

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

Vol 109

June 2004

No 6

The Uttermost Farthing

Mankind was created absolutely perfect. He was able to obey God's commandments without in the least degree coming short of God's high standard: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy strength, and with *all* thy mind". Both Adam and Eve were able to give that full-hearted love to God in all that they did and said and thought. They owed perfect obedience to God and they actually gave Him perfect obedience.

But before long they fell into sin. No longer did they love God perfectly. Indeed, at that point in their lives, they did not love Him at all. And the whole human race fell in Adam, which means that all of mankind "go astray as soon as they be born". They do not love God; they come short of His glory in everything; they sin continually. They are therefore guilty, and all the time they are adding to their guilt. Because they are not rendering to God the obedience they owe to Him, they are in debt to Him. And every transgression is adding to that debt.

God is infinitely just; He must punish sin. In other words, He cannot overlook that debt. So every sinner who is still in debt at the end of his life must go to a lost eternity, the prison for debtors to divine justice, where they are "reserved unto judgement". From that prison there is no possibility of getting out. The sentence has been pronounced on every condemned sinner: "Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing" (Matt 5:26), and it will be confirmed on the day of judgement. These words, spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, are in the context of earthly disputes, and follow advice to "agree with thine adversary quickly . . . lest . . . thou be cast into prison" – for, in particular, debt. But J A Alexander comments that the words "are intended . . . to remind the hearer that perpetual imprisonment for debt on earth is but a shadow of perpetual imprisonment in hell for sin". God would be unjust to ignore that debt unless complete satisfaction is made for it – unless the whole debt is paid, to the very last farthing (the Saviour was referring to a coin of very small value).

As One who is perfectly righteous, God cannot accept anything less than

the full payment of the debt we owe. And, throughout all eternity, the justice of God will pursue the sinner in hell crying, as it were: "Pay me that thou owest". But the sinner cannot pay off the smallest part of his debt. In fact, he will always go on adding to it. One of the solemn aspects of existence in a lost eternity is the lack of restraint on sin; so that, far from the sinner being able to reduce his debt to divine justice, he is continually adding to it. There is no possibility of reducing that debt. The uttermost farthing will never be paid. The sinner can never be freed from a lost eternity.

Is there then any hope of reducing the debt in this life? Could the sinner not turn over a new leaf and begin to please God by keeping His law? The truth is that no one in this fallen world can meet God's standard; no one can love God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind. The Bible is clear on the matter: "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin". By our attempts to keep the law, we can never please God. Fallen creatures that we are, we cannot meet that perfectly holy standard which He has set for us. What the law does is to show us that we come short of this standard, that we are sinning, that we are adding to our debt. Our only hope is to find a substitute who can pay the debt for us before it is too late.

It is the great wonder of this world's history that such a substitute was provided, that the Son of God came into this world to pay this debt on behalf of a multitude which cannot be numbered. It is to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that every sinner is in debt. And God has made a perfectly just provision which allows sinners to escape the eternal prison which their debt deserves. But He has not ignored the debt – that would be unjust. He has laid it on His Son, who came "to give His life a ransom for many". He undertook the responsibility of paying the debt on behalf of all whom God had a purpose to save. And He discharged that responsibility in His sufferings and death. He could pay that debt to the uttermost farthing – and He did. That is what He was announcing when He said on the cross: "It is finished". But can we be sure that the payment was accepted? Yes, we can; God the Father has made a public declaration that He has accepted the payment made by Christ as the substitute for indebted sinners. In the resurrection of Christ we may see that the debt was paid, to the uttermost farthing.

Thus what no sinner can do has been accomplished. So, when a sinner believes in Jesus, he may be sure that his debt has been completely paid. Thus it is said: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1); those who believe in Jesus are freely justified. No contribution is required from the sinner, however great his debt. Many have wished to bring a contribution. Among them was the rich young ruler,

who asked, "What lack I yet?" Indeed he thought he had all his life been making a considerable contribution to his salvation; was he not already keeping the commandments as well as it was reasonable to expect? But no such contribution is possible. As we have already seen, our best deeds are only adding to our debt because they are not full of love to God. To think of purchasing our salvation with our imperfect works is altogether dishonouring to God. They cannot possibly be accepted.

It is a full salvation that is proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And let no sinner question the perfection of this salvation, for he is further assured that Christ "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). If he is looking to Christ, the sinner can be certain that his debt has been completely paid, and that the One who has paid his debt is representing him at the right hand of God. Just as his debt has been paid to the uttermost, so will all his other needs be supplied to the uttermost. The work of sanctification, begun when his debt was paid, will be continued until he is made perfect, at the moment when he will pass into glory. The intercession of his Saviour at the right hand of the Father will ensure this. How glorious then is this salvation! What reason for thankfulness they have whose infinite debt has been so willingly paid, and who have the promise of eternal blessedness and of the supply of all their needs while this life continues! What reason also to live a life of wholehearted obedience to the will of God as expressed in His commandments!

But how sad that so few come to Christ to have their debt paid! Though their debt is infinite, they do not realise the seriousness of their position; they do not realise the guilt of every one of their sins; they do not take it to heart that, if they do not come to Christ as heavily-indebted sinners, they must yet appear before His judgement seat to have their debts announced publicly and be sent to the eternal prison from which they can never get free.

But we are still in life. Let us take to heart the solemnity and the seriousness of being sinners infinitely in debt to the justice of God. We must not doubt the willingness of Christ to clear that debt, even to the uttermost farthing. If God is still our adversary, let us heed the words of Christ: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing" (Matt 5:25,26). Yet Christ still calls: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". He is calling sinners to come, no matter how heavily indebted they are, to have it all forgiven. Let no one refuse.

Jerusalem's Watchmen (1)¹

A Sermon by *Matthew Newcomen*

Isaiah 62:6,7. *Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

The Lord, having promised unto His Church instruments fit for Himself to use in effecting the great things previously promised, says, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem". And having undertaken for the fidelity of these watchmen, which shall never hold their peace night nor day, He turns to them and gives them a charge to see that they make good what He has undertaken. In the words you may consider these three things:

First, the persons called upon: "Ye that make mention of the Lord". The margin reads: *Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers*. Unless our marginal reading only implies that it is the common duty and disposition of all the people of God to remember the Lord and make mention of Him, *the Lord's remembrancers* seems to have something peculiar to some rank and order of men to whom it belongs to put the Lord in mind of His people and of His promises. It seems there was some standing office in the court to be the king's remembrancer, to which the prophet here alludes – ye to whose office it belongs to put the Lord in mind of His Church's necessities, and His promises, which can be no other than the watchmen spoken of in the foregoing words, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem," and they no other but the priests and prophets and ministers of the Lord.

Second, the service they are called to, described negatively: "Keep not silence, and give Him no rest". This implies that their employment here is vocal, and that can only be preaching or praying. Some think the ministers of the Lord are here called to diligence in both these; but in this place I conceive that the Lord calls them to attendance upon prayer, because of the following words: *give Him no rest*, that is, give the Lord no rest – pray, cry importunately, incessantly. God here by His prophet calls His ministers to pray, as elsewhere He doth, by His Apostle, to preach in season and out of season, night and day.

Third, the duration of this service, how long they must continue praying: "Till He establish and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" – till God

¹The first part of a sermon, as edited, preached at Westminster Abbey before both Houses of Parliament and the Westminster Assembly on 7 July 1643, a fast day at the end of the first week of the Assembly. As a member of the Assembly, Newcomen (also spelled Newcomb) was one of those most involved in drawing up the Confession of Faith. He was then minister at Dedham in Essex and a prominent Presbyterian. After he was ejected from his charge in 1662, he crossed to the Netherlands and became minister of the English church in Leiden, where he died of the plague in 1669, aged about 59.

have not only laid the foundations but set up the pinnacles of a glorious Church, not only brought forth the cornerstone but the top-stone of Jerusalem and all the earth with shouting, crying, "Grace, grace unto it".

Out of the words, I might present unto you several doctrines, as many in number as the parts of the text, as:

First, that God will certainly establish Jerusalem and make it a praise in the earth. This is clear, for God would certainly never call His servants to pray for what He never intended to do. If this was the only text in all the book of God that told us of this beauty and glory, wherewith God in the latter days will clothe His Church, even upon earth – if nothing was said of it elsewhere in this evangelical prophet Isaiah or any mention of it in that prophetic evangelist John; if in his whole book of Revelation he had not uttered one word of this glory of the Church – yet in this one text there is enough to support the faith of God's people in the patient and comfortable expectation of it. God hath commanded prayer for it; therefore God will do it, for He never said to the sons of Jacob, "Seek ye Me in vain" (Is 45:19).

Second, we might observe that, though the Lord will certainly make His Church glorious, a praise upon earth, yet He will not do this till it be obtained of Him by earnest and incessant prayer. Therefore in order to His own holy and blessed ends, He here commands His servants' prayers.

Third, we may observe that it is in a special manner the duty of God's ministers to pray earnestly and incessantly to God that He would establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

This third I will embrace. To an assembly of God's ministers met together on a solemn day of prayer to seek God for the good of Jerusalem, what can be more apposite than such a doctrine as this, which tells them that it is in a special manner their duty to pray incessantly and importunately that God would establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth? May the God of wisdom and grace, who directed the thoughts of His servant unto this word, enlarge His own gracious hand, and the heart and mouth of His most unworthy instrument, so that, helped by His Spirit and your prayers, I may utter such things as may advance God's glory and further all our hearts, not only in the work of this day, but in that great employment whereunto we desire this day to sanctify ourselves.

I will not say it is needful (in such an auditory it cannot be), but it may be convenient, to open the terms of this proposition a little. Not to speak of the persons upon whom this duty is imposed (God's ministers), nor of the duty imposed upon them (prayer), I shall only speak of the subject of the duty here propounded to us, which is twofold: first, showing *whom we must pray for*; and second, *what we must pray for*.

1. Whom we must pray for. Jerusalem, which may be taken two ways – either literally or mystically. Literally, for the city so named, or for the people sometime inhabiting that place. The city was sometime famous among the nations as the city where God dwelt, the habitation of His holiness, the place near to which Christ was born, in which He conversed, manifested the truth of His godhead in His actions and the truth of His manhood in His passions, in which He was betrayed, scourged, reviled and condemned, near which He was crucified and buried. But this is not that Jerusalem we must pray for; our devotions must not with the Papists dote upon the ruins and rubbish of the city of God’s curse.

Jerusalem also literally signifies the people of Jerusalem, the nation of the Jews, whom God in His righteous indignation has scattered over the face of the earth, as chaff before the wind. These we may pray for – I mean the remnant according to the election of grace – that God would gather them again according to His promise: “And so all Israel shall be saved” (Rom 11:26).

But neither is this what is here meant. The Jerusalem meant in this place is the mystical Jerusalem, whereof this was but a type, the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven². And so it implies two things:

(1.) The Church of God in its utmost latitude dispersed over the world. The general assembly and Church of the firstborn is unto us Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22,23), for which we are to pray, that God would establish and make it a praise in the earth.
(2.) That particular Church in which we live, to which we belong, to which we stand in the same relation that the Jews did to Jerusalem. For this we are to pray, that God would establish and make it a praise in the earth.

2. What we are to pray for. We find two things mentioned in the text: first, that God would establish His Church; second, that He would make it a praise in the earth.

First. Though the Church has a strong foundation, and walls and bulwarks, yet it is in itself but a weak building – earthly tabernacles planted on a rock. What God says of the earth may be applied to the Church: “The earth and all the inhabitants of it are dissolved; I bear up the pillars of it” (Ps 75:3). All the joints of this great fabric of the universe would be loosened if God did not put His everlasting arms under the pillars of it, and bear up and establish them. So would it be in the Church of God. Therefore we must pray that God would establish His Church in two things:

²Revelation 21:2, which seems to refer to this verse of Isaiah and to speak the same language; for as here (vv 4,5) God saith, The “land shall be married”; and God will rejoice over Jerusalem, “as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride”, so here John sees this Jerusalem “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”.

(1.) We must pray that God would establish His Church in truth, against all errors. The Church is said to be the pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim 3:15); not as the Papists affirm, as if truth were grounded upon the judgement and determination of the Church. The Church is indeed the pillar of truth, not because it holds up the truth, but because it holds forth the truth. The metaphor is taken, not from pillars that support houses, but from such pillars as anciently were wont to be fixed in market places and other places of public meeting, upon which they hung their laws, that they might be public to the view of all men. So, amongst us, proclamations are for the same end fixed to posts. We grant the Church is, and ought to be, such a pillar to hold forth the truth to the view of all men, a pillar to which all men resorting may read and know the truth. It is the pillar and ground of truth (in the original, the first signification of *ground* is a *seat*). It is the place of truth's abode, where truth is always to be found. This the Church of God is, or ought to be.

Now, though the Church of God should be thus, yet we know there is no Church but is subject unto error. The Apostle tells the Corinthians: "There must also be heresies among you" (1 Cor 11:19), and our Saviour tells us that there shall arise such subtle masters of heresy that they shall seduce, if it were possible, the very elect of God (Mark 13:22). Therefore we must pray that God would establish His Church in truth against all errors. Truth is the Church's girdle; a Church, as the Latin proverb is, that hath lost this girdle of truth, or hath this girdle loosed, is an adulterous, beggarly Church. Therefore, ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He establish His Church in truth.

(2.) We must pray that God would establish his Church in *peace*. Peace is one of the richest blessings of heaven, a comprehensive blessing, a circle of blessings. The lack of peace hath made us know what peace is worth. In the enjoyment of this rich, desirable blessing, we must entreat the Lord to establish Jerusalem, His Church. Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep no silence and give Him no rest till He establish Jerusalem in peace.

And this peace is threefold: [1.] civil, with the nations; [2.] ecclesiastical, with its own members; and [3.] spiritual, with its Head and God.

[1.] We must pray that God would establish His Church in peace among the nations. The Church is among the nations as the lily among the thorns. The lot of Israel was among the uncircumcised heathens; so is the Church's. Yet hath her God promised peace in the midst of enemies. "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig tree; and none

shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it” (Mic 4:3,4). Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He establish His Church in this peace.

[2.] There is the peace of the Church with its own members, peace in the bowels and bosom of the Church. We must pray that God would establish His Church so that the Church may not languish and die, that there may be no incurable divisions in the Church, which is one of the greatest and saddest mischiefs which can fall upon the Church, or that the Church fall under. God, who makes men to be of one mind in a house, can make men of one mind in a Church, in a nation, in Jerusalem. He has promised that He will do it: “I will give them one heart” (Ezek 11.19), and “I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9). O happy, happy we, if God would fulfil these promises in us! Happy we, if we could obtain this at the hands of God by our prayers! Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He establish His Church in this peace.

[3.] There is peace between God and His Church. We must pray that God would establish His Church in that also – that God would so watch over and work in His Church that no sin may take hold upon it which might cause a quarrel between His Church and Him, or cause the Lord to say, “Mine heritage is unto Me as a speckled bird” (Jer 12:9). We must pray that God would so order all the ways of His Church before Him that He may never know her by any other than those precious names so full of love: Ammi and Ruhamah, Hephzibah and Beulah. Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He establish His Church in this peace also.

Thus you see the first thing we are to pray for, that God would establish His Church upon the two pillars of truth and peace, as Solomon did the porch of the temple upon those two brazen pillars Jachin and Boaz. Yet there is one thing more that this text commands us to pray for, that God would make Jerusalem a praise; Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He establish and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. In the former we pray that God would fortify His Church; in this that God would beautify His Church – make it clear as the morning, fair as the moon, glorious as the sun, terrible as an army with banners, lovely as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, the praise of all the earth. Now God makes His Church a praise in the earth by these five things especially:

1. God makes His Church a praise in the earth by furnishing her with fullness of ordinances. The pre-eminence of the Church of the Jews above all other nations was chiefly this: to them were committed the oracles of God. This, God tells His people, should make them glorious and praiseworthy in

the eyes of all the nations of the world. "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this nation is a wise and understanding people: for what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgements so righteous, as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut 4:6-8). Now when God bestows His oracles upon a people, appending ordinances, seals, Sabbaths, censures, administered in purity and in power, He then makes them a praise. Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He thus make His Church a praise.

2. God makes His Church a praise by ruling it according to His own order. It is equally prejudicial to the Church not to be ordered at all, as to be ordered after the lusts and wills of men. God, who is the God of order, and not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor 14:33), would have all things in all churches done decently and in order (v 40). Now, when all ordinances and offices are administered in the Church according as God hath ordered, that Church is a praise in heaven and earth, with God and saints. "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them unto you" (1 Cor 11:2). And, on the other side, disorder – or deflection from the rule of Christ – is a blemish, and detracts from the Church's praise, as appears in the same chapter: "Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse" (v 17); and: "What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not" (v 22).

One aberration from the rule of Christ, in the administration of this one ordinance of the Supper of the Lord, casts a cloud upon this Church's glory and causes a great diminution of their praise. Therefore we must pray that God would help His Church in all things to keep the ordinances as they are delivered unto us: Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He make His Church thus a praise.

3. God makes His Church a praise when He fills it with abundance of light and knowledge – when, after a night of ignorance or error that had buried the Church of God, the Church hath a resurrection and looks forth as the morning, clear as the sun, fair as the moon so that men say, Who is this that looketh forth as the morning? (Song 6:10). Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He make Jerusalem thus a praise. Remind Him of that which He has promised: "The

earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9).

4. God makes His Church a praise by sanctifying this knowledge to the working of holiness in the hearts and lives of His people. This was the praise of Jerusalem: it was a holy city. This is the praise of the Church: they are a holy people. “The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all His commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as He hath spoken” (Deut 26:18-19). Abundance of light un sanctified would make the Church, if it were possible, rather hell than heaven, and make men like the devils, who know much but are more desperately wicked. Therefore we must pray that God would sanctify that knowledge wherewith He fills His Church, so that its beauty may be perfect. Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep no silence, give Him no rest, till He make Jerusalem thus a praise.

5. God makes His Church a praise by increasing it, by enlarging its tents, and extending its cords. This is a blessing God calls His Church to rejoice in: “Sing, O barren . . . break forth into singing . . . Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (Is 54:1-3). We are to pray that God would make His Church a praise thus also.

Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig

4. Trials

Rev J L Goldby

Although the congregation of Shieldaig had been without a settled minister since 1843, they were highly favoured to have one of the most fervent and godly Highland ministers of the period preaching the gospel among them for a number of years. After being licensed to preach in 1844, Rev Alexander MacColl was appointed to take charge of the three parishes of Lochcarron, Applecross and Shieldaig. Nearly all the population of this wide district were under his pastoral supervision, and he laboured with untiring zeal. Large congregations attended his ministry and his work was accompanied by an improvement in the habits of the people and by a religious revival. Conscious of the needs of the district, he

remained at his post for eight years, refusing repeated calls from other places.¹

The people of Shieldaig and district were delighted to have in Mr Macdonald a pastor who, spiritually, was likeminded with Mr MacColl. But there was still no church building or manse. The Presbytery minutes reveal the difficulties the congregation faced as they endeavoured to obtain a suitable place of worship. In July 1872 it was decided: as “a minister is now settled over the Free Church congregation at Shieldaig, the Presbytery resolve to make a respectful and earnest application to the Right Honourable Sir John Stuart MP [the local landowner] for a site for a church and manse”. After much prevarication on Sir John’s part, Rev William Sinclair reported at the meeting of August 1874 that “although unaccompanied, much to his regret, by any of the other members of the committee, he had waited on Sir John Stuart regarding a site for a church and manse at Shieldaig; that at first Sir John expressed unqualified indignation at what he was pleased to call the interference of the Presbytery and General Assembly in a matter which concerned his tenantry”. However, at the very point when the interview was about to be abruptly broken up, the landlord relented and promised to “assist Shieldaig shortly”. The Presbytery meanwhile went on “to contemplate, for the forthcoming winter, a marquee to shelter the people from the weather”.

The faith and prayers of Mr Macdonald and his people were soon to bear fruit. When the Presbytery met in September, they learned that at last Sir John Stuart had granted a site for a church and manse at Shieldaig. Yet it was not until 1877 that these buildings were completed! “Many a time”, says Mr Macfarlane, “the minister was under the necessity of preaching in the open field in the winter season when the snow was falling, and he would have to wipe the snowflakes off the Bible before he could see his text.”

The next problem, which became known as the “Torridon Case”, was far more serious. In the first instance, and in the eyes of some, it may have been seen as a little local difficulty. However, it became the occasion or opportunity for powerful figures in high ecclesiastical circles far removed from Shieldaig to exert an influence which would eventually rend the Christian unity of the whole district. The congregation of Shieldaig was scattered over a wide area. Travel was difficult over rugged terrain among the mountains and sea lochs between the villages of Shieldaig, Annat, Torridon, Diabaig and Kenmore. On Sabbath evenings a schoolteacher conducted services in Diabaig, which was the most distant part of the charge. Regular church services in the area

¹Rev Alexander MacColl was born in 1814 in the parish of Lochcarron, where his father acted as sheep manager at New Kelso, Strathcarron. He was baptised by the famous Rev Lachlan Mackenzie. After serving in Skye and Fort Augustus, Mr MacColl returned to the Free Presbytery of Lochcarron in 1877, when he accepted a call to Lochalsh.

were difficult to maintain and some in the congregation were understandably impatient.

At the meeting of Presbytery on 2 April 1879 a petition was read from the minister and certain office-bearers of Shieldaig objecting to the appointment by the Committee on the Highlands of a home missionary to the district of Torridon. The Committee asked the Presbytery to give its advice on the matter and in response the Presbytery recommended that the missionary's appointment be rescinded while they enquired into the circumstances. At the July 2 meeting of Presbytery, documents bearing on the case were read, including a minute from the Highland Committee, and petitions from the people in Torridon and Alligin asking for the missionary to be sent. Mr Macdonald withdrew his objections to the appointment on the understanding that the missionary was to labour under the superintendence of the Kirk Session of Shieldaig.

The Presbytery concluded "that all the difficulties in this matter arose from the Committee on the Highlands appointing the missionary to labour at Torridon and Alligin without the approval of the Kirk Session of Shieldaig, of whose district these places form a part. In doing this, the Committee have, in the opinion of this court, exceeded the powers given them by the General Assembly. The Presbytery knows that members of the Committee were aware of Mr Macdonald's objections to the appointment. Further the Presbytery consider the Committee's minute offensive in stating that, while willing to be guided by the Presbytery in the matter, they resolved meantime to continue the missionary's commission 'till their next meeting', thus acting in direct contravention to the deliverance of Presbytery." A letter was also read from Mr Darroch, the landlord of Torridon, stating that petitions had been sent to the Assembly. But as no documents were before the Presbytery, they could take no action.

Mr Darroch had not been long in the area, having purchased the Torridon estate in 1872. He was an exception among the landowners of this period. His tenants were naturally very appreciative when he released land for them to use as this helped greatly to relieve their poverty. However, he may not have understood Highland Christianity or the real nature of the divisive courses being followed by some leading figures in the Free Church. The Disruption of 1843 was due to external interference, when the civil courts upheld the landlords' rights of presentation; but in the second half of the century the threat arose from within the Free Church itself. The Rainy party used the Torridon case as a kind of Trojan horse in order to divide Highland Free Church conservatives who opposed their innovations.

When the petition from the Torridon district came before the General

Assembly of 1879, the Presbytery was overruled and the Highland Committee authorised to supply services to Torridon till the next Assembly. Encouraged by the Highland Committee and the Assembly, the landlord was unwilling to co-operate on Mr Macdonald's terms and continued to block the endeavours Mr Macdonald and his elders were making to provide suitable church accommodation; he refused to allow the existing buildings to be replaced. In 1882 the Shildaig Kirk Session put forward plans to replace, with a new meeting-house capable of holding 250, the ruinous building in Torridon then being used, but the landlord, who alone had control of sites, refused to support the scheme.

Meanwhile the Kirk Session and Presbytery stood firmly behind the minister of Shildaig and refused to be browbeaten. This uneasy situation continued for some years, until the Torridon group and their supporters in the south decided to take matters into their own hands. On 6 July 1887 Mr Macdonald called the attention of the Presbytery to the fact that "Mr Darroch had begun to build a church which he, Mr Macdonald, and his office-bearers do not consider suitable for the majority of the people". He also submitted documents which indicated that this building was not to be connected with the Free Church. The Alligin people were using an old meetinghouse in their village as a place of worship while the Torridon people had been using an old schoolhouse. Revs Alexander MacColl and William Sinclair were appointed "to correspond with Mr Darroch on the subject, and in the event of the church now in the course of erection not being made over to the Free Church, and the site not being suitable, to ask Mr Darroch to make over the site of the old meeting house in Alligin to the people for the purpose of erecting a new meeting house in connection with the Free Church".

Mr Macdonald was doing his best for the people of Annat, Torridon and Alligin but neither he nor the people had control of the land where suitable meeting houses might be built, while those who did had another agenda. He was concerned about the threat to the gospel posed by those in the Church at large who were determined to depart from the old, scriptural paths. There was a particular threat to his congregation, to whom he was bound by solemn ordination vows and for whose spiritual well-being he was responsible. The dissatisfied parties had not left the Free Church but, through external influences, a church within a church was being set up where *another* gospel would be preached. Yet the minister of a Free Church congregation was responsible to the Presbytery for the mode in which all parts of public worship were being conducted and the Kirk Session was responsible for the spiritual interests of the congregation.

A few days later, on 14 July 1887, a ceremony took place on the Torridon

estate, when Mr Darroch laid the foundation stone of the new Corry Church. His family had provided most of the funds to pay for the building, with the help of friends, and free labour from his grateful tenants. Rev Angus Fiddes, the probationer employed by the Free Church Highland Committee to supply Torridon, applauded Mr Darroch and his family in glowing terms and gave him a silver trowel and mallet, declaring: "This gift which we present to you today is but a small return for the deep interest you have taken in our temporal and spiritual welfare".

Mr Darroch spoke next. He mentioned the old schoolhouse in Torridon, erected by a former proprietor and used for local church services for a hundred years, and referred to what he claimed were the advantages of buildings being "held apart from all ecclesiastical organisations" so that "the people have been unaffected by the Disruption, and have been able to enjoy the ministrations, not only of their own ministers, but also of English clergymen, notably Bishop Mackenzie, of Torridon, and others, who were good enough to conduct worship for them". (One of the landowner's relatives, Rev Charles R P Darroch of Medstead, took the English part of the service.) Mr Darroch had already stated his belief that, from past experience, it seemed good to him and to the people (a small part of the whole, many of whom were his employees and tenants) that the church would be better kept in the "proprietor's custody than if it were given into the hands of any public body"! He claimed that the proprietor had more interest in looking after his people's welfare than anyone else, but it very much smacked of patronage and the controversies of the Ten Years' Conflict. Thereafter he read an agreed statement: "The first use of the building shall be for the ordinary service of the people who are all members and adherents of the Free Church of Scotland, and after that for any *Protestant* service."

This sounded fine to some, but these terms of use opened the door to all the ills that faithful Free Church ministers and people feared. Mr Macdonald and his colleagues in the Presbytery of Lochcarron had expressed concern over changes in doctrine, worship and practice in numerous overtures to the General Assembly in recent years. Unscriptural doctrines were now being taught in Free Church colleges. In particular, the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, the relationship between Church and state, the place of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the form of scriptural worship were all under threat. The consequences of this liberal theological movement were serious and far-reaching, eventually robbing most of the people of Scotland of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If those who then supported the new ways could see the spiritual wilderness which is now the Scottish Church, they might have been a little less keen to promote their innovations and rather

more concerned to be watchful, and strengthen the things which remained, that were ready to die (Rev 3:2).

The next speaker was none other than the leader of the movement supporting these changes, Principal Rainy, Moderator of the Free Church! It was reported that he “gave a most earnest and sympathetic address. He began by saying that though he had often assisted in laying the foundation stones of churches, yet this case was entirely exceptional, as hitherto they had always been Free churches founded in strict accordance with the rules of that body. But he considered that, under the peculiar circumstances, the conditions of the church they were now engaged in founding were fully justified.” After bestowing lavish praise on Mr Fiddes, who was the principal organiser of the scheme, he closed the proceedings with prayer and the benediction. His personal gift of £1 is listed among the contributions towards the cost of the building. It seemed that even Rainy felt the need of trying to justify their work, but the Torridon case was not just a little local difficulty.

The church was completed in record time. The foundation stone was laid on July 14 and the building was opened for public worship six weeks later! Some who read a brass plate affixed to the wall close to the pulpit would see the irony in the claim that the church was built “to the greater glory of God”. This was followed by information on the purposes of the scheme, the principal contributors and, finally, the words of Psalm 127:1, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it”.

As might be expected in the circumstances, correspondence with Mr Darroch did not prove successful. In April 1888 the Presbytery regretted to find that Mr Darroch “still refuses to alter the terms on which he offers the use of the church he had built”. The Presbytery decided to meet at the old meeting-house in Torridon in July. Parties were heard from the townships of Annat, Fassaig, Torridon, Corry and Ploch, as was Mr Macdonald. Thereafter Rev John Baillie, Gairloch, moved and Rev Ronald Dingwall, Poolewe, seconded that “the Presbytery, considering that worshipping at the new church at Corry is not inconsistent with Free Church principles or law, are glad to have the assurance from Mr Macdonald that parties worshipping there will not be debarred from church privileges. The Presbytery do not see their way in the meantime to encourage the building of another place of worship in the district.”

Rev Alexander MacColl was not present, probably because of the cancer from which he was suffering and which was to be the cause of his death the following year. He and Rev William Sinclair had taken a firm stance at the last meeting but now this position was compromised. Mr Macdonald had every right to expect the Presbytery’s full support in this matter but the

Presbytery had supported a divisive course against the Kirk Session by giving credence to the landlord's proposal and failing to uphold the jurisdiction of one of its ministers. A church of the Rainy type was now recognised within the district. It was not a Free church but it was being supplied by a Free Church probationer paid out of Free Church funds; the worshippers were Free Church people in Mr Macdonald's congregation.

The Presbytery's ability to stand against the tide was decreasing. Rev Kenneth Macdonald, Applecross, was not a conservative. For years he had been in the minority within the conservative Presbytery of Lochcarron. For years he had remained silent while Revs William Rose, Alexander MacColl, Donald Macdonald and others, who really believed in the principles they were defending, sent up overtures to the Assembly in defence of the gospel in Scotland. But the balance had begun to shift. Principal Rainy visited Gairloch in 1891 and was entertained by Rev John Baillie. He was a minister with a good reputation as a pastor among the Lord's people but he was clearly drifting in the wrong direction. "His foot went into the bog," said the Gaelic bard of Erradale, "when he opened his bosom to Rainy."

More evidence of divisive intent appeared before long. At the Presbytery meeting on 5 September 1888, Rev Donald Macdonald drew attention to the fact that the student then labouring at Torridon was not, according to the original arrangement, supplying his pulpit at Shieldaig when the minister went to Torridon. Instead the student held meetings in the new church at Corry, only about two miles from the old meeting house at Torridon where Mr Macdonald preached. He also complained that some of the people in that district were sending their contributions, not directly to the Sustentation Fund through the Deacon's Court, but to the Highland Committee.

At their meeting on 24 October 1888, it was reported to the Presbytery that the missionary's persistent refusal to co-operate with the Shieldaig Kirk Session had caused embarrassment to his employers in the Highland Committee, so that the Committee had instructed their missionary to comply. When it was proposed that the Presbytery repeat its instructions to the missionary, Mr Dingwall moved a long amendment, the thrust of which was to refer the whole case to the General Assembly. The amendment was defeated, but Mr Dingwall complained to the Synod. Mr Macdonald, Applecross, and Mr Baillie adhered to the dissent.

At the Assembly, the Presbytery were instructed to make Torridon a mission station under the Kirk Session of Applecross. Mr Macdonald of Applecross was quite prepared to accept the Torridon church on Mr Darroch's terms, who reserved the right to arrange the pulpit supply. The only restriction was that the supply must be a Protestant. He might be an Arminian or an Amyraldian,

or hold erroneous views on the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures; he would not need to have signed the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of his faith. This was in line with the General Assembly's failure to uphold the principle of scriptural worship, the Establishment Principle and many other scriptural doctrines. The next step in this downgrading of the gospel was for the Free Church to enshrine these practical departures in a binding law by introduction of the Declaratory Act of 1892.

Christian Experience¹

4. Backsliding and Recovery

Archibald Alexander

There is something else in the dispensations of God to His people which, prior to experience, they never distinctly understood and which cannot easily be explained. It is His leaving them for a season to backslide, and then recovering them by the exercise of the same sovereign grace which first brought them into the path of life. The young convert cannot believe that he shall ever grow cold and decline in piety, much less that he may be left to commit some grievous sin to the sore wounding of his conscience and perhaps the dishonour of his profession. His strong confidence leads him to boast, "My mountain standeth strong; I shall never be moved". But it will not be a new thing on the earth, or in the Church, if he should add one more beacon to the many with which this coast is already strewed, to be a warning to those who come after him.

Backsliding begins in the heart, shows itself in the closet first, and soon diffuses its paralysing influence through the life. The backslider may for a while preserve a fair exterior and his public devotions may appear to be punctual and fervent, while he is cold and careless in secret. The Christian, while in this declining state, differs so little from the hypocrite that it is not easy to discriminate between them. Indeed, to the man himself, this is commonly impossible and happily so, for when love grows cold, fear must be brought to operate on the natural feelings. If backsliders possess assurance, it is the assurance of delusion. While thus departing from God, they cannot possess satisfactory evidence of His favour, for the exercise of grace is its evidence.

¹A further slightly-edited extract from a sermon on Isaiah 42:16: "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them". Last month's section dealt with sanctification.

The symptoms of backsliding are evident enough. The absence of lively faith and love and penitence is the root of the evil. The reality, beauty and importance of eternal things are out of view. The world therefore rises in magnitude and seems clothed with new interest, and its objects appear more desirable. Seriousness of spirit is now succeeded by levity, and that tenderness of conscience which shuddered at the mere "appearance of evil" by deadness. The spirit of the world gains too great an ascendancy, and conformity to the corrupt maxims and customs of the world becomes manifest. Even lawful objects are sought with too much ardour, and the too-anxious desire to be rich has often entangled the souls of professors in many hurtful snares, from which some are never extricated, but their souls are finally pierced through with many sorrows and drowned in perdition.

When backsliding once begins, there is no knowing how far the declining Christian may depart from God. It cannot be a matter of much surprise therefore that, in an evil hour and under the power of temptation, some insidious lust should prevail against him and should carry him into captivity. Indeed, such is the frailty of the best men that there is no security for their not falling into gross sins but in the preserving grace of God. And when Christians begin to backslide, they never recover themselves and return by their own efforts except by the kind interposition of their faithful Shepherd, whose love to His sheep leads Him to leave the ninety and nine and go into the wilderness to reclaim one straying lamb. He makes His voice to be heard and recognised.

If the common warnings of the Word and gentle suggestions of the Spirit have been neglected or resisted, it is usual with Him to apply the rod. Providence is made to co-operate powerfully with grace, or rather is made a part of that system of gracious means which God uses to preserve and reclaim His erring people. And in the corrective dispensations of providence, there can often be remarked a connection between our sin and God's chastisement. Often the objects which have been the occasion of our sin are somehow made the instruments of our punishment; or in some way God points as with a finger, by His dispensations of affliction, to sins long since committed and perhaps almost forgotten. The riches which were too eagerly sought "make to themselves wings and fly away" as the eagle to heaven, or those for whom these riches were so painfully accumulated are taken away. If we make an idol of any creature, God will often judge it best to remove the stumbling-block and make room for Himself in our affections. Our heavenly Father knows how to direct the rod so as to produce the desired effect. He knows our frame and can touch us where we will feel it, and thus rouse us from our apathy or from our dreams of worldly pleasure and ambition.

The backslider is now arrested in his downward course, is brought to

pause and consider his ways. He now sees how far he has departed from the right path. He is convinced of his folly and sin in having forsaken “the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”. The convictions of sin in the backslider are often attended with keener compunction and anguish than were experienced under his first awakening. Sometimes he almost despairs of mercy; or, if he dares to cherish a trembling hope of acceptance, he expects no more kind and gracious dealings from his heavenly Father. He calculates, like the returning prodigal, to be placed on the footing of “a hired servant”, rather than that of a son. But here again he is led by a path which he knew not, for God not only heals his backsliding, but graciously forgives all his aggravated sins, receives him as a child without upbraiding, draws him with loving cords, even the bands of a man, and says, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him”.

This abounding of free grace and pardoning mercy to backsliding believers is one of the most wonderful things in the way in which God leads His blind people. When they were looking for nothing but wrath, behold He shows His reconciled face and manifests His pardoning mercy with all the tenderness of a kind father. It is by such dispensations of love and mercy that God proves to us how superior He is to all our highest conceptions. That He is God, and not man, is the reason why His people are not consumed. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Mbuma Zending Meeting – 2004

A Report by Rev Neil M Ross

The public meeting of the Society which I attended on April 24 in Utrecht was the forty-first. The attendance on this occasion was much less than usual because the day of the meeting was not a public holiday. Ordinarily it is held in Geldermalsen on 30 April, the public holiday for the Queen’s Birthday, but on this occasion circumstances made a change of venue and date necessary. Nevertheless, more than 3000 people were present.

The meeting was opened at 10.30 am with devotions led by the chairman, Ds Tj de Jong, Staphorst, after which I had the privilege of addressing the people. Ds J Roos then spoke on Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other . . .”. The other ministers who gave addresses were Ds G Gerritsen, who took Daniel 9:20-24 as his text, and Ds S de Jong, who spoke on Psalm

19. Mr A B den Breejen addressed the children – of whom there were very many present and they listened with rapt attention – on the work of a missionary in the early Christian Church. The people listened most attentively to all the addresses, and the Psalm singing between the addresses was majestic and “with grave sweet melody”. Under the able chairmanship of Ds Tj de Jong and the meticulous organisation of Mr van Vliet, the Secretary of the Society, the meeting finished promptly at the appointed time of 4 pm, but not before Ds de Jong intimated that the collection up to that point amounted to 38 117 euros (in excess of £25 500).

It is remarkable, and a clear fruit of the gospel of the grace of God, that so many people gathered – many of them having come long distances – to show their great interest in, and support for, our mission work in Africa. We are deeply indebted to them for their willing help and generous contributions. The kind and warm hospitality shown to us by those friends in Holland who had us in their homes made our visit all the more pleasant and we publically reiterate our gratitude to them.

It was most interesting that, when sitting one evening in a room in a manse in Utrecht, we discovered that it was the very room where the first official committee meeting of the Mbuma Missionary Society in Holland was held 40 years ago. An elder, Mr de Jong, who was present in the room with us, mentioned the fact casually. He added that he himself was also present at that initial meeting in July 1964, and that the Rev Donald MacLean (then Clerk of the Foreign Mission Committee) was also in attendance. One of the reports to the 1965 Synod states that, during his visit to Utrecht, Mr MacLean also addressed a public missionary meeting at which 3000 people were present and the collection amounted to £2800. Since then the work of the Mbuma Zending Society in generously supporting our missionary work has continued steadily and indeed grown very considerably.

Address. It is my pleasure to be with you once again on this Mission Day, and I thank your Mission Committee for your kind invitation to my wife and myself, and for the opportunity given to me to speak on behalf of our Church.

In considering the help which Mbuma Zending has given to the mission work of our Church for many years, I am led to think of the help given by the Apostle Paul to the people of Macedonia, as we see in Acts, chapter 16. There we read, in verse 9, “Come over to Macedonia, and help us”. This was the request of the Macedonian man whom Paul saw in a vision during his second missionary journey. Paul and his companions understood clearly that God required them to go without delay to Macedonia to preach the word, as verse 10 says, “After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured

to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”.

This call, “Come over and help us”, was on the minds of the ministers of our Church from its earliest days. It was Rev Neil Cameron of Glasgow especially who desired that the Church should begin mission work somewhere, as God would be pleased to direct. There was an interest among our Church people in missionary work, and they wished that the Church would send out a missionary of its own. But whom should the Church send? Only the Lord could raise up the man whom the Church should send – and that is what happened!

One day in 1896, Rev Neil Cameron received a telegram from a Mrs Sinclair, a godly lady in Edinburgh, who knew of his prayerful concern about mission work. Her message simply was, “I have found your missionary”. Mr Cameron immediately asked her to send the man to him. The man was John Boyana Radasi, a godly young African. In the providence of the Lord, Mrs Sinclair had been brought into contact with him quite unexpectedly. John Radasi had come to Scotland to learn more about the gospel, but when he arrived in Edinburgh he did not know whom to contact, but God so ordered matters that he became acquainted with Mrs Sinclair, and it was not long before she discovered that he was a spiritually-minded man.

Mr Cameron liked the gracious, unassuming ways of Mr Radasi. Also, he was glad to learn that he had a deep desire to return one day to Africa to preach the gospel in Matabeleland in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), especially to those who had never heard it. It was clear that John Radasi himself was hearing the call, “Come over and help us”.

Mr Radasi then became a divinity student of the Church and followed a course of studies. When he conducted services in Scotland he proved to be both fluent in English and an able preacher. In November 1904 he was ordained as a missionary and departed to Africa soon after that.

So it was one hundred years ago that the Rev John B Radasi sailed for Africa to begin his life’s work as a missionary, but he did not actually commence the work until the beginning of 1905. It is therefore the hope of our Church in Zimbabwe that next year, God willing, they will commemorate the centenary of the beginning of that work, and acknowledge with thanks that the Lord has graciously sent help to them in their great spiritual need. As the history of the Free Presbyterian Church says, “The beginning of the Church’s Foreign Mission work was clearly the Lord’s doing”.

Mr Radasi proved to be a most zealous and faithful minister and missionary. The Lord so blessed his work that our Church was firmly established in what is now Zimbabwe. Although there are difficulties within that troubled

land, we have been enabled to continue the work to the present time. We think of the Apostle Paul's words in Acts 26:22, when we say, "Having therefore obtained help of God, we continue to this day".

What is the main reason for our continuing this work? It is not to educate children – although we have the honour of doing that. It is not to care for the sick – which we are also privileged to do. Our primary purpose is that, under God, we would be of spiritual help to the people by teaching them their helpless state as sinners, and their need of the help of the Saviour who says, "In Me is thine help". He is the David of the New Testament, of whom God the Father says, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty". How great is the love and mercy of God in providing that help by giving His beloved Son as the almighty Helper!

What a great privilege it is to be used by God to help sinners to understand that "vain is the help of man" for the saving of their souls. It is a great wonder to many of the Africans to whom we have been sent that Jesus Christ declares to those who have destroyed themselves: "In Me is thine help", and also a wonder to them that they themselves have been made willing in a day of His power to look to Him for His saving help.

We also set before them that they could not have deliverance from the damnation due to them for their sins, if Jesus Christ Himself had not descended into such depths of suffering on the cross as caused Him to cry to God the Father for help (as we see in Psalm 22): "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me?" He had to endure such awful humiliation as caused Him to cry, "O Lord: O My strength, haste Thee to help Me," – and all so that He could say to helpless, perishing sinners, "In Me is thine help".

Of course, without the help of the Holy Spirit we could not preach – nor could they hear – with profit. We constantly need the presence and power of the One whom the Saviour describes as "the Comforter" or "Helper". Christ said to His disciples, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things". Only by His saving work in the soul will sinners in Africa, Scotland and Holland be brought to cry, as another did, "Lord, help me".

As a Church we acknowledge anew the help which God has given to us through you, our helpers in Holland. Without your help, we could not, humanly speaking, have expanded the work in Zimbabwe and Kenya. As early as 1960 we received help for Mbumba Hospital from some friends in Holland. By 1965, more than 70 congregations in Holland were supporting our Mission. And so it has gone on, year after year – your hearts and your hands have continued to help our work in Africa liberally. Of course, there

is no help so valuable as the prayers of the godly, as they pray that there would be a blessing upon the work of the gospel. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

On behalf of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland I thank you most heartily for being helpers together with us. May the Lord bless our endeavours so that in both Zimbabwe and Kenya, sinners would be saved, believers edified, and, above everything, that the name of the glorious Mediator of the covenant would be exalted. “And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen and Amen.”

The Privilege of Prayer¹

Robert Gordon

If such be the encouragements to pray, how shall we think, without humiliation and shame, of the disinclination which we may frequently have felt towards engaging in that holy exercise, and of the formality with which we have too often observed it? And how little does our estimate of the privilege correspond with its real value if we are satisfied with betaking ourselves to it at certain stated periods, in the way merely of a duty – even though, at such seasons, we should go about it with some degree of solemnity and seriousness.

It is agreeable to Scripture, and to the practice of the pious and devout of all ages, that there should be stated periods for prayer, when the soul may withdraw itself more entirely from worldly things, and address itself more at length, and with greater intensity of thought and feeling unto God, than it can do in ordinary circumstances. And though different individuals may adopt different plans in this respect – I mean as to the time and the regularity of the observance – yet the practice itself will be found indispensable to all.

But if we really conceive of it in this way, it will be impossible for us to rest satisfied with such stated periods for prayer, however devoutly we may then engage in it. Till we are reconciled to God by the reception of the truth as it is in Jesus, we are chargeable, not only with individual acts of disobedience, but with being in a state of sin, inasmuch as the habitual forgetfulness of God is one continued act of rebellion against Him. And if, therefore, we have been reconciled and brought near to Him, must it not be our desire to

¹This is the concluding section, slightly edited, of one of Robert Gordon's *Sermons*, on the answer to Daniel's prayer (Dan 9:20-23). Gordon's fine four-volume set of expositions, *Christ in the Old Testament*, is available at £75 (£60 when ordered from the F P Bookroom). Gordon (1786-1853) was latterly a minister in Edinburgh. In the body of the sermon, he has been emphasising from the passage in Daniel various encouragements to prayer.

live in a state of conscious nearness to Him; so that we may not only do individual things that are pleasing to God, but habitually recognise Him, just as formerly we habitually forgot Him? And if such be our desire, we shall not lack innumerable opportunities for lifting up our souls to God, even when we cannot engage in the more lengthened exercises of devotion; for no man ever was, or ever can be, so immersed in the business of life, as not to be able to breathe a petition for God's blessing on every important step that he is about to take.

Nor will this habit of mind – this preparedness to pray – be cultivated, from a mere sense of duty alone, by those who have learned to rank it among their privileges. Prayer is in truth the protection, the safeguard, of the Christian, not only as preventing the inroads that might be made on his spiritual comfort, but as quickening the sensitivity of his conscience, and thereby providing a faithful monitor to him, should he venture on forbidden ground. There is no man who has ever attempted seriously to ask of God the pardon of his sins, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, but must know experimentally that he could not, after such an attempt, proceed with an easy conscience deliberately to do what he knew to be inconsistent with the divine law. And it will be found that multitudes have abandoned even the very form of prayer because it laid an intolerable restraint on them in the pursuit of some favourite enjoyment.

How much more powerfully therefore must it operate on the believer, who is so frequently engaged in offering up his desires to God, that at whatever moment temptation may present itself, he is instantly reminded that he has just come from the throne of grace, the immediate presence of his Maker! And how should this consideration excite everyone to cherish habitually the spirit of prayer! Nor is it only in cases in which we are tempted to what we know and believe to be sinful that prayer may come in to our aid. If we made conscience of seeking God's direction in every plan that we form, and of supplicating His blessing on every undertaking that we enter upon, we should find in that exercise the decision of many a question in which inclination and conscience are found to take opposite sides – and where, without having recourse to prayer, inclination would in all probability prevail.

Someone has spoken, with great energy, and, I am persuaded, with great truth, with respect to any line of conduct “which conscience has pronounced to be wrong, but in which our inclination has afterwards so warped our judgement as to persuade us that it is right. If we attempt to ask the blessing of God upon it in our closet, we shall often find our attempts to be vain, our mouths will be stopped and our efforts to pray annihilated. In like manner, though some have had the hardihood professedly to defend practices which

are expressly denounced by the law of God, and which go directly to ruin the peace and well-being of their fellow creatures, yet none were ever daring enough to supplicate the divine blessing on such an ungodly enterprise; an attempt like this would choke the utterance even of a profligate.”

If in every case, then, we would fairly and honestly lay before God the purposes that we have formed, and give ourselves seriously to ask His blessing on the execution of them, O how speedily would it demolish the plausible sophistry which perverted our understanding, and by which we permitted ourselves to be led to the very confines of presumptuous sin! And how would every such discovery enhance in our estimation the value of prayer – the privilege of coming to the throne of grace – that we may find mercy to pardon, and grace to help us in the time of need.

Book Reviews

Is all Scripture Inspired?, by J C Ryle, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 74 pages, £3.50, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This booklet reproduces an article originally entitled “Inspiration”, with which the then Bishop of Liverpool commenced his volume *Old Paths*, first published in 1878. While we cannot endorse Ryle’s adherence to “a moderate Calvinism in a National Episcopal Church”, we can commend his commitment to “the full inspiration and authority of the Bible”. He regarded the divine inspiration of the Bible as “the very keel and foundation of Christianity” and wrote this article to counteract the abounding infidelity and scepticism on the subject. It aims to help the reader show good cause for arguing that the Bible is “from heaven and not of men”. It is written in Ryle’s typically readable style, described by a contemporary as a setting forth of the truth with clarity and “an unostentatious but judicious use of the imaginative faculty”, which helps the message work “its way silently yet powerfully into the reader’s mind”. It is characterised by the concern for the spiritual well-being of his readers which is found in all his writings.

Ryle regards the Bible itself as “the best witness of its own inspiration” and aims “to show that nothing can possibly account for the Bible being what it is, and doing what it has done, except the theory that it is the Word of God”. Having outlined characteristics of the Bible which he considers inexplicable apart from divine inspiration, he concludes that “the difficulties of unbelief are far greater than the difficulties of faith”. Acknowledging the mystery involved in “the exact manner in which the minds of the inspired writers of Scripture worked when they wrote”, he states and defends the

position that “every book and chapter and verse and syllable of the Bible was originally given by inspiration of God”. We regret his concession that this view “is not accepted by many good Christians . . . excellent Christians . . . worthy people”. After some exposition of arguments which satisfied his own mind on the subject of verbal inspiration, Ryle endeavours to answer some common objections raised against the doctrine he defends. “A few words of plain application” follow, in which he warns against neglect of the Bible, urges it to be read with deep reverence and fervent prayer, and calls for it to be more highly prized.

An Appendix containing quotations from Jewell, Hooker, Owen and Chalmers on the subject of inspiration is followed by a short article entitled “Not Corrupting the Word” (2 Cor 2:17), originally an address to a Clerical Meeting, previously published in his *Warnings to the Churches*. Ryle warns his ministerial hearers against corrupting the Word of God by throwing doubt on the plenary inspiration of any part of Scripture, making defective statements of doctrine, or making a defective practical application of it. He concludes by briefly pressing the positive lessons of the second part of his text “But as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”.

Ryle did not set out to provide the more theologically-robust, detailed and scholarly treatment of the subject which can be found elsewhere, but to introduce people to thoughts regarding inspiration which would help them realise and defend its fundamental importance to the Christian Faith. In keeping with its aim, this little book should prove helpful to those seeking an introduction to this foundation truth.

(Rev) H M Cartwright

Sing the Lord’s Song, Biblical Psalms in Worship, by John W Keddie, published by Crown & Covenant Publications, paperback, 93 pages.

This is a well-written defence of the principle of singing only the Psalms in public worship. It is an American edition of a work first published in this country in 1994; there would seem to have been at least some revision to take account of recent controversy on the subject.

Mr Keddie rightly calls it a “central concern” that “the words that are being taken on people’s lips ought to be pleasing to the Lord”. The Psalms “are songs designed to be sung by God’s people in every age, and it must be counted a tragedy that so many Christian churches today fail to use these canonical and covenantal songs of Scripture in the worship of God”.

He refers to the objection “that some hymns can express truth better than the Psalms, especially in relation to the themes of the gospel”, and answers it as follows: “This implies that somehow man has to make up what God has left out, namely, to produce song based on New Testament material”. In this connection, the author quotes from James Macgregor, a nineteenth-century

professor at New College, Edinburgh, who was responding to the movement in the Free Church to introduce hymns into public worship: “Our Church, for many generations, has not, in her congregational praise, made use of any materials of merely human inspiration, and . . . with reference even to materials of divine inspiration, the ambiguous quasi-sanction attained by the ‘paraphrases’ dates only from a very recent period of her history, derives its origin from the deepest darkness of her ‘dark age’ of Moderatism”.

The book ends with a series of conclusions which sum up its teaching. Among the headings of these conclusions are: “The Psalms are the fruit of divine inspiration, the Psalms are sufficient for New Testament praise, the Psalms are productive of biblical piety, and the Psalms can be sung without reservation”.

Mr Keddie is a minister in the Free Church (Continuing), but he prefers to use a Bible version other than the AV throughout this book. Almost at the end, there is a quotation from what he calls an “admirable brief work” on the Psalms, by the modernist German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The quotation is in itself unobjectionable, but why should writers go down to the Philistines to sharpen their axes? As a whole, this is a good book on an important subject; it is a pity that these last negative comments are necessary. *Note:* The James Begg Society have reprinted Alexander Blaikie’s booklet, *A Catechism of Praise*, on the same subject (24 pages, £1.50). Their first printing of this booklet was commended thus in this Magazine in 1977: “In the ongoing debate on purity of worship, it is good to read material which presents the Scriptural and Reformed view of this important subject. We wish it a wide circulation.”

Protestant View

Hankering for Bishops in the Kirk

Some in the Church of Scotland envy the high profile which the Roman Catholic Church enjoys in the Scottish media. Therefore, says the Very Rev Finlay Macdonald, the Kirk may need a recognised leader with a higher profile than the current moderator to speak out on major issues – a leader who would be the equivalent of a bishop.

Dr Macdonald, who is principal clerk to the General Assembly and was moderator two years ago, airs this view in his recently published book, *Confidence in a Changing Church*. “In time”, he says, “a similar development may arise at presbytery level and then we will have full-time national and regional leaders. If that day comes, then, effectively, we will have

bishops.” We believe, if that day comes, it will lead also to the Romanising of the Kirk.

In 1957, a plan that the Church of Scotland should adopt bishops alarmed many in the Church because it betrayed the principles of the Reformation. It was eventually dropped. Last year’s General Assembly considered a plan for a merger between the Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Reformed Church and Methodist Church in Scotland. The plan included “bishops” elected by regional church councils, but thankfully it too was rejected.

We hope that it will prove futile to resurrect further episcopal plans. More especially we pray that our national Church will return to the Scriptural and Reformed principles which were established when our nation was delivered at the Reformation from the darkness, superstition and corruption of Rome. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16). *NMR*

Notes and Comments

The Inhumanity of Man

The inhumanity of man has, in recent times, been graphically brought to our attention by press photographs of Iraqi prisoners in the act of being tortured by American interrogators. We do not know the identity of those who were interrogated nor how vital to the saving of soldiers’ lives the information sought for might have been. But the sight of human beings being treated in this manner, and those responsible – including at least one woman – gloating over the spectacle is something we instinctively desire to turn away from. The end never justifies the means. But a more awful spectacle was presented to a world-wide audience when a video recording was taken of the decapitation of an American civilian, while those responsible invoked the name of their god. If questioned, they would no doubt appeal to some verse in the Koran to justify their action. Their god is not our God.

Such barbarous behaviour is clear proof of what the Word of God teaches us in regard to fallen man, the depths to which he sinks when restraining grace is removed, and the desperate wickedness of the unrenewed human heart. Who indeed can know it? We have in 2004 an increase of sinful men. The presence of modern devices such as digital cameras and video recorders, where evil deeds are perpetrated, brings these matters more forcibly before our minds. We look at woodcuts and pen and ink drawings printed in history

books to illustrate the records of the atrocities perpetrated by the Inquisition. The historian G P Fisher tells us that “in 1252 Pope Innocent IV sanctioned torture in the detection of heresy, and it became a fearful engine of cruelty in the hands of the Inquisition”. What is recorded of Tomas de Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisitor General might well be applied to Saddam Hussein: “He owes his reputation for cruelty to the harsh rules of procedure that he devised for the Inquisition and to the rigour with which he had them enforced”.

Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* records fearful acts of cruelty and torture far surpassing what the American interrogators are alleged to be guilty of, and if we think of the instruments of torture which were used by the authorities in Scotland and elsewhere in the seventeenth century, we see a pattern of inhuman behaviour established. Space does not permit us to enlarge on the well-documented inhuman and barbarous behaviour observed within Nazi concentration camps in the twentieth century. We long for the coming of that day when our Saviour’s golden rule shall be universally observed: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”.

JM

The Passion of Christ

After an article in *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, April 2004, in which he gave a largely favourable review of Mel Gibson’s blasphemous attempt to portray the sufferings of the Saviour, the Editor proceeds in the May 2004 issue of his magazine to defend the idea that God can suffer. He strongly affirms that the Father suffered in giving His Son whom He loved, although there is no Scriptural support for this. He depends on humanly sentimental arguments such as: “If David felt love and grief at the death of his son Absalom, how much more did the Father feel grief and love at the death of the holy Son of God?” There is a failure to recognise that God’s making man in His image does not lead to the conclusion that God is in the image of man. Thankfully there is much about even perfect man which does not characterise God.

The Editor claims that, in the light of passages such as Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 4:14, 15, and Acts 3:15, “it is impossible to maintain the impassibility [inability to suffer] of God the Son at least”. From the rest of his article, it is clear that he means, by his confusing and unfounded equating of the suffering of God the Son with the suffering of God, that Jesus suffered “as God as well as man”. The passages cited do not carry the implications attributed to them.

It is not possible in a Note such as this to deal adequately with this error, which seems to be gaining popularity in Evangelical thinking, but we must

point out one of the fundamental flaws in the Editor's reasoning. He writes: "Did He suffer as man, but not as God? It is difficult to see how that could be. The incarnate Son of God is one person with two natures, divine and human. But a nature cannot suffer, only a person can. And Jesus is fundamentally a divine person." Of course it was God the Son, Christ the Person, who "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). The apostle Paul could speak of "the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The blood He shed derived its value from the fact that it was the blood of a divine person. He suffered and died, but it was in His humanity He did so – this being why He became incarnate. The mystery of godliness means that as the Son of God He lived through the death He died in our nature and continued in the bosom of the Father through all the humiliation and suffering endured in our nature. We can no more say that the divine nature suffered than we can say that the human nature was uncreated, infinite or omnipresent.

Our Westminster Standards summarise the Biblical position received in the Reformed Church. Christ "was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever" (*Shorter Catechism* 21). "Two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. . . . Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself: yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature" (*Confession of Faith* 8). It was being made like unto His brethren that gave the eternal and ever-blessed Son of God the capacity to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, to suffer being tempted and to succour them that are tempted (Heb 2:17,18).

It is important for the glory of God and of our divine Redeemer, for the maintenance of a Scriptural theology and Christology, and for the good of our own souls, that our thinking be controlled by the revelation God has given rather than by reasonings from human experiences and ideas of how things ought to be. *HMC*

Tragedy in Glasgow

The dreadful explosion which reduced much of a Glasgow plastics factory to a heap of rubble and resulted in the death of 9 people and the injury of 40, 16 seriously, was the worst industrial accident in Scotland for many years.

This sudden and tragic happening underlines once again the solemn truth, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (Jas 4:14). Indeed, we cannot

say, as we leave our homes in the morning, that we shall return in the evening.

As we sincerely and prayerfully sympathise with the many bereaved and injured we regard the tragic happening as a loud voice to ourselves. It calls us to be prepared for the moment of our own departure into the eternal world. The ungodly scoff at the Scripture exhortation, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12), but the godly believe and obey it. They alone have the essential preparation of possessing the righteousness which is by faith in Christ. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him" (Is 3:10). *NMR*

Divorce in Scotland

The Scottish Executive has brought forward proposals to reduce the waiting time for an uncontested divorce from two years to one, and in contested cases from five years to two years. These proposals may not be implemented immediately, but it is obvious that every such step results in a further weakening of the institution of marriage.

Marriage breakdown can result in tremendous heartache for those involved. But how many marriages might have been saved if the door to divorce was less easily opened? Today's society shows itself determined to turn its back on marriage and other God-given institutions. And sadly the authorities in both Westminster and Edinburgh seem determined to take the lead. When will we see a government which is prepared to promote true religion, and the morality which is part of it?

Christian(?) Aid

Our attention has been drawn to a recently-released report by Christian Aid about AIDS, entitled, "Dying to learn: Young People, HIV and the churches", which appears on its website. It states the sobering fact that "42 million people worldwide are now living with HIV and AIDS. Every day another 8000 die, and 13 000 are infected. 95% of new infections and deaths are in developing countries, over half in Africa."

However, the organisation advocates (on page 5 of its report) nothing less than a secular – indeed ungodly – approach to this serious problem. It recommends the use of contraceptives by unmarried young people, and dismisses the use of "abstinence-only" programmes. By its pursuit of this policy alone, Christian Aid forfeits the right to call itself Christian. Those who profess to be Christians belie their profession decidedly if they discard the biblical principle of chastity before marriage. *NMR*

Making Light of Eternity

The eleventh Duke of Devonshire died recently at the age of 84. His obituary records that he was not a religious man, and that he once made the shocking statement, "I can't believe in another world, though I shall certainly go to

hell if there is one". Many such statements are made by those who take perverse pleasure in denying, or scoffing at, the reality of our continued existence after death, in either heaven or hell.

No one spoke so solemnly about the reality and awfulness of hell as did the incomparably-compassionate Saviour, Jesus Christ. He did so in order that sinners would believe that the punishment of hell is the just consequence of a life of sin – and that they would turn to Himself in faith to be saved from "the wrath to come". He still says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). NMR

Church Information

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

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

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, June 8, at 11 am.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, June 9, at 3 pm.

Western: At Laide, on Tuesday, June 15, at 6 pm.

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

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Tuesday, June 22, at 1 pm.

Northern: At Dingwall, on Tuesday, June 29, at 2 pm.

College and Library Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of two special collections on behalf of the College and Library Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during June.

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", \$214; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 23, Where most needed", \$40; Anon, USA, "As needed", \$450; Mr J Rokos, London, £100.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: North Uist Sabbath School, for John Tallach School, Zimbabwe, £100; Anon, USA, for Kenya Mission, \$150; Mr J Rokos, London, £100.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Bracadale: *Congregational Funds:* The late Catherine MacLean, Broadford, £1000.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds:* The estate of the late Malcolm D MacKay, £100 per Rev JRT.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: A Friend, Portree, for Zimbabwe Mission, £25 per Rev JRT. *Manse Extension:* Duirinish congregation, £1000; A Gillies, £20 per Rev JRT; Bracadale/Strath Deacons' Court, £2000. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, Portree, £20 per Rev JRT.

Shieldaig: *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £25; Anon, £30 per DMC.

Staffin: *Communion Expenses:* CM, Staffin House, £40. *Door Collection:* CM, Staffin House, £30.

Stornoway: *Congregational Funds:* Mrs Dickie, Inverurie, £50; N Pearce, £100 per Rev JML. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Relief Fund, £20.