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The Preacher's Authority

This is an age which, more than most, rejects authority. It is an age therefore when the preacher ought to be particularly clear about the source of his authority. "By what right does a mortal man rise upon the rostrum," asked American theologian W G T Shedd, "and make positive statements concerning the origin of the human race, the dark mysterious beginnings of human history, the purposes and plans of the infinite Mind, and conclude with announcing the alternatives of eternal salvation and eternal damnation?"¹

Shedd is in no doubt about the answer: the preacher's authority to make such positive statements stems from revelation – the revelation given in the Scriptures by Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth. "Apart from the light", adds Shedd, "poured upon [these subjects] by a communication from the Divine Mind, Confucius and Socrates have as much right to speculate and dogmatise as you or I." Apart from the Bible, the preacher has no right to stand in his pulpit and make definite statements on any subject, certainly not on the great matters which are unseen and eternal.

Among all the varying ideas about duty that swirl around the world today, how can any individual dare to insist on one particular set of commandments as absolutely authoritative for regulating human conduct – unless he can point to a higher authority than himself? How else can a preacher call on his hearers to repent and flee to Christ? It was because Paul had such a strong sense of the authority of the One who had sent him that he could speak with real conviction in Athens, where there was such anxiety "to tell or to hear some new thing". Paul knew that his message was true; it was firmly based on those Scriptures which had already been written. And he was absolutely convinced of the accuracy of the statement the Psalmist addressed to God about the Scriptures: "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of Thy righteous judgements endureth for ever" (Ps 119:160).

Today's preachers ought to have equal confidence in the truth of the Scriptures and their permanent relevance, in spite of the attitudes that have most influence on contemporary culture, which would allow Confucius,

¹*Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, p 19.

Socrates – or whatever religious teacher or philosopher one might choose – as much right to dogmatise as Moses or Isaiah or Paul or any other inspired writer. Through the Scriptures, God has spoken to the whole world, whether people are willing to listen or not. And the preacher must go on proclaiming the message of these Scriptures, for it is a message from God – one which is absolutely true, absolutely relevant and absolutely authoritative.

Paul also knew that his message was effective. “I am not ashamed”, he declared, “of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Many preachers may see much less of that power, especially in those generations in which the Holy Spirit is largely withheld. But they must not give in to any temptation to alter their message; any movement away from a fully-scriptural message must inevitably be in the direction of error. Even when the preacher sees little in the way of a blessing as he proclaims the truth, he should recognise that he has the authority of God behind him when he speaks. And those hearers who in unbelief reject his message will have to answer at last to God for their disobedience, unless they repent.

The Church must hold firmly to the whole counsel of God; what was true in the past is still true today. And the Church has a particular responsibility to pass on the testimony of Scripture to the next generation, for what is true today will still be true in the future. On this principle the Psalmist was resolved to pass on to the next generation what the people of his time had heard from their parents: “We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done” (Ps 78:4). What the Psalmist and his contemporaries were to pass on was not a merely traditional account of events in Israel’s history, but the inspired record of them – so they not only had a true account of them but a totally accurate revelation of their significance. Which is what we too have throughout God’s revelation in Scripture, and what we in our generation are to pass on to our children.

And why is it so necessary to pass on these teachings? “That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.” If they are not taught from the Bible, they will live ungodly lives, they will dishonour God and they will be a lost generation hurtling down the broad way which leads to everlasting destruction. No doubt this last sentence particularly has in it emphases which are widely rejected today because of their perceived intolerance. In many quarters, Christian claims to what has been described as a “monopoly of saving truth”

are deemed unacceptable. But, in spite of all this, preachers must continue to proclaim such statements of revelation about Jesus Christ as this: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Christianity does have a monopoly of saving truth.

The preachers of each generation who are called by God Himself pass away one by one to receive their reward in heaven. And the Church has the responsibility to instruct her students for the ministry faithfully in the truths revealed in Scripture, so that they may be prepared to proclaim these teachings to their hearers too. It was one of Paul's directions to Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).

Each generation of preachers has the same authority to proclaim God's Word to a lost world as the original apostles. Christ sent out His disciples with the commission: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt 28:18-20). Today's preachers are to go out conscious that in themselves they have no power to make their message effective to anyone; their only hope must be that the almighty Saviour will, working by the Holy Spirit, use His power to apply to the hearts of their hearers the truths they proclaim. They have no right to adapt their message to what the people of their time may want to hear. They must keep to the message that has been effective in the salvation of multitudes throughout history. *Whatsoever I have commanded you* must be their motto today and always. Everything they bring out from that treasure house of Scripture is truth. And whatever teachings are inconsistent with Scriptures are wrong – however venerable they may be, or however widely accepted. In a generation which is becoming ever more unwilling to accept the concept of truth in religion, this is something which must be emphasised. And to the extent that the preacher departs from the teachings of the Bible, he loses his right to demand a hearing from others, for his authority is compromised.

But the faithful preacher will keep to the teachings of the Bible – he will go on proclaiming the truth. Let him remember the authority which he has as an ambassador of Christ and go on making known the whole counsel of God, in particular the great doctrines of sin and salvation. And let him not fail to announce what Shedd described as the alternatives of eternal salvation and eternal damnation. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Is 3:10,11).

“Take Heed”¹

Synod Sermon by Rev H M Cartwright

Acts 20:28. *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*

These words need little introduction. The Apostle summoned the elders from Ephesus to meet him and this is part of his farewell address to them. He sets himself before them as an example of what a minister ought to be. He does so not in a proud spirit, but with characteristic humility: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). He was the least of the Apostles, not deserving to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the church of God. By the grace of God he was what he was. It could not be said of Paul, as the Lord said of the Pharisees of his day: Do what they tell you but not what they do. He was an example of the duties which he pressed upon the Ephesian elders.

As enabled we shall think *firstly* of the preciousness of the church: “the flock . . . the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood”; *secondly*, of the provision which God has made for the care of the church in the midst of danger: “the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . . take heed therefore . . . to all the flock”; *thirdly*, of the responsibility which lies upon those to whom the Lord has entrusted the care of His church: “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood”.

1. The preciousness of the church. These words are applied to the church at Ephesus. The distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church is very important, and must be maintained; but how often in the Epistles the church, as we see it in the world, is addressed in terms which are applicable, in their deepest sense, only to the church as it is before God – the invisible church. We see that in the case of Corinth. It was a mixed church, needing much discipline to be applied, yet the Apostle Paul wrote “unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor 1:2). The elders of the visible church in Ephesus are addressed, and yet they are spoken to as elders of the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.

¹ “The church of God” is a term which brings before us the fact that the
The sermon preached by the retiring moderator at the opening of this year’s Synod.

church owes its origin to God, belongs to God and exists in a unique manner for the manifestation of God’s glory. It is not a human institution. People did not sit down and devise a constitution for the church. It is God who elected His people, God who redeemed them, God who regenerated them and God who united them to the Saviour. It is God’s church. It is also described as “the flock”. God’s church is not a collection of individual persons. It is a unity into which lost and scattered sinners have been gathered by the grace of God. They are members one of another. The flock is a unit. The Lord’s people are to provoke one another to love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is (Heb 10:24,25), because the church of God is a flock. It is a body to which the individuals belong.

We notice particularly that Paul speaks of it as “the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood”. What a wonderful description of the church of God! It is His purchased possession, His peculiar people, a people whom He has redeemed and purchased for Himself: “not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18,19). The Lord’s people, the church of God, required redemption in their lost and ruined state. God could not inhabit this church or bring it into fellowship with Himself and into the enjoyment of His favour, without atonement being made for sin and satisfaction being given to justice. He said to Israel: “I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee” (Is 43:3), but that was just a shadow of what He was to give for the redemption of His people: “for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). That is the purchase price of the church of Christ – the blood of Christ – and the wonder of it is in this form of expression: “the church of *God* which He hath purchased with *His own* blood.

What a wonderful revelation is here of what is made so clear elsewhere in Scripture: the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. Here is a person who is God over all and blessed for ever, the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, upholding all things by the word of His power, the eternal Son of God. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. That is true of the Redeemer, yet He had a true humanity, brought into union with His Divine Person. It was human blood that was shed, blood that flowed through the veins of human beings in this world; but it was the blood of the man who is God’s fellow, it was the blood of a Divine Person, it was the blood, not of God as God, but of a person who is God. That is the glory of it! God could not suffer. God could not die. God is a Spirit.

We must remember that today, when it is becoming so common in some circles to speak of a suffering God. We have to remember that the reason for

the Incarnation was that there might be a person with divine being and divine glory who could yet take the place of sinners, and die for them. That is what Christ did on the cross of Calvary. This is the blood of a Divine Person, the blood that flowed from the human nature of one who is Himself the eternal God. O how precious is the doctrine of the person of Christ as it is set before us in our Shorter Catechism! If people would keep in mind what the Shorter Catechism has to say of the Redeemer, they would be kept from many of the errors concerning His person which abound in our day.

The preciousness of Christ is reflected in the preciousness of the church. The church has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. How precious the church is to God and how precious it should be to us – there is nothing like it in all creation! Wonders are being discovered by scientists in the creation of God; more wonders may be discovered yet; and there is much more in the works of creation and providence than people will ever discover. But all this is as nothing compared to the wonder of God having a people, chosen out of this lost race, whom He has redeemed by the blood of His Son and brought together in this body of elect, redeemed, regenerate souls who will inhabit glory. The preciousness of the church of Christ, the church of God!

2. The provision which God has made for the care of His church in the midst of danger. It is obvious, even from what the Apostle says here, that the church needs care because it is in danger from without and from within. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (vv 29,30). Dangers from outside and inside have characterised the church of Christ in every generation. We cannot afford to think that this generation is any different. The external dangers were not from persecution or from the opposition of the world. When the Apostle spoke of perilous times coming he spoke of the moral and spiritual state of society. The danger to the church's well-being does not come from the powers of persecuting foes but from the intrusion of error, as we see from church history. We see it in the nineteenth century in the history of the Free Church of Scotland. Men got into the ministry and professorships of the Church through subscribing a Confession in which they had no confidence and used their position to put poison into the Church's system. They came in as wolves in sheep's clothing. There has also always been danger from within, from unexpected sources: men rising up and creating factions, sometimes by perverting the truth, in order to draw people after themselves.

There are dangers from outside and from inside. The Lord has provided means for safeguarding the church, but the ultimate care of the church is in

the hands of the Lord Himself. We have every reason to be thankful that what preserves the church of Christ – the church of God “which He has purchased with His own blood” – is the covenant faithfulness of God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, acting in accordance with the terms of the everlasting covenant. This is the assurance: “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19). God’s choice of His people, God’s knowledge of them, God’s sanctifying work in them, preserves them. But the Lord uses means, and one of the means He uses is the provision of those who are described here as elders and overseers in the church of Christ.

Paul sent to Ephesus and called the “elders”, and the word is just the word which, translated literally, is “presbyters” or “presbytery”. He called for the presbytery of Ephesus to come and meet him and no doubt that presbytery, like every other presbytery, consisted of those who ruled in the church’s affairs and also those who ruled and were responsible, in addition, for labouring in word and in doctrine: those we call elders and those we call ministers. The minister’s responsibility is particularly that of preaching the Word of God, sowing the seed of the gospel, and giving himself to prayer and to meditating upon these things. The work of the elder is principally to watch for the fruits of the ministry. The Second Book of Discipline, one of the Reformation documents, makes that point particularly. The ministers, the pastors and doctors (or teachers), are to give themselves to sowing the seed of the gospel and the elders are to be looking for the fruits of the ministry. They are more among the people and are to be watching and caring for the effects upon the congregation of the Word preached.

God has provided elders and overseers (or bishops). These are not different people. A presbyter and bishop are the same. One has a Jewish background, the other a Greek. One emphasises age, experience and gravity; the other the responsibility of overseeing, watching over, the church of Christ. God has made this provision of overseers in His church, to feed His flock and to watch over the interests of Christ’s cause. He has given the body of presbyters a flock of their own over which to watch. He says, “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”. The Pope claims to be a universal shepherd – one of his many delusions and false claims. The gospel way is to make presbyters responsible for a number of people that they can look after – not looking after all the ends of the earth, but the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers.

This provision was made by the Holy Spirit – “the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”. It is in the Word of God inspired by His Spirit we discover

this office. It is God the Holy Spirit who puts men properly into this office. He gives His people a mind to call them to it. He gives those who were in the office before them a mind to receive them and to admit them. He gives themselves an inclination and qualification for that work. It is solemn to think that those who are rightly elders and overseers in the church of Christ were put in that position by the Holy Spirit of God, not by themselves and not by men, whatever instrumentality the Holy Spirit uses. God has given overseers. He has given them their flock. He has put them in that position. He has given them the responsibility of caring for the flock amongst whom they labour.

Those whom God has appointed to oversee His flock must recognise that the flock requires their full attention, that they have to give all diligence to feeding, shepherding, watching over its interests. That is true particularly of those who labour in the word and doctrine, being set apart from other occupations for this work. The Apostles were not standing on their dignity when they said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables" (Acts 6:2). They introduced deacons into the church to look after the temporal interests of the Lord's people, not because they thought that was beneath them but that they might devote themselves entirely to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Paul himself said, "I will very gladly spend and be spent" (2 Cor 12:15). He gave all the energy he had, all his effort, to the work of the ministry. Ministers must be careful, not only to confine themselves to the work of the church, but also to concentrate upon the work of the ministry and not be distracted by other ecclesiastical matters. The Lord calls His overseers to devote themselves to the work of caring for the flock of God.

3. The responsibility which lies upon those to whom the Lord has entrusted the care of His church: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood". We must feed the flock of God, shepherd it, care for its interests, endeavour by the grace of God to provide it with spiritual food and to guide and guard it. That is the aim of preaching, church discipline and church government, although we often forget it. These things do not exist for themselves but for the care of the flock, the well-being of the church of Christ.

We are given the responsibility to feed the flock, to take heed to *all* the flock. We are conscious of how far short we come in the matter, but overseers must endeavour to have regard to all kinds and conditions of people who come under the sound of the gospel. John had something to say to little children, fathers and young men. Peter was to feed the lambs and the sheep. We must have regard not only to the man with the golden ring and goodly

apparel, but also to the man in vile raiment. The gospel ministry must take heed to all the flock. The elders must take an interest in all the people. The office-bearers of Christ’s church must care for, feed and look after not just those easier to deal with but all the flock. We must be alert to the danger of the flock, concerned about its well-being and devoted to doing all within our power, by God’s grace, in its interests.

We have a particular responsibility to take heed to ourselves. We must do so because the salvation of our own soul must have a significant place in our concerns. At times we who are ministers are afraid of being like signposts by the roadside pointing others to a heaven we will never reach ourselves – perhaps even helping others heavenwards but lost ourselves at last. Being ministers, elders, deacons or members in the church of God on earth does not exclude us from the requirement urged upon Nicodemus by the Saviour: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). There are those who will reach the judgement seat of Christ and say, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? (and the present equivalent of that is: “Have we not preached Thy gospel?”) and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?” And what will the Lord say to them? “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt 7:22,23). We pointed others to a Christ to whom we did not come ourselves; we emphasised the need of a regeneration we had never experienced; we called people to a faith we did not have, to a repentance to which we were strangers. O what a deep place in hell will be occupied by Christless preachers, elders, deacons and church members!

Take heed unto yourselves, even when you are born again, are in Christ and on the way to heaven, because the same grace that brings salvation and teaches others, teaches you also to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. A professionalism can creep into our Christianity when we are in office in Christ’s church. We must beware lest we read the Word of God, pray and listen to the sermons of others, not as poor sinners who need a Saviour, but in a professional manner. We must take heed to ourselves for the sake of the salvation of our own soul and dread to think of coming to eternity and finding, after having preached to others, that we ourselves are cast away.

We also must take heed to ourselves, for the sake of the flock, with regard to how we are performing our duties as office-bearers in the church of Christ. There are times when questions put to us as we entered into the work of the ministry really shake us, when we consider how it has been with us since these days: “Are not zeal for the honour of God, love to Jesus Christ and desire of saving souls, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the

function of the holy ministry, and not worldly designs and interests? Do you engage, in the strength and grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, to rule well your own family, to live a holy and circumspect life, and faithfully, diligently and cheerfully to discharge all the parts of the ministerial work, to the edification of the body of Christ? Do you accept of and close with the call to be Pastor of this congregation and promise, through grace, to perform all the duties of a faithful minister of the gospel among this people?" Does that not make you shudder at times? Perhaps we did not realise the gravity of it when we first took these vows, but as eternity gets nearer to us, does it not become a more solemn matter? Is not the well-being of the flock dependent, humanly speaking – instrumentally speaking – upon the faithfulness of ministers, elders and deacons to the vows they have taken? We must have regard to how things are with ourselves in the discharge of our duties for the sake of the well-being of the flock.

These words also exhort us to care for one another: "take heed to yourselves". I cannot remember if it was Richard Baxter, who has a whole book on this verse, or someone else, who asked, "Who is going to take care of the souls of the pastors?" Who is going to speak faithfully to the office-bearers of the church regarding spiritual matters? They must love one another, speak to one another and care for one another. That is one of the fundamental reasons for the Biblical form of church government being Presbyterian. Not diocesan bishops with others under them, or independent congregations with office-bearers quite apart from the rest of the church, but presbytery – the gathering of office-bearers locally, regionally and nationally – is the Biblical form of church government.

But Presbyterianism can become something very different from what was intended if presbyters are not governed by concern for the glory of God, first of all, and the well-being of the cause of Christ and of one another. Old presbytery records show that it was common in the early Free Church for ministers to meet from time to time to discuss any matter affecting any one of them before it would develop into something harmful to the church of Christ. There must be love among the brethren before that can take place. But a Presbyterianism without love and a Presbyterianism where the presbyters do not care for one another is not the Presbyterianism of the Bible. Paul is saying that this spirit of concern for each other's well-being, personally and in connection with the cause of Christ, should characterise the Lord's overseers. Obviously it is for the well-being of the Church of God that those who rule it should be amicable, loving, and faithful in their dealings with one another.

Taking heed to ourselves is necessary because the office-bearers of the

Church are in the front line, the firing line, of Satan’s attack. If Satan can cause a minister, elder or deacon to fall, it brings much more reproach upon the cause of Christ than the fall of several in the background of the church’s life. Therefore, because we have the same sins and temptations and weaknesses as others, and the devil’s added interest in our fall, we must take heed to ourselves. Satan had his eye on the disciples and particularly on Peter, who was the most talkative and most prominent of them all. “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee” (Luke 22:31,32). You are in the front line of attack; “take heed therefore unto yourselves”.

We may notice a few matters in conclusion. Would those of you who are still strangers to Christ not desire to have a place in the church of God, in the flock “which He hath purchased with His own blood”? The gospel is calling sinners into fellowship with Christ and, through Him, into fellowship with the people of God. Christless sinners may be interested enough to come to the opening of the Synod, and we would not let pass the opportunity of reminding them that each of them should ask the question: Would it not be a good thing for me if I were to seek a place amongst the people of God and be numbered amongst those who are washed in His blood?

If we are in the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood, how we should praise and adore Him for His wonderful grace! That is what makes the difference between us and those who are out on the mountains of vanity, living Godless, hopeless lives. If we are in the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood, the praise belongs entirely to Him!

How we should value the provision God has made for feeding His church and taking care of its interests in this world! How we should value the offices He has established in the church: the ministry of the gospel and the ruling eldership! Paul exhorted the Hebrews: “Remember them which have rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. . . . Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:7,17). After these exhortations the Apostle said, “Pray for us” (Heb 13:18). How often do you pray for the ministers, elders and deacons from whom you are expecting to get spiritual good? Pray for us! We need prayer. The Apostle was not too dignified to ask the Hebrews to pray for him.

If the Lord has put us in office in His church, we should be encouraged by the fact that it is His doing; it is His church, and behind us are the infinite

resources of God. We may be so insignificant that we are not even counted by the world as existing, but “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). And “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). It is a work too high and too hard for any man to perform, but it is God’s ordinance, and God’s grace and strength are sufficient.

Is not this a call to humble ourselves in God’s presence? Probably most have heard of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1596. The Church of Scotland was regarded as a model for Reformed Churches around the world. There was a faithful ministry, church discipline and church government. No doubt many godly men were ministers and elders in the church, but they had a list of reasons drawn up for humbling themselves before God. This included their personal lifestyle, the state of their souls and the content of their preaching. Such matters humbled them. They had a special session of Assembly with sermon and prayers between 9.00 am and 1.00 pm. John Davidson of Prestonpans preached, and we are told that there was such brokenness of heart among the 400 commissioners that for a time the place was full of the sobbing of strong men. They were not weak men in these days. They would not survive if they were. They were not sentimental Christians. The place reverberated with the sobbing of strong men. In the Presbyteries and Synods of the following year this was repeated. No doubt the Lord was preparing them for the sufferings into which most of them were soon to come. Going by the hardness of our own heart, we feel that this would be the most desirable effect of considering the exhortation given to us here. If it came home to us with the power of the Holy Spirit, it would bring us to repentance and humble us in God’s presence.

It would be a good Synod if we entered upon its business humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God – not on account of the sins of the nation or the other churches of the land, but on account of the sins of our own hearts and of the body to which we are honoured to belong and which we believe has a faithful testimony to the cause of Christ which is not so fully found in any other denomination in the land. We need to hear the call: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”. That is our first and foremost responsibility and we desire that the Lord’s praying people would join with us in seeking such an application of the Truth to our own souls at this time.

Holiness is the most brilliant pearl in the King of heaven’s crown: “glorious in holiness” (Ex 15:11). God’s power makes Him mighty; His mercy makes Him lovely; but His holiness makes Him glorious. The holiness of God is the intrinsic purity of His nature and His abhorrence of sin. A godly man bears some kind of analogy with God in this.

Thomas Watson

Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig¹

6. Closing Years

Rev J L Goldby

Mr Macdonald was now growing old and living in the only house that could be obtained for him. This was on the other side of Loch Shieldaig, which he crossed by boat to preach at the open-air site where he had been ordained in 1872. Once again he set about the task of collecting money for a new church. There was no difficulty this time with the landowner. The new proprietor, Mr Murray, and his wife were very kind and readily agreed to provide a suitable site for manse and church. Throughout the years of trial there had been a steady number of converts and, with the exception of Torridon, the people of the district adhered to Mr Macdonald's stand and followed him into the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

A few years later, in September 1904, an article appeared in *The Scotsman* entitled "The Tender Mercies of the Majority". The following extracts illustrate the situation faced by Mr Macfarlane and Mr Macdonald: "The two ministers with their students and congregations departed not a jot or tittle from the old foundations of the Free Church. Their only purpose was to move not, to change not, but only to stand still in the old paths. Their congregations were poor folk, crofters and fishermen, possessing none of the riches of this world. The majority, on whose lips are the words of brotherly kindness and equity, drove from their homes two aged ministers whose only fault was that they refused to accept an Act which the Church had no legal right to pass, deprived them of their livings, and left them to starve so far as the majority were concerned. That was the tender mercy of the majority a decade ago."

"On a beautiful September day ten years ago, the writer happened to be in the Bay of Shieldaig on board the *Clansman*. As soon as the anchor was dropped, a procession of large fishing boats came out from the shore. In the stern of one of them sat a white-haired patriarchal minister, whom the men in the boat seemed to address with great reverence. He was the Rev Donald Macdonald, the minister evicted from his church for too faithful an adherence to the Church's standards; and the assembled boats were there to convey to the shore the wood, the lime and other materials wherewith his people were to build him a new church. Leaning over the taffrail, the tourists, who crowded

¹The final article in a series, the larger part of which was presented to the 2002 Theological Conference. The previous article dealt with the separation of 1893, when Mr Macdonald was one of those who felt it necessary to leave the Free Church of Scotland after the passing of the Declaratory Act and to form the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

the steamer, asked wonderingly what the fleet of boats led by the white-haired minister meant; and they smiled indulgently when they were told that these men were come to carry ashore materials wherewith to build another church for conscience' sake.

“The writer has never forgotten the impression made on him by that scene. It focused for him the great gulf which is fixed between those smiling seekers of pleasure leaning over the taffrail of the steamer, and those blue-eyed dwellers in the west whose engrossing thought is the Eternal, and for whom the sum of all purpose is: ‘Come, let us build a tabernacle, where we will preserve the things that are left us and are ready to perish’. The poorly-clad men, the open boats, the earnest faces, the old minister bent with years, the great hills rising above, the sunshine flooding the bay . . . the unloading of the materials for a new tabernacle in the desert – that scene always rises before the eyes of the writer when he reads the unctuous phrases in which the leaders of ecclesiastical majorities speak of brotherly love and equity.”

The new Shieldaig church was opened on 26 February 1896, and the weather was all that could be desired. The church was crowded with about 700 persons. Rev J R Mackay, Gairloch, preached from Hebrews 1:10-12. Mr Macdonald spoke, making reference to the kindness which he had experienced since the Free Church put him out of his church and manse. He praised the endeavours of the congregation, the kindness of the proprietor and the generosity of the public, high and low.²

It has been estimated that something of the order of 20 000 people joined the Free Presbyterian Church. After the separation, Mr Macdonald was busier than ever in his spiritual duties. He assisted at the first Moy/Tomatin communion held under the auspices of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in a congregation where all the members had joined this Church. The other ministers assisting were Revs D Macfarlane, J R Mackay and A Macrae. Many strangers were present; 800 people attended the Gaelic service on the Sabbath morning and 200 the English. The weather was beautiful and all the services were held in the open air. It was a season of refreshing after the trying times of the preceding months and years, with a bright new prospect opening up before them.

In 1900 Mr Macdonald visited most of our congregations in the north, but after returning home in July his health began to deteriorate. His work was coming to a close. A letter written from Shieldaig, dated 28 March 1901, reveals the state of his mind in the evening of his days. The troubles which beset him in the trying times through which he lived did not dry up the springs of grace within, coming as they did from a well of water springing up unto

²See *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 1, p 38.

everlasting life. He wrote to a friend in Harris: "I have no doubt but you have been told that I am an invalid, and not able, on account of bodily weakness, to go much out of the house, or to preach. My elder, Finlay Macdonald, officiates for me. . . . Jesus Christ is extraordinarily kind to me, liberal and attentive. His smiles and company make one very happy and forgetful of reverses." After asking about various friends and the cause of Christ, he continued: "O how loving Christ is to me in my sickness! How tender, affectionate and liberal! How sweet His kisses are! He likes to entertain me with the kisses of His love. He does not leave me sorrowful with short visits. He allows beams of His holy face to dart into my heart, to set my whole heart in a ferment of love."

Mr Macdonald's death took place on 20 August 1901. His remains were taken by boat to Applecross on a calm sea, without a breath of wind. It was a fitting providence: the storm was changed into a calm at God's command and will (Ps 107:29). The boat, rowed all the way from Shildaig, arrived in Applecross at midnight and the remains were interred in the graveyard there.

The Synod tribute says of him: "His whole soul – from the time in which he was made willing in the day of the power of the Holy Ghost to look to Christ by faith – was almost constantly absorbed in contemplating the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as that love is manifested in the scheme of redemption. This continued until the termination of his life. This was his daily, yea, hourly song in the house of his pilgrimage. From the dawn of this light of life upon his soul in early youth until his old age, it continued to be the sum and substance of his message to his fellow sinners."

Mr Macfarlane preached his funeral sermon in Shildaig the Sabbath after his death. He said that "when Mr Macdonald received from the Lord, he would give to the people, and living souls would be fed, refreshed and comforted. . . . There is no doubt he preached on some texts over and over again, but the sermons were almost invariably delivered with new unction. . . . such was his nearness to Him who is the fountain of life. Prayer was his element; he prayed without ceasing. . . . I never saw a man who prayed as much as he did. He kept up communion with the Lord by prayer and meditation. The enjoyment of God was all in all to him. He was a most spiritually-minded man and he, like Enoch, "walked with God". This nearness to, and dependence upon, Christ was his strength, carrying him through trials with comfort.

Mr Macfarlane concluded his address with a word to the congregation: "The Lord favoured you much by giving you such a godly pastor as Mr Macdonald. Much was given you and much shall be required of you. He laboured long among you, preached the gospel to you in love and faithfulness, and earnestly and sincerely sought your salvation. Though dead, he yet

speaketh. Pray that the word spoken to you may be blessed to you. If you die in your sins after all you have heard from the lips that are now closed in death, he will rise up in judgement against you at the last day and add his amen to your everlasting condemnation. . . . Be faithful unto death and you shall receive a crown of life.”

Adoption (2)¹

Thomas Boston

Shorter Catechism Answer 34: *Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.*

Those that make up that number into which we are received by adoption are: our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the holy angels, and the saints in heaven and earth (Heb 2:11, Eph 3:15). “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22,23).

All these are the sons of God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, by eternal generation: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Ps 2:7). “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). The holy angels are the sons of God, by creation in His image, which is confirmed on them: “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7); compared with: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph 1:10). The saints are the sons and daughters of God, by spiritual marriage with Christ, by adoption, and by regeneration: (Ps 45:10, and Eph 1:5). “Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest” (1 John 3:9,10). And by adoption we are made sons of God too (Eph 1:6, Gal 4:4,5).

The peculiar dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ among that number is that He is the first-born, the eldest brother (Rom 8:29, Col 1:18). The pre-eminence He has among His brethren, as He is the first-born, is that His is the dominion and headship of the family, the priesthood, the blessing, and the

¹The final part of Boston's explanation of Question 34 in *A Brief Explication of the First Part of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, in Boston's *Works*, vol 7.

double portion: Christ was faithful “as a Son over His own house” (Heb 3:6). “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren; that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever. . . . Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Ps 45:2,7).

The blessing is peculiarly His, though all His brethren are blessed too, inasmuch as He is the prime receptacle of the blessing, from whence it is conveyed unto His brethren, who are blessed only in Him: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shall be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2,3); compared with: “And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:9,10), compared with, “That, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph 1:10).

The advantage we have by the dignity of sonship to God is that thereby we have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God: “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 2:7). The privileges of the sons of God are: access to Him as a Father, His fatherly pity, protection, provision and correction, and the eternal inheritance: in Christ Jesus our Lord “we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (Eph 3:12), compared with: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name” (Matt 6:9). “Like as a father pitieth his children; so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Ps 103:13). “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge” (Prov 14:26). “Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:30-

32). “Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb 12:6, and Rom 8:17).

Our right to these privileges by adoption is not our only right to them. We have another right to them also by our justification: “The just shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). “That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:1,2). The difference between these two rights to these privileges lies here: that our right to them by justification is our fundamental right, while our right to them by adoption is an honorary right of inheritance superadded thereto: “By the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. . . . By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:18,19). “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:12).

The earnest of the eternal inheritance, which God gives to His adopted children till they come to the full possession of it, is the spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15, compared with Eph 1:13,14). The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of His Son, sealing them with the Son’s image and working in them a son-like disposition and affection towards God: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6), compared with, “In whom [Christ] ye trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory (Eph 1:13,14), and, “But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). And that is done, on and in them, in their sanctification: “Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God: who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:21,22). “Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor 3:3, and v 18).

Carnal men may say prayers, but they cannot pray. It is natural for man to dread wrath, but it is supernatural in man to dread holiness. We know nothing of life until we are born, so we know nothing of life until we are born again. There will be no cry to be saved till the beginning of salvation has created that cry in our hearts.

Rowland Hill

The Reaper's Wages¹

J C Ryle

We have, for one thing, in these verses, *an instructive pattern of zeal for the good of others*. We read that our Lord Jesus Christ declares, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work". To do good was not merely duty and pleasure to Him. He counted it as His food, meat and drink. Job, one of the holiest Old Testament saints, could say that he esteemed God's *word* "more than his necessary food" (Job 23:15). The Great Head of the New Testament Church went even further: He could say the same of God's *work*.

Do we do any work for God? Do we try, however feebly, to set forward His cause on earth – to check that which is evil, to promote that which is good? If we do, let us never be ashamed of doing it with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Whatsoever our hand finds to do for the souls of others, let us do it with our might. (Ecc 9:10). The world may mock and sneer and call us enthusiasts. The world can admire zeal in any service but that of God, and can praise enthusiasm on any subject but that of religion. Let us work on unmoved. Whatever men may say and think, we are walking in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us, beside this, take comfort in the thought that Jesus Christ never changes. He that sat by the well of Samaria and found it "meat and drink" to do good to an ignorant soul, is always in one mind. High in heaven at God's right hand, He still delights to save sinners and still approves zeal and labour in the cause of God. The work of the missionary and the evangelist may be despised and ridiculed in many quarters; but while man is mocking, Christ is well pleased. Thanks be to God, Jesus is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

We have in these verses, for another thing, *strong encouragement held out to those who labour to do good to souls*. We read that our Lord described the world as a field white for the harvest and then said to His disciples, "He that reapeth, receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal".

Work for the souls of men is undoubtedly attended by great discouragements. The heart of the natural man is very hard and unbelieving. The blindness of most men to their own lost condition and peril of ruin is something past description. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). No one can have any just idea of the desperate hardness of men and women, until he has tried to do good. No one can have any conception of the small number of those who repent and believe, until he has personally endeavoured to "save

¹Taken from Ryle's comments on John 4:31-42 in his *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 1.

some” (1 Cor 9:22). To suppose that everybody will become a true Christian, who is told about Christ and entreated to believe, is mere childish ignorance. Few there be that find the narrow way! The labourer for Christ will find the vast majority of those among whom he labours, unbelieving and impenitent, in spite of all that he can do. The many will not turn to Christ. These are discouraging facts. But they are facts, and facts that ought to be known.

The true antidote against despondency in God’s work is an abiding recollection of such promises as that before us. There are “wages” laid up for faithful reapers. They shall receive a reward at the last day, far exceeding anything they have done for Christ – a reward proportioned not to their success, but to the quantity of their work. They are gathering “fruit” which shall endure when this world has passed away – fruit, in some souls saved, if many will not believe; and fruit in evidences of their own faithfulness, to be brought out before assembled worlds. Do our hands ever hang down and our knees wax faint? Do we feel disposed to say, My labour is in vain and my words without profit? Let us lean back at such seasons on this glorious promise. There are “wages” yet to be paid. There is “fruit” yet to be exhibited. “We are a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved and in them that perish” (2 Cor 2:15). Let us work on. “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps 126:6). One single soul saved shall outweigh and outweigh all the kingdoms of the world.

Book Reviews

William Gadsby, by B A Ramsbottom, published by Gospel Standard Trust Publications, hardback, 352 pages, £12.00, obtainable from the F P Bookroom.

Here is a life of one of the more prominent among nineteenth-century Gospel Standard ministers. He was born in 1773, died in 1844 and was involved in beginning the *Gospel Standard Magazine*, of which Mr Ramsbottom has been editor for the past 33 years. The author’s main aim was “to tell, in an interesting way, the story of the remarkable life of a most godly man and minister”. And he has successfully attained his objective.

Before he was 18, after a time of deep conviction of sin, Gadsby trusted he was “lead to believe in God’s free mercy and pardon and could look up and say, ‘He loved me, and gave Himself for me’”. Soon he was walking eight miles every Sabbath to a Baptist church in Coventry in all kinds of weathers. At this early stage in his spiritual life, we are told, “there was one old man who, in prayer, always seemed so peevish under his troubles that

William Gadsby asked the Lord to let him bear some of this man's troubles for him. He was sure he could bear them better than the old man. But he often said that he never prayed for other people's troubles afterwards! He soon had enough of his own." So the Lord teaches His children.

Much later in life, after breaking his leg, he reflected: "There are many poor creatures with broken limbs, without home, without friends and, worst of all, without a covenant God; while I, a poor, vile, filthy, forgetful, ungrateful wretch, quite unworthy of any favour, have a comfortable home, with many of my family and friends around me, sympathising with me, and, best of all, a glorious and covenant God revealing His love to my poor soul and enabling me to rejoice in Him as my glorious All and in All".

Although he had only a limited education, Gadsby became a preacher at the age of 25 and in 1805 became minister of what was then known as Back Lane Chapel in Manchester. In the 1820s he was preaching to a congregation which, according to Mr Ramsbottom's "sober guess", numbered over 900. Gadsby's son John described his "indefatigable" labours: "Besides preaching four times a week to his own people in Manchester, he for years preached four or five other sermons during the week, and every week". "In preaching," we are told, "he would solemnly open up the depths of the Fall and the aboundings of sin . . . Then he would set forth what he delighted to call 'the riches of matchless grace', dwelling on the glories of Christ, His fulness, His eternal union with the Church, His finished work, His suitability in His offices." What of the results? The author states: "We do not know of any minister who has more real, solid evidence of numbers blessed under his preaching". The point is not that more were converted under his ministry than under some other preachers, but the large number of accounts published in various periodicals of those who so profited.

There are, however, four matters of doctrine and practice which should be briefly highlighted here. First, Gadsby's insistence that the law is not the believer's rule of life; it is the gospel – the idea which lies behind the *Gospel Standard* name. Yet Paul speaks of love as "the fulfilling of the law", a remark which is surely directed towards believers. But it should be emphasised that, in the words of J C Philpot, "Gadsby maintained an unblemished character to the last".

Second, his opposition to the free offer of the gospel. "Let men offer and proffer as long as they will," Gadsby declared, "no man can come unto Christ except the Father draw him." This, of course, is true, though the slight note of ridicule in the first part of the statement jars. But just as the Saviour made His own word effective when He directed the man with the withered hand to stretch it out, so He can make the word of His ambassadors effective

today when, according to the example of the apostles, they call on sinners to believe.

Third, rejection of the baptism of infants and the insistence that this sacrament be by immersion. It does seem strange that the children of believers in New Testament times should be denied a privilege which they had under the Old Testament – of being admitted into the Church by the corresponding sacrament. In a quotation on page 124, Gadsby is clearly referring to Romans 6, but to compare burial to immersion assumes interment in the earth, which is not how the body of the Saviour was buried.

Fourth, the use of uninspired verse in public praise. Gadsby was the compiler of the hymnbook still used in Gospel Standard circles and contributed a number of hymns himself. But, as the Holy Spirit has given the Book of Psalms to the Church as its book of praise, we have no right to substitute merely human poetry, however scriptural its sentiments.

These remarks are not intended to detract from the reputation of William Gadsby, who could testify on his dying bed: “There is nothing too hard for Christ; He is the mighty God – from everlasting to everlasting. He was precious; He is precious.” This book is a worthy tribute to a godly pastor.

Authentic Christianity: Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles, vol 4: Acts 7:1-29, by D M Lloyd-Jones, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 319 pages, £15.95, obtainable from the F P Bookroom.

A review of volume 2 in this series appeared in the February 2003 issue of this Magazine and gave an overview of Dr Lloyd-Jones’ ministry. This volume contains a further series of 20 sermons, from the pulpit of Westminster Chapel, London. They cover the first part of Stephen’s defence before the Jewish council, and are addressed to the unconverted. Large parts of these sermons are occupied by sustained argument, from a scriptural position, with those who are rejecting God and His demands. Although almost 40 years have passed since these sermons were preached and the outlook of the average Londoner has changed somewhat in that time, one feels that the points made in this argument are just as relevant today.

In response to the spiritual rebellion of his time Lloyd-Jones makes plain: “We are living in an evil age; very few people in this country can any longer claim to be Christian. The enemy seems triumphant all along the line – we see the scoffers, the blasphemers, the clever people – and God and His cause and His Christ appear to be defeated. But do not make that fatal mistake. . . . God is still on the throne and He is still all powerful.” And he comments on the Christianity of his time: “The pseudo-philosophy that is being offered as gospel today is just another denial of the very essence of the gospel. It is not a gospel at all. It is just humanism using a little bit of Christian terminology.”

In opposition to this, Lloyd-Jones emphasises: “There is only one way into the presence of God, into the Holiest of All; it is by the blood of Jesus”. But one would have welcomed a greater emphasis on the gospel.

There are some points on which one would take issue with Lloyd-Jones. In particular, it is a pity that he addresses all and sundry, converted and unconverted, in such terms as these: Christ “died for *our* sins”. But the essence of faith is not believing that Christ died for me in particular, but receiving the testimony of the gospel concerning Him as the Saviour of sinners and trusting in Him as a sinner to whom Christ is freely offered in that testimony. So Ebenezer Erskine: “I do not say that the first language of faith is: That Christ died for me, or, that I was elected from eternity. No, but the language of faith is: God offers a slain and crucified Saviour to me, and I take the slain Christ for my Saviour; and in my taking or embracing of Him as offered, I have ground to conclude that I was elected and that He died for me in particular, and not before.”¹

In this volume we have a clear presentation of Scripture truth which convincingly demonstrates the unchanging demands of a holy God on sinners of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is a pleasure to read a contemporary publication which consistently uses the Authorised Version of the Bible.

Church of Scotland General Assembly

Rev Neil M Ross

The appointment of the first-ever woman moderator was the main point the media focused on at this year’s Assembly in Edinburgh in May. Dr Alison Elliot is not a minister but an elder. No objections were raised against her appointment by any of the Evangelicals in the Church – but we can hardly expect them to object when they have tied their hands by submitting to, and thereby condoning, the Church’s unscriptural law which allows the ordination of women elders and ministers.

Lord Steel of Aikwood (notorious for promoting the 1967 Abortion Act) was the Lord High Commissioner this year again. He claimed that the greatest problem in the world today is fundamentalism, of whatever kind – including Christian fundamentalism specifically. But if he had a right conception of the office of eldership, which he occupies, he would instead be calling his Church to return to the fundamentals of the faith.

Cardinal Keith O’Brien seemed more orthodox than the Lord High Commissioner in counselling the Assembly: “We must go back to both the teaching

¹*Works*, vol 1, Free Presbyterian Publications ed, p 153.

and the praying example of the Christian Church down through the centuries”. But he was referring, of course, to the Church of Rome and, as might be expected, gave the Kirk a nudge in that direction, exhorting it to “celebrate the great Christian festivals as of old, especially Christmas and Easter, and remembering also the feast days of our great saints, especially St Andrew, our Patron”. Not that the Kirk really needs to be pushed in that direction. The Report of its Committee on Ecumenical Relations shows that some congregations have Roman Catholic involvement, in Drumchapel and Aberdeen, for example. Also, the Joint Commission on Doctrine (Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic) continues to meet under the joint convenership of Rev Dr J McPake and Archbishop M Conti.

The Ecumenical Relations Committee has also been holding informal talks with representatives of the Free Church of Scotland and states: “It became clear that it is at a local level that there lies greatest scope for co-operation between the two denominations”. The talks are to continue at six-monthly intervals. If there was great need in the distant past for the Free Church to remain separate from the Church of Scotland, there is even greater need now.

Mr Jack McConnell, the Scottish First Minister, was warmly welcomed by the Assembly. *The Scotsman* points out the significance of the welcome: “The Church of Scotland supported the campaign for home rule for decades, took part in the cross-party constitutional convention which drew up the blueprint for devolution and has played host to the Scottish Parliament for the first five years of its existence”. One would have thought therefore that Kirk Committees would attempt to exercise more influence on the Scottish Executive – on, for example, the Executive’s badly-flawed Sexual Health Strategy. Instead, the Committee for the Church’s HIV/AIDS Project asked the Assembly to “commend and support the Scottish Executive as it seeks to implement an appropriate Sexual Health Strategy for the well-being of the whole Scottish population”. But the Assembly voted overwhelmingly for the motion of Rev Iain Murdoch that abstinence before marriage should form part of the Sexual Health Strategy. Whether or not the Scottish Executive will heed its advice is another matter.

The Assembly also agreed to a second motion by Mr Murdoch – that religious observance in schools should reflect Scotland’s Christian tradition. Needless to say, there was strong opposition from some who argued that concentrating on Christianity excluded people of other faiths such as Muslims, and that they found such exclusivity embarrassing.

Sadly, the Church of Scotland is increasingly undermining the exclusivity of the Christian faith as expressed by Christ Himself, when He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me”.

This is demonstrated by the Committee for Chaplains to Her Majesty's Forces taking great pains to pave the way for the appointment of a non-Christian cleric to the Forces Chaplaincy. The Committee has sought advice from a Muslim Member of Parliament, has met with leaders of the Islamic Centre in Glasgow, and is meeting Scottish leaders of other faith groups. It beggars belief that a branch of the Church of Christ should help any religion which is the very antithesis of "the faith once delivered to the saints".

Despite such evident departures from the Reformed Faith, the Church's Panel on Worship, among others assert that there is a growing interest in spirituality in the Church. We suspect the spirituality they speak of is not that which results from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, but religious and emotional experiences which are merely human. In another debate, a minister criticised the idea of spirituality "as some enhanced human fulfilment which leaves God out of the equation".

However, the major concern of this Assembly was the precarious financial position of the Church. Over the past four years its expenditure has exceeded income by a total of nearly £20 million, while the value of Kirk assets has plunged by more than £35 million. The Church will therefore have to find cuts of more than £800 000 to balance next year's budget. At the same time, even though contributions have risen in recent years, there was a call for congregations to give more money, on a sacrificial basis. Concluding with a call for the Assembly to take note of the "gravity and magnitude" of the cutbacks facing the Church, a report states: "As costs increase, deficits mount, reserves dwindle and membership falls, it is urgent that strategic action is taken to address and resolve these problems".

Falling revenues and declining membership were two main reasons why the Assembly agreed to controversial proposals to restructure radically the way the Church is run. It agreed to the establishment of a slimmed-down management structure which will see the current proliferation of boards and committees cut to just six. In addition, an Assembly Council of 16 members will be set up to administer the Church between the annual meetings of the Assembly. Some commissioners expressed grave fears about the centralisation of power within the Kirk and the undermining of the tradition of Presbyterian democracy which has been maintained in the Church of Scotland.

May the day soon come – as it surely will – when our national Church will be blessed with a reformation and restructuring that will be the result of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost from heaven upon the whole visible Church in our land. May the spiritual Israel plead earnestly for it. "Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it,

and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock” (Ezek 36:36, 37).

Protestant View

Rome’s Crisis Management

When *The Daily Telegraph*, a newspaper which is usually not averse to lauding the Papacy, devotes about two-thirds of a page to reports of a developing crisis in the Roman Catholic Church, we must regard it as somewhat significant. The crisis concerns the priesthood. Rome is presently experiencing severe recruitment difficulties and this is thought to stem primarily from the adverse publicity which has followed the exposure of the immoral, sordid behaviour of so many priests within her pale.

“Roman Catholic priests”, we are told, “are rapidly becoming an endangered species, with scandal over clerical abuse exacerbating a long-term decline in vocations.” So dire is the situation in Ireland, which in the past provided “an abundant supply of priests”, that the hierarchy there have invited the Pope to pay another visit in the hope that it would boost the profile of the Church and aid recruitment. After a decade of child-abuse revelations and attempted cover-ups, so shattering is the blow to its moral authority that apparently “only one priest will be ordained in the Dublin diocese this year and none the next”. But a Papal visit, we are glad to note, is unlikely. A quotation from the *Belfast Telegraph* – used in the article we have referred to – sums up the probable outcome: “‘It would be a very big mistake’ for the Church to believe that a high turn-out for a visit by the Pope this autumn would mean ‘that Irish Catholicism is alive and kicking. It is about as robust and vigorous as that poor old man himself.’”

Meantime across the Atlantic, Roman Catholic dioceses such as that of Portland, Oregon, are filing for bankruptcy as a result of lawsuits arising from sexual abuse by priests. This diocese faces having to pay out £85 million in compensation. Nationwide, the increasing number of claims has been described as “like a monsoon”. It is reported that “several multi-million-dollar settlements have been reached and hundreds more claims are pending”. Of course, it is denied that filing for bankruptcy is a convenient way of avoiding responsibility, but if the American dioceses are indeed running out of money, as they maintain, there is more than enough in the Vatican’s coffers. Rome has for long “glorified herself, and lived deliciously”. Can it be that her predicted fall is now approaching? “For strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

JM

Notes and Comments

Religious Observances in Schools

The July 2004 edition of *Care's Education Update* notes that "Scottish schools have for more than 100 years been obliged by statute to incorporate into their work an act of 'religious observance'. The current guidance . . . requires that religious observance be within a broadly Christian framework". Some time ago an item in *Notes and Comments* drew attention to the First Minister's resolve to promote consideration of multi-faith assemblies in schools "to reflect Scotland's multi-cultural society" and because chaos in the classroom is caused by teenagers disgruntled at having to sing hymns first thing in the morning! Mr McConnell regarded the "Time for Reflection" of the Scottish Parliament, which has speakers from various religions, as a potential model for schools. Despite the requirement for "religious observance of a broadly Christian character", later guidelines advise that the aim of religious observance is "to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community" – *spiritual* being used in the modern sense.

The article in *Care's Education Update* reports that "the Scottish Executive is currently considering a report . . . proposing to alter the position and turn traditional religious observance into something resembling multi-faith, or a values-based, reflection. The argument is that, as we are now a multi-cultural society, predominantly Christian worship is no longer appropriate. This despite the finding of the 2001 National Census that 68% of Scots consider themselves to be Christians in a general sense, and only 15% say they have no religious faith. Of the other faiths, Islam is the most numerous at 2% of the population."

The growth of ethnic minorities is being made an excuse for departures in many areas of society from practices which are claimed to be Christian. The BBC's consultative document, *Building Public Value*, claims that "the UK is becoming a mature multi-cultural nation. Between 1991 and 2001 the ethnic population of the UK grew by 54% compared with 4% for the total UK population; ethnic minorities now represent just under 8% of the overall population and are projected to grow as rapidly over the next decade, particularly in urban areas". Accordingly, "as the country changes, the BBC will seek to build a deeper understanding of multi-faith Britain. Christian celebration will continue to represent a significant part of the BBC's commitment. At the same time the BBC will reflect the growth of other faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism. . . . The BBC will also reflect the fast-developing interest in broader spiritual pursuits beyond organised religion."

We should be thankful for those schools where staff or visitors still conduct religious observances in a recognisably Christian manner. Sadly it would appear that such "Christian" observances as take place in many schools are

far from being conformed to the Bible in content or form. However, it is a further step in the spiritual degeneracy of our nation that serious consideration is being given to removing even a professedly-Christian structure from religious observance in schools. Apart from the spiritual issues involved, we believe such proposals to be illegal in a nation committed, as we constitutionally are, to the Reformed Christian Faith. The introduction of multi-faith acts of “worship” will impose an intolerable burden upon conscientious Christian staff and parents and pupils. The odd-ones-out will be those who adhere to the truth of God and to the Christian convictions which made our nation and its educational system what they were.

In Religious Education also there are significant problems. In England, as *Care’s Education Update* points out, “whereas the great majority of RE specialists 30 years ago were Christians, now there are far more from other religions or no religion”. Most teachers not specialising in RE are further disqualified by lack of interest, commitment or training – and there is a professedly “even-handed” approach to religions which discourages the teaching of Biblical truth from commitment or conviction. A teacher is quoted as commenting that “religious study is in danger of treating religiousness as a kind of strangeness to be understood, tolerated, classified or dissected, rather than as a source of personal challenge”.

The basic problem is that our legislators and educationalists have abandoned the idea that Britain is a Christian nation and that Christianity is the one true religion. They have accepted the position that no religion is superior to another or has an exclusive claim to truthfulness. This rot began in the churches, when true Christianity was abandoned and replaced with something which, being untrue, has no claim on conscience. Had the churches and the nation adhered to a truly Biblical Christianity, we would not be facing our current problems in school or society. HMC

Abortion

The publication of 3-D pictures of unborn babies has given fresh impetus to calls for revision of UK legislation on abortion. These pictures show a 28-week child rubbing its eye, an 18-week child opening its eye and even a 12-week foetus making “walking” movements. In any case, there has been widespread concern about the present normal legal limit of 24 weeks for abortions, because some premature infants born earlier have survived. Even Lord Steel, who was responsible for promoting the Abortion Act in Parliament, supports a review. Such a review would be welcomed, as would any resulting tightening of the law.

However, what is needed is to realise that unborn infants are not fundamentally different from those that already enjoy the protection of the law by virtue of having been born. We recognise that abortion may be necessary if

there is threat to the mother's life, but to destroy an unborn child in other circumstances is a clear breach of the Sixth Commandment.

It is a further scandal that babies born alive after failed abortions have been left to die. It was reported to the July meeting of the British Medical Association that 1% of abortions in the UK result in live births. One such infant survived for three days before succumbing to neglect. Thankfully the Association called for such infants to receive the same care as others born prematurely, and no doubt some already receive that care. But it is a sad comment on contemporary attitudes to life that such care is not automatic.

Considerable propaganda is being put out in support of abortion, much of it under the trite slogan: a mother's right to choose, which ignores completely the total lack of choice on the part of the millions of unborn children who have lost their lives in the womb since the Abortion Act was first passed. A co-author of a report from a University of Southampton research centre has called for abortion to be "de-stigmatised". But what she should be calling attention to is the *sin* of abortion; it is no trivial matter.

"Religious Hatred"

Home Secretary David Blunkett has announced legislation to outlaw incitement to religious hatred in England and Wales. One's reaction to the proposed law will depend, to some extent, on how exactly the law is to be framed and how it may be interpreted in the future. We certainly would not wish to incite anyone to hatred of any other human being.

One matter of concern arises from Mr Blunkett's statement that the law would apply "equally to far-right evangelical Christians as to extremists in the Islamic faith". One can only ask, Who exactly are the "evangelical Christians" he has in mind, and what does he really know about their beliefs? If it is the minuscule number of anti-abortion activists who have committed or threatened murder in the USA, there is, as far as we know, no one of in that category in Britain. But it is statements such as this that give rise to concern that there will yet be attempts to limit one's right to speak against false religion and sin – in spite of the Home Secretary's assurance that it will still be possible, under the proposed legislation, for adherents of one religion to criticise another.

Alarm Over Use of Television

According to mediawatch-UK, the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, has suggested that children in our schools would benefit from lessons on watching television. She claimed that these are as needful in the United Kingdom as maths and science lessons. These comments may be considered in the light of a programme presented by Professor Robert Winston which stated that the average 3-year-old child in the UK is glued to the television for nearly 5 hours every day, and that almost half of all 3-year-olds have a television in

their bedrooms. This programme admits that “most scientists now think that TV can encourage violent tendencies”.

A separate review by mediawatch-uk of 86 films, broadcast between July and December 2003 on the five terrestrial channels, found that the names *Jesus* and *Christ* were used as expletives no fewer than 328 times. Together with even higher figures for profane language, this presents a most disturbing trend. In another welcome move, Charles Clarke, the Education Secretary, has strongly challenged the view that violence on television has no effect on children and has demanded that broadcasters investigate whether there is a link between television violence and bullying. It seems that those in positions of responsibility are at last becoming uneasy about the use our nation makes of television and the harmful effects television produces. It is not before time.

One of the most dangerous tendencies of television is to relax, gradually and imperceptibly, viewers' attitudes to sinful activity. When adultery or violence or blasphemy is presented as entertainment, the inevitable consequence is that the conscience of the viewer will be deadened to these things. The morality of the nation now seems to be prescribed by film and television stars. Before long, evil is considered good, and good is despised. It is obvious to most reasonable people that this will be the effect on young, developing minds, if they are exposed to a lot of television. The damage that television, and the almost-universal abuse of it, has done to the moral fibre of our nation is becoming more and more evident. It is high time the Government intervened to curb the vile and degrading language and activity portrayed on television. It is doubtful that the initiative suggested would prove successful in stopping the advance of widespread immorality.

It seems almost impossible to justify a Christian watching more than a very limited amount of what pours out of television channels. And those who do so are in grave danger of hardening their consciences and of being drawn little by little into that conformity to the world which Scripture describes as enmity towards God. Some of us feel that, until great improvements are made, it is wiser for Christians, and especially those with children, not to use this medium at all. DC

Church Information

Rev A B Ndebele

It is with sadness that we have to report that Mr Ndebele passed away on June 24. He was for many years minister of our Ingwenya congregation in Zimbabwe before failing health forced him to retire. It is hoped that a full obituary will appear later.

London Induction

The vacancy created in the London Congregation by the departure of Rev K M Watkins on 30 June 2001 to take charge of the Sengera Mission in Kenya was ended on 25 June 2004 when the Rev John MacLeod, minister in Stornoway since 1969, was inducted as pastor. The London Congregation, supplemented by a goodly company from other parts, were comfortably accommodated in Grove Chapel, Camberwell – historically associated with the names of Independent Calvinistic ministers Joseph Irons, Thomas Bradbury and Henry Atherton – kindly and freely granted for this occasion.

In the absence of the current Moderator of the Southern Presbytery, Rev N M Ross, convalescing after surgery, Rev D MacLean preached and presided as Moderator pro tem. Taking as his text 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”, Mr MacLean discussed in turn the significance of “the word of truth”, “a workman” and “dividing the word of truth”.

A brief narrative of the proceedings leading to the Induction was then read. The Moderator addressed to Mr MacLeod the Questions appointed to be put to ministers on their admission to a pastoral charge and, when he gave satisfactory answers to these Questions and signed the Formula in the presence of the Congregation, the Moderator engaged in prayer and, in the name of the Presbytery and by authority of the Divine Head of the Church, admitted Mr MacLeod to the pastoral charge of the London Congregation. In token of his admission the right hand of fellowship was given to Mr MacLeod by the Moderator and the other members of Presbytery.

The newly-inducted Minister was addressed by the Presbytery Clerk, who based his remarks on Colossians 1:27-29: “Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily”. Rev R MacLeod, interim-moderator throughout most of the vacancy, addressed the Congregation from the request of the Apostle Paul: “Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1).

Messages of good wishes were read from Rev N M Ross, Rev K M Watkins, Rev G G Hutton, Rev F Macdonald, Rev D Campbell, Rev J R Tallach, Rev J L Goldby, Rev. D A Ross and the Ness Congregation. Presentations from the London Congregation to the minister and interim-moderator were made by the Moderator. The name of Rev John MacLeod was added to the Roll of the Southern Presbytery.

After the service substantial provision was made in the Church Hall by the ladies of the Congregation for the company, many of whom, even those locally based, had travelled a considerable distance.

The Church at large will join with the Presbytery and Congregation in praying that the ministry commencing in the national metropolis will be owned of God and made useful in the hand of the Holy Spirit to the gathering in of sinners to Christ and the building up of the Lord's people "in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation" (*Shorter Catechism*, 89).

(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright, Presbytery Clerk

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Tuesday, August 31, at 1 pm.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, October 12, at 11 am.

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, on Friday, January 28, at 2.30 pm.

Sydney Communion

This year, a communion season is to be held in the Sydney congregation on the first Sabbath in September, DV.

J van Praag

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund

By appointment of Synod, the second of the year's two special collections for the Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund is due to be taken in congregations during August.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: The McCarter family, USA, \$300.

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, for Ukraine congregation, £100.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, Sutherland, £100; Anon, Kent, for Mbumba famine relief, £300; A friend, Dingwall, for work in Israel, £50 per Rev JLG; Anon, for Thembeiso Children's Home, £100; Anon, for Mbumba Hospital, £100.

Legacy Reserve Fund: The estate of the late Mrs Jessie Rankine, Dumbarton, £510 per R S Forsyth.

Magazines Free Distribution Fund: Inverness friends, £14.20 per IG.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Barnoldswick: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £30 per DOC; Anon, £80.

Beaully: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £20.

Edinburgh: *Communion Expenses:* DM & AM, £50. *Congregational Funds:* A friend, where most needed, £100. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Zimbabwe Aid Fund, £50.

Fort William: *College & Library Fund:* AM, £25. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where most needed, £50. *Sustentation Fund:* AM, £25. *Tape Fund:* JM, £10.

Portree: *Bus Fund:* A friend, £10; A friend, £10 per SYM. *Congregational Funds:* A friend, for minister's petrol, £15; KI & RM, where most needed, £500 per SYM. *Door Collection:* A friend, £16; A friend, £20 per SYM. *Property Fund:* KD, £10. *Sustentation Fund:* A friend, £30; A friend, £30; A friend, £30 per SYM. *Tape Fund:* A friend, £12 per SYM.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, Raasay, for manse extension, £50 per Rev JRT; Anon, in loving memory, where most needed, £100. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A friend, Portree, for Zimbabwe Mission, £25 per Rev JRT. *Sustentation Fund:* A friend, Portree, £15 per Rev JRT.

Shieldaig: *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A friend, Gairloch, for work among the Jews, £80 per Rev JLG. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, in grateful memory of a loving husband & father, £100.

Staffin: *College & Library Fund:* Anon, £20. *Door Collection:* Anon, Staffin House, £20.