

REPORTS

being" is simply heretical. No-one in the Bible has spoken more about hell than the Lord Jesus Christ. In His teaching He makes plain that hell is a place of conscious suffering where, "*the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9:44,48). It is a place of "*torments*" (Luke 16:23), and a place of "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 25:30).

It is also clear that the duration of hell as a place of punishment is eternal. In the same breath the Lord Jesus warns of hell's eternity and heaven's eternity, using the same word for both. Matt. 25:46 speaks of the wicked "*going away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*"

To deny or dilute these plain statements of our Lord is no kindness to our fellow man. The result is described by our Lord in Matt. 15:14, "*If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.*"

It is a mercy to mankind that God in Scripture is so explicit about hell. The truth about hell is revealed in order to warn men and women. We are told about the wrath to come and urged to flee from it (Matt.3:7). We are told that there will be no escape if we neglect so great salvation (Heb. 2:3).

Out of concern for the glory of God and for the souls of men and women, we warn them of such a destiny, so that being warned, they will flee from it to Christ who is the only and all-sufficient conqueror of sin and death and hell.

SYNODICAL RESOLUTION TO BE SENT TO HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, which met at Bready, County Tyrone, on Monday 10 June 1996, wishes to express its grave concern at events in recent

REPORTS

months in which Your Majesty has appeared to display a favourable attitude towards the Roman Catholic religion. We refer to Your Majesty's attendance at a Roman Catholic service marking the centenary of the foundation of Westminster Cathedral and also the appointment of an honorary Roman Catholic chaplain to Your Majesty.

We respectfully remind Your Majesty that such actions are not compatible with the Coronation Oath to maintain "the Protestant Reformed religion". The difference between the Protestant Reformed religion based on an infallible Bible and Roman Catholicism with its belief in an infallible church is as wide now as ever, and we urge Your Majesty to cleave to the former and to reject the latter.

We would assure Your Majesty that our concern is for your own personal welfare and that of the United Kingdom over which you reign. We believe the political and religious claims of the Papacy to be contrary to the civil and eternal welfare of the citizens of this realm. The Biblical message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone is that which the Monarch of this nation is duty bound to uphold.

May Your Majesty be enabled to resist all counsel that dishonours the Saviour who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*". (John 14 verse 6)

RESPONSE BY THE REFORMED WITNESS COMMITTEE TO THE PROTEST BY MR PHILIP RAINEY TO BE CONSIDERED BY SYNOD 10 -12 JUNE

1. CONDITION IN THE COVENANT

On this point, we find in Mr Rainey's comments the following:-

REPORTS

a) Assumption. Mr Rainey simply tells us that belief in the preaching of a conditional promise is Amyrauldianism. What the school of Amyraut actually taught was a conditional universalism with respect to the extent of the Atonement. The extent of the Atonement is limited to the elect, whereas the extent of the Gospel offer is not, nor is the conditional promise which that offer entails.

b) Vagueness. Mr Rainey condemns the idea of a “universal possibility of salvation”. What does this mean? Possibility in whose mind? If he is suggesting that the Reformed Witness Committee believes that the exact number of those who will be saved is uncertain in the mind of God, we deny this. God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass and that includes the salvation of an elect multitude which no man can number.

To believe in the preaching of a conditional Divine promise no more suggests uncertainty in God’s mind or purpose as to who will actually believe that promise than to preach a universal Divine command to repent and believe suggests uncertainty in God’s mind and purpose as to who will obey that command.

c) Misrepresentation. Mr Rainey states, “The issue amounts to this: Is faith a condition to be fulfilled by unsaved man which leads to salvation or is it part of salvation itself? If it is a condition of salvation then it cannot be part of salvation.”

Whilst salvation includes all the benefits Christ purchased for the elect, the Scriptural usage of the term varies, sometimes referring to a particular aspect of salvation. Sometimes it refers to God’s work in the soul which is the cause of faith, sometimes the blessings which follow faith, or even blessings to be bestowed in the future (e.g. 1 Peter 1:5, Heb. 9:28). So the Apostle could say that God “*saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5) and yet tell the Philippian jailer, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*” Acts 16:31).

REPORTS

In the overall sense, of course, faith is part of salvation, but that does not prevent us saying that it is the condition of entry to those blessings of salvation which follow it, e.g. justification and glorification.

When the Westminster Confession speaks of “His mercy in Christ **to** such as are penitent” (XV/I) it does not contradict the truth that the penitence itself comes from the mercy of God. Thus the Confession also speaks of life and salvation being offered to sinners and of God’s requiring of them faith in Christ “**that** they may be saved” (VII/III).

d) Avoidance. Mr Rainey simply insists the promise is “for the elect” and ignores the fact stated in the original article that the Confession teaches that saving faith entails “embracing the promises of God” (XIV/II). Since no-one can know his election till after conversion (2 Peter 1:10), then how do the elect embrace promises that they cannot know are addressed **to** them?

“God’s decree of election or his intention to save me is not the proper object of my faithas the condemned man believeth first the king’s grace and clemency to all humbled supplicants, who sue for grace, before he believe grace to himself; and if this were not, the method of applying Christ were unreasonable.” (Samuel Rutherford, Sermon to the House of Commons, 1644).

e) Inadequate Definition. Mr Rainey defines “condition” as used in the Westminster Standards as “means to an end”. He says it is the “means or instrument of salvation”. This is not the whole picture. The significance of the condition is not confined to the elect whom God enables to fulfil it.

“The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (Westminster Confession VII/II).

REPORTS

Here the Westminster Assembly, speaking of the first covenant, uses both the terms "promise" and "condition". In the decree of God, Adam did not fulfil the condition and the promise was not realised. The Assembly saw no incompatibility between God's absolute sovereignty and his issuing a conditional promise to one who, according to God's plan, would not fulfil the condition and so not inherit that which was promised.

One of the greatest theologians at the Westminster Assembly draws the parallel, "the condition of the Covenant is faith: **this do** was the condition of the Covenant of Works; **this believe** is the condition of this Covenant". (Samuel Rutherford: *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* p.87).

2. "COMMON GRACE"

- a) We use this term simply to refer to all those expressions of God's lovingkindness in this world which are not confined to the elect.
- b) There is no reason whatever why God may not show his lovingkindness to the non-elect in the context of the preaching of the Gospel, as well as any other setting, despite Mr Rainey's unsubstantiated definition to the contrary and the introduction of a confusing third term of "gospel grace" as well as "common grace" and "special grace".
- c) The term "common operations of the Spirit" (Westminster Confession X/IV) refers to something the non-elect "may have", not merely witness in the preacher. That it is internal is also clear from the use of Matt. 13:20-21 in the proof texts attached to this phrase. It explains why Felix trembled while others did not (Acts 24:25).
- d) That the Holy Spirit works in the reprobate in any context without renewing them is part of God's sovereign control over all his creatures and all their actions (Psalm 76:10. 106:46,

REPORTS

Daniel 1:9 etc.) and explains why unregenerate men sin to varying degrees and in different ways.

"But we ought to consider that, notwithstanding the corruption of our nature, there is some room for Divine grace, such grace as, without purifying it, may lay it under internal restraint. For, did the Lord let every mind loose to wanton in its lusts, doubtless there is not a man who would not show that his nature is capable of all the crimes with which Paul charges it." (John Calvin: *Institutes II/III/3*). Mr Rainey makes no attempt to deal with Matt. 5: 43-48 and Luke 6:45 which clearly show that God has a love for his enemies which is to be patterned in his people.

3. THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL

Mr Rainey appears to approve the term "invitation" and yet denies the "well-meant offer". To us this appears contradictory. Let us look at the texts in question.

a) **Isaiah 55: 1-7**

(i) There is no basis whatever for regarding vs. 1-5 as referring to a different class of people to vs. 6-7, i.e. the wicked whose ways and thoughts are condemned by God.

(ii) Those addressed in vs. 1-5 as those who "*spend money for that which is not bread and their labour for that which satisfieth not*" (v.2). They look for satisfaction outside of Christ. This is not compatible with regeneration which turns the heart and will towards Christ.

(iii) The unregenerate man does not in any degree love God or true righteousness, but he can and does desire happiness. He can and does desire satisfaction of soul but not to Christ who can give it. This elementary distinction is entirely overlooked by Mr Rainey.

b) Ezekiel 18: 31-32 and 33:11

These verses are addressed to the wicked. The wicked in Ezekiel 33:11 includes those who do not repent as well as those who do as vs. 8-9 make clear beyond all doubt.

Mr Rainey has misunderstood Calvin who, in his commentary on Ezekiel 18:23 states, "We hold, then, that God wills not the death of a sinner, since he calls all equally to repentance, and **promises** himself prepared to receive them if they only sincerely repent. If anyone should object - then there is no election of God, by which he has predestinated a fixed number to salvation, the answer is at hand: The prophet does not here speak of God's secret counsel, but only recalls miserable men from despair, that they may apprehend the hope of pardon and repent and embrace the offered salvation." This is entirely consistent with all that Calvin says in the Institutes III/XXIV/15 to which Mr Rainey refers.

John Owen, similarly states, "It is true that God inviteth many to repentance, and **earnestly** inviteth them by the means of the Word which he offereth them, to turn from their evil ways of whom all the individuals are not converted as he dealt with the house of Israel who had his word and ordinances, Ezekiel 18:31-32." (Works Vol. 12, p.559). Owen is here telling us that there is no evidence that all those addressed in this overture actually come to repentance and the historical context indicates that some certainly do not.

c) Luke 19:41-42, Matt. 23:37

Mr Rainey imposes various unnatural assumptions (such as the nature of Christ's tears and the identity of Jerusalem) upon these texts instead of drawing the meaning from the text. The reason for this lies entirely in his stated presupposition that the truths of absolute predestination and effectual calling are incompatible with God expressing lovingkindness to all in the preaching of the Gospel. If Mr Rainey's mind were freed from this unwarranted assumption, we are sure he would

approach those texts with greater care and reverence and arrive at their true and obvious meaning. God is free to express his lovingkindness as, when, how and to the extent he pleases. }

John Owen, a theologian we know Mr Rainey highly regards, says, "That God is good to all men, and bountiful, being a wise, powerful, liberal provider for the works of his hands, and by innumerable dispensations and various communications of his goodness to them, and may in that regard be said to have a universal love for them all, is granted". (Works Vol. 12, p.552)

He continues, "He intended much good to all and every man in the world, and accordingly, in abundance of variety, accomplisheth that his intention towards them - to some in a greater, to some in a lesser measure, according as seems good to his infinite wisdom and pleasure, for which all things were created and made, (Rev. 4:11). And for that particular eminent good of salvation by Jesus Christ, for the praise of his glorious grace, we do not say that he intended that from eternity for a few, absolutely considered, for these will appear in the issue to be a '*a great multitude, which no man can number*' (Rev 7:9)" (ibid).

Owen here distinguishes between what has been called "common grace" in this world and "saving" or "special grace" which is to eternity. Both are absolutely sovereign.

One aspect of God's sovereign expression of his lovingkindness to the non-elect in this life is the overture of the Gospel. So, John Owen declares, "None shall have their portion so low in the nethermost hell, none shall drink so deep of the cup of God's indignation, as they who have refused Christ in the gospel. Men will curse the day to all eternity wherein the blessed name of Jesus Christ was made known unto them, if they continue to despise it. He that abuseth the choicest of **mercies**, shall have judgement without mercy.

REPORTS

What can help them who reject the counsel of God for their good?" (Works, Vol. 8, p.39).

Thus, the Larger Catechism, speaking of the non-elect, refers to "their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them" (A.68).

d) 2 Corinthians 5: 19-21

- (i) Verse 19 refers to the elect since it is speaking of those who ultimately are forgiven.
- (ii) Verse 21 gives the basis of this, Christ's substitution for "us", i.e. the people of God. Redemption is particular.
- (iii) Verse 20 gives the means whereby this reconciliation is brought into effect, i.e. the content of the "*Word of reconciliation*" of v.19. From verse 20 we conclude:-

Firstly, no-one is actually reconciled until effectually called (Rom. 8:30, 1 Cor. 6:11, Eph. 2:3 c.f. Westminster Confession XI/IV). (The reconciliation in v.20 must be taken in the same sense as in v.19).

Secondly, the word of reconciliation contains an indiscriminate overture of mercy, reflecting not only the compassion of the preacher but of Christ whose ambassador he is. The Authorised Version has "you" in italics, showing that it is added only to make sense in English. There is no ground for regarding the Apostle as addressing the Corinthian Christians who were already reconciled (bearing in mind the meaning of the word from v.19), but rather declaring the message he preached in every place as he had when he first evangelised Corinth,

- (iv) This is the actual position set out in the "Practical Use of Saving Knowledge" (Second Warrant to Believe), to which Mr Rainey refers. Verses 19 & 21 are indeed treated as particular, but v.20 is treated as containing the indiscriminate overture of mercy addressed to all and through which the elect are brought to faith. So in section 8 we read, "And therefore most fearful wrath must abide them who do set light by this

REPORTS

request, and do not yield when they hear ministers with commission, saying, '*We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*'"

Evidently, the authors of the "Practical use..." envisage sinners who are finally condemned as having, in this world, been requested and besought in Christ's name to be reconciled to God, and therefore all the more guilty because of their rejection of a genuine merciful overture.

4. CONCLUSION

Although we have included some quotations from uninspired authors since Mr Rainey is under the misapprehension that he is defending the historic Reformed faith, our chief concern has been to show the teaching of the Word of God.

We are hopeful that if Mr Rainey humbly and prayerfully studies the Scriptures on these matters, he will see his way clear to rejecting the errors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America and the British Reformed Fellowship and instead embracing the authentic Biblical and Reformed orthodoxy of the whole Westminster Standards.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Reformed Witness Committee requests Synod to:-

1. Reject Mr Rainey's protest as unfounded and doctrinally erroneous, being inconsistent with the Word of God, the Westminster Standards and the statement on the Gospel offer adopted at last year's Synod (Minute 39).
2. Endorse the article submitted by the Reformed Witness Committee and printed in the February 1996 Covenanter Witness.
3. Arrange that a copy of this response be sent to Mr Rainey from Synod.
4. Appoint two members of Synod along with Mr Rainey's minister to meet with Mr Rainey and, in a brotherly way, to

REPORTS

exhort and encourage him to humbly accept the teaching of the Word of God.

RELIEF FUND

The Relief Fund has been faithfully and generously supported during the year. We have been enabled to continue the half-yearly payments for the supply of drugs for the Mother and Child Health-care Clinic in Makelle. This Clinic seems to be serving a useful purpose in meeting a need for the care of mothers and young children as reports and photographs have shown. We are keeping in touch with the Relief Society of Tigray, which is responsible for handling our half-yearly payments and for keeping us informed of progress.

Letters from our Christian friends in Ethiopia continue to arrive and we have been able to respond in practical ways as well as giving what encouragement we can. The Church in Tigray continues to grow. There is a demand for literature, especially Bibles, and these are being supplied through our donations to the National Bible Society of Ethiopia. Some Bibles in English have also been sent.

Of the three men who are doing the Introductory Bible Study Course supplied by the Irish Bible School, one is making very good progress and may wish to continue with a more advanced course. We are told that he is making use of the material he is studying as he teaches in the Makelle Fellowship.

We welcome every opportunity to keep the Church informed of developments in Ethiopia through the Church magazines and Prayer and News Letter.

Respectfully submitted

S K CROMIE (Secretary/Treasurer)

REPORTS

SCOTLAND

Your Committee met with the Scottish Committee on two occasions.

On 4 November 1995 we considered a brief summary of past meetings, the remits and objectives of both committees were reviewed and it was agreed that we should proceed immediately to discuss seriously the possibility of the union of both Churches (subject to decisions of the Synods).

We drew up a list of items to be investigated by the Committees:

1. Financial and legal matters (e.g. Ferguson Bequest, Trust Deeds, etc.)
2. Differences between the two Churches in terms of official Standards (e.g. Testimonies, Covenants, Terms of Membership etc.)
3. Practicalities of a 5 Presbytery Church (geographical and financial issues).

At our second meeting on 12 February the following were examined:

Variations between the Testimonies on Consanguinity of Marriage, The Establishment Principle, Roman Catholicism, the descending obligation of the Covenants.

Subject to a continuing remit from the Synods we would hope to investigate any differences of position regarding the Elective Franchise, Terms of Membership and Purity of Worship.

Whilst we are required (by the very nature of our remits) to consider such matters we are conscious that far more unites than divides us. We believe these hurdles are not insurmountable and would request Synod to permit us to continue with our work.

Respectfully submitted

THOMAS C DONACHIE (Convener)