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Editorial

This year is the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. His impact upon the subsequent history of the church and of Western Europe as a whole has been enormous. The extent of that impact upon the Baptist churches in particular is far more difficult to assess. Calvin, rather than Luther, has held pride of place amongst us and we have made selective use even of his theology. The Luther story that probably most Baptists know is his defiant stand at the Diet of Worms when he pitted his conscience and his reading of the Bible against the combined majesty of pope, councils, inquisitions and princes. That the story figures so largely in our denominational memory is probably indicative of Luther's significance for us. He is the loner, the democratizer, the man of conscience, the flayer of institutions.

Luther for us is justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. Yet our interpretation of the first is shot through with penal concepts. The Anselmic language of satisfaction and debt and payments still colours our view of the cross. Such language will always be ill at ease with the outrageous Lutheran emphasis upon the God who justifies sinners, *simul iustus et peccator*, made righteous by faith, *now*, not after the debts have been paid, but always now, because God is eternally gracious. The message should be as liberating today as it was in the sixteenth century, this age in which people can so easily lose any sense of their own value. Over against the felt need to impress, to acquire status, to purchase the indulgence bills of our own day certifying our qualification for this, that or the other, is this joyous proclamation of a free and forgiving love that takes us as we are.

As for the priesthood of all believers we have tended to sound more like Carlstadt than Luther. It is the doctrine of the ministry of word and sacrament that has suffered most. And perhaps never more so than today when we are caste in the mould of church managers, graph readers, salesmen or one amongst a number of 'ruling elders'. There has been too little reference of the priesthood to prayer and the offering of the whole peoples' intercessions, or to eucharist and the offering of the whole peoples' sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving and promise, or to service and the offering of each person's calling as that which God has given him. The priesthood of all believers has too often been an excuse for bolsheism rather than an interpretation of place and function within the Body of Christ.

Then there is the Luther of the sacraments who seems to have eluded us altogether, the Luther of Marburg, stabbing his finger on the pages of scripture, 'This *is* my body', 'This *is* my blood'. Instead we have stood with Zwingli in that shadow world of pious mental exercises where matter and spirit are sundered, truth comes incarnate only in our minds and we are not nurtured as we could be by the deep consolation, so cherished by Luther, that God in Christ has come down into the very depths of our world and is found in the darkness and the reality where we least expect his presence. Luther (and Calvin) found other and more meaningful ways of speaking of Christ's presence in the sacrament than the Aristotelean metaphysics of the catholics. It would be well if we were to take them as our starting point that our communion services might again be celebrated in hope and in the sure expectancy that Christ the Living Bread is given to us again.

Luther was religious genius, not, as one of our contributors has pointed out, easy to live with. That genius has lost little of its brightness over the centuries, for his words can still quicken the heart and his daring leaps of exegesis and theology can still make us gasp before the divine glory.

Luther's Strange God

Five years ago I was fortunate enough to be able to spend a week in East Germany on an ecumenical study-visit. One day I absented myself from the official tour and took the train from Erfurt to Wittenberg, determined to see for myself the birthplace of the Reformation. Since Luther's time, Wittenberg has taken its fair share of destruction and restoration in the tides of warfare that have swept back and forth across the north German plain, but its buildings and its atmosphere are still essentially late medieval. The University in which Luther was professor, roughly like a single small Oxbridge college, is an obvious focal point of pilgrimage, with its rooms in which Luther lectured, and ate and drank — and talked — around the table.

So also of course is the Castle Church, to the door of which on that fateful day in 1517, Luther fastened his 95 theses. Inside lies Luther's tomb. As I stood there, two Russian soldiers were also sight-seeing. It was impossible not to feel that whereas I, a pilgrim from the Christian Protestant west was coming home to pay tribute to the spiritual grand-parent of my tradition, this place must have seemed almost meaningless if not completely foreign to them. What could be more antipodal than a British Baptist and a Red Army soldier? Protestant pride and possessiveness rose in my breast as their wondering glances tried to take in the reason for the seeming importance of this building.

Any real encounter with Luther, however, quickly dispels the pretentiousness of such feelings. No-one, be he ever so 'Protestant' in stance, can ever really feel comfortable and secure with Luther. What he discovered, or rediscovered, about the nature of the gospel can never be domesticated. It will always be strange and alien to us, even to us — and perhaps especially to us — who think we know it so well. Luther himself once remarked that the common people always stare at the doctrine of justification by faith like cows at a new gate. We may smile in knowing agreement at this, but do we actually preach it? Are not so many of our sermons, whether issued from conservative, liberal, radical or whatever pulpits, in the end a matter of telling people to try harder at being better Christians? Who dares really to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in all its outrageous clarity? And when we do venture to speak of the unutterable grace of God, do we not find ourselves standing at the church door afterwards, hoping for complimentary words on our fine performance? Luther was as fine a psychologist as he was a theologian (no accident that) and his words should be pinned on every minister's desk: 'If you are highly pleased when someone praises you in the presence of others; if you perhaps look for praise, and would sulk or quit what you are doing if you do not get it — if you are of that stripe, dear friend, then take yourself by the ears, and if you do this in the right way you will find a beautiful pair of big, long, shaggy donkey ears. Then do not spare any expense! Decorate them with golden bells, so that people will be able to hear you wherever you go, point their finger at you, and say, "See, See! There goes that clever beast, who can write such exquisite books and preach so remarkably well"'. That moment you will be blessed and blessed

beyond measure in the kingdom of heaven. Yes, in that heaven where hellfire is ready for the devil and his angels. To sum up: Let us be proud and seek honour in the places where we can. But in this book the honour is God's alone, as it is said, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"; to whom be glory, world without end, Amen.'

The explosive nature of Luther's theology was due, to a great extent, to its fusion of his personal, passionate spiritual striving for peace with God on the one hand, and his objective, scholarly biblical study on the other. The pious monk yearned to be right with God, yet not even the most rigorous system of spirituality seemed adequate to this end. How could he ever be meritorious enough in the sight of the all-holy God? The solution came, not through finding the answer to this question, but by seeing that it was the wrong question. God's way with men, he learned through Paul, was not to accept those who became righteous by their efforts, but to accept sinners into the sole righteousness of Jesus Christ. Hammering at the locked door of acquired merit, he found the door of grace already open. *By faith alone* became the key. Faith, said Luther, is a living daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's grace and knowledge of it makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all his creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith.

Such faith, however, as this last quotation itself makes clear, is not just a human exercise or quality in itself. It is faith *in God*, who himself enables faith through the Spirit. 'By faith alone' is therefore simply the other side of *by grace alone*. Faith is the unity with God in Christ, the only righteous one. Baptists have often questioned Lutherans as to why, in view of such a lively insistence on personal faith, they have steadfastly defended infant baptism. Lutherans have usually replied in terms, first, of Luther's own conception of a germinal faith on the part of the infant, and secondly, in terms of this insistence on the prevenient grace without which faith is in danger of becoming another form of meritorious work. Baptists have not always held the balance from their side. How often does one hear believers' baptism described as 'making one's commitment' or 'witnessing to one's faith' — terms which are difficult to justify from Scripture, to say the least?

Mention of Scripture brings us to another obvious key element in Luther's theology. It was via Scripture that Luther had, by 1517, become convinced that *by faith alone* and *by grace alone* expressed the heart of Christian truth. But an explicit formulation of the authority of Scripture had not yet arisen. It took shape under the pressure of events. Luther at first appealed to the Pope against the practice of selling indulgences, the crudest contradiction of his theology of grace. The Pope not only refused to intervene, but moved in condemnation against Luther. Luther then called for a general council of the Catholic Church as the appropriate voice of authority. In dispute with John Eck, however, Luther was forced to concede that the logic of his position queried even the authority of such councils, since it was just such a body which had condemned John Huss, the Bohemian reformer of a previous century with whom Luther was in obvious sympathy. What, then, remained as the supreme authority for Christian belief and practice? *Scripture alone.*

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Luther's doctrine of the authority of Scripture, like that of 'faith alone' and 'grace alone' is not however as simple as it sounds. Just as saving faith means faith in *Christ*, and as God's grace means union with the crucified and risen *Christ*, so too for Luther Scripture is authoritative in that it is the medium of *Christ*. 'Scripture is the crib wherein Christ lieth'. Scripture, paradoxically, therefore both contains the norm and is to be assessed by the norm, which is Christ himself. This enabled Luther to attach varying degrees of significance to different parts of Scripture, as in his famous (though usually only partly-quoted) comment that in comparison with the gospels and Pauline and Petrine epistles 'the epistle of James is an epistle full of straw, because it contains nothing evangelical'. Such a doctrine will appear strange today, alike to those who identify the authority of Scripture with literal inerrancy (an issue which had not arisen either for Luther or his opponents in the 16th century) and to those who, in the wake of historical and literary criticism, will not allow Scripture to say anything on its own behalf.

If forced into the unwelcome task of summarizing Luther's theology, bearing in mind the immense wealth and range of his writing on biblical, doctrinal, sacramental, pastoral and ethical matters, I would say: God present for man in Jesus Christ. It is the sense of the immediacy of God in his Word which touches everything Luther said, not least in his advice to preachers, that they should preach as if Christ were crucified yesterday, risen today and coming tomorrow. God is not at the end of a ladder of philosophical speculation, nor in a remote realm of saintliness. He has come in the despised man Jesus, in the humility of the crib and in the humiliation of the cross. He is to be apprehended not in his naked majesty, but in the apparent weakness which offers to faith the forgiveness of sins. Still today, he is present in the earthly forms of bread and wine and in the brotherly love in which each is a little Christ to his neighbour.

He is in all these, because this is where *he has placed himself*. Put simply, to believe in and worship God means allowing him to be the God he wants to be. Men often desire a different God, a God in their own image, an idol of their lusts, whether sensual, intellectual, social, political — or religious. Through the gospel Luther discerned a God who will forever be strange to men. He perceived a God who in some sense always remains hidden from view, yet who makes himself accessible to faith in the place and in the form he chooses. While intellectuality cranes its neck to peer into heaven, Jesus is born in Bethlehem. While would-be powers invoke heavenly might to justify their claims, he has nowhere to lay his head. While the godly are anxious about their own righteousness, he hangs under judgement on the cross. Much of God is inscrutable — but never more so than as to how, when and where he emerges from his hiddenness. Such a God refuses to settle in the abodes we make for him. He has to be sought and received on the terms of his sovereign grace.

Today, we do no real honour to Luther by simply applauding what he did in the 16th century. Nor can we be faithful to the truth of his insights simply by trying to repeat, phrase for phrase, what he said then. History has moved

on, and theology with it. Above all, theology has been made increasingly aware, ever since the late 18th century, of the formidable questions arising from the peculiarly modern consciousness of history. If the human story, overall, is one of continual cultural shifts and changing perspectives on reality, what absolute meaning or value can be attached to any single cultural view, or an event occurring and interpreted with one culture? Religion is part and parcel of a drama in which there are many actors, many scenes, a variety of plots — all relative in significance, none absolute. In face of this, the Christian belief in the absolute significance of the New Testament story is not so much to be regarded as either true or false, as meaningless. To speak of the eternal significance of a piece of temporal history is of the same order as speaking of a perfectly square circle. No history, by definition, can be absolutely normative for the rest of history. So runs the post-Enlightenment argument.

Now it is no coincidence that the theologians who have made the most conspicuous responses to this challenge, have been in the Lutheran tradition. It is this tradition which, more than most, has fastened on to the particularity of God's Word in Christ and been open to wider cultural activity. Perhaps the roots of this ambivalence go right back to Luther's debates with Erasmus, the great humanist. Of course the responses have been very varied. Søren Kierkegaard deliberately impaled himself on the horns of the dilemma of whether a universal truth could come through a particular event. Yes, he said, God came on earth in the man Jesus. Faced with the seeming absurdity of the incarnation, reason gives way to faith, the supreme human passion. Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing programme, for all its apparent negativity, was in fact a deeply devout attempt to distinguish the message of divine forgiveness (which for him was *not* myth) from the culturally-conditioned cosmological framework of the first century, and to allow it to engage with modern human self-understanding. Paul Tillich embraced a universal vision of all cultures and religions, expanding the Lutheran emphasis on judgment and grace into a 'Protestant principle' which, he argued, is an essential safeguard against idolatry in any sphere. Most strikingly of all, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison writings explore the possibility of a 'non-religious' interpretation of the gospel. Of the reality of God in Christ, and of the sovereignty of the gospel of grace, Bonhoeffer was never in a shadow of doubt. What he became aware of — to a great extent through reading 19th century analyses of history and more recent works on the growth of scientific understanding — was the inexorable tide of change in human understanding of our place in the universe. What has often been understood as 'religion' in the west, Bonhoeffer argued, might simply be another ephemeral feature of the human story. Christianity as faith in the God and Father of Jesus Christ need not and cannot any longer be wedded to this 'religion'. 'What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today', he wrote. So Christianity has to recover its own peculiarity: not a God of might to buttress the privileged or to prop up the immature, but the God who brings life to all men: not a God beyond the world we know, in

shadowy corners or ethereal remoteness, the *deus ex machina* brought in as a last resort, but the beyond-in-the-midst, existing in and for the world he has made and loves; not a God who cowed men into submission but a God who condescends to suffer the pain of the world on the cross; not a God enjoyed in a private life of pious superiority, but a God encountered through following Jesus in the life for others.

In all this, Bonhoeffer writes with Luther looking over his shoulder, seeking God as God wishes to be, not as we would like him to be. But *can* Christianity in the long run be isolated from the changing cultural forms in which it has found expression? Is not even the 'God of the Bible' as time-conditioned a concept as any other in history? And so on, right to Jesus himself and the gospel? Can the scandal of particularity be borne any longer? It can be borne, not as a burden but as a liberating gift, if we remember where the particularity actually lies. It lies not in the claim that here in the first century is a piece of human history which is completely out of the ordinary compared with all other parts of history. It lies, rather, in the claim that in this history — which is ultimately of a piece with all history — the eternal Word became one with human birth and life and death. The uniqueness is claimed for the self-giving condescension of God in that story, not for any absolute remarkableness in the story itself as human history. Here in the crib and there on the cross, God decided to be.

So Luther's theology of divine condescension, a theology of the cross, does not panic in the face of the relativizing historical consciousness of today. In fact it points to a way of taking history seriously — far more seriously in fact than the anxious brooding of the philosopher of history and culture, who is faced with choosing either an abstract meaning to be distilled out of all history, or a despairing acceptance of the meaningless relativity of chance and change. By choosing to place himself in the lowly story of Jesus, God shows his true majesty and sovereignty over all history. Precisely in his unique self-giving at a particular point, God reveals how desperately he cares for the human story as a whole. If it is asked why God should do this in such a particular way, it has to be replied that the only way into real history is via the particular. There can be no greater demonstration of the divine love for all, than the Word living the life and dying the death of one real person.

This is the strangeness of God which Luther discerned, the strangeness which is his freedom to place himself where we least expect him to be, or want him to be. Men — especially religious men — will forever be constructing abodes for him. They want to keep him at a distance, or they feel the need to protect him from a godless world. The task of theology and preaching is, over and over again, to demolish the false pedestals on which we place God, and to allow him to be himself. 'He is worth calling a theologian', says Luther, 'who understands the visible and hidden parts of God to mean the passion and the cross ... Therefore in Christ crucified is the true theology and the knowledge of God'.

Keith W. Clements

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Theses for Today

On the anniversary of Luther's birth; it might be worth speculating on whether Luther would feel obliged to publish any Theses today, and if so, in what terms?

A reading of his original Theses suggests Luther would feel obliged to challenge much of our present day evangelism. This article is an attempt to guess at the kind of Theses Luther might publish if he were alive today.

Before setting down Theses for today, we should note Luther's intention and look at the original Ninety-Five Theses together with some of his other writings which clarify his meaning.

It is clear from his letters that Luther did not intend his theses to be widely circulated, but to be the basis for discussion by a few learned men. He did not wish for controversy, nor did he hope to divide the church. He did not so much criticise the theology of Indulgences, but complained that people were being deceived, and the church harmed, by the preaching associated with the Sale of Indulgences. Thesis Thirty-Eight states "Yet the Pope's remission and dispensation are in no way to be despised, for, as already said, they proclaim the divine remission".

The theory of Indulgences is based upon the concept of the merit, or treasure, of Christ's incarnation and atonement. In particular, Christ redeemed by his precious blood, "a mere measured drop" of which would be sufficient to redeem humanity. This infinite treasure was believed to have increased over the years by the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints. There is no fear of this treasure being diminished because the merits of Christ are infinite. This treasure of merit can be applied by the Church to offset the punishment due to a sinner. The paper of Indulgence certified that punishment had been cancelled by the merit of Christ. The money paid was a mark of sincerity on the part of the purchaser and an offering towards the expenses of the Church, particularly towards the rebuilding of St. Peter's at Rome, but also, although this was not generally known, to pay off the huge bank overdraft of Archbishop Albert!

Luther attacked the sale of Indulgences on the ground that such enterprise reduced the gospel to a mere matter of escaping punishment for sins. The First thesis declares "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent', he meant that the whole life of believers should be one of penitence". The third thesis asserts that mere inward penitence is insufficient, "inward penitence is nothing, unless it produces outwardly the various nullifications of the flesh". Theses Forty-three, Forty-four and Forty-five contend that the person who is truly repentant gives to the poor, lends to the needy, and grows by works of love. The last four theses emphasise the true nature of Christian discipleship.

Luther presented his understanding of the gospel with two propositions: "a Christian man is the most free Lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone".

The freedom of the Christian is guaranteed by the Word of God which alone is necessary for life and justification. Justification is by faith alone and not by works. God gives to everyone all the riches of justification and salvation in Christ, so that we are no longer in want of anything., "except of faith to believe that this is so".

Luther states that the duty and servitude of the Christian does not automatically follow from his belief in God's acceptance. It should do because it should totally revolutionise our relationship to others, but we have lived too long in the world to be re-educated overnight. Luther in his *Theology of the Cross* put it thus:

"The cross of Christ is not simply something which Jesus Christ endured, but it is something which all his followers are called to share, as a life-long penitence, and as their 'old man' is daily crucified with its lusts and creaturely egocentric desires". This sounds Catholic! But it is also Reformation theology!

When Luther came to the point where he saw no alternative to Reformation he declared "The time for silence is gone, and the time to speak has come!" He then issued a long statement respecting the Reformation of the Christian State. The section headed *Concerning Christian Liberty* describes Luther's understanding of how the life of faith should be characterised by loving service to our neighbours.

Luther advises that the outward manifestation of faith will only come with discipline. Although the believer, being confirmed to God and created after the image of God through faith, rejoices and delights in Christ and lives to serve God with joy and only for love, he is still obstructed by his old nature. Luther therefore stresses the need to teach good works. He devotes a long passage to the works we should perform towards our neighbour. Christians are specifically instructed "to acquire and preserve property for the aid of those who are in want, that thus the strongest member may serve the weaker member, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ". The closing words of Luther in this section of his work are so exuberant that I must quote:

"For such a Father, then, who has overwhelmed me with those inestimable riches of his, why should I not freely, cheerfully, and with my whole heart and from voluntary zeal, do all that I know will be pleasing to him and acceptable in his sight? I will, therefore, give myself, as a sort of Christ, to my neighbour, as Christ has given himself to me; and will do nothing in this life except what I see will be needful, advantageous and wholesome for my neighbour, since by faith I should abound in all good things in Christ."

In trying to imagine Luther's attitude to the life of our own churches we must consider if his original complaint against the Sale of Indulgences has any relevance today.

The theology of Indulgences was based upon a theory of the merit of Christ being set over against the punishment due for sins. This is still a factor in many modern day theories of the atonement, indeed it may not be

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possible to omit this idea from an adequate understanding of the work of Christ. The criticism Luther made was regarding the way this theology was being applied. It was being reduced to a mere transaction. Literally, you pay your money and you take your pardon! To be "in Christ" as St. Paul preached involved an 'immersion' into Christ, literally a baptism; and therefore a new life of service to God and one's neighbour. As Luther put it, the believer becomes "a sort of Christ" to his neighbour!

Some present day evangelistic campaigns appear to share the dangers associated with the Sale of Indulgences. The gospel is over-simplified to the point where all that matters is escaping from the consequences of one's sins, and all that is required is a simple decision. The modern evangelist does not ask for payment, although some do tell of fantastic returns in this life and the next for tithes paid into Church accounts. The appeal to come to Christ, is manifestly far short of what Christ and the apostles demanded.

As an example of present day malpractice I would refer to a free booklet which I received in the post recently. It is said to be a study course based on the Bible. It is better than many of the same sort which arrive almost weekly by post. It is typical in reducing the gospel to the single issue of escaping from the consequences of sin. There is a promise of peace and real satisfaction, but no hint that there is any sharing in the suffering of Christ except perhaps the ridicule of friends. Under the heading "What is a Disciple?" the enquirer is taught four things: read the Bible, pray, tell others (by word and actions), and attend Church. This list is a caricature of what it means to follow Christ. It is a list every Pharisee would have applauded; reading the scriptures, praying, proselytizing and attending synagogue! What about loving one's neighbour (not, like the Pharisees, only in order to gain converts)?

The Bible teaches that many who are scrupulous in their religious duties are repugnant to God. The Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, our Lord himself, St. Paul and St. James, all condemn those who claim to belong to God and are zealous in their religion, but fail to pursue justice, to attend to the needs of the poor and to comfort the needy. Much of our modern evangelism turns out to be modern phariseeism.

The decimated gospel of saving souls ignores God's work of creation. Those who preach this message profess to love mankind, but their concern is possessive; love only in the hope of winning converts. Their giving, which is considerable, is devoted mainly to evangelism or to organisations which aim to convert the people they help. These evangelicals do not normally subscribe to secular charities, because they are contemptuous of secular society.

This gospel of saving my soul and my neighbour's soul; this self-centred and church-centred evangelism; this is *not* the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who dares to suggest that taking up the cross and following Jesus consists of reading the Bible, praying, telling others and going to Church? Where is our Lord's concern for the world? Do some modern evangelicals believe that Jesus died only to save the souls of believers?

It is not surprising that the word 'personal' is so often used by modern evangelists. Their message is essentially inward looking; introspective and selfish. It is to do with experiencing peace and salvation; instead of being concerned with suffering and sacrifice.

The true evangelical task is to convince people that God does not hold their sins against them but accepts them as they are. This acceptance by God is unconditional.

Most people find it hard to believe that God accepts them. Our normal (that is, sinful) experience of life proves that we are only accepted by people if they approve of us, if we conform to their norms, and if it is beneficial to know us. It is hard to persuade people they are accepted by God as they are.

We have to preach this gospel over and over and over again. Committed Christians need this as much as believers, because believers are often bewildered by their sins. We need to be constantly assured that God accepts us as we are, and that in any case our ultimate salvation depends upon God's grace.

This gospel needs also to be demonstrated. The Church must show acceptance of people in its statements and by its actions. Especially the church needs to show concern for the outcast. Without some radical demonstrations, the notorious and the under privileged will imagine they are condemned by God, as they are by society. In truth, those who are most frequently abused and condemned by society, are usually the least blameworthy.

Arising out of the preaching of the gospel of God's acceptance, there should follow a radical change in our life style. We can no longer imagine that our good fortune is our own achievement, nor can we accept that other people's misfortunes must be put down to their sin. We must demonstrate our understanding of the liberality of God by our efforts to help others, especially those who are most needy.

Conversion is more of a process than a transaction. The parables of the kingdom are all about growth, not about instant salvation. Jesus warns us to listen carefully, to be alert and industrious, and to be prepared for suffering and sacrifice. The kingdom is not simply about receiving the Word of God into our hearts, it is about producing the fruit of good works. This is what glorifies God.

Reviewing Luther's own Theses, and considering some present day preaching, we can now publish a Thesis for today. We may attempt a shorter document than Luther's and submit the following theses:

1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", he meant that the whole life of believers should be one of penitence.
2. The gospel is concerned with the world; with the whole of society as well as with individuals.
3. Salvation depends upon God's acceptance of us, not upon our acceptance of Him.

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How SPURGEON'S HOMES is
Moving with the Times
With small family homes and Family
Day Care Centres

Children coming into care these days no longer need to live "away from it all" in large institutional type homes. Many of them are the victims of broken marriages and they need to stay close to places and schools they know. Spurgeon's have now established a network of small family units in Bedford, Coventry and Luton, each run by houseparents. The children often need us for only a few months and being close to home can see their families and friends. We have also opened Family Day Care Centres at Coventry and Wolverhampton to meet a desperate need for pre-school age children.

All this work is a step in a wider sphere of service to show practical everyday Christianity to children in need. We hope that you will share in this growing outreach by encouraging your Church to remember our work in their prayers and send a gift of money.

Please send your enquiries and gifts to:-

The Secretary, Peter Johnson,
Spurgeon's Homes, 14, Haddon House,
Station Road, Birchington, Kent, CT7 9DH.
Telephone: Thanet (0843) 41381.

Reg. Charity No. 307560

4. Those preachers are wrong who say that only those who make a personal decision for Christ will be saved.
5. It does not follow automatically that a person who believes in Christ will do good works. Christians should be taught to give to the poor, to lend to the needy, to support good work; not hoping for any return.
6. By works of love, love grows and a man becomes better; whereas some preach only freedom from punishment.
7. Good riddance to all those evangelicals who preach, "The cross, the cross!" but do not preach the necessity of bearing other people's burdens.
8. Christians should be encouraged to follow Christ, their Head, through suffering and service.
9. And let them be more confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than false assurance of peace.

Those who are familiar with Luther's Ninety-Five Theses will recognise that numbers 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9 follow closely Luther's actual words. Numbers 2 to 5 follow the interpretation and application made to Luther's words in this article.

Eric Blakebrough

Choices in Childlessness

Ours is a society fuelled by the expectation of an ever-increasing range of choices. Most of us, provided that we do not have our backs to the financial wall, shop probably not at the supermarket with the lowest prices but at the one with the widest range of goods. Moving house, we may look for an area where there is a choice of schooling for our children, where they themselves will have the greatest diversity of 'options' in lesson time and a multiplicity of clubs and activities out of it. Back home in the evening, cable television is set to bring into our sitting rooms a dazzling—and probably strife-provoking—array of choices of entertainment. And it will be surprising if these do not include a 'self-help' programme or two, non-directive in approach, suggesting that there are no 'right answers' and perhaps even no moral guidelines, and that each individual must make what choices and decisions seem right for his personal fulfilment.

A cynical picture of our society? 'Spoilt for choice'? Certainly most of us see 'choice' as synonymous with 'freedom', — our own freedom, of course; we do

not expect to have to grapple with the concept that our freedom to choose may in fact set limitations on the freedom of other people. Perhaps the very impersonality and complexity of our world that makes us clamour for our rights not to be overlooked makes it easier for us in turn to overlook the rights of others.

As Christian people, involved in ministry, in the 'caring professions' or participating in other spheres in the business of the kingdom of God, we too face choices. We have to choose what we can afford to give our time or emotional energy to. Assuming a shared commitment to 'mission', Christians may feel drawn to the various issues of world peace, world development, contemporary morality. None of us can espouse all the great causes, none of us can grapple in an informed way with all the moral issues. Even while we recognise that the causes and the issues may overlap in what they have to say about the nature and needs of humanity and the nature and resources of the kingdom of God, we are bound to be selective. Therefore I would not presume to assert that "every Christian has a responsibility to be informed about the scientific and legal facts relating to human embryology and 'in vitro' fertilisation and to think through the moral, philosophical and theological issues."

Neither, however, is it possible for us to close our eyes to what is happening. We cannot close our eyes to the need for informed Christian comment, such as that currently being submitted to the Warnock Commission. We cannot ignore the fact that scientific research places choices not just before individuals but before society and that, however society may shy away from moral imperatives, the choices that it makes reveal its beliefs and principles or lack of them. And neither, if we have any compassion at all, can we close our eyes to the fact that there is more to be said than the rather harsh picture painted at the start of this article about how people respond to choices. The fact that as many as one couple in ten is involuntarily childless means that within and around the local church will be couples faced with choices that arouse in them fear, excitement or confusion and bring them close to the extremes of hope or despair.

In 1979 a working party was set up under the auspices of the Free Church Federal Council and the British Council of Churches to "consider and assess

1. Attitudes to procreation and childlessness
2. Psychological, social, ethical and legal aspects of childlessness, voluntary and involuntary
3. Means of overcoming childlessness (a) medical (b) other than medical."

Last year the working party published its report entitled *Choices in Childlessness*. Who is the report for? It is written, I would say, for that elusive creature 'the ordinary Christian' and you do not need to be either scientist, theologian or moral philosopher to understand it.

Choices in Childlessness deals not only with the always possible but 'not yet' questions of genetic engineering but with the choices that face the childless couple now. These may include coming to terms with their childlessness, even perhaps to the point of seeing it as a vocation; adoption or fostering; artificial



WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House, 409 Barking Road,
Plaistow, E13 8AL

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Dear Fellow Ministers,

It was while I was on holiday in Switzerland that I heard of the sudden death of Stanley Turl, my predecessor in the office of Superintendent of West Ham Central Mission. It would be impossible to over estimate the contribution that he made not only to the life of the Mission, but also to the wider life of the Denomination and indeed far beyond. He was one of the very few who might be described as "a legend in his own time".

Stanley Turl was a big man in every way. He could never enter a room unnoticed, yet his presence brought with it a wisdom, a compassion and an irrepressible sense of humour which were a blessing to all who knew him. Stanley Turl was, first and foremost, a minister of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was no secret that he found his deepest fulfilment in the pastoral and preaching ministry, and he had been generously endowed with the gifts that fitted him for both. For 25 years, Stanley Turl guided and inspired the life of West Ham Central Mission, and it is upon the foundations which he laid that I have been given the privilege of building. In a very real sense, York House is the fulfilment of the vision that Stanley and Olga Turl receiving during their time of ministry here. The appropriately named "Stanley Turl Wing" bears testimony to his deep desire that the Mission should minister to folk until the very end of their lives. My brother ministers will appreciate the fact that during the first five years of my ministry here, Stanley Turl never interfered or sought in any way to influence, far less to overshadow, what I was seeking to do. This is a sign not only of a man with immaculate "professional ethics", but also of a true gentleman.

Others will write of Stanley Turl's contribution to the life of the denomination, and of the Free Church Federal Council, and of his involvement in local affairs, particularly through his service on the Bench. I can only say that knowing him and having the privilege of succeeding him at the Mission is a source of profound satisfaction to me. Many of us will remember Stanley with thanksgiving. We would also remember with prayerful compassion his widow and his family at this time.

Yours in His service,

Trevor W. Davis
Superintendent Minister

insemination by husband or donor; 'in vitro fertilisation'; even perhaps surrogate motherhood or 'womb leasing'. The report begins with the choices facing the individual couple but it goes on to bring Christian insight to bear on those choices and to set them in the context of the community, of social well-being and social justice.

The report draws distinctions between 'wants' and 'needs' and points out that for the Christian both have to be ordered and transformed by the wider question of 'what God wants'; it shows the distinction too between 'limitations' and 'limits', reminding us that "a recognition of limits takes us right into the heart of God, who for the sake of his creation accepts the most radical limits on himself." It argues that "practical possibilities" are not to be allowed some self-validating, self-perpetuating impetus of their own but are to be subject to "moral constraints", for "cleverness is not the same as wisdom."

"Moral constraints" led the working party to certain assertions and recommendations. They led to a condemnation of surrogate motherhood and womb-leasing; they led to some concern about artificial insemination by donor, partly because of the covenant relationship between husband and wife but also because "the deliberate separation of the responsibilities involved in sex, procreation and parenting disrupts a set of relationships, physical, psychological and spiritual, which together provide a rich soil for human identity and fulfilment." Though the working party found no objection to artificial insemination by the husband or to 'in vitro' fertilisation as practised at present, they would have similar anxieties about the use of donor ovum or donor sperm. It would appear to be the "who" as much as the "how" that is crucial and the report raises questions about what it is to be human. It also takes an interesting look at the idea of a child as a 'gift' but not a possession, belonging as a child does to himself, to the community and to God.

The idea that a child is a gift to the community may be relevant in considering the choice made by some couples to remain childless. *Choices in Childlessness* lives up to its title by examining not only the desire of most couples to have children but the alternative option. Perhaps we should look again at the belief that the procreation of children is a necessary aim of Christian marriage, and this report gives some recognition to the fact that some couples, including Christians, may choose to be childless and may believe that they have a special vocation to serve the community which involves remaining so. A timely reminder perhaps for the church to look again at its assumptions. How timely too is its warning that "the Church itself can place so great an emphasis on marriage and family life that those who are unmarried or who have no children feel themselves to be only second-class members." A reminder perhaps of the other aspect of human aspirations — that most of us, even while we clamour for choice, take refuge in conformity.

Gwenda Bond

Choices in Childlessness is available from Rita Milne, Dept. of Mission, Baptist Church House, 80p.

Baptist
Men's Movement Housing Association LTD



Each of the Association's schemes is supported by the local church or churches through Local Management Committees. One such scheme is at Bushey, Hertfordshire.

Faithfield in Bushey is adjoining the Baptist Church. There is a total of thirty-five flats. Twenty-two are for single people, seven for two persons and one for three persons. Additionally there are four flatlets for younger people, a Warden's maisonette, a lounge and a laundry.

Faithfield is a wonderful example of the community spirit formed by the love and faith of caring Christian people. Visits are arranged for the residents to many places of interest. A holiday is organised each summer by the Warden who accompanies the residents. Amongst other things a keep fit class is run in which tenants and friends alike both participate. Several of these are over eighty years of age!

This scheme and the wider work of the Association are featured on a video tape which is available to any Church upon application to:-

The General Secretary
Baptist Men's Movement Housing Association Limited
Baptist Church House
4 Southampton Row
London WC1B 4AB.