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Rejecting God

The United Kingdom is among the most secular nations in the world, according to a survey carried out for a BBC programme. Only 67% of those interviewed in this country claimed they “believed in God or a higher power”. This leaves one in three Britons claiming to be atheists. It is a dire picture, particularly when the corresponding figures for countries like Nigeria and Indonesia are in excess of 90%, though many of these are followers of false religions. Of course, it does not need a survey to tell us how far religion has fallen in Britain today, but these figures, however inexact they may be, do put the position in sharp focus.

The words of Psalm 14 will no doubt spring to the minds of many readers: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”. Perhaps in no previous generation have so many, particularly in Western countries, taken so blatantly atheistic a position. Other generations have indulged in practical atheism: they have said *in their hearts* that there is no God; they have not sought Him; they have been careless about His worship; and they did not strive to keep His laws. But this generation has tried to deny the existence of God with their mouths and with their pens, openly and unashamedly. Which reveals a unique degree of hardness of heart – no doubt the result of the fact that what people in Britain today are turning their back on with perverse determination is not a false religion but a rich Christian heritage.

What foolishness! It is to ignore the *evidence* that God exists. The beauty and complexity of the universe – in particular, of plants and animals – could not have come about by any random process, however forcefully that may be asserted by those who claim to be today’s leading thinkers. Only the supernatural power of the eternal God could have brought it about.

Besides, atheism ignores the *revelation* God has given in the Scriptures. There we are plainly taught, again and again, that God has created everything that exists. Atheism therefore rejects the *authority* of God, though, strangely, 30% of professed atheists in the survey sometimes pray – or perhaps not so strangely, for, as Paul makes clear, “the invisible things of Him . . . are plainly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead”, and even those who profess to

be atheists cannot always deny what is plainly seen of the eternal power and Godhead of the Most High. And, in rejecting God, His revelation and His authority, atheists are putting away from them the *hope* of salvation.

As an illustration of the extent to which men, even men with brilliant intellects, may go in sweeping away every vestige of reasonable hope from under them, we may note the chilling words of the prominent twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell as he laid out part of his unbelieving creed: “That man is the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving. That his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves, his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms. That no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave. That all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspirations, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system . . . All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation, henceforth, be safely built.”¹

All this may be eloquent, but it is most certainly full of unyielding despair. And, without the slightest doubt, unyielding despair is manifestly a firm foundation for nothing. How foolish man becomes when he is left to his own wisdom – even the wisdom of a brilliant intellect! The one firm foundation for understanding the origin of man and his eternal existence beyond the grave is God’s revelation in the Bible. There God has also made known that the soul’s habitation may be safely built on Christ Jesus, the God-man, who came into the world to work out salvation by the sacrifice of Himself. It was because Paul had trusted in Christ that he could express himself hopefully as he looked into the future, beyond the grave: “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”.

In the same poll only 7% of respondents in the United Kingdom said that they regularly attended religious services and only 31% claimed that their God is the only true God, in contrast with countries like Nigeria and Indonesia, where over 90% made this claim. This of course reflects the disappearance, in large measure, in the West of the concept of truth in religion. Hence, the accepted view, at least in some influential quarters, is that all religions are equally valid (or invalid) – a statement which tends to achieve the status of absolute truth, even where the idea of absolute truth is rejected! But this is to dismiss the testimony of Him who cannot lie, when He said, “I am God,

¹ Quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage, The Real Face of Atheism*, pp 94,95.

and there is none else”. So to dismiss divine testimony is typical of man, who since the Fall has had an inward bias against God and His truth.

Our situation today cries out for the proclamation of scriptural truth everywhere. But in historically Christian nations, it is a situation where scriptural ideas have for many years been marginalised. They are normally presented in the media as extreme – as what no self-respecting person could possibly choose to believe. The bulk of people in Britain today – just as in countries which are manifestly non-Christian – assume that scriptural teaching may be automatically rejected. Only a few generations ago, most of the population showed some degree of respect for the teachings of the Bible even when they were unwilling to submit to them. The position today is very different, and one might be inclined to despair of this generation ever giving a hearing to the gospel.

But such an attitude is not justified. It ignores the power of the truth when it is applied by the Holy Spirit. And it ignores the record of the success of the gospel when it was proclaimed by the apostles in a heathen environment. Even in Athens, where people were open to all sorts of unbiblical philosophies, some individuals cleaved to Paul and believed. And in Antioch, the Gentiles responded to Paul’s preaching with gladness “and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”. It is clear that nothing is too hard for the Lord; there will be fruit, no matter how unpromising the soil in which it is planted, when He is pleased to bless the sowing of the seed of the gospel. No matter how foolish sinners may be in their rejection of the fact of God’s existence, He is able to make them willing to recognise that fact and to cast themselves, as helpless and ignorant sinners, upon the sure foundation which has been laid in Christ Jesus for the salvation of the guilty.

In 1848, the atheist Karl Marx was bringing his *Communist Manifesto* to a conclusion with the words: “Workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain. Workers of the world, unite!” Eventually, the workers in many countries including Russia and China became entangled in the chains of Communist oppression which, in varying degrees, involved opposition to true religion. But in most of these countries except China, communism is already a thing of the past. Generally speaking, it brought them no real gain, even for this world. But, supposing it had, “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul”? For lasting profit, he must seek to gain the world to come. What need there is of ambassadors to go out to the whole world to proclaim the gospel – revealed in the Scriptures in terms which are totally dependable! And what need that the Lord would be pleased to send His Holy Spirit to bless the gospel everywhere!

The Head over All Things¹

A Sermon by Rev D A Macfarlane

Ephesians 1:22. *And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church.*

As enabled, I would address you to some extent on the headship of the Redeemer, the Lord of glory. This verse is just part of the prayer Paul is making for the Ephesians. In verse 16 he gives thanks, and then he prays “that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”, and many other things, as it is here revealed by God the Holy Spirit. The Father put all things under the feet of the Redeemer and made Him to be the head over all things.

If men are to be saved, they need the Redeemer as the holy and divine Head of His spiritual body, the Church – and to be taught their absolute need of having the Redeemer as the alone and divine covenant Head of His body the Church. The Father said to the Son, “Sit on My right hand”. However little may be referred to on this occasion, He is the alone and holy divine Head, able to save to the uttermost all who are made willing to come and who are brought unto Him. We are invited to come, welcome to come, and we ought to come, when God gives us the invitation and holy exhortation.

They receive out of His covenant fullness for ever and ever. However little we may grasp of this, the Father has put all things under His feet, and given Him to be Head over all things to the Church. So He is not only the Head of His body the Church, but He is over all things for the good of the Church, according to the blessed promise: “All things work together for good” according to His glory and the need of His people down through the ages. He has control over all things invisible and visible, whether in heaven, in outer darkness or in the world. He has divine rule and dominion, then, over things that are seen and temporal, for the glory of the triune God and for the good of the Church.

We will refer, to begin with, to the absolute need of our minds and consciences having the Redeemer as our Head, and of belonging to the Church of the living God, which He purchased with His divine atoning self-sacrifice. We have this need because the first Adam believed the devil. He was seduced by the terrible counsel which poor Eve gave him when she herself was deceived, and he took her counsel and became satanic. She was also satanic. Instead of being holy, harmless and healthily well – as they had been, in holy harmony with the heart of the Most High – sin entered into their bosom,

¹Notes of a sermon preached by the then minister of the Dingwall congregation on 7 November 1968, which would appear to have been a Harvest Thanksgiving Day.

mind, heart, conscience and thoughts. And therefore death eternal entered by sin. God the Holy Spirit from the Father, and along the channel of the work of Christ, tells us about the satanic, brutish nature that is in man. The Lord bless us with a measure of trembling, reverence and godly fear – and gratitude for telling us the truth for our good – that we may put our Amen to the testimony concerning our malady.

Man has been in this fallen estate since Adam's first sin. All mankind descended from him by ordinary generation sinned in him and fell with him. However educated men may be with the learning of this world, however theological they may be as far as we can see, they are on their way to outer darkness unless they get repentance. There is a great deal of rationalistic theology in our day, a plague of rationalism – the reason of man sitting in judgement on the Word of God. Men who sit in judgement on the Word and go by their own wisdom and their own philosophical views of the Bible are, as far as we can see, still in the kingdom of Satan, and are enemies of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost – the three Persons, the one God, in His self-existent being.

May the Lord teach us! "Who teacheth like Him?" All His children are taught of Him, though some have a deeper grasp than others. Those who are taught of Him seek to set to their seal that there is a satanic nature in themselves, and that they are in a state of enmity. A person may go very far by restraining grace, and be very neighbourly and kindly disposed to others, but below the surface is the hidden man of the heart. That hidden man of the heart in myself and in your soul, by nature, is at enmity with God – which is another way of saying that the state of man towards the Most High is one of enmity and moral poison. His law is holy and glorious. We ought to be grateful to Him – we desire to thank Him – for forbidding what He forbids with regard to both the first and second tables of the law. The principle of satanic enmity in the carnal mind is in every mere man of the human race. He cannot stoop to the testimony of the law apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

It takes omnipotence to bring us to stoop down to put our Amen to the law and to the truth of the promise – any promise. The parent promise is that the seed of the woman – the Lord of glory, the express image of His character – would grasp our nature. May God the Holy Spirit seal this upon us! May we pray for others and for ourselves, who by nature have this immoral vacuum toward God as the Creator, Lawgiver and Judge! When the Lord gives the summons, we are to stand before the judgement seat. Men and devils will crowd, like a flash of lightning, to stand before Him. May we and multitudes of our fellow creatures be secretly washed, consecrated, justified, united to the Saviour, in and through the Saviour, by the Spirit of our God!

O that we may be found as debtors, and be fleeing from the subtlety of sin, and of the promises of sin. The natural man believes the promises of the devil in one way or another. No man can save us. Parents pray for their children, and they are right to do so; and the Lord answer their prayers according to His holy will! God the Holy Spirit must bring it home to the soul that he is bankrupt. We are in a state of enmity. However learned a man may have been – he may get a great deal of praise in the world – he is in hell unless he got Christ. He may have been a Doctor of Divinity and have a column put in the paper about him but, when it comes to the last, that is utterly worthless unless a man was effectually called in the mercy of the Lord. There is a self-seeking spirit in us all, and it is left even in the godly.

Wrestle for others as well as for yourself. The godly are children of the covenant by faith in Christ Jesus. They are reconciled to the Lord in incomprehensible grace. They are wrestling and praying that all the ends of the earth, Jews and Gentiles in our time, will be built up by the Lord as stones united to the holy corner stone, the holy blessed One. There is no hope in man alone, because mere man will never convince and convert – although men are used in their own way in praying for their children and others. “The prayer of the destitute He surely will regard.” May we be poor and little and frail in our own eyes – bruised reeds and smoking flax!

There is a partition between the living and the dead. Show me a godly father and another man. However nice the other man is, if he does not have Christ, there is a gulf between them. The one is in the land of the living, the other among the dead. The man without Christ would hiss like a cobra in the face of Jehovah, if that were possible. We are so fallen that we cannot know it, but we are told by one that cannot lie that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. May the Lord give us the publican’s prayer! What need we have of seeing ourselves in the mirror of the law, ten thousand times in debt to law and promise! We need His secret and divine dealing with us to quicken the dead in trespasses and sins so that they may come to the breast of a promise and get some milk for eternity. May He enable us to take a low place in our hearts and spirits, and may multitudes upon multitudes be blessed wherever the inspired Word is!

The Lord spared not His own Son. The one whom He gave was not a created angel, but the One who is, from everlasting to everlasting, the brightness of His glory and the God of majesty. We read these things and hear about them, but how little we know about them! We are only of yesterday, but He is from everlasting. If you feel your ignorance, you will bow in your heart before Him. Seek to have tears in God’s bottle and ask, Grant me a glimpse of the holy suitability of Immanuel; grant that I may be found in Him. These

things will come out at the great day if you have them – panting to be in Christ, hanging on Christ to get a sweet smell as of ointment poured forth. You may say, No one will know whether I am longing for Him or not. Well, the Lord knows and He has a book of remembrance. And all the time He is recording these yearnings for yourself and for others. He remembers them, and every secret thing will be brought to light in a way beyond our understanding.

I wish to point out that the Lord from heaven is Benjamin, the Son of His right arm, the Son of His love, who grasped our nature. You must fill in a lot of this yourself. Adam, the first man, went in the teeth of the commandment. God said to His beloved Son: “Thou art to be the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. Take their nature and grasp the holy human nature – the body prepared in the womb of the virgin Mary. Thou wilt be the covenant Head of the Church. The law is in fragments.” Christ said to the covenant of works, “I promise to satisfy you, I promise to give up the ghost to fulfil you.” He promised to gather up the broken fragments of the two tables of Moses with the worth of His life and death, and to hide them inside Himself.

The representative and surety was made of a woman. It ought to be wonderful to us. I heard these things from my early days. I can in a sense recall yet the late Mr Macfarlane giving out Psalm 85. I was then an ignorant lump, a poor, unprofitable, useless creature. One may remember these things and they may be blessed to one. The Lord said that He would meet the law and the curse. He said, “I promise to come under the law, meet the curse and make an end of the curse”. This is another way of saying that there is no hell for His people; there is no eternal doom. It is the Redeemer who tells us that. Christ is the author of the Old Testament, though men were employed as sub-authors. You know that, again and again, in the days of His flesh, He Himself spoke of a lost eternity and the worm that dieth not and outer darkness and the division between sheep and goats. We might say in a sense that He spoke about hell more than His disciples. They preached what He taught. He solemnly put before them the fact that men will perish unless they have the Redeemer as their covenant Head. That is a wide field.

He took hold of the covenant of works and said, “I will please you and satisfy you infinitely. I will give up the ghost and hide you in Myself the way the two tables were hidden in the Ark.” Turn it into nourishment for your own soul. On the ground of that satisfying of the law, everyone who hears the gospel trumpet gets the invitation though they will not come. The point at issue is that He satisfied the covenant of works and hid it in Himself. He is now the Covenant Head, the Head of His body the Church, and you may meditate upon portions of truth which speak of this.

We read later on that He has, of the free goodness of the Lord, quickened

us by grace who were dead in sins. By nature, men are like a lot of serpents hissing at law and gospel. The Redeemer says, "I must turn these serpents into doves. I must impart a new nature so that they will begin to be ashamed of their evil ways." The Redeemer was given a multitude; they are as the stars. And there are some in this church tonight who will shine as the stars for ever and ever, with Christ in them the hope of glory. If you have reason to believe before the Lord that you got grace to turn against yourself, to say with Ephraim, "Turn Thou me", then He loved you with an everlasting love, and such are in this church today. Their light may be very small. I see a switch here for putting on the lights; it can be put down to make the light very, very low. So it is with the Holy Spirit's work; it may not be very clearly seen, but when death comes and the Lord puts light on them, then in an instant they will shine in the full blaze of light – in love and every grace.

May we be of the spiritual seed of Immanuel! The secret things belong to the Lord. It is of sovereign grace that vipers are turned to be like doves. Watch that you will not make an excuse of divine sovereignty – saying that, because you cannot come, you will not be accountable. It is natural for us to make our excuses, to justify ourselves. Ask the Lord to change you into a babe: "Make a little child of me. Enable me to close in with Thee on Thine own terms." It is true that no one can do this of himself. We are walking lumps of mud and mire, and the horrible pit is in us. If it were not for grace there would be no Church, no salvation, nor sinners saved. Have prayers in your bosom for yourself, and for the ends of the earth that they may be saved from their false wisdom.

We read of this city: "The city shall be flourishing". The devil has a city in this world. He has a city in Europe where Babylon is established. He has a city, to a large extent, in Russia and he has a city in our own land too, where we are so much given to our lusts. When the Holy Spirit will come, Christ's "city shall be flourishing; her citizens abound in number shall, like to the grass that grows upon the ground". None can keep it back. You might as well try to stop the sun rising tomorrow. When the Sun of Righteousness rises and blesses His Word, men will fly as a cloud of doves to their windows. Who can count them or the fourth part of the dust of Jacob?

Christ – Prophet, Priest and King – is now in glory stretching out His hands and saying: "Come along now and I will make a bargain". Ask the Lord that the Saviour would be your living Head – that God the Holy Spirit would take of this truth of Immanuel. May He take away the veil, captivate our hearts and give us a gracious frame of soul – to be climbing down. It is a promising sign to be climbing down. People naturally like to climb up. O that the Lord would visit us and bless us!

Ask the Lord to bless you with effectual calling. You read about it and hear about it time and again, and we should be seeking to press our way into some of these matters. We are persuaded when the Holy Spirit works in us. Flavel is very nice on the difference between moral suasion and persuasion. Persuasion is the work of the Holy Spirit. He has won your heart and your will, He has created a new nature in you so that you turn against yourself, so that you turn to Immanuel on His own terms. We heard today about the crops, and how the Lord showed us kindness in giving us the barley crop and the wheat crop, and so on. After the woman of Samaria met with Christ, the corn of wheat that was to die, she went to her friends and said, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did. And what a mess I was!" The Holy Spirit appears to have touched these men in Samaria invisibly, divinely, compassionately. They poured out to see Jesus. Here was now a whole field of wheat, white, all ready to harvest, ready for the divine Reaper to put in His sickle and gather them into His garner. They appear to have been all changed before they reached Him, though they listened to Him and got corn and milk from the corn of wheat who was about to fall into the ground and die.

Do you think you have reason to say, "I was as a bullock; turn Thou me, so that Christ would be mine. Let me be Thine unreservedly, in total"? Do you have this: "Turn thou me, and help me to hide in Immanuel, let Him be my all and in all – He who was the Son in the bosom of the Father, my Prophet, Priest and King"? How little anyone of us grasps, or can grasp, of the holy, inconceivable, incomprehensible fullness of Immanuel in His justice, goodness and truth! Christ is the bank, and Christ is the safe, and the door of the safe is wide open. The Father is saying, "Come and welcome to Christ; in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". They will not send detectives after you, saying you are stealing from this bank. The bank door is open. The safe is full of wisdom and justice and you are welcome, welcome to Him.

In conclusion, He is Head over all things for the Church, over all things in heaven, in outer darkness and in the earth. You read all about that in the Lord's Prayer. He is Head over all the angels in glory and He has dominion over all the spirits in hell. They are only allowed to go so far. He has put a rein on them. The Lord will never "suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it". In Psalm 65, He is Head over the sun and moon and stars and winds and waves. He spoke in the boat on the sea of Galilee and the winds and waves were calmed. He is Head over all the wild and tame animals and the fish of the sea. He is Head over the seasons and the fruits of the earth. He has created food for man and beast. "Good unto all men is the Lord" in providence, as

was brought before us this morning. O to render thanks unto the Lord, to get a little grace, a baptism! Our bellies may be cleaving to the dust in our ignorance, but may the Lord take hold of us and saturate us with the grace of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, that we may be thankful for wheat and barley, the fruits of the earth, and for His kindness to the unworthy and undone!

We read in the Scriptures of those in heaven who followed the Lord riding on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. They are in the army of Christ. This is difficult and mysterious. Perhaps in its primary reference, this text speaks of the angels who are ministering spirits. Probably it is the case that the angels will meet the spirits of the just made perfect. I would like to think that they are in this church tonight who got the white horse of a promise and are riding on that white horse in the army of Christ. They are in the kingdom of heaven here below. There is a truth coming to my mind: "This is a faithful saying," full of fidelity, "and worthy of all acceptance" or acceptability, so that we should just pounce on it, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". If that is made precious to you, I would think it would be a white horse. You would follow Him here in the kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory hereafter. The world is to be rolled up like a scroll. The Lord has given us corn and wheat and barley and pretty trees and flowers. The pretty things He has given us are all under His hand. He is so kind to give us pretty flowers to look at, but He is going to destroy it all with a fervent heat. Ask that you would get Himself.

Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig¹

2. Student Years

Rev J L Goldby

Following his decision to study for the ministry, Mr Macdonald entered the University of Edinburgh in the winter of 1849, the year of his spiritual release. During his College course, both in Arts and Divinity, he acted as a schoolteacher and missionary in the interval between sessions. After his first university session he taught in a school run by the Ladies' Society for the Religious Improvement of the Remote Highlands and Islands. They began their good work in 1850 and set up schools in many poor districts. One object of the Society was to help godly young men who were studying for the ministry, and therefore only students were employed as teachers.

¹The first article gave an account of his call by grace under the ministry of Rev Alexander MacIntyre. The main source for this period of his life is Rev D Macfarlane's *Memoir and Remains of Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig*.

The Society sent Mr Macdonald to Uiskeva, on the east side of Benbecula, where a good number of children lived, far away from any school. "The coming of a teacher to this remote district," says Mr Macfarlane, "was hailed by the inhabitants with joy and gratitude. It was a great boon and a wonderful providence. All the children of school age at Uiskeva and the neighbouring townships came to be taught, and even grown-ups were among the pupils. Most of these were never at school before. . . . All the common branches of education taught in other schools were taught in the Ladies' Schools, and in the case of advanced scholars who wished to prosecute their studies at college, the rudiments of the higher branches were also taught, such as Latin and Greek. But, as the object of the Society was chiefly to communicate religious instruction to the young, the Bible and Shorter Catechism had a prominent place in the schools. While Mr Macdonald was competent to teach all the secular branches required in this school, he was eminently fitted to conduct the religious department, as he was himself taught of the Lord and deeply concerned for the spiritual good of the young.

"He acted as a missionary as well as a schoolmaster. He began to conduct meetings on the Sabbath, morning and evening, and kept a Sabbath school. All the Protestants in the district, old and young, came to hear him, and they soon discovered that the teacher providentially sent them was a true man of God and an ambassador for Christ. He addressed the meeting while sitting, thinking it would be presumptuous of him at that stage to stand. He was then in the heat of his 'first love', and was most lively and full of unction in his addresses. It was in this place he composed most of his Gaelic poems, which he used to chant melodiously as he walked over the fields after school hours, competing as it were with the thrush that chirped its song merrily in the bush beside him. Speaking afterwards of his happy time at Uiskeva, he confessed that he never enjoyed more of the Lord than he did there, and that he loved the very ground and stones of the locality where the Lord was so rich in mercy to his soul."

As time passed, more pupils attended the school; some came from the west side of the island and took lodgings within reach of the school. There were no fees to pay, which was an incentive to parents to send their children to this school, the only one of its kind in Benbecula at that time.

Mr Macfarlane's description of his friend's qualities, even before he became a minister, is highly instructive. These qualities helped greatly to draw the people, and they attended his Sabbath services with increasing interest. "It need hardly be said that law and gospel were most faithfully proclaimed to them by a man who had experimental knowledge of both, as few had. His addresses could not fail to arrest attention. The character of the preacher, his

genuine piety, his fervent earnestness, and his yearning desire for the salvation of their immortal souls, together with his most heavenly and solemn manner, added weight to his message, and produced a salutary influence on his hearers, which confirmed them in their conviction, the oftener they heard him, that the Lord was speaking to their hearts through His servant.”

Later Mr Macdonald taught in the Ladies’ School at Stoneybridge in South Uist. In the winter of 1856, when he went south to attend college, he employed Mr Macfarlane as his substitute during the session. When he returned, Mr Macfarlane remained with him for the summer and lodged in his house. It was then he began to see what a bright Christian he was: “Though I knew him to some extent at Uiskeva (I was one of his pupils there), yet I was not then in a position to understand what a great privilege we had in having such a teacher. His savoury spiritual exercises, both in the school and in his home, were truly precious. He conscientiously and diligently attended to his duties in the school during school hours; and after the school was dismissed, and dinner over, there was always some time spent in reading a portion of Scripture and in prayer. Every day was like a Sabbath, and yet the Lord’s Day was the queen of the week.

“As he had to officiate on Sabbath, Saturday was devoted to the work of preparation for the duties of that sacred day. So far as I recollect, he did not at that time commit his thoughts to writing; his preparation consisted in prayer and meditation on a passage of Scripture. Sometimes the schoolhouse, which was connected with his dwelling, was his study; other times the open field. He often went to the shore of the Atlantic and walked up and down the beautiful sandy strand meditating on his subject and ejaculating his thoughts in the way of preaching as if a congregation were before him – the roaring waves of the great ocean, which rolled in rapid succession upon the beach, made it impossible for passers-by to hear his voice. On Sabbath he rose early. He made it a rule that we should be up at 6 o’clock, and that rule was punctually adhered to. Until the breakfast hour, 9 o’clock, the time was occupied with private devotions, reading the Scriptures and prayers. After breakfast and worship he walked to Howmore, a few miles distant, to conduct the meeting there. In the evening he held a prayer meeting in his own room, where the few Free Church people in the district gathered.

“I shall never forget the happy time I spent with Mr Macdonald at Stoneybridge. His house might be called a Bethel, the house of God, and he was himself a Jacob who wrestled with the Angel of the Covenant and prevailed. I saw him in different states and moods – sometimes so much cast down with a feeling of desertion that he could not enjoy any earthly comfort, other times so much filled with the Lord’s gracious presence that he had to stretch

himself quite prostrate on the bed. He was not at that time left long without comfort. He was an importunate suppliant at his Father's door."

While in Edinburgh, Mr Macdonald learned, not only from his university classes, but also from his contacts with eminent Christians such as Rabbi Duncan and Robert Flockhart. Dr Duncan took a fatherly interest in him, and there was mutual friendship between them. Dr Duncan had laboured with wonderful success among the Jewish people of Hungary and he no doubt helped to fashion Mr Macdonald's own keen, prayerful interest in the Jewish people and their salvation, to which he often referred in his sermons. Dr Duncan conducted a Saturday meeting, at which he expounded a passage of Scripture and spoke faithfully to the students about the work of the ministry. Mr Macdonald, though not then a divinity student, attended these meetings. He enjoyed them immensely and derived much benefit from them. On one occasion Dr Duncan was lecturing on a passage which mentions stealing the Word of the Lord. He paused for some time and then, looking at the young men before him, he warned them with tears in his eyes to take heed that they would not be guilty of stealing the Word of the Lord. He spoke with such solemn gravity and deep earnestness that Mr Macdonald said he could never forget it.

Robert Flockhart was also a most helpful spiritual friend to Mr Macdonald. He had, Mr Macfarlane tells us, "served his time in the army and, having been converted while on service in India, he became a great street preacher. Having faithfully served his Queen and country, he became a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He held his meetings on the streets of Edinburgh. Crowds of people gathered around him; and although he endured much insult and suffering in the performance of his duty – roughs in the crowd sometimes pelting him with bits of stick and stones – he still held his ground, and was very successful in winning souls to the Saviour. Well knowing the profligacy of some soldiers, he lost no opportunity of speaking to their case when any of them appeared among his audience. He held a prayer meeting in his own house, where a number of godly young men gathered. Mr Macdonald attended this meeting and, when Mr Flockhart came to know him, he made him one of his praying men. Mutual Christian friendship ensued, and the more they came to know each other the more the friendship grew."

Flockhart's mantle as a man of prayer fell upon Mr Macdonald, who became noted for this grace. It is recorded of Robert Flockhart that he was eminently a man of prayer. He often spoke of the sinfulness of restraining prayer. On one occasion he was overheard in secret prayer telling the Lord of his griefs and fears, his designs and expectations, in regard to his labours: "Lord, dinna forsake Edinburgh! Dinna forsake Edinburgh! Why should our

preaching here be so powerless? Consciences are not pricked, hearts are not broken, and souls are not saved. The enemy is come in as a flood. O pluck Thy right hand out of Thy bosom! Lord, dinna forsake Edinburgh!" "You know", he once said, "we must give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Prayer is the one half of our work, the first half and the better half too." Mr Macdonald imbibed this prayerful, wrestling spirit.

Courage was another characteristic of Robert Flockhart which, as we shall see, was also strong in Mr Macdonald. During the Crimean War, Flockhart spent some portion of every day interceding for the soldiers. When he heard of any brave act, his martial spirit was stirred. He would say, "Shouldn't it be just the same with Christ's soldiers? They must charge the enemy . . . up and into the heart of them! Three cheers and down with the enemy's colours! That's the way to carry the day."

Mr Macdonald was also noted for his fervent Christian love. The love between him and Mr Macfarlane ascends from the latter's pen as sweet incense. The love of Christ that transcends denominational boundaries drew Robert Flockhart and Donald Macdonald together in sweet fellowship. When Flockhart spoke with pleasure of the "Church in the army" in India, he added, "How prayerful they were and how warm was their love to each other. "Christian love in this country", he said, "is like Greenland to theirs."

"Mr Flockhart", Mr Macfarlane, goes on, "acted as a nursing father to Mr Macdonald, who often in soul trouble ran to his friend's house for comfort. Though Mr Macdonald got such clear evidences of his interest in Christ when he experienced the liberty of the gospel at the outset of his Christian course, yet he was often afterwards tempted to doubt the genuineness of his faith. He began to discover, after that time of happy enjoyment, the fountain of iniquity that was in his heart, and he could not reconcile this state of things with his being a new creature in Christ. This occasioned him much perplexity, and he was often thereby brought into bondage. As he knew that Mr Flockhart was an experienced Christian, and that he could frankly disclose his mind to him, he often went to him in his trouble. . . . During this period Mr Macdonald was much exercised on one occasion as to whether he should continue to prosecute his studies with a view to the ministry or not. He wrote Mr Flockhart from North Uist on the subject, and in after years often acknowledged his obligations to this worthy man for the help and encouragement he got from him." The full text of Robert Flockhart's wise reply is recorded in the *Memoir*. The following is an extract:

"Need I say how much I sympathise with you in your present position? I have laid your case before the Lord. I do hope the Lord, in answer to our prayers, has cleared up to you the path of duty. If now I venture to give you

any counsel, my prayer is that the Lord would speak to you by me. The dealings of God's providence are to be observed by His people. They are to be judged by the infallible Word of God, not by our own opinions. We are not to infer from the circumstance of our meeting with trials that we are out of the path of duty. On the contrary, the Christian path is beset with trials. It is through *much* tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Children of Israel in their journey to Canaan had to cross the Red Sea and had to travel through a waste, howling wilderness. They had enemies on all sides – the Egyptians in their rear, the Canaanites in front, the Amalekites and others on either hand. But it was not the combination of these enemies against them that slew so many of the Israelites; it was their own evil heart of unbelief that provoked Jehovah – who would otherwise have been their shield and deliverer – to give them up to the will of their enemies. Let us take a lesson, and not fall after the same example of unbelief. Let us seek the Lord's guidance as to the path of duty. When once we have learned that, it remains that we go forward.

“You can make application of this to your own case. If the Lord has put it into your heart to devote yourself to His service, you need not fear but He will support you through every difficulty in the course of preparation for it. His name is Jehovah Jireh, ‘The Lord will provide’. It is only the eye of faith, however, that can see sufficiency in Him. Seek to get a thorough conviction of His infinite all-sufficiency for your every want. Think of this text: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor 12:9). This will support you when you are overwhelmed with a sense of your own weakness and insufficiency for the work. . . . If your desire to serve the Lord in the gospel springs from love to God and to the souls of men, if it springs from a desire to glorify God in the salvation of lost sinners, I pray God that your desires may be strengthened, and that you may progress in your studies, because I feel assured that the Lord will not send you a warfare on your own charges.”

The more you converse with Christ, the more you partake of heaven. To be with yourself is to be in ill company. To be with the world rubs rust on you. To be with Christ leaves a smell of heaven, and a dye and colour of another world, on you that will never rub off.

We desire to go to paradise through no other way but paradise and a way strewn with roses. Nay, but we must endure hardness, and resolve the way cannot be changed to flatter our softness. It is God [who] has carved it out.

If ye were not Christ's wheat, appointed to be bread in His house, He would not grind you.

Samuel Rutherford

Christian Experience¹

2. Conversion

Archibald Alexander

Conversion turns out also, in experience, to be a very different thing from what was anticipated. Awakened sinners hear of others being translated from darkness to the marvellous light of the gospel and expect to be brought through the new birth in a way perfectly similar to some remarkable conversions they have perhaps heard or read about, which however they understand very imperfectly. They therefore endeavour to place themselves in the same circumstances as those in which others were when they found peace with God, and they continue to look and wait for some sudden and almost miraculous change. They often endeavour beforehand to imagine what their views and exercises will be when their conversion shall take place. These expectations never come to pass and are always erroneous, for when this blessed change actually occurs, the light is commonly like that of the dawn: obscure at first, but shining more and more to the perfect day. And instead of the views being miraculous or strange, they appear to arise in the mind like other thoughts and feelings.

The only marked difference is in the spiritual beauty and glory of the objects contemplated, not in the manner of the views. Instead of a sudden and violent agitation, there is a sweet exercise of the mind in directing its thoughts to Christ and to the glorious perfections of God, as exhibited in His works and in His word. The soul reposes with delightful complacency on the truths to which its attention happens to turn and, besides the light afforded by the Spirit shining on the Word, there is often a suggestion of precious Scripture promises, or other gospel truths, suited to the condition and wants of the new-born soul. These sometimes come dropping into the mind successively as precious morsels on which it feeds. As the recently-born infant instinctively thirsts for the nutriment which the mother's milk supplies, so new-born souls as naturally thirst for "the sincere [or pure] milk of the word, that [they] may grow thereby".

One circumstance which will appear strange to those who have not learned it by experience is that, in the first exercises of the new convert, there is frequently no thought or question whether these are the genuine

¹This is a further slightly-edited extract from a sermon on Isaiah 42:16: "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them". The first section, last month, dealt with conviction of sin. Alexander was the first professor at Princeton Seminary.

exercises of one born of God. There is no room at present for such reflex acts; the mind is completely occupied with the objects of its contemplation. And often, when these views are clear, it forgets itself and is absorbed in beholding the glory of God in the Mediator, or the wonders of redemption as set forth in the gospel, or the beauty of holiness as manifested both in the law and the gospel. Thus often Christ is received, true faith is exercised, the heart is humbled in penitence and exercises sincere love to God, without knowing or even asking what the nature of these exercises may be. And in many cases these views and exercises come on so gradually that their origin cannot be traced.

So far is it then from being true that every regenerated man knows the precise time of his renovation, that it is a thing exceedingly difficult to be ascertained. It is not difficult to know that on such a day our minds were thus and thus exercised; but whether those were the exercises of genuine piety is quite another question, and whether, if they were, they were the first of this kind is still a different question. Some who speak confidently of the day and the hour of their conversion were never truly converted, but were imposed on by a mere counterfeit. Others who have the same confidence of knowing the precise time of their conversion, though true Christians, are mistaken as to this matter. They were enabled obscurely to view the truth, and feebly to believe, long before the period at which they date their conversion. Some attain a full assurance of hope who do not pretend to know when their spiritual life commenced. All they can say is, with the blind man in the gospel, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see".

As in the dawning of the natural day, we often can know assuredly that the day has commenced, because the objects around us are distinctly visible, when we could not tell the precise moment when the day dawned. Sincere souls, which have the scriptural evidences of piety, need not be distressed because of their ignorance of the day and hour of their new birth. But let not those who have never experienced any change take comfort from this, as though it were possible that they also may have experienced regeneration while they knew nothing about it. In regard to which we may truly say, You cannot be converted without knowing something about it; you cannot be the subjects of a series of new views and feelings without being conscious of these spiritual exercises.

The soul, under the leadings of the Spirit, is often brought near to Christ when it apprehended He was far off. Their first intercourse with the Redeemer is like that of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. Their eyes are, as it were, holden, so that they do not know in very deed that the person with whom they are conversing is Christ. But afterwards, like those disciples,

they can say, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" In such a conversation, under such a sermon, or while meditating on such a passage of Scripture, did we not feel our minds to be elevated, warmed, enlightened? What could this be but the risen Saviour whispering His love into our hearts? When He thus comes near and we are not aware of His being present, He will not keep the veil long before our eyes which conceals His true features. He will come nearer still and, in "the breaking of bread" or in some other divine ordinance, He will stand revealed before our eyes, and we shall recognize Him as our friend and our beloved. And if it should be but a glimpse which He affords us before He vanishes from our wistful sight, yet even this transient view will be sufficient to convince us that "He is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand".

Obituary

Malcolm D MacKay, elder, Raasay

On Saturday, 31 January 2004, in Broadford Hospital, Calum MacKay, an elder in the Raasay congregation, passed from time to eternity, from the scene of the good fight of faith to the eternal Sabbath which remains for the people of God. He was born in the island of Rona in 1918 and grew up under the sound of the gospel. In later years his work in the forestry took him to the Dingwall area, where he heard the Rev D A Macfarlane, Dingwall, and to the Lochbroom area, where he heard the Rev D N MacLeod.

He returned to Raasay in 1951 and it was there, in 1972 during the ministry of the Rev D Nicolson, that he confessed faith in Christ. In 1975 Calum was ordained an elder in the Raasay congregation. In the years after Mr Nicolson left in 1978 and before the vacancy was filled in 1983, the services were largely kept by Calum and his brother elder Ronald MacBeath. He regularly precented in church and was particularly attractive when leading the praise in Gaelic.

Physically Calum was very strong, and temperamentally he was never one to complain. This was particularly evident latterly when he was troubled with several ailments but bore all patiently. Spiritually he was very ready to confess, and complain of, the sins of his own heart and his need of a Saviour. The decline of vital religion in his native island and the low state of the Church at large were a cause of grief to him. This personal, experimental religion gave a warmth to his exercises in prayer and to his speaking to the Question. As with all God's children, he had been taken from the miry clay

and his feet put on the rock and a new song put in his mouth. The theme of that new song was evident when, nearing his end and capable only of a whisper, he said, "If we have Christ, we have all".

Calum had a son by his first marriage and is survived by his second wife. To them both we extend our sincere sympathy, and for them and the congregation it is a comfort to know that "we do not mourn as those that have no hope".

"But unto those that do Him fear
 God's mercy never ends
 And to their children's children still
 His righteousness extends."

(Rev) J R Tallach

African Missions Update

Rev Neil M Ross

The work of the gospel goes on in our missions in both Zimbabwe and Kenya despite various difficulties. We are indebted to the Lord of the harvest for maintaining that work, but how necessary it is that we should look prayerfully to Him for the increase! May our ministers who labour there "in the word and doctrine" be encouraged by the promise, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps 126:6).

Zimbabwe

The difficulty of insufficient staff to take all the Religious Education classes at Ingwenya has been solved for the first term of the current session (January to April) at any rate; Miss Rhoda MacKay has deferred her furlough, and Mr Bongani Khumalo (son of Rev S Khumalo) and Miss Marion Tallach (daughter of Rev Dr J R Tallach) have been temporarily employed to teach the subject. The situation has been eased further by the return of headmaster Mr B Ncube from two months' leave.

Some of the staff and pupils at the John Tallach School in Ingwenya had an alarming experience when lightning struck the school during a terrible storm on Wednesday, March 3. Thankfully no one was injured. Four children were slightly shocked and were taken to the hospital outpatients' clinic but soon recovered after treatment. Some of the classroom windows were smashed and the telephone system was put out of action. The centre of the strike was the office of teacher Mr Dube and the adjacent corridor. Just moments before, Mr Dube had dismissed some girls who had been washing the corridor walls and then left the office to answer a telephone in another room. As Miss

Norma MacLean, the deputy headteacher, said in an e-mail: "It is wonderful to see God's providence working so mercifully".

At Mbumba Hospital there are now three European Nurses – Sisters Peta van de Ridder, Willi Geursten, and Petra Beukers. Sisters Geursten and Beukers are completing their orientation course in Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo. All the hospital staff look forward to the eventual arrival of Miss Joanna Boekhout from Holland, who is presently nursing in Inverness. She has been appointed by the Foreign Mission Committee to nurse at Mbumba but will not be free to go for a further year.

It is a matter for much thankfulness that, despite fears to the contrary, our various mission departments have been able to obtain sufficient supplies of food and motor fuel.

Kenya

In a newsletter at the beginning of the year, Rev Keith Watkins, the Mission Superintendent, said, "The year 2003 was a difficult one for me health-wise, with the ongoing effects of the heart virus I contracted in September 2002 and with repeated bouts of malaria. . . . But now we have been back from our 2003 furlough for over a month, and thankfully I am feeling much better and stronger." However, Mr Watkins has had yet further attacks of malaria which lasted some considerable time. He was examined by a specialist in Nairobi who is taking a close and personal interest in his case and wishes to monitor and treat any future attacks.

In his newsletter, after speaking about the preaching and teaching of the Word to increasingly large numbers in the church and Sabbath school, he says, "On the more practical side we have seen another year in which the Mission's facilities have been maintained and improved. These things are important for the support of the gospel. When the administrative side of things is running smoothly, and problems are being taken care of, the gospel work can advance without interruption. I have to acknowledge my grateful thanks once again to Mr Hugh Mackenzie for taking care of this side of the mission and relieving me of so many distractions. We also have to say that we live very comfortably, in lovely homes with all the facilities: running water (hot and cold), electricity and so on. A project has begun of screening bedroom windows so that we can enjoy the cooler night air without being invaded by mosquitoes. When we read of missionaries in former years who were so distracted with bare survival on the mission field, we are in a very privileged position. 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.'"

Mr and Mrs Watkins have made good progress in acquiring Ekegusii, the local language. "Over the new year period we completed another 20 hours'

intensive language study with our tutor from Nairobi. He was very pleased with our progress from a year before. It is harder for us to see the progress ourselves. I have been pronouncing the benediction in Ekegusii for a long time, but have begun to take the concluding prayer in it as well. . . . With the Lord's help we hope to continue to improve. But there is still a long way to go, and it is hard to fit in time for language study with everything else that keeps us so busy."

Translation work proceeds steadily. A new improved and enlarged edition of the Metrical Psalms in Ekegusii is now in circulation. (Mr Watkins gives a detailed account of the process of translating the Psalms – and a lengthy, painstaking process it is, involving several people and many drafts.) The revision of the Ekegussii translation of the Shorter Catechism is still in hand but it is a slow task because of the lack of suitable Ekegusii words to express theological concepts. It is especially desirable that a more accurate translation of the Ekegusii Bible be produced. The prayer of the staff there and the friends of the Mission is, as Mr Watkins says, that "the Lord Himself would raise up labourers, resources and opportunities for an improved translation".

Another project is the translation of a 1150-word tract on hell based on an original publication by a Dutch minister, Ds Harinck, who was a missionary in Ghana for many years. Mr Watkins says, "Seventh Day Adventists have been very successful in Kisii land. Some of this cult's most pernicious heresies are the denial of the soul's immortality and the rejection of the everlasting nature of hell torments. As a result, most of the Kisii tribe, although they profess to be Bible-believing Christians, do not believe that hell is for ever." The tract, entitled *Is Hell There?* is in good, smooth-running, easily-understandable Ekegusii, and many hundreds have been distributed locally. "We look to the Most High," says Mr Watkins, "that He would bless our endeavours to establish His truth among this people. Only the Holy Spirit can write it on their hearts with the conviction that it is divine truth."

Book Review

Richard Hobson of Liverpool, *The Autobiography of a Faithful Pastor*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 383 pages, £13.50, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Originally published by himself in four editions, this volume tells the life-story of Richard Hobson (1831-1914), who was for the greater part of his public life vicar of St Nathaniel's, Liverpool. The first 48 pages follow him from his birth in a strongly Protestant family of Yorkshire origin in Co

Wicklow, through childhood and youth exposed to poverty, famine and disease, working as he could to help maintain his brothers and sisters, invalid father and eventually-widowed mother, until he became in turn an agent of the Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics of Ireland, a student at Birkenhead for the Anglican ministry and curate of Christ's Church in that town. The minister to whom he was curate was Dr R P Blakeney, another Anglo-Irishman and a prominent writer, speaker and organiser on the Protestant side of the theological, social and legal controversy with Romanism, and in the Church Association's contest with Anglo-Catholicism. The main part of the book provides a selective, year-by-year account of his ministry in St Nathaniel's (1868-1901), based on his diaries, with a conclusion written the year before his death and several appendices mainly in the nature of testimonials.

Each part of the book has its own interest. Hobson was enlightened with regard to the nature of Romanism, concerned for the conversion of his Romanist acquaintances and a lifelong contender for what he regarded as the unequivocal Protestantism of the Church of England. Yet he justified his non-participating attendance as a young mission agent at a mass in Drogheda (at which he was attacked) on the ground that he could afterwards speak of the mass as a first-hand witness – a principle which could be used to countenance many prohibited experiments of the kind in various areas of life.

After a period in Blakeney's upper-class congregation, the area allocated to Hobson, first as curate and then as vicar, was a part of Toxteth Park regarded as socially and morally the most degenerate in south-east Liverpool. Five attended his first service in a cellar in this uncultivated field, which contained many Roman Catholics and Nonconformists, as well as nominal Anglicans, among its thousands. When he retired 33 years later, a church, vicarage and three halls had long been built; there were 811 communicants, and many agencies in the congregation engaged in religious and social work in the community. The community itself, formerly notorious for immorality, crime and disease, was extensively transformed – attributed by himself and others largely to God's blessing on his persistent visitation of the parish and his plain biblical preaching and teaching in church, hall and home.

There are profitable comments on Scripture interspersed throughout the book. Theologically he was of a mind with J C Ryle, who was his bishop from 1880 to 1900 and his personal friend, and so he would probably be described as a "moderate Calvinist". There is much evidence of personal and pastoral diligence beyond his physical strength which inspires and rebukes. Interest is sustained by a flow of anecdotes which mostly illustrate the effects of his ministry.

The book, however, illustrates how much a person is affected by his ecclesiastical upbringing and how necessary it therefore is that this be regulated by Scripture. He had a high regard for Confirmation and evening communions. While repudiating the “altar”, he refers to the “holy table”. Some of the agencies and activities connected with the church would not commend themselves to us as appropriate. While there is no reason to doubt the suggestion that candidates for Church privileges were examined more thoroughly than usual in the Anglican Church as to their experience of the new birth, professions of conversion appear to have been rather hastily accepted. It is somewhat surprising that, after hesitation in joining in inviting Moody and Sankey to Liverpool, he regarded their visit as a great help to the cause of God in the parish and “gathered from those gifted and honoured servants of the Most High many useful hints as to both matter and manner in preaching to win souls”.

(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright

Protestant View

Roman Catholic Reports on Child Abuse

Two significant reports about child sexual abuse by priests were released in February by the Roman Catholic Church, one by the Vatican and the other in the USA.

USA Report: This survey was compiled by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and overseen by the National Review Board – a lay panel formed by the bishops at the height of the abuse crisis. The board rebuked the bishops for failing to stop widespread sexual abuse by priests over the last half-century, calling their performance “shameful to the church”.

The main finding is that about 4% of priests – a much greater proportion than previous estimates suggested – have been accused of molesting children across the USA since 1950. There were 10 667 abuse claims over those 52 years. More than 80% of the alleged victims were male and over half said they were between 11 and 14 when they were assaulted. Victims’ representatives are sceptical about even these figures because they are based on self-reporting by bishops. “To allow them to count the numbers just doesn’t make any sense”, said one advocate. The report also revealed that, up to 2002, abuse claims have cost the Roman Catholic Church in the USA \$533.4 million – and many multi-million-dollar settlements have been made since then.

Blame for the abuse is laid on, among other things, the bishops’ emphasis on avoiding scandal. Their failure to stop predators, says the report, let the “smoke of Satan” into the church. The molesting of children by priests is in

fact exceedingly satanic and confirms that Rome is indeed “the masterpiece of Satan”.

Vatican Report: This document is actually the proceedings of a conference at which eight psychiatric experts spoke on the topic of sexual abuse. Vatican officials insisted that it should not be considered a set of official rules for how to think about, and respond to, sexual abuse by priests. The report found fault with the American bishops’ zero-tolerance policy of June 2002 – the removal from public duties of any Roman Catholic priest who had abused a child. It is strange that the report portrays this policy as an overreaction to a public outcry, but it is in character with Rome’s past practice of being more protective of her priests than of their victims.

Many Roman Catholic critics of the Church’s handling of sexually-abusive priests have promoted the zero-tolerance policy as the only way to make sure that bishops do not continue to cover up the crimes of priests. It is little wonder then that David Clohessy, one of these critics, called the report “a terribly depressing development”. Can one really expect anything better?

The Vatican report is just a damage-limitation exercise – and a not very effective one at that. In any case, the superstructure of Romanism is unsound because it is built on a crumbling mixture of papal heresies and traditions, mixed with some Scripture – and not on the secure foundation, pure Scripture. Although Rome may recover to some extent from this scandal, it can only continue to worsen morally. NMR

Papal Primacy and the Church of England

A joint Roman Catholic and Anglican report, *The Gift of Authority*, argues that the Pope should be recognised as the “universal primate” in the Church of England. The report was discussed at its General Synod in February, and the Church was asked to take its biggest step, since Henry VIII broke from Rome over 450 years ago, towards accepting the primacy of the Pope and the concept of infallibility.

Before the Synod meeting, Rev David Phillips, the general secretary of the Church Society and a Synod member, said, “We would reject universal primacy. There is no way we would want to be linked to the Roman Catholic Church. On some issues, its teaching is even worse now than it was at the Reformation.” True indeed!

In the event, the Synod resisted the Report’s proposals, arguing that it “lacked clarity and detail”. At the same time, attempts by Evangelicals to emphasise their opposition to Roman Catholic teaching about the Virgin Mary were thwarted. Their opponents in Synod criticised their “dark talk” of papal plots and their “old war cries” about popery. And the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that, although papal infallibility raised grave misgivings,

these could dissolve if it were seen as a trustworthy way of discerning and settling disputes, rather than one man's power to assert doctrine.

The Synod debate was largely academic because unity talks had already been disrupted as a result of the Anglican decision to ordain women and their divisions over homosexuality. However, the Evangelicals will be gratified that there has been a little veering away from Rome at present. *NMR*

Notes and Comments

Doing Evil That Good May Come

Much publicity has been given to a film purporting to portray the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, which has been widely acclaimed in the USA by professed Evangelicals, with churches booking all the seats in some cinemas and doing all they can to fill them. One pastor of a charismatic church was quoted in *The Scotsman* (7 February 2004): "Churches used to communicate by having a little lecture time on Sunday morning. People don't interact that way any more. Here's a chance for us to use a modern-day technique to communicate the truth of the Bible." The film was due to arrive in the UK in March, though not, initially at least, with such enthusiastic support.

Criticisms of this film have mainly concentrated on its alleged sadism and anti-Semitism. In the USA under 17s were not to be admitted unless accompanied by an adult, because of the extreme violence depicted. It is significant that the Holy Scriptures are extremely restrained in their accounts of the physical sufferings of our Lord. This is in keeping with the fact that "the soul of His sufferings was the sufferings of His soul". While the sufferings inflicted on Him by men were a necessary and bitter ingredient of the cup He had to drink, it was His willing submission to the righteous wrath of God He bore in the place of His people that was the major element in His atoning sacrifice. It is the power of truth proclaimed by word in the gospel, and not human imagination, that is used by the Holy Spirit to bring sinners savingly to "behold the Lamb of God".

Roman Catholicism's mythology and emphasis on the visual drama of the mass rather than biblical truth is the basis of the view of Christ's passion informing this production by a conservative Roman Catholic intent on promoting his religion. Whether or not charges of anti-Semitism are justified in this case, they seem to be advanced by those to whom all religions are equally valid or invalid, or those who regard Christianity as essentially anti-Semitic, or those who would be opposed to laying the guilt of our Lord's death at anyone's door – who would oppose the suggestion that anyone should

repent of this sin against God and embrace the previously-rejected Saviour.

Apart from the general fact that the fictional film industry has been a major expression of, and contributor to, the moral corruption of societies, the particular and fundamental objection to this film is that any attempt to present an image of the Lord Jesus Christ is blasphemous. Included in the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment is “the making of any representation of God, of all or any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever” (*Larger Catechism* 109; Deut 4, Rom 1). Christ, “being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever” (*Shorter Catechism* 21). It is impossible to make an artistic representation of the One in whose face and person the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is given. It is no doubt to caution against such attempts being made that the Scriptures provide no materials which could facilitate the endeavour.

The idea that the cause of the gospel can be furthered by the use of a blasphemous medium to present a Jesus who is not the Christ of God only illustrates how far removed from the gospel of the Bible and of the Reformation are so many who claim to be Evangelicals. How far removed such a stance is from that of the inspired apostle: “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:2-5). HMC

Profaning the Sabbath

Public violations of the Fourth Commandment have become so common that those who “call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable” (Is 58:13), often feel overwhelmed with the apparent hopelessness of attempting to resist the tide, especially perhaps in the larger urban centres of population. However, there are still Sabbath-breaking and God-defying activities which stand out among others for their sheer audacity. One such is the intention to move the September open-air concert and fireworks display which mark the end of the summer Festival season in Edinburgh from the Saturday to the Sabbath evening. It is estimated that over a quarter of a million people attend this event, and concerns have been expressed at the hundreds of underage teenagers who have been found with drink in recent years. There are fears of drink-related offences making families reluctant to attend.

Brian McMaster, the Director of the International Festival, hopes that the change will make the event “more family-friendly” and indicates that they

will be looking at introducing further events on the Sabbath next year as part of the evolution of the Festival. Assistant Chief Constable Ian Dickinson welcomes the change as a means of promoting less congestion in the city centre and a safer environment for families. Ray Macfarlane, head of Community Investment at the Bank of Scotland, the sponsor of this event, is happy to support the change of day, regarding it as important that the concert continues to develop and extend its appeal to the widest possible audience. Another reason given is the desire to wait until the conclusion of a multicultural festival which ends that day. Those involved in tourism also contemplate with pleasure the financial gain expected from inducing more visitors to spend another day in the city.

There is no regard whatsoever to the fact that such a move profanes the Sabbath Day and is an affront to God. The Festival season itself, according to the published programmes and reports, is for many an opportunity to parade and promote unashamed immorality in the name of culture and art. To bring it to a conclusion with such publicly-sponsored contempt for the Lord's Day is adding insult to injury. "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath" (Neh 13:17,18). It is a further indication of a rejection of the authority of God to whom civil rulers are accountable (Rom 13), an authority which requires recognition of the Sabbath Day: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark 4:27,28).

Ignorance and delusion have taken possession of those in authority; they cannot see that it is inevitable that, as they themselves reject the authority of God, His temporal judgement on them will involve an increase in that rejection of human authority and civilised behaviour which professedly causes them such concern. "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam 2:30). *HMC*

The Evil of Terrorism in Spain

How unspeakably solemn that almost 200 souls were in an instant ushered into the eternal world by terrorist bombs in Madrid! One cannot but feel prayerful sympathy for the many hundreds who mourn the deaths of loved ones; but we must also consider this horrendous event as a loud call to everyone to be prepared to meet their God. This brutal mass murder demonstrates once again the profound contempt for human life, and the fanatical hatred towards their fellow humans, harboured by terrorists, whether they belong to ETA (the violent Basque separatist group), or al-Qaeda, or the IRA.

All human beings, because of the Fall, are “hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3) until they are converted. Yet this is especially seen in its stark and chilling horror in such atrocities. It was also seen in the final message of two suicide bombers from the UK – recorded before they set out on a murderous mission to Tel Aviv – claiming that it was a great honour to kill Jews.

On the other hand, how ironic that certain other terrorists, and supporters of terrorist movements, condemn the Madrid atrocity as if they would never be associated with such an incident themselves! Such was the response to the bombing by Arnaldo Otegi of Batasuna, the political wing of ETA. Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, the IRA’s political wing, also condemned the bombing, something he would have shied away from a few years ago. Some days before the bombing Adams was actually mixing with leaders of Batasuna at Sinn Féin’s annual conference in Dublin. No doubt his condemnation of the bombing arises from the fact that should ETA be found to have perpetrated the attacks, his position could become delicate.

Adams, like Yasser Arafat, and with comparable plausibility, continues to deny complicity in terrorism, writes an Ulster minister. “Both cultivate the fiction of separation from the violent organizations that serve their respective goals – destruction of British rule in Ulster, and of Israel. A mural on an Ulster wall proclaims IRA solidarity with Arafat’s cause.”

It seems impossible to eradicate terrorism. Stanley Baldwin, then a senior Government minister, told the Commons in 1932: “I think it is as well for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through.” Very true – but there is a Power in heaven to whom we may turn. While we are to pray to God that those engaged in the fight against terrorism would have success in bringing the murderers and other men of violence to justice, our primary petitions must be, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth”. Only then will peace and security prevail in nations and between factions. *NMR*

Gambling Addiction Likely to Increase

Britain could face a sharp rise in gambling addiction if the Government’s plans to relax gaming laws are introduced, says a new report. The number of “problem gamblers” (defined as those whose families are “damaged” by their compulsion to bet) may increase from the current level of 400 000 adults to over 700 000 by 2010.

It is estimated that the nation will bet an extra £1 billion each year as a direct consequence of a Bill that would encourage the setting up of large casinos across the country. Tim Vine, a spokesman for the Department of

Culture, Media and Sport, which is responsible for the draft Bill, denied that the increase in tax revenue was the motivating factor behind the proposals. Nevertheless, the Government could gain an extra £400 million in tax annually by 2010 if the Bill were introduced, according to the report. Mr Vine stated that the current legislation dated back to the 1960s, “when gambling was perceived as an evil that had to be controlled”.

It is deplorable that the Government should propose such a Bill, but even more so that it should close its eyes to the fact that gambling is indeed a great evil, which should be banned. But successive governments have been “greedy of gain”. This was patently obvious when Premium Bonds were introduced in 1956, and also the National Lottery in 1993 (the objective of which is “to maximise revenue for Good Causes and *the Government*”).

Of course, gamblers themselves, by gambling, are guilty, among other sins, of idolatry. The basic motivation in gambling is covetousness, and this, Scripture tells us, is “idolatry”. At the same time, governments which use gambling to collect revenue must be branded as “greedy of gain”, and thus are a cause of much misery among those whom they govern. “He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house” (Prov 15:27). NMR

“Euthanasia on the Sly”

A Lancaster man, Mr Leslie Burke, who suffers from a degenerative disease, has begun a test case at the High Court against General Medical Council guidelines which allow doctors to withdraw hydration and artificial feeding from terminally-ill patients, thus leaving them to die. Mr Burke fears that, as his disease advances, doctors could eventually decide that the quality of his life is so poor that he should not be kept alive. “Physically, my body will deteriorate,” said Mr Burke, “but I will be mentally alert the whole time. I may not be able to communicate with the doctors and it takes two to three weeks to die when hydration and nutrition are withdrawn, and I will be acutely aware of that every single day and, physically, not be able to do anything about it.”

A physician wrote in a letter to the press, “To subject an apparently unresponsive or ‘locked-in’ human being, who may be aware of what is happening, to the agony of death by thirst is probably the most diabolical form of execution by torture imaginable”. Another correspondent states, “If someone deliberately withheld food and water from a dog or a horse until it died, they could be prosecuted, fined and possibly imprisoned. To allow a human being to die in this way is simply euthanasia kept within the letter of the law.”

The GMC guidelines must be revised. They have been in force since 1993, notes a journalist, “when the House of Lords ruled that Tony Bland, who was in a persistent vegetative state, could have artificial feeding withdrawn after

court approval. Astonishingly, for any patients suffering from *other* conditions, the GMC states food and drink can be withdrawn *without* the courts' consent. It is estimated that this affects thousands of dying patients a year."

Mr Burke may possibly win his case, considering that a mother, Mrs Carol Glass of Portsmouth, recently won a five-year legal battle against medical authorities who decided that her disabled son, hospitalised with a serious respiratory infection, should be removed from his life-support machine and injected with diamorphine in order to let him "die with dignity". She removed her son from their care and nursed him at home until he recovered. Although her claim that medical staff acted beyond their legal powers was rejected by both the High Court and the Court of Appeal, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled in her favour. While we deplore our national courts being under the authority of the European Court of Human Rights, it is a relief that the ruling will mean that hospitals who want to withhold or withdraw treatment against the wishes of a patient or their family must first seek a decision from our courts, unless there are "exceptional" circumstances". As Mrs Glass said, the actions of the doctors who were treating her son amounted to "euthanasia on the sly". It would be most encouraging if the High Court ruled in Mr Burke's favour.

Our society cannot be considered God-honouring – and it even loses its claim to be civilised – if we ignore Scripture principles about the sanctity of life, as summed up, for example, in the Larger Catechism. The Sixth Commandment requires all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life and that of others. We must accordingly comfort and succour the distressed, and protect and defend the innocent. The same Commandment forbids us to neglect, or withdraw, the necessary means of preserving life. NMR

Gender Recognition Bill Decision

The Government's Gender Recognition Bill (by which a man would be able to obtain a birth certificate stating he was born a woman, or vice versa, and thus allow, for example, two men to marry each other legally) has made its way undefeated through the House of Lords. It is now well on its way to becoming law, if God does not prevent it.

Some of our readers who have been prayerfully concerned about it have written to various peers. They are no doubt disappointed by the narrow defeat of Baroness O'Cathain's amendment to allow churches to exclude transsexuals from membership and office. No fewer than three of the five Bishops in the House voted against the amendment. Shame on them! As one peer said in a letter to us, "I am still reeling from the shock. You have no doubt heard that we lost by just five votes in a very big vote." Had those three bishops voted for the amendment, it would have gone through by one vote.

Lady O'Cathain is to be highly commended for the fight she put up against

the Bill. One report stated that “in the course of six separate debates in the House of Lords, she spoke for a total of around two-and-a-half hours, and tabled almost 30 different amendments. She argued from an explicitly Christian position, unashamedly quoting the Bible and arguing in defence of church teaching.”

Another peer, in reply to our letter, quoted the fourth Earl of Pembroke: “A parliament can do anything but make a man a woman, and a woman a man”. He then said about the Gender Recognition Bill: “Perhaps never before has there been a Bill which so challenges the very nature of reality”. More solemn still is the defiant challenge it makes to the Divine Lawgiver. How long will God suffer our blatant rebellion? “O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab 3:2). *NMR*

Church Information

Daviot, Stratherrick and Tomatin Communion

The Kirk Session of the Daviot, Stratherrick and Tomatin congregation have decided that there will be, God willing, two Communion each year instead of the present three. The Farr (Daviot) Communion will continue annually on the first Sabbath of June. However, the Stratherrick and Tomatin Communion will become bi-annual and move to the last Sabbath of August. This year there will be no Tomatin Communion, and the Stratherrick Communion will be held, God willing, on Sabbath, August 29.

(Rev) Allan J Macdonald, Moderator of Kirk Session

Urgent Need for Doctor at Mbumba Hospital

There is a vacancy at Mbumba Mission Hospital, Zimbabwe, for a doctor. Medically the work is varied, interesting and challenging, while spiritually the hospital is a handmaid to the gospel. To apply, or for further information, contact in the first instance the undersigned at: F P Manse, Isle of Raasay, by Kyle, Ross-shire, IV40 8PB.

(Rev) J R Tallach, Clerk of the Foreign Mission Committee

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, April 28, at 5.30 pm.

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, June 22, at 11 am.

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, Monday, June 7, at 2.30 pm.

General Building Fund

By appointment of Synod, this year's special collection on behalf of the General Building Fund is due to be taken in congregations during April.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Correction

There was a regrettable error on page 66 of the March issue of this Magazine. The expression on the thirteenth line from the bottom of the page should read *God-honouring*.

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: Anon, USA, "Where Needed", \$161; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 103, £40; The McCarter Family, Michigan, USA, \$500; Anon, USA, "Where Needed", \$218.

Dominions & Overseas Fund: A Friend, Newcastle, Isaiah 41:14, £40.

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, USA, for Odessa, \$200; Anon, 1 Chron 29:14, £15 000.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, USA, for Kenya Mission, \$515.75; Anon, for the work in Israel, £50 per Rev JLG; Anon, Lewis, for Kenya Mission, £40; Anon, USA, for Kenya Mission, \$376.

Legacy Reserve Fund: The estate of the late Mrs J Rankin, Gartocharn, £332 per McArthur Stanton, Solicitors; The estate of the late Mr I MacDonald, Glasgow, £16 900.97 per Frederick & Co, Solicitors; Anon, USA, for Broadstairs congregation, \$240.

Outreach Fund: Mr A P Mumford, Suffolk, £5.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Aberdeen: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, North Tolsta, £20; Anon, North Uist, £20 per Rev DS.

Breasclete: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £10 per RJM. *Congregational Funds:* Dr R Dickie, £45, £15.

Duirinish: *Eastern Europe Fund:* New Year's Day Collection, £215.

Gairloch: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £10; Anon, £250 per Rev AEWM. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Friend, for work among the Jews, £60.

Laide: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50 per RAC. *Congregational Funds:* Friend, Kishorn, £10; Friend, Holland, for manse refurbishment, £793.14 per Rev DAR; Anon, £50. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, Shieldaig, £25; Anon, Shieldaig, £25; Anon, Shieldaig, £75; Friend, Gairloch, £20; Friend, Ness, £50; Friend, Laide, for fuel, £20; R Kershaw, towards purchase of new vehicle, £50; Anon, towards printing of Mr Macfarlane's sermons, £20; Friend, Edinburgh, £25; Friend, Edinburgh, £50; Friend, £50 per Rev DAR; Anon, Aultbea, for Christian literature, £20; Friend, Aultbea, £20 per CR. *Sustentation Fund:* Friend, Kyle, £50 per Rev DAR. *Where Most Needed:* Friend, Gairloch, £50.

Larne: *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £20.

London: *Building Fund:* The estate of the late Mr D Ayres, £10 000.

North Uist: *Communion Expenses:* A Friend, Glasgow, £50. *Congregational Funds:* The executors of the late Joan MacCuish, £100.

Portree: *Congregational Funds:* Tunbridge Wells Friend, £40 per FM. *Door Collection:* MM, £10; MM, £10, MM, £10; Friend, £15; Friend, £10 per SYM; Anon, £20 per JG; Anon, £10. *Property Fund:* MM, £10 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund:* Friend, £35, Friend, £40; Friend, £35 per SYM; DM, £10 per FM. *TBS:* IGM, £35.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds:* Friend, Portree, for manse repairs, £20. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Friend Portree, for Kenya mission, £30. *Sustentation Fund:* Friend, Portree, £22. All per Rev JRT.

Staffin: *Bookroom Fund:* Anon, £20. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £15.

Stornoway: *Broadstairs Appeal:* Anon, £50. *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £20; Anon, £200; Anon, £10. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £500; Friend, North Tolsta, £20 per Rev JML. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £140.