to Chelmsford and to share in Darren's Installation Service on 15 September. Thank you to friends who joined us on that occasion. Darren has been busy meeting with congregational groups, visiting other ministers in the district, and generally settling into pastoral ministry here.

Darren has preached from Luke during morning services and from Jonah in the evening services. Both series have challenged us concerning our motivation for evangelism and Christ's concern for our needy world. At mid-week meetings, we have completed a 'Talking About Jesus' series. This is a very practical course aimed at helping us to be more effective in sharing our faith.

Student outreach has been an area of focus, beginning with some members attending the Freshers' Fair at our local University.

Darren Moore, Alastair Steven,

Chris Kavanagh and Craig Taylor assist Christian Union members at Writtle College with Bible studies. We are grateful for this opportunity, and pray that under God's hand, it will prosper. It has already been a particular encouragement to see an increased number of students attending our services of worship.

Craig Taylor only recently came into membership and contributes to many facets of our congregational life. He joins us after three years working with IFES in Prague.

Some social events for international students have been reasonably well attended. Of particular note was a Christmas meal held at David and Ruth Ferguson's home, after which Darren was able to speak on the significance of the names attributed to the infant Christ.

Further Saturday Bible Club sessions were held in September and December, and it was good to share in the children's enjoyment of these. Our 'Tiny Tots' group has recommenced and is slowly becoming more established.

Finally, we are delighted to extend congratulations to Matthew Ferguson and his fiancée Lois, on their recent engagement to be married.

♦ Julie Kavanagh

Bury St Edmunds

We are glad to report that Matthew returned to ministry at the end of Sep-

tember after a long spell of illness. He is preaching a series from Luke's gospel entitled 'Meet the Saviour'. We pray that the many unbelievers who have attended services would indeed give their lives to Him.

Our annual Harvest Supper and subsequent American-style Thanksgiving meal were both well attended, as were the two afternoons of children's activities which we held during the half term break, and the carol service in December. Please pray for plans to start a regular weekly children's meeting in this new year, and wisdom as we consider other ways to reach out.

We are thankful that Libby, Becky and Anna who started university in September have all settled in churches and made Christian friends. Please pray for these and others studying away from home.

Also pray for continued good health for Matthew, and for his wife Kristen as they expect their first child in March.

♦ Clare Pape

IN THE NORTH

Gateshead

Looking back over the past year, we have much to be thankful for as a church. We brought five students into membership. Three had come to faith over the past year and two were covenant children. August saw the fourth annual young people's camp with young people from Gateshead, Shef-

field, Solihull, Durham, and nearby Newcastle Reformed Evangelical Church. Also in August, we celebrated our first wedding. This was a wonderful occasion, not only to celebrate a new family, but also God's goodness to us, as it brought together a member of one of our founding families (Anna Winch, now Hilton), and one of the first people God used our church to bring to himself (Nathan Hilton). Indeed for all these things and others we praise God and thank Him for His continued and undeserved blessing on the church.

Looking ahead into this year, we are just beginning our annual Christianity Explored course and praying that God would bring people to it and use it savingly in their lives. We also continue to get visitors regularly, both Christians and non-Christians, and we pray that we might continue be a church where they will both feel welcomed and faithfully hear the truth.

♦ Benjamin Wontrop

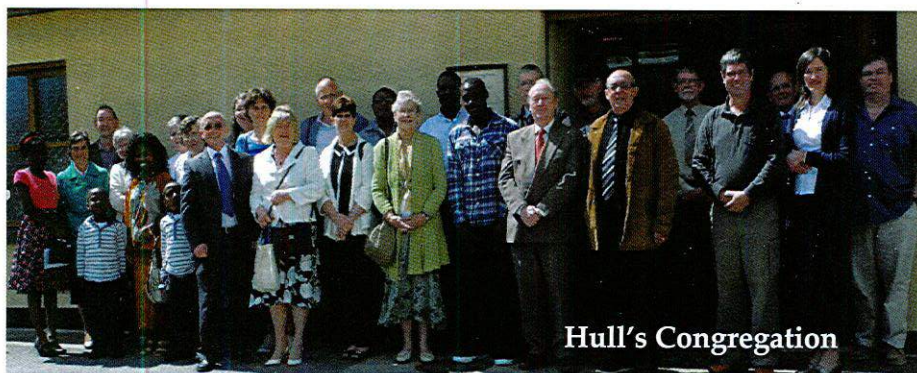
Durham

In July we rejoiced at the birth of a little girl after many difficult months for the family concerned. August saw the wedding here of Chris, an elder, and Jane. Then in September we mourned the death of an American member of the congregation. Also in September, Paul and Kilby Austin announced the birth of their daughter who was baptized here at Christmas; Paul is now studying at Mid America Reformed Seminary. In December another little girl was born, and two more births are expected in the congregation in January.

We've started a Bible Study in Blyth, Northumberland, to explore church planting potential there. At present this is very small and is aimed at building up a core group before seeking wider contacts.

Our annual distribution of evangelistic material was carried out in December, including the new houses down the road from us.

♦ Brenda Norton



Hull's Congregation

Hull

In the months since our last report, our small congregation has experienced highs and lows. A few examples of those highs: we have had a good Summer Holiday Bible club, in which the gospel was presented to new children, who were very attentive and very sad that the club was not going to continue when the week came to the end – a high! Attendance at our morning services increased – a high! Our Christmas day service was well attended – a high!

But there were lows as well. The attendance at the evening services fell, a member has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, another member fell and fractured a vertebra in her spine. A couple who had been worshipping with us for many weeks suddenly stopped.

Highs and lows can be very unsettling, but as we looked back over them, we found ourselves led to thank God for the answer to prayer and more reason to pray on.

What of the near future? Well, God willing, we will be recommencing our Parents and Toddlers club, three years after it closed – why? Because a mother came into the church and asked if we would.

This year, for the first time, we will (DV) be holding a two day Holiday club in the Easter break.

Current Issues. We are still very short of workers who can take on the activities that we as a church hope to



engage in. We still have a desperate need for elders.

There is still no interest in the people round about for the things of the gospel. We still are looking for ways in which we can share the gospel in this area.

I thank you for your prayers for us and ask that you continue to lift our small work before the throne of grace.

♦ Bill McCully

Blackburn

Twenty years have passed since we began the Presbyterian witness in Blackburn. From its inception we have had our ups and downs, our trials, traumas and triumphs. Down through the years we have seen progress both numerically and spiritually. Yet much of the past year has been deeply traumatic for us. Pray for us that the Lord will come amongst us in power, granting us all the necessary gifts and graces and spirit of love and unity, that the evident blessing of God may be upon us throughout this new year.

♦ Norman Green

Homosexuality

viewed in the light of Scripture

Part 2

Kevin McGrane

In Part 1 we demonstrated the uniqueness of marriage, that it is exclusively a union between a man and a woman, and that it is the only estate within which sexual relations can be expressed without immorality. In what is today very counter-cultural teaching, we saw that the 'rights' over one's sexual nature do not belong to oneself but only to a marriage partner. From a logical perspective, therefore, it is not essential to find 'proof texts' proscribing each and every type of extra-marital sexual activity; but certainly where such activities are specifically addressed we will there find useful evidence and 'case law' to confirm (or otherwise) the aforementioned principles. We do in fact find that homosexual acts are explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament, and to these specific injunctions we now turn. But having seen the proscription (which follows by logical necessity) based on the positive teaching about and meaning of marriage, which to date transcends culture and human history, we will not now make the elementary mistake of considering that such activi-

ties were proscribed merely for 'ceremonial' (and thus temporary and changeable) reasons, since they touch on something that is plainly of enduring moral value.

The first biblical mention of homosexual activity is in Genesis 19 in relation to the desire of the men of Sodom to 'know' (Hebrew *yādaʿ*) the newcomers to the city:

The men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.' Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please' (Genesis 19: 4-8).

It is evident that the men were seeking sexual intercourse with the men inside, since Lot offered his virgin daughters (as a lesser evil) to divert them (the propriety of Lot's action is not under consideration here). Some have suggested that

the townsfolk of Sodom merely wanted to ascertain who these strangers were, since the Hebrew word *yādaʿ* can be understood that way; but that is untenable, as the similar passage in Judges 19 below demonstrates.

The men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know (*yādaʿ*) him.' And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing.' But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew (*yādaʿ*) her and abused her all night until the morning. (Judges 19:22-25).

These passages in Genesis and Judges reveal that the craving of the men was not idolatrous religious or cultic practices, but plain sexual wickedness. It will not do merely to assert that what is condemned in these incidents is intended rape, and actual rape—whether heterosexual, bisexual or

homosexual. Certainly rape was bad enough and aggravated the crime, but Jude's commentary goes well beyond that: it was unnatural lust and being given over to immorality:

Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire [literally flesh], serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire (Jude 1: 7).

The apostle Paul describes the descent into sin that begins with idolatry in the heart, which through lust and being given over to immorality, vile affections and degenerate thinking, ends with outward immoral praxis:

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened....God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves...God gave them up to dishonourable passions...God gave them up to a debased mind (Romans 1: 21-24, 26, 28).

We should not fail to note that the Greek adjective used in 'dishonourable passions', *atimias*, and its cognate verb *atimazo* in 'dishonouring of their bodies', are the very opposite of the 'honourable' (*timios*) estate of marriage where sexual relations are

undefiled, as we saw in Hebrews 13: 4 in Part I. The root of all sexual sin is idolatry—a despising, a suppressing, a dishonouring and an overthrow of the divine order, and the substitution of man's inventions and imaginations.

The apostle is clear that sexual activity between those of the same sex is not only unnatural but degrading:

God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with men' (Romans 1:26-27).

Most other translations also use the words 'men' and 'women' in this passage, which is poor choice since the words used in the Greek are 'male' and 'female' (and are translated such in every other place in the New Testament) which emphasize their sexual distinctions, not merely their social roles. Literally it is:

God give them up to passions of dishonour, for even their females changed the natural use into that against nature; and in like manner also the males having left the natural use of the female, burned out in their lust toward one another; males with males working shame.

Injunctions in Leviticus

Apologists for homosexuality claim that where the most explicit description of homosexual activity is found (and reproved), in Leviticus 18 and 20, the proscription is found among sundry laws of separation, a 'holiness code' meant to represent or teach about Israel's separation from the nations, which is now superseded.¹ Regrettably, some English translations of Leviticus use the word 'abomination' to translate completely different Hebrew words; so there is scope to mislead the reader into believing that since homosexual acts and eating pork are both described as 'abomination', then they are somehow on a par in being temporary ceremonial or ritual injunctions. A variant and more sophisticated form of this argument, which concedes that there are enduring moral precepts in Leviticus, states that because so many different practices are described as 'abomination' then it is impossible to separate ceremonial and ritual proscriptions from moral proscriptions, so it is mere opinion as to which class homosexuality belongs. This argument relies for its force on ignorance.

Let us dispel the ignorance once and for all. In Leviticus, certain practices are described by the Hebrew word *tô'ēbhâ*, abominable, in

the sense of 'abominable to the LORD'. To be abominable to the LORD implies a permanent moral disgust, something detestable to God first and foremost, not something of ritual or ceremonial quality. The complete list of *tô'ēbhâ* practices in Leviticus is as follows: incest, adultery, sexual intercourse during menstruation, homosexual intercourse, bestiality, and human sacrifice. It was these practices that are given as the reason why the LORD was driving out the nations in Canaan, which demonstrates that they are timeless moral infractions that disgust God. God did not drive out nations over dietary laws, the fibres in their clothing or the length of their beards.²

Certain animals used for food were commanded to be treated as 'filth', Hebrew *sheqes* (or its cognate verb *shāqas*), by the Israelites. Such things are not intrinsically 'abominable to the LORD', who had given all moving and creeping animals for food:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Genesis 9: 3).

In Leviticus, only animal meat is described as *sheqes*, and then only so far as it should be viewed in a ritual or ceremonial fashion: i.e., certain meats shall be regarded as *sheqes* to you (but not to God). This

is ceremonial uncleanness. There is no inherent moral issue at stake, which is why such restrictions could be merely temporary in character, not in force before the Exodus, and abolished after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. In Leviticus, the complete list of things to be considered *sheqes* (filth to the Israelites) contains only animals that may not be eaten.

The Geneva Bible is most accurate in the translation of the specific injunctions on homosexual acts:

Thou shalt not lie with the male as one lieth with a woman: for it is abomination [*tô'ēbhâ*] (Leviticus 18: 22).

The man also that lieth with the male, as one lieth with a woman, they have both committed abomination [*tô'ēbhâ*] (Leviticus 20: 13).

The abomination here is the *tô'ēbhâ* sort that disgusts God. This is pretty plain teaching and clearly covers homosexual acts between men, where one lies with another of the male sex *as with a woman*. Leviticus 20: 13 makes it clear that *both* sexual partners in such activity are guilty of committing an act that disgusts God. The Hebrew in 'as one lies' is the word for 'bed', used in this context as a figure of speech for sexual relations; this idiom is also used in Greek, for example in Hebrews 13: 4. The Hebrew verb in 'to lie with a male' has in this context the sense of sexual activity;

there is no doubt, for example, about what this means should a man lie *actually* with a woman:

And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' (Genesis 39: 7).

Greek terminology

What does the Septuagint, that ancient translation of the Hebrew into Greek around 280 BC (for the Pentateuch), have for Leviticus 20: 13, which covers both partners? In the Septuagint these verses in Leviticus read as follows:

hōs an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gunaikos bdelugma epoiesan amphoterōi,

i.e. Whatever (man) would have lain down with a male as in bed with a woman/wife, both have committed abomination.

Notice the words '*arsenos koiten*': *arsenos*, male (in genitive case), and *koiten*, bed/marriage bed (in accusative case). There is a compound Greek word for a practising male homosexual that combines these words, and that word is *arsenokoites*. It is this word that the apostle Paul uses to describe male homosexuals – men who have sexual intercourse with men.

Paul uses the term in his first letter to Timothy:

Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy

and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality [*arsenokoitais*, dative plural of *arsenokoites*], enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1: 9-10).

Here Paul is giving examples, in order, of heinous infractions of the second table of the Law, the Ten Commandments, such as can be regulated and restrained by the civil magistrate.³ Thus the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' is most severely breached by violent wounding of parents; the sixth, 'Thou shalt not kill,' by murder; the seventh, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' by homosexual practices; the eighth, 'Thou shalt not steal,' by kidnappers and men-stealers; and the ninth, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness,' by perjury, i.e. lying under oath.

Paul also uses the word in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but you were washed (1 Corinthians 6: 9-11).

In this context the phrase 'men

who practise homosexuality' here translates two Greek words: *mala-koi*, translated 'effeminate' in the Authorized Version and American Standard Version, and *arsenokoitai* (nominative plural of *arsenokoites*), which relates to sexual relations between men. The English Standard Version has a footnote explaining the meaning of these two Greek words as follows: 'The two Greek terms translated by this phrase [men who practise homosexuality] refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts,' which seems to be clear enough and needs no further elucidation.

The apostle Paul's use of the noun *arsenokoites* is the first known recorded use of the term, though the cognate verb meaning 'to commit homosexual acts' was in use for centuries beforehand. Some have suggested (and it is mere speculation) that Paul coined the noun, but even if that be the case then it must have been evocative of something meaningful in the minds of the readers and hearers, either (i) from the cognate verb, or (ii) from the use of the words making up the compound from Leviticus 20: 13 in the Septuagint, or (iii) from what is evident from the words making up the compounds themselves, i.e. whatever would have been understood by 'male-bedders' or such

like. There is, indeed, very strong resonance with all three. No more than the next man could Paul have invented a readily understandable neologism unless it resonated strongly and unmistakably with words and concepts in current use. He could not, for example, have compiled a list of practitioners of various immoralities, as he did in the passage quoted, and then stated 'and such were some of you' unless his readers knew perfectly well what particular practices he meant because he was referring really, and not hypothetically, to known individuals. There must have been at least one exemplar of each of those categories within the congregation at Corinth, and we cannot believe that those who received the epistle would be left wondering 'Lord, who is it?'

Moreover, in the early translations of the Greek New Testament into Old Latin, Coptic and Syriac, the Greek word was uniformly translated with the word in those languages whose meaning is 'one who commits homosexual acts', so it was obvious to Greek speakers what was meant by Paul's use of the term.

Our actions and reactions towards the sexually immoral

We must never cease to be vexed by the wickedness of sexual im-

morality in the society all around us. In a society where sexual immorality, whether it be fornication, adultery or homosexuality, have become commonplace and are projected as quite normal, or even desirable, we can lose sight of how heinous these behaviours are in the sight of God. They are not regarded in the Scriptures as mere foibles and peccadilloes but as detestable to God, and serious enough to be capital offences. The moment we cease to be troubled by such behaviour, and take them lightly, at that very moment we reveal ourselves to be in a parlous spiritual state ourselves. We read that Lot was daily greatly distressed and tormented in his soul by the immoral behaviour in Sodom, and so should we be:

righteous Lot [was] greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority (2 Peter 2: 7-10).

We should be as the psalmist who wrote that 'rivers of water run down my eyes because they keep

not thy law'.

We have seen that the Bible censures homosexual relations, as one of a number of sexual immoralities, and it declares that those who persist in such behaviour cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Christians cannot withdraw from association with such persons where they are unbelievers, because, as Paul says, 'then you would need to go out of the world', and such persons would then never hear the saving gospel of Christ that delivers from the bondage to sin. Notwithstanding, those who persistently and wilfully practise homosexual acts cannot be received as believers or tolerated as members of the Church of Christ, far less be in positions of authority in the Church.

As Paul reminded the Corinthians:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one (1 Corinthians 5: 9-11).

Here Paul has very similar lists to

that in chapter 6: the sexually immoral, greedy, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of heaven - unless they repent (1 Corinthians 6: 11):

And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Christians will always encounter immorality in the societies in which they find themselves, and have to dwell amongst those who are the sexually immoral of this world; but on no account can believers be associated with a person who 'bears the name of brother' (i.e. professes to be a Christian) who practises such things. Immoral practices that are found and even widely accepted in the world cannot be introduced or tolerated in the Church of Christ.

This gives the lie to the argument that somehow the church must get into line with the world. A man who calls himself a Christian but is a persistent swindler or a drunkard or an idolater is not to be accepted or tolerated in the Christian community; nor is one who practises sexual immorality of any stripe. One cannot associate with such a person if he claims to be a Christian because he openly dishonours Christ and his saving work, and is

a perilous hypocrite *par excellence*.

We must ever remember, of course, that homosexuals should not be singled out by this stricture—the same need for separation applies to professors of the faith who are 'practising' adulterers, thieves, drunkards etc. But to eat and associate, as Jesus himself did, with those who are yet to be called to repentance is certainly to be expected of Christians. And those in the church who, after repentance, still have temptations and tendencies towards such behaviours, we should seek to support through prayer and encouragement to live in a godly manner and resist temptations, for the glory of God.

We must hold fast to the gospel of Christ and declare it as the power of God unto salvation. For the world at large, we have the Bible's instruction that the infamously immoral pagan city of Nineveh repented under Jonah's preaching sufficiently to hold off impending doom (Jonah 3: 5-10; Matthew 12: 41), and that the immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were totally destroyed, would have repented had they heard the gospel and seen the mighty power of God at work; the context is that most solemn warning that those who reject the gospel and gospel privileges, and sin against the light, will be judged more severely than those

who practise immorality in comparative ignorance (Matthew 10: 15; 11: 23, 24; Mark 6: 11; Luke 10: 12; cf., Lamentations 4: 6). That the apostle can declare 'Such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' continues to offer hope for the saving power of the gospel to transform broken lives.

Notes

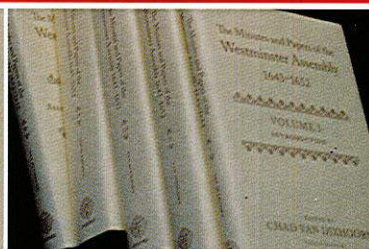
1. The paucity of argument from the apologists of homosexuality is exemplified in the following, that when Christians 'quote this ridiculous out-of-context thing from Leviticus, they should...look into the New Testament and realise that Jesus said "Love one another"...' *Lesbians and Christianity*, Lesbian Identity Project, 2009. When Jesus said 'Love one another as I have loved you', he was obviously not referring to sexual behaviour.

2. Outside Leviticus, other *tô-ēbhâ* practices that are 'abominable to the LORD' are as follows: idolatry, sorcery, astrology and fortune telling, witchcraft, making spells, divination, spiritism, necromancy, wizardry, transvestism, cultic prostitution, bringing earnings of prostitution into God's house, re-marrying one's divorced spouse, cheating, lying, false witness, perverting justice, sowing discord, perversity, pride, slaying the innocent, plotting wickedness, running to mischief, the sacrifices and religious service of the wicked, the way of the wicked, and the thoughts of the wicked.

These, together with those in Leviticus, comprise the complete list. All these practices that the LORD finds disgusting and detestable read as moral in character, and none can be construed as mere ceremonial or ritual proscriptions.

3. Clearly the tenth (covetousness) cannot be regulated until it breaks out into outward actions covered by the other commandments, such as stealing or sexual immorality; thus Paul limits himself to the fifth to the ninth commandments.

A Resource for the church



Long awaited! *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652*, edited by Chad van Dixhoorn, five volumes (Oxford University Press) has now been published.

Although it is probably too expensive for individuals to buy, it will be a valuable addition to any church library.

Thanks be to God that he grants his church ministers who apply themselves to painstaking research; and we may all benefit from the fruit of their labours.

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- Chelmsford.** Hall Street Methodist Church, Chelmsford CM2 0HG. Services: Sun. 11:30 am & 6:00 pm; Thu. 8:00 pm. Minister: Rev. Darren Moore. T. 01245 690559. Email: darrenmoore@chelmsfordpres.org.uk. Website www.chelmsfordpres.org.uk.
- Cheltenham.** 23 Naunton Lane, Leckhampton, Cheltenham GL53 7BJ. Services: Sun. 10:30 am & 6:30 pm; Wed. 7:45 pm. Minister: Rev. Andrew Young. T. 01242 231278. M. 07963 139683. Email: revandrewyoung@yahoo.co.uk. Website: www.cheltenhampres.org.uk.
- Durham.** The Chapel, Laburnum Avenue, (off Hawthorn Terrace), Durham. Services: Sun. 10:30 am & 3:30 pm; Thu. 7:45 pm. Minister: Rev. Brian Norton. T. 0191 384 0504. Email: durham@epcew.org.uk. Website: www.depc.org.uk.
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- Sweden. Tranås.** Höggatan 8, 57333 Tranås, Sweden. Service: Sun. 10:00 am. Minister: Rev. David Bergmark. T.+46 70 244 7241. Email: d.bergmark@erkis.se. Website: www.erkis.se.
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