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Christian Principles

This year is the two hundredth anniversary of the passing of the “Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade”. It was the culmination of a long period of agitation against a trade which ran strongly in the face of every claim that Britain was a Christian nation. Many of the leaders of the campaign were motivated by strongly-Christian principles. And most prominent among them was William Wilberforce, then an MP for Yorkshire, a man whose spiritual standing is indicated by the desire expressed in his diary: “O Lord, do Thou guide us right, and enable me to maintain a spiritual mind amid all my hurry or worldly business, having my conversation in heaven”.¹

This Bill did not, however, affect slavery as an institution, only the shipping of slaves from Africa. A further long, hard struggle was needed before Parliament agreed to abolish slavery in the British Empire. Wilberforce supported this struggle enthusiastically but by then others had taken the lead, notably Thomas Buxton. But just a few days before his death in 1833 Wilberforce could express thankfulness to God on hearing that a bill to abolish slavery had passed its final stages in the House of Commons.

One of Wilberforce’s supporters in the struggle against slavery was John Newton, himself at one time a slave captain.² After many years of ministry in Olney and in London, Newton was approaching his death in 1807. He told his niece: “It is a great thing to die; and when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever. I know whom I have believed, and He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of right-

¹Quoted in John Pollock, *Wilberforce*, Lion Publishing, 1978, p 203.

²Rev Iain Murray addresses the question of how Newton could continue in the slave trade for four years after his conversion. He quotes Newton: “My religious views were not very clear. Custom, example and interest had blinded my eyes. I did it ignorantly.” One factor was that Newton had not, as yet, come under sound preaching. Yet the saving change he had experienced did make some difference to the way he treated the slaves in his ship: “I thought myself bound to treat the slaves under my care with gentleness and to consult their ease and convenience, as far as was consistent with the whole family of whites and blacks on board my ship” (*Banner of Truth Magazine*, issue 527/8, p 17).

eousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.”³

He was ready to die; he had escaped from spiritual slavery. Yet, unless awakened by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, no one is conscious of that form of slavery. What Wilberforce fought against was iniquitous – as is people-trafficking today, which is opposed on all sides in Britain. But scarcely any effort is made to combat spiritual slavery. Sinners go on, oblivious to God’s authority – with their eyes blinded by the devil and without a thought of the glorious freedom which the children of God possess. And as Satan’s kingdom becomes stronger and the surrounding darkness becomes deeper, more and more sinners go on in sin, with no thought of the consequences. They have no power to escape – except by looking to Christ, who came into the world to rescue sinners from spiritual slavery. But they have no wish to escape, for they are willing slaves.

Wilberforce, Newton and Buxton lived in an age when Christian principles were having an increasing effect on public life in Britain. That age has long since passed. Today, however clearly and forcefully Christian principles are presented to the Government in the UK, or elsewhere, they seem to make no impact. One area of special concern is abortion. In 2006 there were almost 200 000 abortions in England and Wales besides 13 000 in Scotland, and the total since the Abortion Act was passed 40 years ago is well over 6 million. A country where so many unborn human beings have been condemned to death has clearly lost all claim to a Christian conscience. The Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons has been considering possible amendments to the law on abortion and, unbelievably, were not able to consider moral factors in their report. MPs considered suggestions that the 24-week legal limit for an abortion in England, Wales and Scotland should be reduced. But no, they rejected such suggestions, in spite of the fact that some infants born prematurely, at less than 24 weeks, do survive.

What need for men in positions of influence who, like Wilberforce and Buxton, would give themselves to promoting legislation based on Christian principles! Yes indeed, but in the face, not only of an unbelieving legislature, but also of an unbelieving electorate, we cannot be optimistic about the degree of success they would have. Our primary need is that God would graciously visit this generation, providing the means whereby the gospel would be spread everywhere, and powerfully accompanying it by the Holy Spirit. In another age when spiritual desolation reigned, Isaiah was given grace to cry, “Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence” (Is 64:1). We can scarcely find more suitable words to use today in prayer to God.

³*Out of the Depths*, London, 1925 reprint, p 192.

Growth in Grace¹

A Sermon by *William Forbes*

2 Peter 3:18. *But grow in grace.*

The Apostle's purpose in his Epistles was to establish his brethren, the Jews, in the faith which they had received and to guard them against the errors of false, seducing teachers. "The last days", to which he refers in the third verse, are the Christian dispensation – the latter days of the gospel, as compared to those of Moses. They include the whole Christian dispensation. They are marked by the presence of scoffers; it was so in Peter's day, and also in ours. The time may appear long, but what is it compared with the endless eternity to follow? The years during which the world is to continue are no more to the Lord than as many days. It is because of His mercy that the Lord delays His coming, to give all who hear the gospel an opportunity of salvation. But when the day of the Lord comes at last, men will be found as intent on worldly business as ever (Luke 18:20). We should be preparing for that day, diligent in the discharge of every duty, so that, when the Lord comes, we may be found of Him without spot and blameless.

We shall consider: (1) what is implied by growth in grace, (2) the necessity for this growth, (3) how we may be enabled so to grow.

1. What is implied by growing in grace. By the term *grace* we understand the supernatural aid given to the soul by the Spirit of God, and also the effects of that aid in the lives of those who have received it. This aid is bestowed by God in the exercise of His free favour; it is not due to us as a debt because of any good works that we have done. In general, to grow in grace is to "die unto sin and live unto righteousness", according to Romans 6:19. But, more particularly, let us give some marks of those who are "dead to sin" and "have their fruit unto holiness".

(1) *They are detached from the love of sin.* Human nature is utterly polluted by sin. "Every imagination of the thoughts" of man's heart is "only evil continually". This inherent propensity to evil shows itself by loving those things which are dishonouring to God and contrary to the happiness of man. "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn My glory into shame? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?" And nothing but grace – the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit – can thwart the progress of human depravity or detach the heart from the love of sin. Notwithstanding all the warnings

¹Taken, with editing, from the volume of Forbes' discourses: *Communion and Other Sermons*. John Kennedy of Dingwall began to prepare these sermons for the press, but he was able to complete only two sermons before his death, and this was one of them. For an account of Forbes' life, see the following article.

which can be given to the unrenewed sinner, he invariably loves the pleasures of sin till he is made a partaker of the grace of God. This is illustrated by the case of Paul, who tells that it was only when the Lord called him by His grace that he counted as loss the things which he formerly reckoned to be gain. All who are called by God's grace perceive the infinite evil of sin and are detached from the love of it.

(2) *They do not continue in the habit of sin.* For a person to continue willingly in the habit of sin is sufficient evidence of him being destitute of grace and of loving those things which God has forbidden. Whoever is habitually dishonest must be under the influence of a covetous disposition – loving, like Balaam, “the wages of unrighteousness”. But he who is renewed by divine grace will not persist in any sinful habit, however much he may be favoured by time, place or opportunity. Thus Joseph said, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

(3) *They renounce all false reasoning in defence of sin.* While destitute of grace, men will exert their ingenuity to defend the vicious habits to which they are addicted. This is a striking instance of the power of the depravity of their heart. “Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse.” The law of God declares sin to be an evil thing and bitter, contrary to the present comfort and future hope of a rational being; yet he still hugs evil to his bosom. He asks, “How doth God know? Can He judge through the dark cloud?” How ready the licentious are to assert that they have a right to gratify themselves, provided they do not injure society or defraud their neighbours. They will admit the bad effects of sin only when their worldly interests are ruined by it. But he who is taught from above will not defend any known sin, because he believes the testimony of God regarding it. He is assured that “it shall be ill with the wicked” and that “the wages of sin is death”. His cry will be the prayer of Job, “How many are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin,” and that of David, “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.”

(4) *They mourn on account of the prevalence of sin and of the little progress they make in holiness.* Most people are not at all affected by the prevalence of sin in themselves or in others. They have no spiritual discernment; they cannot perceive how God is dishonoured and the interests of religion injured by the prevalence of sin. But the sorrow of a Christian on account of his own sins and the sins of others will always be in proportion to his growth in grace. Accordingly we hear of the holiest men who ever lived mourning because of sin. The great Apostle of the Gentiles exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And David, the man after God's own heart, said, “Innumerable evils have

compassed me about; my iniquities have taken hold on me, so that I am not able to look up”.

But they do advance in holiness. That deep and affecting sense of sin which is peculiar to all who have received grace may be considered evidence of their progress in holiness. Such a sense of sin proceeds from a right view of its evil, and this view is obtained through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. By His continued teaching and renewing, their hatred of sin is confirmed and deepened. This result of His work appears:

(1) *In their respect for all God's commandments.* Holiness may properly be defined as conformity to the law of God, this conformity being the effect of His grace. Nothing else can correct the errors and remove the blindness of the understanding, or bind the will of man to spiritual things. “By the grace of God,” said Paul, “I am what I am.” And the Psalmist showed, by his ardent desire to walk in the ways of the Lord, that he was a partaker of that grace. “O that my ways were directed,” he cried, “to keep Thy statutes; then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all Thy commandments.”

(2) *In a steadfast opposition to sin.* God's law requires Christians to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” in the face of all the opposition of the old heart, a present evil world, and the powers of darkness. In the light of truth they perceive the deformity of sin and are stirred up to resist it. They are enabled by grace, in some measure, to oppose its motions, so that they can say, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of a good conscience towards God”. Although an unrenewed sinner may resolve to forsake vicious habits, yet, as he has no relish for holiness, he will be easily diverted from the path of duty by the suggestions of a corrupt heart or by the influence of a bad example. But the person who makes progress in holiness is enabled steadfastly to guard against temptations by dependence on the Lord's promised aid. His prayer will be, “Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not”.

(3) *In humility.* One special effect of grace is to subdue pride. While “God resisteth the proud . . . He giveth grace to the lowly”. Humility is evidence that a sinner has been taught of God and is an ornament to his life among men. The baneful effects of pride cannot be fully enumerated. It cast Satan out of heaven, and it drove our first parents out of Eden, for their fall was due to their desire “to be as gods, knowing good and evil”. This principle is in every heart by nature, and influences a man's whole life, till it is subdued by the grace of God. Although “all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass,” yet it is natural for one man to affect superiority over another. It is only when a sinner is effectually taught by the Holy Spirit that he understands the nature and tendency of this depraved principle and is

made to abhor himself on account of it. And when a Christian frequently laments over pride in his heart, this may be considered evidence of growth in humility and of advancing in the ways of holiness.

(4) *In patience.* This grace too is the effect of the renewing and teaching of the Holy Ghost. Thus Paul, addressing the Hebrews as real Christians, writes: "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise". And Peter requires those who have been made "partakers of the divine nature" to add to their faith patience.

Now it is utterly impossible for an unrenewed sinner to exercise patience. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We cannot form any adequate idea of patience except in connection with trial. And the patience which the Spirit works leads Christians to consider trials as appointed by God in order to promote growth in grace. But however amiable the natural disposition of an unconverted sinner may be, he cannot view affliction in this light, and must be destitute of the comfort which real Christians enjoy. The favourable events in his life do not excite gratitude to the Giver of all good, nor do calamities make him diligent in seeking the chief good. But all who have received grace acknowledge God's goodness; they ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" And under an afflictive providence, they do not grieve as those who have no hope; they patiently endure, as seeing Him who is invisible; they have respect to the recompense of the reward. Grace is an earnest of glory, and the hope of a better inheritance reconciles the Christian to trials and leads him patiently to bear his cross.

(5) *In heavenly mindedness.* This is the grace to which Paul referred when he said, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". It is lamentably true that the mind of man is not usually much occupied about divine and heavenly things – a proof that he is by nature alienated from God, and "to every good work reprobate". The calamities of life cannot of themselves cure this folly. Nothing short of divine grace can lessen man's attachment to the world. The longer an unrenewed sinner lives on this earth, the more eagerly does he seek to grasp its pleasures and its gains. Do we not see many old people as intent on acquiring a property or a name in this world as if they were never to leave it. Though they have met with many disasters in time past, so that their own experience of the world might convince them of its vanity, yet they still expect a happiness from it which its fleeting enjoyments can never yield.

"The fashion of this world passeth away", and when the unregenerate

sinner feels the symptoms of approaching death, he is reluctantly torn from those worldly objects with which his mind was occupied and which banished heavenly things from his thoughts. "And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" But grace has a transforming influence on all who receive it, making them like Him from whom it came. This spiritual principle proves its existence in a Christian by gradually leading him to God and by preparing him for the mansions of glory; so, the longer he lives in this world, the more fully is he convinced of its vanity. A right view of his condition on earth excites in him an ardent desire after the heavenly inheritance. "I have a desire," he will say with Paul, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

2. The necessity of growth in grace. Various arguments may be brought forward to prove this:

(1) *From its nature.* It is often represented in Scripture as the kingdom of God, or of heaven – which is compared to "a grain of mustard seed" (Matt 13:31), that grows gradually till it reaches the perfection to which its nature can attain. It is compared too to "a little leaven"; in Judea it was customary to put a small portion of leaven into a considerable quantity of meal, and this little leaven converted the whole mass into dough. Thus our Lord forcibly explains the progressive nature of grace. Though small in its beginning, it spreads its influence throughout the soul till those who were at first weak in the faith grow up to perfection, "filled with all the fulness of God." In Mark 4:26-29, He plainly intimates that, as a grain of corn makes gradual progress from the time it is cast into the earth till it is fit to be reaped, so divine grace in the renewed soul grows till the Christian, fully prepared for glory, shall be cut down by death and conveyed to his mansion in the Father's house.

(2) *From analogy.* Man comes into this world ignorant not only of God, but also of the ordinary pursuits of life; he must learn what is necessary for his time in this world. If his early days are spent in idleness, it is hardly possible for him to fill any position with credit to himself or with advantage to others. The great end of coming into the world is to prepare for eternity, "for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come". If we spend our time in ignorance of God and neglect the duties He requires, we cannot have a well-grounded hope of happiness in the world to come. To each individual the Word of God says, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace," and, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear". And the prayer of real Christians is: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". No one can become wise unto salvation unless he makes his "calling and election sure", by adding to his "faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance godliness, and

to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity". Only as he does so can he make progress in the ways of God, and "go from strength to strength", till he appears at last before God in Zion.

(3) *By comparing man's condition here with what it will be in the world to come.* His present depravity renders him unfit to join "the general assembly and Church of the firstborn". "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" It is plainly declared that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord". In their present state, real Christians can have only a very inadequate conception of God's perfections. "Now we see through a glass darkly", is their estimate of their present knowledge. Their views of God's holy law are very indistinct, and they often draw wrong conclusions from the course of His providence. Instead of considering their trials as parts of the great plan devised by infinite wisdom to promote their eternal welfare, they frequently murmur. "I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul", was the gloomy thought of the man after God's own heart. Such complaints proceed from the weakness of grace in the souls of God's children. They therefore need to grow in grace, so that they may believe that all things work together for their good and that they may be prepared to join "the spirits of just men made perfect". Now, believers, you are "in heaviness through manifold temptations," but the trial of your faith is more precious than "gold that perisheth" and shall be found "to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ".

(4) *From the representations given to us in Scripture of the Christian life.* It is frequently compared to a warfare. "Fight the good fight of faith", is the counsel given to all true Christians. As there are enemies to be encountered, it is only by God's grace that a frail, fallible creature is enabled successfully to contend for victory. "Who goeth a warfare at his own charges?" It is necessary then not only to engage in, but to maintain, this conflict till death, when the last enemy is destroyed. The primitive saints were, out of weakness, made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and put to flight the armies of the aliens.

The Christian's life is also *compared to a race*. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." In that race it is necessary not only to begin well but to persevere to the end of the course. "So run that ye may obtain". Without renewed supplies of grace it is impossible so to run as to obtain the prize. "Not by might nor by power, but My Spirit, saith the Lord." It is only as He gives power to the faint, and renews might to him that has no strength, that the Christian can "run and not be weary" and "walk and not faint".

3. The means of promoting growth in grace. In every period of the Church's history some have perverted the doctrines of Scripture. They say, "If this is free, we may obtain it at any time. If it is the gift of God, we may meantime indulge in sin." But what man of common sense would use such reasoning

in his temporal affairs? Would any rational being, who must labour for food and clothing, say, "They are the gifts of God, so I do not need to take any trouble to obtain them". If God has appointed means for obtaining His grace and making progress in holiness, then surely every Christian has enough wisdom to see that the use of these means is indispensable. The great promise of pardoning mercy: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," is followed by the command: "Put Me in remembrance". And the promise of renewing grace in Ezekiel 36 is followed by the declaration, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them".

If you would comply with the exhortation of the text, you must endeavour:

(1.) *To live under a constant sense of spiritual poverty and unworthiness.*

This is indispensable to obtaining grace for further progress in the life of God. It is expressly declared that "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble". Founded on this is the exhortation, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time". Why do so many who are favoured with revelation not obtain the grace of God? Because of their mistaken estimate of their condition. They imagine they have some merit, while they are content with a lifeless routine of formal services. It was thus with the Pharisee: "I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess". Instead of confessing his sins, he listed his good deeds and counted on God being as well pleased with them as he was. But it was the Publican that went down to his house justified; he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner,". A proud, selfish spirit is such a bar to growth in grace that it is impossible to obey the exhortation of the text till it be mortified. You will grow only to the extent that the words of the prodigal, "I am no more worthy to be called Thy son", come from your heart.

(2.) *Be familiar with the Word of God.* "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." A Christian unacquainted with his Bible – no, there can be no such person. He may lack the knowledge of it that makes men learned, but he cannot lack what makes men "wise unto salvation". In every age, all who obtain grace have a high respect for the Word of God and find it a means of nourishment and comfort to their souls. This experience is fitly described by Jeremiah: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart".

The God of all grace frequently blesses the reading and preaching of the Word as a means of convincing and converting sinners and of establishing them in the ways of holiness. "I commend you to God," Paul told the elders

of Ephesus, “and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” And the words of Christ’s intercessory prayer are: “Sanctify them through the truth, Thy word is truth.” If then the great end for which God has given the Word of truth to professing Christians is to promote their growth in grace and conformity to His image, they must search the Scriptures, daily and attentively. The Word of God points out the various duties with which our happiness is connected. Every Christian is therefore bound to receive the sacrament of the Supper, as well as to read and hear. “Do this in remembrance of Me”, is a positive precept given by the Head of the Church in order to promote the work of grace in the hearts of His people. Whoever then ventures to say that he can obtain salvation without receiving the seal of the covenant sets up his own wisdom in opposition to God’s.

(3.) *Grow “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”*. “This is life eternal,” Jesus said, “that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” The great end of the ordinances of God is to lead sinners to Him who has “made peace through the blood of His cross” and “brought in an everlasting righteousness”. Because grace is bestowed on the undeserving through Him, the Apostle insists on growth in the knowledge of Christ, as well as on growth in grace. You must be well acquainted with His names, titles, offices and character. You must know the relations in which He stands to His Church as her Head, her Healer and her Husband. This knowledge will enable the Christian to understand the wondrous things of the law, and strengthen him in his petitions for grace to help him in his times of need. The Word and ordinances have no beauty for him except as the glory of Christ shines through them, and no efficacy except when they lead the soul to Him who is appointed “Head over all things to the Church”. The sum and substance of the gospel is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”.

But some of you are destitute of grace and of the saving knowledge of Christ. The Word and ordinances of God have never yet had their designed effect on you. However great your comforts in this world may be, you will soon be deprived of them all. If you die without grace, neither your worldly possessions nor your religious profession can be of any avail. “If in this life only we have hope . . . we are of all men most miserable.” Nay, the privileges which you now enjoy shall aggravate your woe for ever. “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom” than for you. Be persuaded then to make use of the short time which remains. Cry for grace in the name of Christ, while it is the accepted time; He has “the residue of the Spirit”. And wait on the His ordinances, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”.

William Forbes¹

Malcolm MacGregor

William Forbes, was born in 1767 in the parish of Avoch, on the southern slope of the Black Isle. His father was a substantial farmer and his mother was an eminently godly woman, a devoted adherent of the Old Light Seceders. While William was still a boy, he used to accompany his mother every Sabbath morning to the Secession church at the east end of the parish of Nigg to hear the earnest and eloquent Patrick Buchanan, at that time the pastor – a cousin of Dugald Buchanan, the famous Gaelic poet. With her soul refreshed by the dew of heaven and satisfied by the marrow of the gospel, they would return home to Avoch the same evening. Verily the word of the Lord was rare in those days, and to her it was very precious.

By the teaching, example and prayers of such a mother, William's young mind was deeply impressed; in early youth he had serious thoughts about sin and salvation, the state of his soul, and God and eternity. He received his early education at Fortrose Academy, where he had Angus Macintosh as his class-mate, who was afterwards minister of Tain. He entered King's College, Aberdeen, in 1782 and graduated MA with honours in 1786. The following session, he entered the Divinity Hall, where he proved himself a devoted and diligent student. He was for some time tutor in the family of Mrs Rose of Kilravock, when he often had opportunities of hearing Alexander Fraser, who was then minister of Kirkhill and author of a volume on unfulfilled prophecy and a commentary on Isaiah; he was one of the most able and eloquent evangelical preachers of his day. This was the means, under the blessing of God, of deepening his religious convictions and giving him a fuller and clearer knowledge of the whole scheme of divine truth.

Forbes was licensed as a preacher of the gospel in the Church of Scotland by the Presbytery of Nairn on 29 August, 1791. Soon afterwards he was engaged as an assistant to Hugh Calder, minister of Croy, one of a family of eminent and godly ministers. From the fellowship and example of this godly man, who during his whole ministerial life was sickly and infirm, he derived much spiritual good and obtained valuable counsel to guide him in his future pastoral work. After leaving Croy he was assistant for some time to the minister of Strachur in Argyll, where his labours were much blessed. In 1798 he was unanimously called to the Gaelic Chapel in Aberdeen. He found the people there without any bond of union, but during his brief ministry they were moulded into a united congregation under the power of his preaching

¹Abridged from the "Memoir" prefixed to Forbes' *Communion and Other Sermons*. MacGregor was Free Church minister of Ferintosh from 1850 to 1888.

and his pastoral wisdom. There is evidence, moreover, that his early ministry there was blessed in the conversion of many souls.

Early in 1800 a vacancy occurred in the parish of Tarbat, Easter Ross, and at the earnest and unanimous request of the people, the patroness issued a presentation in favour of Forbes, along with a call "signed by all the heritors in the parish, by all the members of the kirk-session, warmly and cordially, and by all the heads of families, so far as they had an opportunity to do so. All the rest of the people showed their approval of the call by signing a warm and hearty concurrence to it."

Forbes saw it his duty to accept this call, as it opened up to him a wider sphere of usefulness than he had at Aberdeen. Accordingly he was inducted to Tarbat on 24 April, 1800, when Thomas Urquhart of Rosskeen preached on 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God". On the following Sabbath, Forbes preached his first sermon in Tarbat, very solemn and earnest, from these words of Peter in Acts 10:29, "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me". His pastorate was fruitful, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, in opening the eyes of careless men and women and "turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God".

He was not long engaged in the Lord's work among the people of Tarbat, when they felt that the Lord had sent them a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth". During the 38 years of his ministry there, he laboured with great, unwearied zeal. His pulpit preparation was always conscientious and, in the judgement of all the people of spiritual discernment, his preaching had great authority, unction and solemnity. But it was as a pastor and a visitor of his people in their homes that he excelled. It was his habit to catechise, on the questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, all the families in the parish once a year. Such was their reverence for the minister that no member of the family would be absent, and such was their fear of shame lest they should not be able to answer his questions that every member of every family carefully committed to memory all the questions of that wonderful little compendium of Scripture truth. The result was, with the blessing of God, that the people grew in Christian knowledge and came to value the means of grace very highly, so that, from being very careless, they came to be regular in their attendance.

It is recorded that, on one occasion during his ministry, he had to pronounce the sentence of excommunication against a heinous and incorrigible offender. Many remembered the sensation of awe which passed through the whole congregation when, before removing this erring but obdurate member,

the minister read in the ears of all present the closing verses of Psalm 101.

He was always an early riser. Summer and winter he was up every morning at 6 o'clock, and he regularly devoted the early hours of the day to study, preparation for the pulpit and secret prayer. He always made a point of having his sermons written out by the Thursday evening; if, through pressure of other engagements, he was not able to do so, he felt uncomfortable. He was very much sought after for communion seasons in all the parishes around which were not then lying under the withering spiritual blight of Moderatism. Neither he nor any other like-minded minister would be permitted to enter those parishes, lest by the rousing power of the gospel any poor slumbering soul there might be awakened from spiritual death and thus lose all relish for the dry morality usually preached to them.

In 1813 Forbes married Jane, the younger daughter of Alexander Sage, parish minister of Kildonan in Sutherland, who belonged to a family of eminent Evangelical ministers who, in the hands of God, were among the main agents in raising the tone of spiritual religion in Ross-shire. His father, Aeneas Sage, the first Evangelical minister of Lochcarron, was famous, both for his physical powers and the blessing of God on his teaching. He was the means of a vast improvement in the moral and religious condition of the people. Instead of spending the Sabbath day playing shinty, wrestling, putting the stone, or other games, he brought them to attend the means of grace regularly.

John Kennedy writes thus of him in his *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*: "He was just the man for the work of breaking up the fallow ground in a field so wild, and a rich blessing rested on his labours. On the night of his first arrival at Lochcarron, an attempt was made to burn the house in which he lodged and, for some time after his induction, his life was in constant danger. But the esteem he could not win as a minister he soon acquired for his great physical strength. The champion at the athletic games was the first man in Lochcarron in those days. Mr Sage, conscious of his strength, and knowing that he would make himself respected by all if he could only lay Big Rorie on his back, who was acknowledged to be the strongest man in the district, joined the people on the earliest opportunity at their games. Challenging the whole field he competed for the prize in putting the stone, tossing the caber and wrestling, and won an easy victory.

"His fame was established at once. The minister was now the champion of the district, and none was more ready to defer to him than he whom he had deprived of the laurels. Taking Rorie aside . . . he said to him: 'Now, Rorie . . . we must see to it that all the people attend church, observe the Sabbath, and conduct themselves properly' . . . One of his earliest sermons was blessed to the conversion of his assistant, and a truly valuable helper he

found in Big Rorie thereafter. The result of Mr Sage's ministry is thus described by Mr Lachlan Mackenzie, his successor, who was himself one of the most eminent fathers of Ross-shire in his day: 'Mr Sage made the people very orthodox'. They 'seem to have a strong attachment to religion'. 'There is a great appearance of religion in Lochcarron; and as the fire of God's Word is hereafter to try every man's work, there is cause to hope that some of it will bear the trial.'"

His son Alexander Sage of Kildonan was settled in a very beautiful and charming parish, well peopled with thriving crofters – a religious, law-abiding, loyal race. He was doing the work of his ministry among 800 of them with great zeal, diligence and success when the Sutherland clearances began – which will be famous, or infamous, in the history of the Highlands – and swept all his congregation away, and the beautiful valley of Kildonan was left a wilderness.

His ministry was much blessed while his congregation was left to him; but when they were swept away to make room for sheep, though he was strong and brave of heart, he was overwhelmed with sorrow for the loss of his people, who loved him much, and whom he loved with ardent pastoral affection. The evening of his days was spent in heaviness of spirit under the shadow of this sore and grievous social calamity. But he had the manliness to denounce the Earl and Countess of Sutherland for their conduct in this matter, and to remind them that there was a retributive Judge on high to whom they would have to be answerable.

His son was Donald Sage, minister of Resolis, an able, earnest, popular Evangelical minister in his day, one of the fathers of the Disruption. Having served his generation well, and having borne noble testimony to the crown rights of Christ as King and Head of His Church, he died in March 1869.

From such a family of eminent ministers Forbes chose his wife, and she was in every respect a true help meet for him. She encouraged his heart with a radiant hopefulness, amid the worries and labours and cares of his public ministry. In their home they had, as the Lord was pleased to ordain it for them, their own share of the discipline of sorrow. In 1833 their son Alexander, a very promising youth, was taken away at the early age of 16; and two years later their eldest son, William, a young man of ripe piety and intellectual power, was taken away on the verge of a life of useful service in the Church below, to render more perfect service to God in the redeemed Church on high.

These sore bereavements brought sadness to the whole family for a time, but the godly parents regarded them as the chastisements of a loving Father, and viewed them as part of the "all things" that "work together for good to

them that love God". Though they felt the bitterness of these trials keenly while they were passing through them, yet, being exercised by them, they brought forth thereafter the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Of Mr Forbes especially it is recorded that all the Christian graces shone out more beautifully and brightly, both in his personal life and in his public ministry, after passing through this fiery ordeal than ever they had done before.

Thus, in cloud and in sunshine, amid many oppositions and difficulties and trials of faith and patience, he laboured earnestly and faithfully in the gospel in Tarbat during 38 years, "warning every man, and exhorting every man, that [he might] present every man perfect in Christ". And when, after a prolonged illness, Forbes died on 12 May 1838, it was the unanimous testimony of all who were capable of forming a right judgement that his ministry was eminently blessed of God, largely fruitful in the conversion of sinners, in the edification of saints and in building up the body of Christ.

About a year after Forbes' death, it pleased the Lord to pour a spirit of revival on the Church in Scotland. It first manifested itself openly in Kilsyth; under the preaching of William C Burns – a son of the venerable minister of the parish, then a young man of fervent zeal for God and of wonderful spiritual power – hundreds were awakened and turned to the Lord. This wave of revival spread far and wide over the land. From Kilsyth it came to Dundee, from Dundee to Perth, and at length it reached Ross-shire. No parish within the county was more moved by it than the parish of Tarbat. The seed of the Word sown by their late pastor lay dead in the hearts of the people, but when this time of blessing came there was a general awakening. And under the rousing preaching of John Macdonald and Angus Mackintosh there were days like the day of Pentecost, when thousands were crying out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" We quote from the *Inverness Herald* of 24 July 1840:

"The parish of Tarbat has long enjoyed the ministrations of an eminent clergyman, who was considered a master in Israel. William Forbes was a man of God, a sound, scriptural and experimental preacher of the everlasting gospel. He was a clear and logical thinker, who, without any attempt to dazzle by flashes of eloquence or ingenious argument, was mighty in doctrine. We knew this venerable clergyman ourselves, and we knew him well. We enjoyed the precious privilege of listening to his Gaelic lectures for several months, several years ago. We remember well the mighty mingled multitude who assembled to hear him; the church of Tarbat could but ill contain them. In fact a little congregation always collected about the doors and windows of the church, for whom no place could be found within the precincts of the hallowed building.

“A solemn stillness pervaded the overcrowded sanctuary as Forbes read some portion of a Psalm which, we have no doubt, many sang with the understanding and with the heart. We then listened with breathless attention to the prayer that followed, rich in unction, in deep devotional feeling and in profound scriptural experience. We have felt as if breathing in the atmosphere of heaven whilst hearing petitions admirably adapted to every variety of case and of circumstances, and we have often said to ourselves, Surely ‘this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’.

“The venerable man proceeded to expound the passage of Scripture on which he had been meditating deeply during the week. Every eye was fixed upon him. He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes. He reprimanded, rebuked, exhorted with all longsuffering and patience. He explained the meaning of Scripture by the most appropriate references to Scripture itself. His great anxiety seemed to be that his hearers might be sound in the faith, and that their faith should operate as a practical principle, and evidence itself in a life and conversation becoming the gospel. But a combination of deep feeling and the most accurate rationality pervaded his solemn instructions. There was the rigour of demonstration which might have satisfied a philosopher; but there was also, and in most beautiful unison, the tenderness of moral appeal to the heart and the conscience which might have gratified a poet.

“We have seen him labour under emotions too big for utterance, as his clear and comprehensive mind seemed overwhelmed under the grandeur of things unseen and eternal. We have seen him sit down in his pulpit, unable to proceed further with the exposition of a subject which was intensely interesting. And we thought, if we could interpret the desire of our fellow-hearers, their language would be that of the disciples of old, “Lord, evermore give us this bread”. Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the Scriptures? His words were like ointment poured forth, yea sweeter than all perfumes. He was a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of God.

“Naturally endowed with keen feelings, he entered with parental affection into the various difficulties and trials which beset the path of those who are journeying towards Zion. He rejoiced with those who rejoiced and wept with those who wept. In the doubtful and perplexing circumstances in which the Christian is sometimes placed, when he knows not what to do, his resolution contained the wisdom of an oracle. Amid the infirmities of advancing age, and the decline of health, he felt increasingly the solemn responsibility of his high office as a minister of reconciliation; he laboured as one who had to give an account. Deeply exercised in the truths of Christianity which had long formed the nourishment of his soul, he could speak from the heart most

powerfully of what he had not only heard and seen, but tasted and handled, of the word of life.

“We would not have said so much about the ministerial character of this man of God, but for an interesting circumstance which connects this with the recent revival in Tarbat. We understand that, when the first symptoms of an awakening occurred, the excellent minister of Ferintosh [John Macdonald] was preaching in Gaelic on the Sabbath evening of the communion in this parish, and appealing forcibly to the consciences of the people with reference to the high privilege which they had enjoyed under the preaching of their late venerable pastor. Many were conscience-struck by the appeal and convinced of all and, judged of all, received the sentence of death in themselves and were constrained to cry out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’ And thus the bread cast upon the waters by the late worthy minister of Tarbat has been found after many days. The seed he sowed, though long under the clod, has suddenly sprung up and will, we doubt not, bring forth fruit abundantly unto everlasting life. The prayers and tears of the sainted pastor, who walked with God in the world and has now entered into glory, have been answered in an acceptable time. He sowed in tears and he reaps in everlasting joy.”

Led by the Right Way

A Sermon Outline by John Kennedy

Psalm 107:7. *And He led them forth by the right way.*

The text tells of the Lord’s way of dealing with His redeemed, and so with His redeemed in all ages.

The right way. It is so because it is the Lord who appointed it.

There can be no mistake in the divine plans.

It is the way in which He shows His wisdom, grace and glory.

It leads to the place where He purposes to bring them.

In this way they will all reach the city of habitation.

What is this way? The way in which they are being prepared for heaven.

The way of their lot in this life is by divine appointment.

The way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

That is walking in Christ Jesus the Lord to heaven.

That is walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

The Lord’s leading. This is the right way, though it is often tedious.

It is the right way through many troubles and trials.

The Lord’s leading is by the Angel of the Covenant.

He guides them by His Word and Spirit in the way.

Their Leader is gracious, wise, faithful and almighty.

The city of habitation. There is no permanent habitation in the wilderness.

There is no permanent habitation upon the sick bed.

There is no permanent habitation upon the battlefield.

There is no permanent rest in the wilderness.

There shall be eternal rest in the Father's house.

Application. Have I the hope of that house eternal in the heavens?

That house will be such as to suit the Father and the children.

There will be rest, love, bliss and glory eternal. *Jamestown, 10 July 1882*

Eastern Europe Mission News

Rev D A Ross

For a number of years the Free Presbyterian Church gave liberal support to organizations which were evangelizing Communist countries. In 1984 a report came to the Synod highlighting problems in supporting those organisations and in 1986 the Church began mission work in Eastern Europe, with the emphasis on reaching Christians there. Over the years since then the Church has sent the Word of God to persecuted Christians in that area. In the early days it was with much trepidation that any missionary would go behind the Iron Curtain, and one of their greatest concerns was that they might endanger Christians by their presence and thereby cause further persecution. One could not but be deeply impressed with the tenacity of believers in the face of Communist oppression. While people with all kinds of religion were prepared to endure persecution, relatively few believed that Christ Jesus is the only Saviour from sin. Many had only a limited knowledge of biblical doctrines, yet we hope they had the root of the matter. Calvinists there were, but we met only a few.

More and more, our work was focused on spreading the Reformed faith, which was so lacking in many churches, aiming to encourage churches to embrace the doctrines so well summarised in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. After 10 years of contact with Christians in Eastern Europe, and in the Ukraine in particular, we eventually met a number of Christian families who wished to know more about these teachings and wanted us to help them establish the Free Presbyterian Church in the Ukraine. They make up the present gathering of believers in Odessa, where much of our work is concentrated. Trials, disappointments and mistakes there were while doing this work, but up to this moment we acknowledge the Lord's wonderful care and direction. "Hitherto hath the Lord has helped us" (1 Sam 7-12).

The distribution of the Word of God and sound literature continues, mainly through the constancy of Mr Igor Zadoroshniy in Odessa. While attending to a small bookstall in the city centre he met some teachers from a local Christian College who asked him to give a lecture on Calvinism and to distribute 200 copies of *The Shorter Catechism* to the students. This he cheerfully undertook to do.

We have fallen behind in our printing programme; one reason is that we were dependant on Mr Dmitriy Levitskiy, along with others, to edit books and tracts, but this work has been slowed down by his studies. We continue to search for another suitable person to undertake this work. Among the books translated is *Line upon Line*, but it will be some time before we can have them in print. A considerable number of Reformed books have now been translated into Russian and spread throughout the churches of Eastern Europe, whereas previously there was a limited supply of religious literature and a dearth of Reformed literature. I am led to believe that the quality of translation could be greatly improved in quite a number of cases. We are more than anxious that the books we publish would be of a high standard, as we too have had some sharp disappointments with poor-quality translation.

We hope that the third and final stage of the building in Odessa will be completed early in 2008. The small congregation continues to meet in Mr Zadoroshniy's home, which might not be available in the longer term, and we look forward to this new building being completed. He is actively involved with it, not least in occupying it at night, as does Mr Levitskiy, since no building is safe against thieves unless it is occupied.

Mr Chris Lamont and Mr Edward Ross took a load of aid to the Odessa Children's Hospital in September. We are indebted to them for giving up their working time to do so, and for the assistance they gave after reaching Odessa. They were able to take a few hundred, rather large, Ukrainian Bibles in the Kulish language and gave these to Mr Zadoroshniy to distribute. These Bibles were donated by a friend in Vancouver. When taking aid to a government institution, it is not always practical to leave Bibles in their care, though taking aid to the Children's Hospital does contribute towards the work of the gospel.

Rev Donald Ross and Mr Edward Ross hope, God willing, to take a load of aid to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe in November. This includes Christian literature as well as 8000 Trinitarian Bible Society *Words of Life* Calendars (in Hungarian and Romanian) and over 1000 Bibles in these languages, the majority of them donated by the Trinitarian Bible Society, and 1000 Gospels of John. We are indebted to those in the Laide Congregation, among others, who helped to prepare the

load. With the expansion of the European Union, travel to Eastern Europe has become much easier. We can drive from Scotland to the Poland/Ukraine border without having to pull over for border checks. The fact that Romania is now in the European Union will avoid many hours of delay.

In February 2008 we intend to visit the Odessa Congregation and once more have a communion season. It will be just over a year since the last such occasion. While Mr Zadoroshniy is now an elder in the congregation, and that is a tremendous benefit, it is desirable that the elders from Scotland continue to attend for a time; at this moment they are Mr Kenneth MacLeod, Ullapool, and Mr Edward Ross, Lochcarron.

None of these activities would be possible if the Most High did not provide the means – money and other gifts, including parts of two legacies which are to be used for the work in Eastern Europe, without which we would never be so far on with the building. Another wonderful contribution came from the Schalijs family in Rijssen, Holland, who kindly donated a seven-and-a-half-ton truck from their fleet for the work in Eastern Europe. Mr de Bruin from Rotterdam and his son designed and fitted the truck with sleeping quarters. We cannot but wonder at the goodness of the Lord in opening the hearts of people in this and other ways. The Saviour commands the Church to send the gospel to the whole world, and we ask praying people to continue remembering this work, wrestling for the blessing of the Lord on all these activities.

“And let the beauty of the Lord our God be us upon:

Our handy-works establish Thou, establish them each one.” *Ps 90:17*

Book Reviews¹

Lectures on Revivals, by W B Sprague, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 432 pages, £16.50.

This attractive edition of Sprague’s *Lectures* has been reset by the Banner of Truth, updating its appearance from their 1959 edition; the book was first published in 1832. Besides the nine lectures, there is an appendix of nearly 200 pages containing 20 letters from noted divines from whom the author requested insights on the subject of revival. This edition includes very useful biographical introductions to these correspondents by Dr James D Garretson.

William B Sprague (1795-1876) was a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America for over 50 years. To have lived in an era when true revival was not only a common experience but was, in even greater measure, the heritage of previous generations, gives a more authoritative aspect to his own insights.

¹Books reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

In our spiritually-barren times, we have much to learn from Sprague's *Lectures*. Today's lack of acquaintance with the subject might discourage readers of this volume. However, we believe that the subjects covered and the manner of their treatment should lead to the very opposite effect. These lectures are designed to correct wrong views on the subject and to encourage diligence in promoting genuine revivals of religion. This is greatly needed in our times.

The nine lectures are each based on a text of Scripture which sums up the subject to be considered. They are as follows: the Nature of, Defence of, Obstacles to, Divine Agency in, and Means of Producing and Promoting Revivals; the Treatment Due to Awakened Sinners, and to Young Converts; the Evils to be Avoided; and the Results of Revivals. While some of these titles may seem to restrict the subject matter to those experiencing revival, they contain much wise and practical instruction in issues of pastoral theology which is relevant whenever sinners come under the power of the truth. What is relevant for awakening and establishing multitudes during revivals is equally relevant for one solitary sinner, and the lessons apply to both. Indeed this perspective on the revival of true religion, which "is substantially the same in all worlds" (p 5), gives the lectures their practical worth. When dealing with the subjects of awakening and establishing young converts, avoiding hindrances, and divine agency, Sprague applies plain Scripture principles which every pastor ought to adopt, whether living in times of revival or not.

The chapter on divine agency in revivals is particularly interesting as, together with a necessary emphasis on the need for absolute dependence on the Spirit of God, Sprague gives a prominent place to the working of providence in individual lives. Providence neither hinders human diligence nor excuses human negligence. Prayer and upright living are shown to be the primary duties of Christians in promoting revivals and the searching chapter on the obstacles to revivals should be read carefully by those who make the subject of revival their frequent plea at the throne of grace. Among other obstacles, Sprague identifies "ignorance of the nature of revivals" and the "want of a proper sense of personal responsibility among professed Christians". He rebukes those who treat divine agency in a fatalistic manner: "Much of what God does is done through His people; and if they remain with their arms folded, it were unreasonable to expect that God's work should be revived" (p 54). In one sense revival is to be viewed, says Sprague, as "the improved religious state of a congregation", and "increased zeal is usually rendered instrumental in the conversion of sinners" (p 6).

The extensive treatment, in the lectures and more especially in the appendix, of evils which disturb and ultimately destroy revival is most instructive.

Here Sprague condemns human interference in God's work and particularly the adoption of evangelistic methods which are extra-biblical or even contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture. Revival was common in his lifetime, but so too was spurious religious excitement. This was promoted by various zealous, and often censorious, individuals and greatly damaged the reputation and progress of true revival. James Davenport is identified by more than one of Sprague's correspondents as such a leader, and his imprudent methods are carefully analysed. Among the features associated with spurious revivals were the public speaking of new converts, camp meetings and the consequent alienation of many from the ordained ministry and the established public means of grace. In our day, when religion is increasingly privatised and public preaching generally rejected, these warnings are timely and instructive.

The letters which make up the appendix and nearly half the content of this volume are of varying degrees of interest. Those by well-known writers such as Archibald Alexander, and a particularly long contribution from Samuel Millar, make truly edifying reading. Both these ecclesiastical giants have points of warning extremely applicable to the modern day. Millar analyses carefully the expediency of the "anxious seat" at revival meetings, which at this point began to have widespread use, and rejects it. The almost-invariable danger that such devices will breed self-deception and false professions should sound a necessary alarm for today's Church. These insights help greatly in reviewing revivals and revivalism from the nineteenth century onwards and we believe that the unscriptural methods warned against in this volume have been a plague to Evangelical Churches down to the present day. May we not conclude that, for this and similar reasons, the Holy Spirit is grieved away from today's professing Church to a large extent?

We heartily recommend this volume to lovers of Zion and we are glad to find in it frequent expression of a firm hope of God's works being revived among all nations. This prospect, as it encourages zeal and prayerfulness, lay behind the greatest missionary endeavours that the world has witnessed. Its loss in modern Evangelical circles has surely contributed to the decline of that zeal for souls which characterised Christianity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both in America and the United Kingdom.

(Rev) D Campbell

Raising Children God's Way, by D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 93 pages, £5.50.

This slim paperback consists of five addresses on Ephesians 6:1-4: "Children, obey your parents . . .". The emphasis is on the responsibility of parents to discipline their children and bring them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord".

In the last chapter Lloyd-Jones warns against putting pressure on children to “make a decision for Christ”. And the following point also is well made: it is crucially important “that the impression should always be given that Christ is the Head of the house”. But how should that impression be given? Chiefly, he answers, by the parents’ “general conduct and example”.

This material has already been published as part of *Life in the Spirit*, one of the volumes in the author’s series on Ephesians. But the publishers feel it useful to publish it separately in an age “which has witnessed an almost total collapse of the family unit”; they believe that “a Christian family in which the true relationship between parents and children is clearly seen” is a powerful witness to others. Many parents will find these addresses helpful.

Protestant View

Mother Teresa

A recently-published collection of letters by Mother Teresa entitled *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* has occasioned surprise in Roman Catholic circles, and is the subject of an extensive review in *Time* magazine. The letters, and the review, cast sad but instructive light on the deceptive religious experiences of unbelievers.

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) was born in Skopje in Macedonia, became a nun in Ireland in 1928, moved to India in 1929, had visions, “including one of herself conversing with Christ on the cross”, about the end of 1946, and began her work among the poor in 1948. She had 11 years of “terrible darkness” from then until 1958, had a glimpse of spiritual joy in praying to the newly-deceased Pope Pius XII in October of that year, and then “an excruciating night in her soul” for the rest of her life. During this time, she felt no presence of God, “neither in her heart, nor in the eucharist”.

It is these periods of darkness, the second one lasting nearly 50 years, that have occasioned the surprise. Mother Teresa gave no indication of them in public. In one of her letters she confesses that her public smile was “a mask or a cloak that covers everything”. Some Roman Catholics have put forward the explanation that Mother Teresa’s spiritual darkness was an extreme form of the purgative “dark night of the soul” spoken of by the Spanish mystic St John of the Cross (1542-91). Her darkness, they suggest, indicates that she was “holier than anyone knew”.

The simple truth is, however, that Mother Teresa’s darkness illustrates the

evil of Romanism. Here we have a poor woman who was religious, who prayed, who was exercised about her relationship with God, who presumably had access to the Bible, and who, devoted her long life, as she thought to Christ. And yet Romanism, though going by the name of Christianity, was successful in keeping her from the knowledge of the truth, from putting her trust in the finished work of Christ, and from experiencing the true love of God. One of the pictures in *Time* magazine shows her in old age, on her knees, praying from a book in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary, just like a heathen idolater.

Another matter highlighted by these letters is the danger of spurious “visions” and ill-founded religious joy. Once Mother Teresa had experienced her visions, with their associated joy, they seem to have become the foundation of her hope. It is clear, however, from their entirely unscriptural nature that if there was any reality in them, it was of a Satanic rather than a heavenly origin. We fear that many people, particularly in the Charismatic movement, have been similarly deceived. They have first been ensnared by false visions and feelings of joy, and have then built their hope for heaven on the fact of having experienced such things. Every spiritual experience is to be tested by the Word of God, and even those which are genuine are not fit to be made the foundation of religion. The apostle Peter heard the voice of God the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration, but he directs us to the “more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed” (2 Pet 1:19). The only rock on which we may rest is the promise of God in the gospel.

Many of the true people of God have endured periods of spiritual darkness and have said with Job, “Behold I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.” (Job 23:9-10). But they can also say with Job, “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (v 12). There is not a single reference to the Bible in the *Time* review, and no indication that it played much part in Mother Teresa’s religion. The prophet Isaiah asks, “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?” and he gives the comforting direction, “Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” (Is 50:10). But the next verse, we fear, is applicable to Roman mysticism: “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. But this shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

DWBS

Notes and Comments

The Watchtower Society's Deadly Prohibition

The death of a young woman last month at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital was especially sad. It was the result of the loss of blood shortly after she gave birth to twins. She refused to have a blood transfusion because, as a Jehovah's Witness, her religion prohibits it. Medical staff pled with her relatives to allow a transfusion to save her but they refused.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, or Watchtower Society, made this prohibition only in 1945, and not until 1961 did they make receiving blood an offence which would result in excommunication. Despite stating that "decisions regarding health issues and medication are entirely personal", they absurdly warn that accepting a blood transfusion "may result in the immediate and very temporary prolongation of life, but at the cost of eternal life".

They base their prohibition on the phrase in Acts 15:20: "that ye abstain . . . from blood". This ruling was originally given by the church council in Jerusalem to the early Gentile Christians and was grounded on such Old Testament restrictions as that in Leviticus 7:26: "Ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings".

However, the Jerusalem council ruling against the use of blood as food was only for the short term. As J A Alexander comments, "The prohibition was prudential and temporary, founded on no natural necessity or principle, the Old Testament restriction having ceased with the sacrificial services to which it had relation, and the one before us being merely an expedient for maintaining peace between converted Jews and Gentiles, during the anomalous and doubtful interval between the organisation of the Christian Church and the outward as well as inward abrogation of the Jewish one".

After the tragic death of the young mother, a Watchtower Society spokesman stated that "the basis of the faith is that we follow commands from the Scriptures, and it is a scriptural command to abstain from blood". But like many of the other doctrines of this pernicious cult, the prohibition is based on a twisting of Bible truth. Not only does their wresting of Scripture lead to the eternal destruction of multitudes but this prohibition also results in the physical death of many. It has been claimed that about 1000 of their people die each year because of their supposedly martyr-like refusal to have a blood transfusion.

But how sincere is the Watchtower Society in holding to what they assert is an incontrovertible biblical principle? When the Society applied in 1997 to the Bulgarian Government to be recognised as an official religious organisation, it compromised by agreeing that "members [of the Society] should have free

choice in the matter [of blood transfusions] for themselves and their children, without any control or sanction on the part of the association [or Society]”, in exchange for the Government consenting to their adherents undertaking civilian service instead of military service.

The Watchtower Society continues to do what it has been doing since its Russelite roots were put down in the 1870s – deceitfully playing fast and loose with the Word of God. Solemn indeed is the warning by Peter when he says that in Paul’s Epistles “are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:16). NMR

“Thy” or “Your”?

The common idea that the desire to change from the singular *thee* and *thy* to the plural *you* and *your* in addressing God is a modern phenomenon is scotched by a comment of Thomas Boston (1676-1732) in a sermon on the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer (*Works*, vol 2, p 587). Described in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* as “a fine linguist”, Boston said: “Observe here, by the by, that we are directed to speak to God in prayer as one. Hallowed be *Thy* name, not *Your* name: *Thy* will be done, not *Your* will. Wherefore then should any forsake such a form of sound words for such an harsh one as speaks to God by *ye* and *your*, *your* Majesty, *ye* know all things, etc? I will not insist on what may be said to defend it, from the plurality of persons in the Godhead, the manner of speaking to kings, and from common conversation (those who use it, I suppose, doing it rather from custom than judgement). But it is not the Scripture way of speaking to God; it is not the way of this pattern of prayer; it is offensive to, and grating in, the ears of the most part of Christians, as savouring of the opinion of the plurality of Gods, and therefore ought to be forsaken. I may well say in this case, ‘But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God’ (1 Cor 11:16).”

No doubt by this quotation Boston means, with the Apostle, that the Church does not regard as negotiable or controvertible those practices in worship which have biblical authority – Paul referring to the head-covering of women in worship, and Boston to the use of the singular in addressing God in prayer. The English language affords us the opportunity to reflect faithfully this particular shade of meaning in the original. HMC

The Gunpowder Plot

Sitting down on November 5 to write some Notes for the *Magazine*, after several evenings, even a Sabbath-evening service, punctuated by the sound of fireworks throughout the city, one wonders how many of those engaged in these noisy “celebrations” are aware of the events which accounted for the

original setting apart of this day in England as a holiday and day of national thanksgiving to God.

Political correctness and other motives may have led to the rewriting of history, but the godly of the time and reputable historians of more modern times believed that, led by Robert Catesby and Guy Fawkes, there was a Jesuit-condoned if not Jesuit-inspired conspiracy to blow up Westminster Parliament House when King James I would be present at Parliament's opening session on 5 November 1605 – a plot foiled by the discovery of Fawkes in the cellars of Parliament House with 36 barrels of gunpowder on the previous evening. James had not made the concessions which had been expected by Roman Catholics when he succeeded Elizabeth, and the conspirators hoped to take advantage of the chaos, which would result from the intended explosion, to initiate a rebellion which would secure their own ascendancy.

Our nation has been delivered from many plots to subvert the religion established at the Reformation, but not only are these deliverances forgotten, the religion preserved is now generally despised among us and the reasons for resistance to the ambitions of Rome have been forgotten. Preaching a Fifth-of-November sermon in Cambridge on Psalm 7:14, Richard Sibbes made the following applications among others: "For ourselves, we cannot better show our thankfulness for this deliverance, by means whereof we enjoy our lives and our religion, than to preserve that truth that is grounded upon the foundations of truth, which hath been derived unto us from those that went before, who held out the same truth; that hath been sealed by the blood of so many martyrs; that hath been established by the authority of gracious princes; that God hath given witness to by so many deliverances; that concurs with the confessions of all Reformed churches; that God hath blessed with a constant tenor of peace, even to the rejoicing of all neighbour churches, to the envy of our enemies, and to the admiration of all" (*Works*, vol 1, p 312). *HMC*

Church Information

Day of Humiliation and Prayer

The Synod decided that "Wednesday, 12 December 2007, be held throughout the Church as a day of humiliation and prayer, on account of the increasing manifestations of God's holy displeasure at our national departures from the Christian faith and our Reformed heritage; and in order that we would confess our sins in embracing ideas and practices which are in defiant opposition to God's revealed will and also that we would implore the God of heaven to return in the power of His Spirit to bring us back to Himself in repentance and obedience and that He would build His Church according to His promise".

(Rev) J MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

Visits Abroad

Small though we are as Church, several ministers have been able to go abroad to preach the gospel in the gracious providence of the Lord – though there are difficulties in ministers being absent from their congregations and families.

Some of the ministers have been asked by the Dominion and Overseas Committee to go as deputies. Two have already returned home. Rev John MacLeod was in Singapore for two Sabbaths, and the congregation there appreciated his visit. Rev Roderick MacLeod was able to go to Chesley for a fortnight, a visit also much appreciated. At the time of writing Rev Bruce Jardine is in Sante Fe and hopes to take the communion season in the congregation there. Also Rev Barry Whear is supplying Chesley and is then to move to Sante Fe. Over the course of the year, Interim Moderators are responsible for these congregations: Rev E A Rayner for Singapore, Rev Neil Ross for Sante Fe and Rev Roderick MacLeod for Chesley.

Rev K D Macleod intends, DV, to go to Singapore, Australia and New Zealand for a period of eight weeks from mid-January 2008. We crave the prayers of the Lord's people for His blessing on all these preaching activities.

(Rev) D A Ross

College and Library Fund

By appointment of Synod, the second of the year's two special collections for this College and Library Fund is due to be taken in congregations during December.

William Campbell, General Treasurer

Notice to Congregational Treasurers

Treasurers are requested to send their final remittances for 2007 to the General Treasurer, to reach him by December 27, to enable funds to be processed before the end of the year.

William Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Breasclete: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £120, £27, £10; Friend, Stornoway, £36 per WMK.

Gairloch: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £100; Anon, for church/manse work, £400; Anon, for church repairs, £50 per JM.

Inverness: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £20; Mrs CMD, £20; Mrs FS, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where most needed, £20; Anon, for eldership books, £35; Anon, for manse, £20; Anon, £35, £50, £20, £25, £20, £30.

Lochcarron: *Eastern Europe Fund (Odessa Church):* GM, £40, £20, £20; Friend, Lochcarron, £30, £1000.

London: *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, Singapore, £60 per Rev JML.

North Harris: *Congregational Funds:* Family of the Mrs M MacLeod, £100; DGG, £40; Friend, Stockinish, for Fabric Fund, £10; JNM, MacQueen St, where most needed, £80; CML, MacQueen St, where most needed, £50 per Rev JBJ; RML, £10 per Rev JBJ. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Mr MacArthur, South Africa, £25 per MAM.

Staffin: *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* CAF, £60.

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

2007

Volume 112

Editor:
Rev Kenneth D Macleod

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee,
that it may be displayed because of the truth (Psalm 60:4)*

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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