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A Good Death?

The final programme in a series entitled “Life over 80”, which was broadcast on radio some months ago, focused on the subject of death. The presenter began with a few sentences from her mother, who claimed to be looking forward to death. “It could be something more fulfilling”, she told listeners. “You’ve got to wait and see.” Sadly, nowhere in the programme was there any suggestion that we do *not* need to wait to find out by experience what is on the other side of death. There is no need to speculate; we have a revelation, from God, which gives us all the information we need about what lies beyond death. Which makes it all the more tragic that this generation, by and large, is going on towards eternity with no thought of preparing for it. The danger of a lost eternity is made perfectly clear in the Scriptures – as is the fact of our sin, and the glorious remedy which God has provided in Christ Jesus.

The programme particularly addressed the question: What is a good death? As might be expected, in an age which all too readily assumes that death is the end of human existence, the answers related to the actual time of dying. One health professional suggested that “it would have to be completely symptom-free, pain-free, in a comfortable, safe environment, with family”. No doubt it is an exaggeration to refer to a symptom-free death – people do not die if there is nothing wrong with them – but every effort should be made to eliminate pain and to make those who are dying as comfortable as is absolutely possible. Every effort should be made to realise the aspiration of one contributor: that the best of care should become standard care in Britain’s National Health Service.

Another contributor spoke of a good death in terms of “achieving what they can before they die in order to complete their life”. He was thinking of, for example, people having the opportunity to speak once more, in the last days of life, to someone who used to be a close friend, but from whom they had drifted apart. Someone else spoke of people having “a right to get yourself sorted out and prepared” – she used the analogy of preparing for a long holiday – but it seemed to be preparation for the act of dying rather than

for what is beyond. Yet the preparation is relatively pointless which does not look beyond this life. The command of Scripture is: “Prepare *to meet thy God*”. The fact is that we will meet God at death – God’s revelation assures us that we will. The vast majority of people today may reject this fact; many of them may be so ignorant of Scripture that it has never impinged on their consciousness even as a possibility. But it remains a fact, to which we do well to take heed.

Listeners were told about a man who “came to terms with [death] very well because he was a very good man, had a very good life,” and so, it would seem, “he had a very good death”. But what makes a man good? What constitutes a good life? Again we must rely on the revelation God has given in Scripture. Not even an outward conformity to all the commandments, as we learn from the Saviour’s conversation with the rich young ruler, will entitle people to describe themselves as truly good. God’s eye can identify inconsistencies which no one else can and, even more significantly, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer 17:9). The unconverted sinner, untaught by God, cannot begin to understand his wickedness, at least in any practical way – so that he will seek for salvation. But God can teach us, and then we will at least begin to recognise our need of salvation, our need of being purified and forgiven. And, while that is a work beyond our power to carry out, it is not beyond God’s power; He has provided a complete salvation in Christ, who “is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him”.

A good death follows a good life – not a sinless life but a life transformed by the Spirit of God. Satan has blinded the eyes of most people today to their need of that spiritual transformation. He has blinded their eyes to the reality of the eternal world. Many even of those who have some contact with the Scriptures are equally blinded; they know the facts but they resist their implications; they may think from afar off, as it were, of their need of a good death, but they refuse to seek the salvation they so much need. How much we need today a divine work so that the facts contained in God’s revelation would be sent everywhere and that these facts would be applied by the Holy Spirit, bringing these individuals to a living faith in Jesus Christ. Then they would begin to live godly lives and be prepared to enter heaven. A good death is out of the question unless we look to Christ while we are yet on mercy’s ground. Yes, the thief on the cross entered paradise though he lived by far the greatest part of his life in sin; but there was another thief on another cross who, in hardness of heart, refused to turn to the Saviour who was so very near to him. The danger is that those who deliberately leave seeking salvation till some “convenient season”, away in the indefinite

future, will be allowed to go on in hardness of heart till the very end. Theirs, solemnly, cannot possibly be a good death.

What then is a good death? It is the death of one who, like David, can say, “Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow” (2 Sam 23:5), or like Paul awaiting the hour of his execution: “I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12). Such men could die comfortably in the full assurance of faith.

Ebenezer Erskine expands on this point in one of his sermons: “Strong faith makes the approaches of death more easy than they are to the weak believer. Strong faith takes up the telescope of the promise and looks beyond death to the land afar off and rejoices in the hope of the glory of God, saying as the head Christ did, ‘My heart is glad, and My glory rejoiceth: My flesh also shall rest in hope’ (Ps 16:9), for He has shown me ‘the path of life’, the new and living way to these ‘rivers of pleasure’ and that ‘fulness of joy’ which are at God’s ‘right hand for evermore’. Strong faith viewing an exalted Redeemer sees death and hell among the trophies of His victory and thereupon triumphs over it as a vanquished and slain enemy, saying, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ But now weak faith shivers and trembles at the approaches of death lest it should be swallowed up in the swelling of that Jordan. Let these considerations, I say, quicken you to breathe after the increase of your weak faith, that you may draw near with full assurance of faith.”¹

Yet weak faith brings the Christian into the same blessed eternity as strong faith, though without the same degree of comfort. Clearly it is better to have strong faith than weak faith, but the more important distinction is between having true, saving faith and being without it. So, as this year draws to a close, bringing us another 12 months closer to the time of our death, we should be asking ourselves: Am I ready to die? Am I ready to meet God? Can I expect to spend a blessed eternity in heaven?

Especially because of the uncertainty as to when we will have to confront death, how urgently and seriously we should welcome these words: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Is 55:6,7).

¹*Works*, vol 1, Free Presbyterian Publications edition, pp 270-271.

God's Dealings with Natural Men¹

A Sermon by R M M'Cheyne

Isaiah 28:14-18. *Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgement also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.*

These words were first spoken to the men of Jerusalem, but they apply as fully to the men of our own town. There is perhaps no passage of the Bible which shows in such a remarkable manner the goodness and severity of God. Behold the severity and goodness of God; to them who refuse Christ, severity; but to thee, O believer, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness (see Rom 11:22).

1. The Character of Natural Men.

(1.) *They Are Scornful.* "Hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men" (verse 14). The same persons are spoken of in Proverbs, chapter 1: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning" (Prov 1:22). This is the character of almost all natural men.

(a) *They scorn the wrath of God.* They read in the Bible the plainest declarations of God's wrath against sin, and they feel in their conscience that they have sinned against God, and yet they refuse to tremble. They read in Romans 1 that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and yet they refuse to flee from the wrath to come. When Lot spoke to his sons-in-law, he seemed to them as one that mocked. When Noah the preacher of righteousness told the ungodly world of the coming flood, sinners stopped their ears and scorned his warnings. So is it still. The whole earth sitteth still and is at ease. They are not in trouble as other men. They are like wine settled on its lees.

¹This sermon was preached in St Peter's, Dundee, on 1 December 1838. It is taken from the volume, *Old Testament Sermons*, one of three by M'Cheyne recently published by the Banner of Truth Trust. Obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom, it costs £13.95.

(b) *They scorn the mercy of God.* They hear that there is a Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, yet they do not choose Him as their Lamb. They hear that there is mercy for all who come, and yet they will not come. They hear that Christ is standing and knocking at their door, wishing to wash them in His own blood, and yet they will not let Him in.

O, are there none of you who know what it is to be scornful men? You see others trembling for their souls, yet you never tremble. You see others feeling themselves lost who have done no more sin than you, yet you do not feel lost. You see others flying to Christ like a cloud, and like doves to their windows, yet you pass the Saviour by. You hear of others being converted to God, and yet you scorn the very name. You hate the very words, *conversion to God*. Ah, then you are the very souls here spoken to. Ye scornful men, hear ye the Word of the Lord.

(2.) *They Have Refuges of Lies.* I have often considered what was going on in the minds of natural men, when others are flying to Christ and they are keeping back. Now, here is their very heart laid bare by the heart-searching God: "We have made a covenant with death".

Some of you will think it impossible that you could be so impious, but just examine your heart and you will see that God is true, though every man should turn out a liar. Are there none of you putting off conversion to another day? You say, I am too young yet. I have seen too little of the world. I have not had my fill of its pleasures yet. Next year I shall begin to care for my soul. It will be time enough next year. Ah, this is making a covenant with death and an agreement with hell. You are acting as if you had bargained with death that he should not strike you till next year, and that hell should not receive you till then.

Some of you say you are too busy. Your business requires all your time. "I have a family to support, and we must keep up appearances in the world, but when I have a more convenient season I will call for thee." Ah, this is making a covenant with death and an agreement with hell. How do you know that death may not do his business before your business is done, and that hell may not receive you before you receive a Saviour?

And then, you have refuges of lies. Every natural man is hiding beneath some refuge of lies. I shall mention a few.

(a) *Ignorance of the Word of God.* This blessed book is full of the clearest declarations of God's wrath against sin, all sin. It is full also of the plainest declarations of the true hiding place – the Lamb slain for sinners. But natural men keep themselves ignorant of what is in the Bible. They do not study this blessed book. They do not calmly search the Scriptures.

O, are there none of you proud natural men who leave the Bible unopened?

Who never search it upon your knees? You think you will thus hide yourself from unpleasant truths. Alas, it is a refuge of lies, for the threatenings are there though you do not read them, and Christ is there though you do not fly to Him. How soon will the hail sweep away this refuge of lies.

(b) *“Perhaps the Bible may not be true.”* “Perhaps there is no hell; perhaps there is no Christ; perhaps there is no God; perhaps there is no hereafter.” Are there none of you who cover your soul with a “perhaps”? This also is a refuge of lies, for there is a hell. Whether you believe or not, He abideth faithful. And will you imperil your soul upon a “maybe”?

(c) *Amendment of life.* This is another refuge of lies. Some natural men like Herod hear ministers gladly and do many things. At such a time as this, when many are concerned about their souls, they become concerned also. They lay aside outward sins. They avoid the giddy world. They lay a bridle upon their raging lusts; they read the Bible; they begin to pray. Their friends and ministers begin to think well of them. They feel the change and begin to take peace in their amendment. Yet this also is a refuge of lies. Is there anyone hiding under his amendment of life? O man, consider this, that nothing but a perfect covering can cover thee before a perfect God. Thine amendment is all imperfect. It is a refuge of lies. Whatever besides Christ gives peace to the soul before God, it is a refuge of lies. Christ is the refuge of truth, the true refuge. All others are a lie.

2. The Mercy of God to Natural Men. “Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Is 28:16). (1.) *The Reason of God’s Mercy.* O, what a depth of meaning there is in that little word, *Therefore.* O, what a window does it open into the heart of God! O, what a discovery does it make of the motives that lie at the bottom of the heart of God! Therefore, I say, “O God, this is not the manner of men (see 2 Sam 7:19). What would you have expected God to have said? “Therefore I will cast you into hell, ye scornful men. Ye have scorned My grace and defied My power. Ye have made a covenant with death and an agreement with hell. You have made lies your refuge, and under falsehood have hid yourselves. Therefore behold, I cast you out of My sight into outer darkness.” Ah, no! God says, “Therefore, behold, I lay a foundation stone.”

This is a great encouragement to scorners. Some of you feel that you have been scorners all your days. The law and the gospel have fallen upon your ears like an accustomed sound for many years. You have got into some secure refuge of lies where you can laugh at awakening sermons and bless yourself in your heart that you are not affected by them. And now, what do you think is God’s mind toward you? You think that He has no mercy for

you. It is needless for you to turn, for He would not receive such an one. Ah yes, He would! You do not know God. He knows all your perversity, all your pride. He knows well every feeling in your proud, rebellious heart. He sees the frailty of the refuges of lies under which you are hiding. He sees that in a few short years the hail shall sweep them all away, and you will be left shelter-less, refuge-less, Saviour-less. God's eye pities you. God's heart spares you: "Behold, sinner, just because you are so lost, I lay here a stone on which you may find rest."

O, the mercy of God to sinners! It is like the great deep, it passes search; no human line can fathom it. O sinners, how shall you escape if you neglect so great a salvation? How shall you escape if you turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven?

(2.) *The Matter of God's Mercy.*

(a) *A foundation Stone laid by God.* Now this is the very thing a sinner needs. By nature we all have houses on the sand. We may have been building all our life, but it has been on the sand. We have no place to stand on when the wrath of God shall come. The wrath of God is coming. It is an overflowing scourge. It is like Jordan, which in autumn overflows all its banks. It is like the Flood, when the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the tops of the highest mountains were covered. What will a sinner do in the swellings of Jordan? Where will you place your foot on that day?

O sinner, you may scorn Christ just now, but you will change your mind in that day when it will be too late. See what God has laid as a foundation stone, the Stone of Israel, Immanuel, God with us, the Rock that is higher than we. "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

Awakened sinner, if God laid Him, will you rest on Him? What will you place your foot on, if not on Jesus? You fear the wrath of God, but, behold, that very God has provided a hiding place. O, there is none of you too great a sinner but you may rest on Him. There is none of you so small a sinner but you must rest on Him.

(b) *A tried Stone.* This Stone has been tried *by God*: God not only laid Him but tried Him, tried if He were able to be a Saviour for sinners. Infinite wrath was laid on Him, yet He bore it all. Infinite obedience was required of Him, yet He gave it. And now God has taken Him up to His throne in token that He is well pleased. He is a tried Saviour.

It has been tried *by man*: Thousands have believed on Him and have

found Him a sure stone for their soul to rest on. Never did any try Him and find Him an insecure Saviour. Thousands have tried Him in an hour of trouble when their sins came against them like a flood. They have found rest. None have been disappointed. Thousands have tried Him in an hour of darkness, when all their sins came over them like a flood. They have looked unto Him. They have cast their soul on this foundation and, in that valley, light has sprung up.

O awakened souls, look round you! Many beside you have tried Him. Ask them if He failed them. Were they cast out? And why will you not try Him also? Though you had ten thousand souls, you might rest them all on that atoning Saviour!

(c) *A precious corner Stone.* He is precious *in Himself*, first, because He is Immanuel, God with us. If there is anything precious in the jewels and silver and gold of this world, it is all to be found in Christ as its Fountain, for He made them all. If there is anything precious in the unseen treasures of the heart of God, it is all to be found in Christ, for Christ is God. If there is anything precious in divine love, bursting forth from a divine bosom, even unto death, it is all in Christ, for He loved us and gave Himself for us.

He is precious *in the eyes of the Father*: When the Father chose a stone for sinners to rest on, He not only chose a mighty one, but one infinitely precious. Had He chosen the gems of the ocean or the gold of the mine, had He chosen one from among the glorious angels, it would have been precious, but O, He chose the Jewel out of His own bosom, the gem of heaven's ocean! The equal of the Father! He is precious.

He is precious *in the eyes of believers*: To you that believe He is precious (1 Pet 2:7). His blood is more precious than drops of liquid gold. His righteousness is whiter than any fuller on earth could white it. He is the Precious One. All things are to be counted but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. His atoning death is worth the agonies of a world of sinners. His perfect obedience is better than the obedience of a hundred angels. All other things fade when He approaches, like the stars before the sun. Have you seen Him? Have you known Him? Have you cleaved to Him? Will you ever part from Him? To you that believe, He is precious.

(d) *A sure Foundation.* He that believeth on Him shall not make haste. When you place your foot upon a rocking stone, you are in haste to draw back your foot. Or when you are standing upon sinking sand, or on a shaking quagmire, you are in haste to find firm footing again. But Christ is a sure foundation. "He that believeth shall not make haste." The awakened soul often hastens from one refuge to another. He goes from mountain to hill, forgetting his resting place. First he tries one refuge and then another where

he may rest his weary soul. But when he comes to Christ, he finds rest. He has no wish to change, no wish for another. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Ps 116:7).

When others go away and walk no more with Jesus, he says, "Lord, to whom can I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." I have heard travellers tell of a serpent which has so bright and dazzling an eye that when a bird once catches sight of it, it is rivetted to the spot and cannot go away. But I know a wonder far greater than this: when once a fluttering sinner comes in sight of Christ, when once he has seen the atoning blood, the love and tenderness that are in the eye of Immanuel, he cannot withdraw. He is bound to that Saviour for ever. He that believeth shall not make haste.

O, you that have known Him, see that ye abide in Him. Keep Him and do not let Him go. Run your race with the eye upon Jesus. Pray with the eye upon Jesus. The more you are rivetted in His presence, the happier you will be. "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god" (Ps 16:4).

3. The Severity of God to Sinners. You have seen His mercy, now look for a moment at His strict and holy severity.

(1.) *Observe His Strictness.* "Judgement also will I lay to the line." This shows you the manner of God's procedure in judgement with natural men. You have seen a mason, when he is building a wall, apply the line and plummet to see if it is upright. He puts the line close to the wall and sees if the lead hangs evenly down. This is the very way in which God will judge all men. The holy law of God is His line and plummet. He will apply it to men's lives and hearts to see whether they are straight and upright. O sinner, where will you appear? Your heart is like a crooked wall. Your life is like a tottering fence, and how will you stand in that day, when God judges you by line and plummet? Take the line and plummet of God's law and try yourself now and you will easily see that you are condemned. By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. O, there is only one that can bear that the line and plummet should be applied to His righteous soul, the Righteous One. It is Jesus, the sinner's Friend. He stood for sinners, and offers to be their refuge. Ah sinner, be found in Him, and you will obtain mercy of the Lord in that day.

(2.) *Observe His Severity.* O scornful men, if you will still scorn the Saviour; if you will still cleave to your refuges of lies; if you will still trust to your morality and being as good as other men; if you think still to stand before God, clothed in your own amendments; if you think to be saved at the last by a "God help me" on your death-bed; or by a "Lord, have mercy on my soul" when you are plunging into eternity; if you will still neglect the great salvation, the Tried Stone, the Sure Foundation, then God has passed

His Word, you shall feel the hail sweeping away your refuges of lies. You shall feel the waters soon overflowing your hiding place.

Be not mockers. Those who believe will not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. Amen.

Arminianism (2)¹

Rev D A Ross

3. The Extent of the Atonement. The Westminster Confession states: “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him” (8:5). Arminianism, on the other hand, maintains that Christ died for everyone, thus making atonement universal. One of a number of portions of Scripture which they use to support their view is John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

However, we must take this text along with other parts of Scripture. For example, Christ’s intercessory prayer for the Church shows Him to us clearly distinguishing from others those whom the Father has given Him. As He addresses the Father, He says of Himself: “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him. . . . I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me. . . . I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine (John 17:1-3,6,9). Accordingly, when we interpret Scripture by Scripture, as we ought to, it is evident that John 3:16 does not teach a universal atonement. Rather Christ is presented in the gospel as a Saviour suitable for sinners worldwide.

Arminians accuse Calvinists of limiting the power of the atonement. “The limitation, however, is not in the power of salvation, but in the purpose of salvation. The Reformed Christian holds that the atonement . . . is sufficient to save all, but it is only efficient to save the elect. There is no lack of power whatsoever.”² Calvinistic preachers do not limit their proclamation of the gospel to the elect. As directed by Christ, they declare to all sinners the

¹The first part of this Theological Conference paper dealt with the first two of the Five Points of Calvinism, and the Arminian errors which they were a response to.

²K G Talbot and W G Crampton, *Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism & Arminianism* p 30.

worth and sufficiency of the atonement: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). As they do so, they assure every sinner – and all kinds of sinners – of the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ for the chief of sinners.

It is in fact the Arminians who by their doctrine limit the atonement. While they believe that the atonement was made for all, theirs is an atonement which does not save all, because many are lost. How limited indeed! To avoid this charge they say that the atonement is only intended to make salvation possible, if only a person will believe. Indeed, should everyone decide not to believe, no one would finally be saved. This is altogether God-dishonouring and contrary to the truth. However, because the Saviour died for His people in particular, the benefits of His atonement are certain to be applied to them; so none of those for whom He died can possibly be lost at last. “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Is 53:11). How could He be satisfied if, having died for all, only some at last are saved? “Reformed Churches,” as Louis Berkhof points out, “believe in a limited atonement. Christ suffered and died for the purpose of saving only the elect, and that purpose is actually accomplished”.³

4. Is Grace Resistible? The Confession of Faith teaches: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ . . . yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace” (10:1). Arminianism states that, by virtue of the death of Christ, all men have received grace and ability from the Holy Spirit to obey the gospel. Therefore, for the gospel to become effectual, it is really up to the sinner to exercise the ability given him. What it amounts to is that the Holy Spirit has done His best; He cannot do more. In fact, says the Arminian, for regeneration to take place it is necessary that the sinner co-operate with the Holy Spirit by obeying the gospel. The Holy Spirit is not the sole cause of regeneration but the sinner and the Holy Spirit together. Evidently then, the Holy Spirit is limited by the power of man and can be resisted in His gracious influences. Thus the Arminians deny the irresistible grace of God in effectually calling a sinner.

In support of their teaching they will quote the scripture, “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost” (Acts 7:52). However, this verse in no way teaches that the Holy Spirit can be effectively resisted when it is His mind to regenerate a sinner; rather, it refers to the common operations of the Holy Spirit which He is pleased to exercise upon those who hear the gospel. The

³*A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p 107.

Word of God assures us that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). His work in regeneration is always effectual; His power is invincible, and so the outcome is sure. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Ps 110:3). “Even when we were dead in sins, hath [God] quickened us together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). In due time, a saving change overtakes the natural man who is elected to everlasting life, so that he no longer rejects the things of the Spirit of God.

Arminians seem to make no distinction between the common work of the Holy Spirit, which is invariably resisted by the natural man, and His effectual work on the elect, which cannot be resisted. Robert Shaw says: “We admit that there are common operations of the Spirit which do not issue in the conversion of the sinner, but we maintain that the special operations of the Spirit overcome all opposition and effectually determine the sinner to embrace Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel. If the special operations of the Spirit were not invincible, but might be effectually resisted, then it would be uncertain whether any would believe or not, and consequently possible that all which Christ had done and suffered in the work of redemption might have been done and suffered in vain.” Shaw also says, “The Arminians, in words, ascribe the conversion of the sinner to the grace of God; yet they ultimately resolve it into the free will of man”.⁴

5. The Perseverance of the Saints. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (15:1). But Arminians hold perversely that a saved sinner can fall from grace – that is, he may not merely backslide but fall completely away from salvation (although that individual may yet return to a state of salvation). There are, of course, examples in the Bible of the Lord’s people backsliding, and some of them backsliding very far indeed, but we never read of any who completely and finally fell away.

Arminians back up their teaching by referring to particular scriptures, for example: “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:26,27). Believers are indeed warned about the solemn matter of falling away by the whole passage (vv 26-39). It is, however, abundantly clear that it serves as a call, to everyone professing the name of Christ, to be exercised about a true saving interest in Christ, and to watch and pray. Where a true, saving interest in Christ exists, that person will not fall away,

⁴*Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, pp 121-2,117.

as we are assured from verse 39 of this passage: “But we are not of them who draw back to perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul”. At the same time, these words clearly indicate that there is a natural, intellectual faith which is not soul-saving, and those who have it will ultimately fall away, however high their religious attainments.

This solemn fact is confirmed by Hebrews 6:4-6. “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”. While Arminians use this passage also to prove that one may fall out of a state of grace and be lost, it does not in fact apply to the true believer. This is confirmed by the words of verse 9: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation”.

How emphatically Christ emphasises that His people, truly united to Him by faith, cannot possibly fall away! “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29). While the final salvation of the Saviour’s sheep is sure, every Christian is to make sure, with the help of God, that he is among those who truly trust in Christ. False professors will at some stage draw back to perdition or discover, like the five foolish virgins, as they pass from time into eternity, that they are not ready. The obligation on every believer to examine himself as to whether he is in the faith – to make his calling and election sure – is altogether different from the Arminian notion that the true believer in Christ can finally fall away.

Christmas in Scottish Church History

Rev David Campbell

At the Reformation, one of the most important publications was the *First Book of Discipline* of 1560, which served as a statement of doctrine and organisation for the Reformed Church in Scotland. John Knox, the great Reformer, had a major influence on this work, which states: “The keeping of holy days . . . that the Papists have invented, as the feasts . . . of Christmas . . . which things, because in God’s Scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from this realm.”

In 1566, the General Assembly took exception to support for the observance of the “Christian Year” in the Second Helvetic Confession. Christmas featured prominently: “If, in Christian liberty, the churches religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord’s nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, and of His ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, we approve of it highly”.⁴ From this the Scottish Church had purged herself, leaving her the purest of Reformed Churches in Europe. Although the Christian calendar was retained for some secular purposes in Scotland as well as in England, and some holidays were kept as before in towns and cities, it is clear that the religious observance of Christmas was not practised under the Reformers in Scotland.

One of the most decided rejections of the practice of observing Christmas was in 1618, when the Five Articles of Perth were imposed on the Scottish Church by the autocratic James VI and I, with a view to conforming the Scottish Church to the English. One of these articles made it law that certain holy days be observed in Church and state: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. The other four articles referred to kneeling at the Lord’s Supper, Episcopal confirmation, and private baptisms and communion. These were all contrary to the scriptural order for the administration of holy ordinances. James convened an Assembly of clerics, chosen by himself, in Perth on August 25 to pass the Articles into Church law. “This Assembly”, says the historian John Row, “was not made up of commissioners sent from Presbyteries, but of Bishops, doctors, deans and such ministers as were the Bishops’ followers; then the king had his commissioners, and there were sundry noblemen and gentlemen who were written for by the king and bishops to keep the assembly.”⁵ The few ministers present who were sent by Presbyteries were not called upon to speak and had no vote; during the deliberations they were made to stand aside from the table around which the others sat, as if they were merely spectators.

The response of the Scottish Church and of the Scottish people to these impositions was decided. Wherever true piety is found, there is a tendency to turn from what is *not* commanded in the Word – to turn from will-worship and traditions imposed by men. This was so in Scotland in Reformation days to a conspicuous degree. Thomas M’Crie explains the resistance to the imposition of Christmas on the Scottish Church: “Against the holy days they objected that the nativity of Christ was of an uncertain date and that the

⁴*Second Helvetic Confession*, chapter 24: “Of Holy Days, Fasts and the Choice of Foods”.

⁵Quoted by Thomas M’Crie in “The Five Articles of Perth, A Passage of Scottish Church History”, *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 3, p 303 (reprinted from *The Scottish Christian Herald*).

institution of Christmas was an imitation of the idolatrous Saturnalia of the Romans, to coincide with which it was changed by the Roman Church to December 25".⁶ He goes on to describe how, when Christmas Day 1618 arrived, the churches of Edinburgh were opened, and some of the time-serving ministers, in obedience to the instructions of the king, observed the festival. But, notwithstanding all the exertions made by the bishops and magistrates, few could be prevailed upon to attend; the people flocked out of town or went about their ordinary affairs.

M'Crie notes the sad declension of one particular cleric on this occasion, and he uses his example as a warning that many who begin with great zeal may ultimately prove hirelings and scatterers of the flock. Patrick Galloway, who had once attempted to display his zeal by offering to sign the protestation against the Articles with his blood and had formerly so abominated Christmas that he even used to take it badly when asked to eat a Christmas pie, appeared in his pulpit on Christmas day 1618 to deliver his Christmas sermon. On discovering that the people of his congregation had more sense than to accept this innovation, he fretted and fumed against them, denouncing famine of the Word, deafness and leanness upon all those who had not come out to hear him. While modern churchmen may not go to such lengths, it is instructive to see history repeating itself when men who once rejected Christmas decisively are now sending Christmas messages to their congregations.

James boasted that he had celebrated Christmas and Easter when in Scotland, and in this his successors followed him heartily. Both Charles I and Charles II secretly courted Popery and, less secretly, adopted its customs. Under James, godly ministers who would not conform were ejected from their pulpits in Scotland. Yet those who suffered according to the will of God in those days, stood fast and witnessed a good confession. In so doing they secured for us, their posterity, a good inheritance and it is to our shame if we have forgotten them. The observance of Christmas is no longer forced on the Presbyterian Church, but it is embraced by the majority. This situation requires the utmost steadfastness in those who agree with our godly forefathers that the practice, and other Roman Catholic customs, should have no place in the life and testimony of the true Church of Christ.

In the dark days after 1618, it pleased God to bless His people with many evidences of His special favour, including the Stewarton and Kirk of Shotts revivals. The godly gathered in earnest prayer for better days, or as George Gillespie put it, "some blessed opportunity to be rid of all such rotten relics, riven [torn] rags, and rotten remainders of Popery".⁷ Samuel Rutherford, in

⁶"The Five Articles of Perth", in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 3, p 302.

⁷J King Hewison, *The Covenanters*, vol 1, p 211.

a sermon on Hosea 8:1-3 preached in August 1640, exhorted the nation to repentance: “So let everyone take pains to read over the account of their old sins . . . and such as were anyways art and part bringing in a new worship in the Kirk of God in this land, who consented unto the Five Articles of Perth etc, and be humbled before God for them. If ye would have a lap of Christ’s garment to cover you in the ill day – if ye would be safe when the Lord comes against the sinners of Zion as an eagle – count for your old sins and be humbled for them, and ye shall be safe.”⁸ Such was the attitude of the godly ministers in Scotland to the imposition of Christmas and other unscriptural practices on the Scottish Church. In 1638 the famous General Assembly in Glasgow utterly abolished all observance of festival days, “because they are neither commanded nor warranted by Scripture”.

In 1637, when he was only 25 years old, George Gillespie published his famous *Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland*. This excellent work consists of four parts. The first proves that the Popish ceremonies and festivals were not necessary, the second that they were not expedient, the third that they were not lawful and the fourth that they were not to be viewed as matters indifferent. In his preface Gillespie, in the strong language of his day, bemoans the change which had come over the Scottish Church:

“What doleful and disastrous mutation (to be bewailed with tears of blood) hath happened to the Church and spouse of Christ in these dominions? Her comely countenance is miscoloured with the fading lustre of the mother of harlots; her shamefaced forehead hath received the mark of the beast; her lovely locks are frizzled with the crisping pins of antichristian fashions; her chaste ears are made to listen to the friends of the great whore, who bring the bewitching doctrine of enchanting traditions; her dove eyes look pleasantly upon the well-attired harlot; her sweet voice is humming and muttering some musical and magical liturgies; her fair neck beareth the halter-like tokens of her former captivity, even a burdensome chain of superfluous and superstitious ceremonies; her undefiled garments are stained with the meretricious [showily but falsely attractive] bravery of Babylonish ornaments and with symbolising badges of conformity with Rome; her harmless hands reach brick and mortar to the building of Babel; her beautiful feet with shoes are all besmeared, whilst they return apace in the way of Egypt, and wade the ingruent [assailing] brooks of Popery. O transformed virgin, whither is thy beauty gone from thee? O forlorn prince’s daughter, how art thou not ashamed to look thy Lord in the face?”⁹ The learning and skill shown in this

⁸*Quaint Sermons by Samuel Rutherford*, 1999 edition, p 55.

⁹In *Works*, vol 1, p viii, 1991 edition.

production have made it an enduring legacy for the Church to use in opposition to the celebration of Christmas.

The National Covenant, first signed in 1580 by the King and in 1581 by many in the nation, and again most famously in 1638, further renounces the Popish ceremonies imposed on the Scottish Church: “We detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist . . . and all his tyrannous laws made upon indifferent things against our Christian liberty . . . his five bastard sacraments, with all his rites, ceremonies and false doctrine . . . his dedicating of kirks, altars and days . . . and finally, we detest all his vain allegories, rites, signs and traditions brought in the kirk, without or against the Word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed kirk; to the which we join ourselves willingly, in doctrine, faith, religion and discipline”. The Covenant goes on in more specific terms to “condemn all erroneous books and writs containing erroneous doctrine against the religion presently professed, or containing superstitious rites and ceremonies Papistical, whereby the people are greatly abused;” and to “condemn the monuments and dregs of bygone idolatry, as going to crosses, observing the festival days of saints, and such other superstitions and Papistical rites, to the dishonour of God, contempt of true religion, and fostering of great error among the people”.¹⁰

Both Gillespie and Rutherford represented the Scottish Church in the Westminster Assembly. While the Confession itself does not refer directly to holy days, the Westminster Divines expressly prohibit them in their *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1645. “There is no day commanded in Scripture”, they say, “to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord’s Day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called holy-days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued.”¹¹ Here we have the established position of the Reformed Church in Scotland.

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland has always opposed the celebration of Christmas. For good reason it has stood against those who are willing to compromise with this practice which every year disrupts the nation. It is our wisdom to learn well the history of our Reformed Church lest, being mingled with the heathen, we learn their ways. We would encourage our people to continue to make a stand against this festival, which was taken over by Rome from heathenism.

¹⁰The National Covenant is bound up with the Westminster Confession of Faith; see pp 347-350 of the current Free Presbyterian Publications edition.

¹¹In *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Free Presbyterian Publications edition, p 394.

Pharaoh's Hardness of Heart¹

Jonathan Edwards

Pharaoh's behaviour represents in a very lively manner the behaviour of impenitent sinners when they are the subjects of reproofs and corrections for their sins – when they are under convictions of conscience and warnings and fears of future wrath with respect to parting with their sins, or letting go the objects of their lusts. Indeed it is an instance of this very conduct. Pharaoh, in refusing to let the people go, refused to let go the objects of his lusts. In keeping them in bondage, he kept his sins. His pride was gratified in his dominion over that people. He was loath to let them go, because he was loath to part with his pride. His covetousness was also gratified by the profits he had by their slavery; he would not let them go because he would not part with the object of his covetousness. God commanded him to let the people go. He sent His commands from time to time by Moses and Aaron and warned him of the ill consequences if he refused; so God counsels and warns sinners by His word, through His ministers.

God first made known His will to Pharaoh mildly and gently, but that was far from being effectual; he was only the worse for it. Instead of letting the people go, he increased their burdens. So God is wont first to use gentle means with sinners; yet impenitent sinners are not the better, but the worse, for the gracious calls and counsels of the Word of God. They sin with greater contempt as a result, as Pharaoh disdained God's command. He said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" Then God proceeded to lay greater matter of conviction before Pharaoh and, by turning the rod into a serpent, to warn him of the calamity that his refusal would bring upon him. And when he still hardened his heart, God began to chastise him by turning the water into blood – which was not only a chastisement, but also a clear and loud warning of the future destruction he would bring upon himself by his obstinacy. So God is wont to give sinners fair warning of the misery and the danger of their sins before He destroys them.

After this, when God's hand pressed Pharaoh and he was exercised with fears of God's future wrath, he entertained some thoughts of letting the people go and promised he would do it. But time after time he broke his promises when he saw there was respite. So sinners are often wont to do under convictions of conscience and fears of wrath; they have many thoughts of parting with their sins, but a divorce between them and their lusts is never actually made. It is common for sinners, when under affliction and threatening dispensations of providence, to make promises of amendment – as in

¹On Exodus 5 to 14, taken from Edwards' *Notes on the Bible*, in his *Works*, vol 2.

times of sore sickness and when in danger of death and damnation – but soon to forget them when God's hand is removed and future damnation more out of sight. In such cases, sinners are wont to beg the prayers of ministers, that God would remove His hand and restore them again, as Pharaoh begged the prayers of Moses and Aaron. "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Entreat the Lord that He may take away the frogs from me, and from my people, and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord" (Ex 8:8).

Pharaoh was brought by God's judgements and terrors to confess his sin with seeming humility, as when "Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Ex 9:27). This was when there were mighty thunderings; and it follows in the next verse, "Entreat the Lord that there may be no more mighty thunderings". So again: "He said, I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you; now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once" (Ex 10:16,17). So sinners under affliction and danger of future wrath, and when God thunders upon their consciences, oftentimes seem very penitent and humble and are much in confessing their sins, but as yet their lusts are not divorced from them and they have no thorough disposition to forsake them.

Pharaoh, in the struggle between his conscience and his lusts, was contriving that God might be served, and yet that he might enjoy his lusts which were gratified by the slavery of the Children of Israel. When Moses kept insisting that God should be served and sacrificed to, "Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Ex 8:25). Pharaoh was willing to consent to that, but he would have it done without parting with the Children of Israel. So it is oftentimes with sinners under fear of divine wrath; they are for contriving to serve God and enjoy their lusts too. They are willing to be very devout in many duties of religion, but without parting with their beloved sins. How do some wicked men amongst the Papists and elsewhere seem to abound in acts of devotion! How great pains they take, how much trouble and loss they are at! They are like the Samaritans who worshipped the God of Israel and served their own gods too. So did the Jews: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal; and come and stand before Me in this house?" (Jer 7:9,10). And: "When they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it, and lo, thus have they done in the midst of Mine house" (Ezek 23:39).

Moses objected against complying with Pharaoh's conscience and proposed that serving God and continuing in the land of Egypt in slavery to the

Egyptians were inconsistent one with another. The Egyptian taskmasters would abhor the service that God required and would not tolerate it but would kill God's worshippers. A separation between Israelites and Egyptians was therefore necessary in order to God being served. So the service of God and our still continuing in the service of our lusts are inconsistent one with another, as Christ says, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon". There is a necessity of forsaking one in order to cleave to the other. If we retain our sins – if we do not part from them – they will kill those duties wherewith God is served.

When Pharaoh saw that it would not be consented to that the people should only sacrifice to their God in the land, he consented to let them go, provided they would not go far away. He was not willing to part with them finally, and therefore would not let them go clear but would have them within reach so that he might bring them back again. So it often is with sinners; they will refrain a while from their sins but will not wholly part with them – taking an everlasting leave of them, quitting all hopes or expectations of ever having anything more to do with them.

Afterwards, when God's plagues came still harder upon Pharaoh, he consented to let the men go, if they would leave the women and children (Ex 10: 8-10). Then after that, when God's hand pressed him still more sorely, he consented that they should go, even women and children, provided they would leave their cattle behind; but he was not willing to let them go and all that they had (Ex 10:24). So it oftentimes is with sinners; when pressed with God's judgements or fears of future wrath, they are brought to be willing to part with some of their sins, but not all. They are brought to part with the more gross acts but not with lesser indulging of their lusts; whereas we must part with all our sins, little and great, and all that belongs to them. There must not be a hoof left behind. At last, when it came to an extremity, Pharaoh consented to let all the people go, and all that they had. But he was not steadfastly of that mind; he soon repented and pursued after them again. And then, when he was guilty of such backsliding, he was destroyed without remedy, which is often the case with sinners. Note that when there is only a forced parting with sin – though it be universal – it is not sincere, nor is it like to be persevering.

God exercised abundance of patience with Pharaoh before He destroyed him; the warnings that were given him became louder and louder, and God's judgements upon him greater and greater, and God's hand and design in them became more and more manifest. First, God only sends a command, directing Moses to deliver it, and let it be accompanied with humble entreaties, paying him the honour due to a king (Ex 3:18, 5:3). After that, Moses

spoke with more authority; God made him a god to Pharaoh, and he no more besought him as a subject (Ex 7:1), and his word was confirmed by miracles. But the first miracles were such as did not hurt them, but only warn them, as turning the rod into a serpent. Then God proceeded to miracles that were hurtful, which yet were imitated by the magicians. But then God proceeded further, to do things that the magicians could not imitate, but confessed that they manifested the finger of God.

That the evidence might be still clearer and God's meaning in those plagues plainer – God proceeded to sever between the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel dwelt, and the rest of Egypt. Then, in the next plague, God severed even between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt; and the next plague, the plague of boils and blains, was not only beyond what the magicians could do, but the magicians themselves were the subjects of the plague and were grievously tormented, so that they could not stand before Moses. And this plague was brought upon them by the ashes of the furnace, wherein they employed the children of Israel in their slavery in burning the brick they made, so that Pharaoh might see wherefore God was angry and did so chastise him.

After this, Pharaoh was more particularly and fully warned of God by His word than ever before, and was forewarned what those plagues would at last come to if he continued still obstinate (Ex 9:13ff). And then God brought the plague of hail and thunder, which was more terrifying and threatening than any heretofore; and, to complete the destruction caused by the hail, the locusts were sent to eat up what the hail had left. Then came the plague of darkness, with frightful apparitions of evil angels, which was more terrifying still than any that had gone before, and the distinction made in it, between the children of Israel and the Egyptians, was more remarkable, for they had light in their dwellings where they dwelt mingled with the Egyptians. And then, before that great destruction by the last plague, Pharaoh was again particularly warned, much more fully and particularly than ever, of what was coming, and when it would come, and in what manner (Ex 11:4ff). And then came the last and greatest plague that preceded Pharaoh's own destruction, attended with the greatest tokens of God's wrath, and a remarkable distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. And last of all, Pharaoh himself, with all the prime of Egypt, was destroyed in the Red Sea.

Not a dog can move his tongue against God's people unless God gives permission. Daniel never spent a night more safely than that he spent in the lions' den.

If Felix trembled when Paul merely reasoned of judgement, how will sinners tremble when Christ shall come to judgement? *W S Plumer*

Book Reviews

The Suffering Saviour, by F W Krummacher, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 464 pages, £15.95.¹

Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher (1796-1868) held several preaching or pastoral charges in the German Reformed Church, including a period as royal chaplain. In his youth he was affected by what he calls “the cold, hard Rationalism which then, from almost every pulpit in the land, cast down the chopped straw and chaff of its poor ideas to scanty and spiritually-famished congregations”. He was educated in theological classes where he “saw the Lord of glory stripped of His supernatural majesty, shrivelled into the rank of a mere rabbi, noble indeed, and highly gifted, but yet always entangled by the prejudices of His time”. He confessed that, when he began his ministry, his “whole Christianity consisted, as yet, more in undefined sentimentality than in firm conviction; more in the hazy vision of the imagination than in the possession of truth won as a result of warfare against error or as gained from experience”.

While his words apply generally, he is no doubt drawing on his own experience when he writes: “In the days of our blindness we had also divested the Lord Jesus of the glory of His inherent splendour, while presuming to deny one or other particular concerning Him, so as to leave Him little more than the title of Jewish Rabbi, or the Sage of Nazareth. But how did we afterward alter our course, when the Lord stripped us of the garments of our imaginary righteousness, and in the mirror of His law exhibited to us our real form! How hastily did we then put upon Immanuel His own raiment!” (pp 307,308). His testimony to “the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures” (p 6) and his call to “place a firm reliance on the Word of truth” (p 7) are more commendable in view of the rationalistic environment in which he ministered. Awareness of this ecclesiastical background helps us appreciate the significance of his occasional pointed criticisms of views destructive of Scripture and of the Person and work of Christ – criticisms as appropriate and needful in Scotland today as in mid-nineteenth century Germany.

Krummacher considers the history of the final sufferings of Christ as the approach of the Lamb of God to the altar of burnt offering in the tabernacle and divides his study into three sections: (1) “The Outer Court”, which traces the Lord’s progress from His plain announcement of His approaching death to His disciples, on the way to Jerusalem, until He reached Gethsemane, taking in the various judicial trials to which He was subjected; (2) “The Holy Place”, which takes us from the Lord’s experience in Gethsemane until He

¹Both books reviewed here are available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

came to Calvary; and (3) “The Most Holy Place”, which contemplates the crucifixion and burial of our Lord. The principle on which he proceeds is that “there is no feature in the history of the passion which is devoid of significance. Throughout there is a manifestation of superior arrangement and divine depth of purpose” (p 212). The Lord being taken prisoner, His various trials and His condemnation “are only symbolical representations of infinitely more exalted events, which were behind the veil, in the relations of the Mediator to God” (p 119).

Advertised as a “series of devotional meditations”, these 53 studies focus the attention of mind and soul upon Christ as the Lamb of God in readable language which reveals the warmth of the writer’s attachment to the Saviour and should help promote appropriate attitudes in gracious readers. At times Krummacher engages in somewhat fanciful interpretations and may be inclined to forget that sanctified imagination should function as a help to enter into what has been revealed rather than to add to it. The extended treatment of Judas Iscariot provides the most obvious and questionable example of this tendency. The underlying theology breaks through from time to time, though not as prominently as in the works of our Scottish theologians and preachers, such as Hugh Martin’s *The Shadow of Calvary*, which covers some of the same ground as *The Suffering Saviour* and was described by Martin as “an attempt to view the *history* of Christ’s sufferings in the light of the *doctrine* and the *fruits* thereof”.

There are expressions to which one demurs, but it is evident from this volume that Krummacher has a high view of Scripture, holds firmly to the divine glory of the Redeemer even in the depths of His humiliation and regards His work on Calvary as that of vicarious atonement. “All the doctrinal systems which seek to neutralise or evade the view of Christ’s sufferings as an atonement proceed from a conscious or unconscious effort to weaken and lessen the enormity of sin” (p 265). Such “devotional” literature is useful when used as a priming of the pump – illustrating how we should respond to the doctrines of the Word of God rather than acting as a substitute for personal contact with the Word and reflection and meditation on it.

Practical application is scattered throughout, as in the comment on Peter’s sad fall: “The love of Christ constrains us to venture everything for Him; but it is only the belief in Christ’s love for us, and the trusting to His gracious power and strength, that enables us to overcome. He who trembles at himself, as being capable of denying the Master, will gain greater victories than he who deems himself sufficiently strong to be able to say, ‘Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.’ ‘Thou standest by faith,’ writes Paul in Romans. ‘Be not high-minded, but fear.’”

(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright

Dying Thoughts, by Richard Baxter, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 144 pages, £4.50.

Dying Thoughts, as explained on the rear cover of the book, is an abridged version of Richard Baxter's exposition of Paul's words in Philippians 1:23: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

The Introduction, by Edward Donnelly, was first published under the title "A Corrective for Reformed Preachers" in *The Banner of Truth* magazine for July-August 1997. In it he asks the question: "In looking for help from the Puritan giants, are there not other and safer preaching models?" This is a relevant question, for, as the writer reminds us, "Baxter's theology was flawed. His desire to promote Church unity sometimes betrayed him into seeking common cause with those who were far removed from biblical faith, and . . . although an able controversialist, he confesses: 'I am too much inclined to such words in controversial writings which are too keen, and apt to provoke the person whom I write against'."

The answer suggested is that three characteristics of Baxter's preaching are often lacking in preaching today: his preaching was devoted to a simple exposition of basic truths; it had a passionate evangelical appeal; and it was shaped and enforced by systematic pastoral counselling. All of this comes out in those "thoughts". His five points are: (1.) What is desirable in the present life. (2.) The souls of the godly are with Christ. (3.) Departing to be with Christ. (4.) Why it is far better to be with Christ, and (5.) God makes us willing to depart.

Addressing his own heart and practice, Baxter takes us through all these points. After dealing with how much more desirable the future state of the believer is to the present, he comes to the doubts and fears which often assail believers as they face eternity. He is especially helpful here, dealing with these matters firmly and honestly. For example: "Were I on the top of a castle or steeple, fastened by the strongest chains, or guarded by the surest battlements, I could not possibly look down without fear; and so it is with our prospect in the life to come. If, therefore, my soul sees undeniable evidence of immortality, and is able by irrefragable arguments to prove a future blessedness; if I am convinced that divine promises are true, and trust my soul, and all my hope, upon them; then neither my averseness to dying nor my irrational fear of entering upon eternity can invalidate the reasons of my hope or prove the unsoundness of my faith, but only the weakness of it. 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' was Christ's reproof to His disciples. A timorous heart needs to be chided, by saying, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall

yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God”” (p 36).

This book, because of the language style, is not the easiest to read, but the trembling believer who takes pains to read it will be amply rewarded.

(Rev) W A Weale

Notes and Comments

Government Encouragement of Gambling and Drinking

A Government Bill providing for a major overhaul of laws on gambling has come before the UK parliament. Proposals to have slot machines removed from places where children can get access to them are to be welcomed. This is the aspect on which the Government are attempting to focus public attention, but plans to remove any restriction on the size of jackpots offered by casinos seem much more central to the thrust of the proposed legislation. It is expected that up to 40 so-called super casinos, after the fashion of Las Vegas, will be set up as a result of this Bill.

While opposition to the proposals may result in some modifications, this would still be a serious departure from what a government should be standing for. The responsibilities of government extend to the moral welfare of its people, and they ought to have a care for, at least, those whose finances will be ruined by overreaching themselves at gambling tables. One person's winnings come from someone else's losses, while the casino itself is sure of a profit – and the Government also is sure of its cut.

Meanwhile in Glasgow, the opening of a new casino has brought objections from local residents who will have to endure disturbance throughout the night – closing time is 6 am. Proposals for a further casino costing £8 million, and for another with the massive price tag of £162 million, indicate the scale of profits which the gambling companies expect to make. No wonder there are fears that up to 70 000 gambling addicts could be the result.

At the same time the Prime Minister was backing plans to allow 24-hour drinking in England and Wales. He dismissed “the notion that we should stop everybody in the country doing that because there are some hooligans that get fired up with drink on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night and go out and beat the place up”. His attitude again is irresponsible. Chris Fox, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, commented on existing problems, and added: “If all we are going to do is to extend the time [licensed premises] are open, this will extend the problem”. He went on to call for a change in behaviour. Indeed!

But how is such a change to come about? No doubt more restrictive licens-

ing laws would help. But the fundamental problem, to which both Government and law-enforcement agencies close their eyes, is the corruption of the human heart. And there is only one solution – the preaching of the pure gospel applied by the Holy Spirit. While it is not the duty of the Government to proclaim the gospel, it is its duty to do all in its power to promote Christianity and Christian morality. This, sadly, it steadfastly refuses to do.

Africa Bishops Take a Stand

We do not regard Episcopalianism as the form of church government prescribed in the New Testament but, nonetheless, godly people have lived under it and pious men have been instrumental in administering it. Like Presbyterianism it was, through emigration and missionary activities, exported to other parts of the world, including Africa. These Episcopal Churches, like others in Africa, were dependent on overseas aid, and their pastors received their training in either Britain or North America.

Now the wheel has almost turned full circle and, in the Episcopalian context, North America may now be regarded as the “dark continent”, where homosexuality is condoned and a man who lives in that very sin has been appointed to prominent ecclesiastical office. The African bishops have been loud in their condemnation, but their voices are not being listened to. As there is no hope of remedying the situation, they are now preparing to declare themselves independent. Episcopalian they may be, but we cannot but admire their determination to resist this evil. This was made clear at a recent conference held in Lagos, Nigeria, where the official theme was “Africa comes of age” and this, it is said, “was borne out in the rhetoric and resolutions”.

From now on, the African church will have its own institutions and will train its own clergy. “We feel,” declared Peter Akinola, Primate of Nigeria, “it would be dangerous for the future of our church to continue to send our own future leaders to those institutions” – in North America and Britain. Jane Little, a BBC Religious Affairs correspondent, comments, “This is a decisive move away from a colonial model of church towards one in which Africans see the roles reversed – that is, where the parent Church of England should learn from them. . . . Many Anglicans in Africa see the decline in Western Christianity as the product of secular decadence and believe it is up to them to uphold the purity of the gospel. . . . The message of this meeting in Lagos appears to be that, whether or not the Americans repent of their actions, African clergy will lead the way with a ‘pure’ home-grown theology.” One would think that the Archbishop of Canterbury and other prominent liberal Anglican ecclesiastics have reason to be alarmed. It is too much to hope that they will be ashamed.

JM

Protestant View

Tony Blair and Roman Catholicism

It would appear that we are being prepared for the announcement that the Rt Hon Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, is to become a full-blown Roman Catholic. It is just a matter of time, if we accept recent press reports, although Mr Blair has denied them. It seems that a local Roman Catholic priest who ministers to the Blair household when they are resident at Chequers, the Prime Minister's country home, has been conducting mass within its precincts since the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York. Before then it seems that the entire Blair family attended mass in the village of Great Missenden, where this priest, in charge of the parish of "the Immaculate Heart of Mary", regularly propagates this "dangerous deceit and blasphemous fable".

It would appear that Mr Blair realises that no Roman Catholic has ever been Prime Minister and, according to the previously-mentioned priest, that is acting as a restraint on him at present. "Can the Prime Minister of Britain be a [Roman] Catholic? is the question he is said to have posed to the priest over lunch.

We hope the day will never dawn when a Roman Catholic prime minister will sit in 10 Downing Street, at the centre of Government, but owing allegiance first and foremost to the usurper of Christ's titles in the Vatican, who blasphemously claims universal rule as Prince of the Kings of the Earth. It seems that we could have a Protestant Queen bound to adhere to the terms of the Bill of Rights, and a Roman Catholic prime minister who would in the nature of things be bound to undermine it. Our prayer for Tony Blair should be that Lord would open his eyes. JM

Church Information

Student Received

The Southern Presbytery, meeting in Glasgow on 2 November 2004, received, on the recommendation of the Edinburgh Kirk Session, Dr Allan MacColl as a student studying for the ministry of the gospel in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

(Rev) H M Cartwright, Clerk of Presbytery

New Publications

Free Presbyterian Publications are glad to announce that a volume entitled *Dear J* is expected to be available by early December. It consists of the letters which Mrs Margaret R Macleod contributed to *The Young People's Magazine* over the seven years before her death. A 168-page hardback, it will cost £7.50. The letters were intended for pupils at the upper stages of primary schools and the lower stages of secondary schools.

Rev J L Goldby

Mr Goldby expects to leave for Israel on November 16. His postal address is: 2 HaYarden, Talpiot, Jerusalem, Israel; and his e-mail address: jgoldfpc@netvision.net.il.

Visit to Eastern Europe

Mr E Ross and Mr C Lamont plan to leave, DV, on November 29 for Sfanto Gheorghe, Romania, with 640 Hungarian Bibles, 8000 Hungarian and 2000 Romanian calendars, supplied by the TBS. They will also take Reformed literature in English as well as clothing and household goods etc; these were intended for Odessa but due to unforeseen circumstances had to be diverted to Presbyterian congregations in Romania. We ask our people to pray not only the Word would prosper but also that the other aid would prove useful and that the men would be brought safely over these long distances in winter. (Rev) D A Ross

Magazine Prices

From the January issue, the cost of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* is to be increased to £1.20 per issue, while the cost of *The Young People's Magazine* will remain unchanged. The annual subscription for the two magazines for 2005 will rise to £25; that for *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* alone to £16; and that for *The Young People's Magazine* alone is unchanged at £11.

Notice to Congregational Treasurers

Congregational Treasurers are requested to send their final remittances for 2004 to the General Treasurer to reach him not later than 29 December 2004, so that they may be lodged in the bank by December 31. All payments not banked by then will be included in the 2005 accounts. R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: Anon, USA, "where needed", \$200.59; Anon, USA, "where needed", \$395.

Jewish & Foreign Fund: NP, Wales, for the work in Israel, £100 per Rev JML.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Ness: *Communion Expenses:* A Wick Friend, £10 per NT; Mr & Mrs MML, Breasclate, £20 per AM; A Friend of the Cause, £20.

North Tolsta: *Door Collection:* Anon, £30; Anon, £20; Anon, £20. *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £20; Anon, £10.

Portree: *Bus Fund:* A Friend, £10 per SYM. *Door Collection:* Anon, £4; Anon, £6; A Friend, £20 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £30 per SYM. *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £10; Anon, £14.

Raasay: *Door Collection:* A Friend, £150. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A Friend, for Kenya Mission, £26 per Rev JRT. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £20 per Rev JRT.

Staffin: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £100. *Sustentation Fund:* GM, Staffin House, £30 per SMK.

Stornoway: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50; Anon, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Mr W Clelland, £246.20 per KMA. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Fund, £20. *Sabbath School Expenses:* Anon, £20; Breasclate, £15 per MML.

South Harris: *Congregational Funds:* A Friend of the Cause, £500; A Friend, North Uist, £20 per Rev KDM.

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

2004

Volume 109

Editor:
Rev Kenneth D Macleod

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

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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