

CORRESPONDENCE

HYPERCALVINISM

From B A Ramsbottom, Editor:
The Gospel Standard Magazine

'May I draw your attention to a mistake in your Journal (January-March)? The review on page 40 says that "the Gospel Standard group of Strict Baptist Churches ... aver that the gospel should be preached only to 'awakened sinners.'" This is not so. In obedience to Christ's command, we believe the gospel is to be preached to every creature, but that Scripture teaches that the invitations of the gospel are to those who have been awakened to feel their need.

I am not sure what is meant by describing us as hyper-Calvinist. True, we do not believe in the free offer of the gospel; if that is what is meant; but neither did Huntington nor Vinall, who are highly commended (article on Jireh Chapel Lewes) - the article ending: "We refute the charge that we are hyper-Calvinists." The views of the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists concerning preaching the gospel are identical with those of Huntington and Vinall. I shall be very grateful if you can make these things clear.'

REVIVAL

From Dr Stephen Westcott,
Bristol

'Book reviews are most helpful for pointing out material that might be missed otherwise, and I will wish to at least read through the volume on the Ulster revival. Whilst not wishing to be "un-evangelistic" it is true that the Reformed faith has been naïve about "revivals," and a fear of "opposing the Spirit" has repeatedly resulted in a lowering of the Con-

fessional standards. You will be aware of an excellent item which was printed as an introduction to the recent U.S. reprint of Charles Hodge's *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.*, dealing with the "Great Awakening" there. It would make a fine little booklet if reissued by itself, and would seem to cover much the same ground as the new "Ulster" reprint. Following Tracy et al ("Banner" reprint) the Reformed have identified with the Tennants and even Davenport, and accepted much of the slander about "unregenerate ministers" without realising that in America we are not talking about Whitefield dealing with the Anglican establishment, and that the accused ministers were mainly later-day Puritans, adhering strictly to the Confession, and arguing against innovations and "new methods." Similarly the Scottish "Marrow men" were more active and concerned than the generality of their Assembly - but the Assembly had the more orthodox and confessionally correct theology! (See Protestant Reformed Theological Journal, XIII, No.1. Nov 1984, pps 22 on).'

BAPTISM

From Rev Jonathan F Bayes,
Pastor: Independent Evangelical
Church, Stockton-on-Tees

'I was interested to receive the introductory leaflet about the British Reformed Fellowship in this month's *Evangelical Times*. I would be glad to receive any further information about the Fellowship which you have available, as well as a sample copy of *The British*

Reformed Journal and a catalogue of available literature.

My reason for writing like this, rather than simply returning the reply slip, is that I have one specific question, and I would not feel able to consider actually joining the Fellowship until I knew the answer.

I can say unhesitatingly that I subscribe to the doctrines set forth in the four standards listed in section (ii) of the Doctrinal Basis as regards their general theological stance; for me there would be a problem at just one point, namely the question of the proper subjects for baptism. This does not apply to the Canons of Dort, to which I am able to give wholehearted and unreserved assent. However, I am a baptist, and therefore would not agree entirely with the answers to the Heidelberg Catechism Question 74, the Westminster Larger Catechism Question 166, and the Shorter Catechism Question 95, nor with Article 34 of the Belgic Confession and Chapter 28 of the Westminster Confession. I accept the covenant theology which underlies these answers and articles, but believe that this is not incompatible with being a baptist.

Is it your intention to restrict membership of the Fellowship to paedobaptist presbyterians (incidentally I have no problem with presbyterianism), or is there a place for those who subscribe to the Savoy Declaration or the Baptist Confession of 1689? Perhaps you could let me know.

With sincere good wishes in the Lord, and prayers for the success of your work.

EDITOR'S REPLY: *Thank you for the very frank way in which you outlined your position. It is encouraging to communicate with someone who is acquainted with the Reformed standards and has given the matter of baptism (and presumably many others) much prayer and consideration.*

Concerning your query, we do

feel we should restrict membership of the Fellowship to those of paedobaptist persuasion. This may sound partisan but we feel that, if we give the impression that the statements in the confessions which you mention are 'unimportant,' then this could encourage folk to join who might not be able to accept other, perhaps more important, statements and doctrines. I trust you can understand our reasoning in this?

Having said this, you will see that we are happy to send the Journal to non-members and we operate a kind of 'auxiliary membership' for those in a position such as your own. This would not restrict you in any way and we would be pleased to see you at all our activities, meetings and conferences.

Incidentally, while respecting your own position, perhaps I could point out that we believe strongly in the position of children within the covenant of grace. We are aware that the majority of evangelicals in England (this is not the same in other areas) are of baptist persuasion but we feel that the covenant of grace (including its subjects) is a forgotten teaching today and this has contributed in no small way to the wholesale loss of young people from the churches in their teenage years. (I hasten to add that we do not, of course, believe in baptismal regeneration.)

**From Mr Ian H Day B Sc
Southall, Middlesex**

I received your introductory leaflet with my copy of "Evangelical Times." I was immediately interested, then saddened to see that your position is divisive on the matters of baptism and the Covenant of Grace.

While I have held the reformed faith for many years, I could not join because your Doctrinal Basis and your final paragraph on the Covenant seem calculated to ex-

clude those of us who practise baptism of believers, who hold to the 1689 Baptist Confession. (Presumably you would also exclude Independents, such as the FIEC & Strict Baptists.)

I cannot believe that Genesis 17:7 teaches that Ishmael and all of Abraham's children and descendants are included in the Covenant of Grace. If they are, it means that countless unbelievers are included in the everlasting covenant between God the Father and the elect in God the Son. If unbelievers are included in the Covenant of Grace, then that covenant becomes meaningless. Surely such teaching is in direct contradiction of Scriptures such as John 1:12-13; 8:31-47; Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 2:6-7,29.

I don't anticipate changing any individual's views on baptism by a letter such as this, but I do appeal to you to modify your position, and your literature so that reformed baptists (and independents) are not deliberately excluded. This seems especially important as a substantial number of reformed Christians (including regular contributors to and readers of ET) hold to believers' baptism. In my experience, a different attitude to baptism does not create a barrier to fellowship between reformed Christians, so it should not be used by an organisation such as the BRF to restrict membership.

EDITOR'S REPLY: You seem surprised that the British Reformed Fellowship should contend for a position which it strongly believes and upon which it was founded? This seems strange! Surely, there is nothing to stop other Christians forming an association of Reformed Baptists or Reformed Independents or whatever, if they so wish?

What we contend for is the Reformed Faith (the faith of the Reformers) including the doctrines of grace, paedobaptism and connectional church government. This we believe is the teaching of Holy Scripture and the major Reformed

confessions. Have you never wondered why so many of the Reformers taught these truths and why they are reflected in the vast majority of the Reformed confessions? Confessions such as the Westminster Standards, the Savoy Declaration, the Cambridge Platform, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Augsburg Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism etc, all teach paedobaptism and a connectional view of church government.

In our contacts with evangelical Christians, particularly in England, we find that few have given these matters much real thought or study. There is, however, a considerable amount of material in print setting out our position. I hesitate to send anything to you for fear of appearing provocative but we would willingly send you literature on these subjects free of charge, should you be interested.

Regarding the Scriptures you quote, the BRF does not interpret Genesis 17:7 as you suggest and for a correct interpretation I would refer you to any good commentary. Neither do we teach that unbelievers are included in the covenant of grace. We believe, simply, with the Westminster Confession, that "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel... consists of all these throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (XXV:2).

Fellowship among believers is another matter altogether. We enjoy fellowship with Christians of all persuasions. I go regularly to interdenominational Bible Rallies, meetings and conferences and probably the majority of my Christian acquaintances are 'baptist.'

I trust this answers some of the points you raise.