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Christ Exalted to Bless

The Saviour had finished the work which the Father had given Him to do on earth. He had come to give His life a ransom for many, and the ransom had now been paid. Accordingly He had risen from the grave, for death could not hold Him there now that justice was satisfied – now that Christ had done all that was necessary for the salvation of all whom the Father had given Him. And, during a further 40 days, Christ had instructed His disciples, so that they now had a vastly improved understanding of why He had come into the world. Luke describes one such occasion when He met with His disciples: “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (24:45-47). The disciples were now ready for this work of spreading the gospel among all nations.

Now that this work of instructing the disciples was at an end, “He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50,51). We are not told what words the Saviour used as He blessed His disciples, but we do know that, when He appeared among the disciples who were gathered together in Jerusalem, He said to them, “Peace be unto you”. He was expressing His will for their welfare, especially for their spiritual welfare. And this must also have been the substance of what Christ said to His disciples by way of blessing them just before He finally parted from them near Bethany.

But Christ did not finish blessing His disciples when He went to heaven. There He continued expressing His will for their welfare, and especially for their spiritual welfare. And it is the same today. Christ, sitting at the right hand of power on high, is blessing all His disciples – those who (using the widest sense of the term) are sitting, so to speak, at His feet and learning from Him, as Mary did in her home in Bethany.

Christ blesses those who are not yet His disciples when He sends the Holy

Spirit to make them willing to follow Him – and so makes them His disciples, individuals willing to learn from Him. The exalted Saviour in heaven blesses His people in this world as He goes on making intercession for them – expressing, on the basis of His redemptive work on earth, His will for them to receive whatever is good for them, with a view especially to them receiving spiritual good. And the climax of this is His intercession that at last they be with Him in glory for ever.

But it is only by faith that we can see that Christ is still blessing His Church on earth. Even the people of God are liable to assume that, if Christ was still in the world, everything would be so much better. But the disciples did not think like that. They were conscious that they had received Christ's blessing and, we are told, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy". They knew that they would continue to receive their Master's blessing even when they were not able to see Him. Although they could not see their Master with the eyes of the body, He had not left them. And by faith they recognised that He would, from heaven, continue to bless them. They could be sure that He was still with them; He would never fail them.

Similarly the children of God today can be sure that the Saviour's promise still holds true: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them". In particular, when His children are gathered for public worship, the Master is present. How else can there be a blessing? And what reason there is to plead that Christ would indeed be present on every such occasion so that He might bless all who are there! We may expect the presence also of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not sinners are born again at any particular service, we may be sure that, if Christ is present – and the Holy Spirit for His sake – there will be a blessing, more or less, for the people of God. The least that can be said is that, through the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to their souls, grace will be sustained in their hearts, and they will be brought on in the way of faith and holiness until at last they are taken to glory.

The children of God then should feel encouraged to pray for a blessing on the public means of grace. By faith they are to lay hold on the assurance that Christ will be present. But we live in a time when the work of the Holy Spirit is very much restrained. We might most easily recognise that restraint in terms of the relative fewness of conversions, but we should also recognise it in the relative weakness of grace in many, if not all, believers.

Among other graces, faith is weak, which has its effect on prayer. The Saviour rebuked His disciples: "O ye of little faith". And is there not much reason for such a rebuke today? God has promised great things for His Church, because Christ has purchased great things for her; He "ascended on

high . . . received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them” (Ps 68:18). If we look to Christ by faith, we will see Him exalted, with an abundance of gifts to bestow even on rebellious sinners. We know that He is sovereign; He has a right to do what He will with His gifts – to give or to withhold as He pleases. Yet we are encouraged to plead with Him to bestow on us, however unworthy we may be – and on the whole world, however rebellious it may be – those gifts which He has purchased for unworthy, rebellious sinners.

When Paul quotes this verse from Psalm 68, he applies it particularly to the gift of ambassadors from God. When God sends out “pastors and teachers”, we are to see them as a blessing purchased by Christ, and a means whereby blessings may be brought even to rebellious sinners. The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest of such gifts, but he was conscious of his need of God’s blessing so that his ministry might be useful to others. “Brethren, pray for us,” He wrote, “that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified.” What, in particular, was he looking for? Surely the great gift of the Holy Spirit, whom the Saviour was to send after He departed from the disciples. It is the Spirit alone, as we have noted already, who can apply the word of the Lord to the hearts of sinners. And it is the exalted Saviour who gives this unspeakable blessing to a lost world. When any part of the world is left to itself, it continues to be barren ground. But when Christ sends the Holy Spirit to bless the preaching of the gospel, there will be the further great gift of spiritual growth – in its beginning and its continuing growth. It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that the proclamation of law and gospel is blessed to sinners.

If the children of God are to seek these gifts for themselves and for others, they need the *grace* of prayer. As surely as they cannot believe in their own strength, they cannot pray in their own strength. Yes, they may use words, appropriate words, in the way of petition, but if these words do not come from a heart in which the grace of God is active, there is no real prayer. To enable anyone truly to pray is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is because Christ is still blessing His Church from heaven that the exercise of prayer does not die out. The Lord has never forgotten His Church; He has not left her altogether to herself. That is a matter for great thankfulness, but we should be seeking even greater blessings. And we have every encouragement to do so, for Christ is exalted to bless His Church with such gifts. He will give the gift of the Holy Spirit – as the Spirit of prayer – to those who ask Him.

Christ as the great High Priest of His Church is before the throne in heaven making intercession for her. But we are to see Christ as “a Priest *upon His throne*”, which points us to the fact that He also reigns as King. His acts as

King are bound up with His intercession and what He did at Calvary in offering Himself up as a sweet sacrifice to the Father. The fact that Christ is King points us to His power – His irresistible power – to put His purposes into effect. So, when He blesses His Church, it is not the expression of a mere hope which cannot be carried out but the expression of a purpose which will without fail be brought to pass. If He has a purpose to bless a sinner still in the kingdom of darkness, nothing can stand in the way of that purpose being fulfilled. Every sinner given to Him in the everlasting covenant will most certainly be blessed with a measure of spiritual blessings in this world and will enjoy them in perfection for ever in heaven. If Christ has a purpose to grant some particular blessing to one of His children, He has unlimited resources as King to bring that about. No power on earth or in hell can prevent that child receiving the blessing – being strengthened in danger, for instance, being given growth in grace, or a fresh insight into the Scriptures. And if, as her King, He has a purpose to bless His Church, particularly by giving the Holy Spirit to apply the Word of God to believer or unbeliever, that must inevitably take place.

One would have expected the disciples to make their way back to Jerusalem in deep sorrow. Their Master had left them; they could never expect to see Him again in this world. But, in fact, they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy”. They were clearly convinced of the truth of His promise to them: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”. Physically He was no longer with them, but they had His spiritual presence, and they would never lose it. Yet this promise, to be with them till the end of the world, was not merely for one generation of the Church, but for all generations – including our own at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Church may lose sight of the promise, but the promise is sure; it will never fail. The power of her King will ensure that.

There were many difficulties before the disciples – much tribulation, constant opposition, repeated temptations, and a consciousness of their own weakness. But none of these things occupied the forefront of their minds as they walked back to Jerusalem. They were taken up with the reality of their Saviour’s continued presence, His promises, and His power to act for them. Their faith, sustained by the Holy Spirit, was strong. And as they waited for the fulfilment of the promise of the coming of the Spirit in a public way, they not only prayed, but they “were continually in the temple, *praising and blessing God*” – so sure were they of the truth of Christ’s promise, and of the certainty of its fulfilment. He who was now exalted to heaven, they knew, was sure to bless them and would support them in the work He had given them to do. Theirs is the example God has left with His Church today.

The Believer's Rock¹

A Sermon by *Thomas Boston*

Psalm 18:46. *The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock.*

In the former part of the Psalm, the psalmist acknowledged God, praised Him for his deliverance and prophesied greater good to come to himself. In contemplation of these, he in this verse breaks out, as in a rapture, into the praises of God. Wherein we have:

1. The storehouse of the Christian's comfort for all cases and in all times: The Lord Jehovah liveth. Christ remains; there is no end of His days. Come what will – whatever changes be made in the world – the Lord still lives.

2. The frame that meditation on this puts the psalmist into, even a praising frame: "Blessed be my rock". His praising is expressed by blessing God, which implies the declarative blessedness of God, with the psalmist's desire to have it declared to the world. The grounds of it are two: (1) God's relation to those who have taken Him as their rock for refuge and defence against all enemies. (2) Their interest in Him: "my rock".

Observations: 1. That the Lord liveth. Woe then to all His enemies, and happy they that are His friends. 2. That believers, when delivered from trouble, will readily acknowledge the hand through which the deliverance came. 3. That even those who are spiritually victorious will, after deliverances received, see more troubles coming on and need still more of Christ as their refuge.

Doctrine: That, come what will, believers have ground of joy, and know of a rock for refuge, as long as Christ remains. "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living" (Ps 142:4,5).

¹Thomas Boston (1676-1732) was ordained minister of Simprin in 1699 and married on Wednesday, 17 July 1700. The sermon which he preached on the Sabbath prior to his marriage was printed in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* of November 1998, pp 324-330. The present sermon was preached on the Sabbath after his marriage, at Dunning, near Auchterarder. Both sermons were taken from an unpublished manuscript in Boston's handwriting. A few expressions were too faint to read.

Here is his account of his spiritual exercise at this time: "At and about the time of my marriage, it pleased the Lord to deal bountifully with my soul. And the Lord's day immediately following, I preached at Dunning in Strathearn. . . . When I came to Dunning on the Saturday night, I found myself wrong, having neither heart nor hand for my work. On the Sabbath morning my indisposition continued, save that at family prayer my affections were loosed, and I had a deep sense of my own vileness on my spirit. In the forenoon it was neither very ill nor very well; but in the afternoon my bands were freely loosed, and I had light and life from the Lord. I preached on Ps 18:46, the which text I was led to, as my anchor ground, in my new circumstances through the change of my lot."

1. Why Christ is called the believers' rock.

(1.) He is their refuge and defence against all storms, from whatever direction they come: "a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest" (Is 32:2). (1) From those that come from God: "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). They fly to the hand that heals them. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight" (Hos 6:1-2). (2) From such as come from Satan: "There was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. . . . And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:7,9). (3) From the world: "for in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord" (Ps 27:5,6). "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me" (Ps 138:7). (4) From conscience: His blood is able to wash and sprinkle it. "Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away" (Ps 65:3).

(2.) Because Christ is able to bear all the believer's burdens – of their sins, their duties and their troubles – that he lays on Him. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Is 26:4). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Ps 55:22). He bore the might of the Father's wrath for them and, if He failed not under that, He will fail in none. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law" (Is 42:4).

(3.) Because Christ is durable and permanent; His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; He lives and reigns for evermore. All other things that people make their rock will pass away; they are but empty shadows and the very name of nothing: "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov 23:5). "Who is a rock save our God?" (Ps 18:31); see Deuteronomy 32:31: "For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges".

(4.) Because He is high above all others. He is high above all others in His nature, "For who in heaven can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the

sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?" (Ps 89:6); and in His personal properties and, being the chief of ten thousand, in authority etc.

(5.) Because it is from Him that the weary travellers to Zion have their refreshment. Christ was that rock in the wilderness (see Is 32:2) and He therefore calls men to come to Him and drink if athirst.

2. The reasons of the doctrine.

(1.) Because they have a full Christ, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" (Col 1:19), who is all in all to them, to supply all their wants.

(2.) Because of His transcendent excellency. "For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it" (Prov 8:11). He is the one pearl. All other things, considered relatively or distributively, transcend infinitely all lawful, as well as unlawful, comforts. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased" (Ps 4:6-7).

(3.) Because of these precious things that they shall certainly get with Him – grace and glory (Ps 84:11). What though they should be banished from house and home as long as Christ remains providing heaven for them. "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2,3).

(4.) Because they have full promises, which are the saints' storehouse: "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). They are full intensively, "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet 1:4). They go to the utmost of any case: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34); see Romans 16:20: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". They are full extensively, reaching all cases and times, etc: "I have seen an end of all perfection: but Thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Ps 119:96); see that remarkable word: "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler" (Ps 91:4).

(5.) Because He is the sovereign manager of all things.

(6.) Because He will so manage all things for them as that they shall work together for their good (Rom 8:28). All they meet with is the product of infinite wisdom set on work for their good: all disappointments, losses, etc. Even their very falls are to be managed by Him.

(7.) Because, whatever they will lose in the world, they cannot break so long as Christ remains. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield

no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab 3:17). Their outworks may be broken down, but Christ their rock is an impregnable fort. “He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” (Is 33:16).

(8.) Because in the worst of times Christ is a satisfying portion to them: “I have all, and abound” (Phil 4:18).

Use 1. Of information. It shows us (1.) It is a damnable prejudice some have: that religion is a melancholy life and that in turning religious they must bid farewell to all joy and comforts. (2.) Of all men in the world a believer is best provided against a storm. He has a rock to run to, and chambers for a tempest. “Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast” (Is 26:20). (3.) Nothing can put an end to the Christian’s happiness, for it lasts so long as Christ lasts.

Use 2. Of reproof. (1.) To those who slight Christ, who seek shelter for themselves elsewhere than in Christ, some in their good works. “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My spirit, that they may add sin to sin” (Is 30:1); and trust in an arm of flesh (Jer 17:5).

(2.) To the godly that give way to impious cares and fears, either upon the prospect of troubles, or when troubles actually come on them. There is no case a godly soul can be in but there is sufficient comfort in this: “The Lord liveth”. (1) What though their provocations be great and numerous? The Lord liveth who is a gracious and merciful God and the soul’s advocate. (2) What though they find deadness on their hearts? Because He liveth, they shall live also. (3) What though the enemies of God may have designs on foot for the subversion of religion? The Lord liveth who guides all. (4) What though they should be deprived of all creature comforts? The Lord liveth still. (5) What though they cannot see how to win through the difficulty before them? The Lord liveth who knows it well.

Use 3. Of exhortation. Would ye be secure? Then flee to Christ as your rock on this day wherein there seems to be wrath on the growing hand. And for your making use of Christ as a rock: (1.) Live near God when others are going far from Him. “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen 6:9). (2.) Be much in the duty of prayer. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” (Ps 50:15). (3.) Exercise faith on Him. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee” (Ps 55:22).

Thomas Boston's Preaching¹

The acquaintance I had with him, and the frequent opportunities I had of hearing him preach, I look upon as one of the greatest privileges I was favoured with in my early days, and which I still reflect on with great pleasure. He was indeed one of the most powerful preachers of the gospel I ever heard open a mouth. It is true he was no Boanerges as to his voice, his delivery being grave and deliberate. Yet there was a majestic energy in it, which, together with his venerable and comely aspect, made no small impression to his advantage on the minds of them who had the pleasure of hearing him.

There were few men, if any, in his day who courted popularity less than he did; nay, he rather shunned it. But, like his shadow, it followed him wherever he went, for his ministrations were savoury and acceptable to all who had a relish for the truth as it is in Jesus, and a love to that holiness of heart and life which the belief of it never fails to produce in the minds of all the children of God.

Though he usually wrote his sermons as full as he intended to preach them, yet this was not always the case: for some of his sermons printed a good many years ago from his notes, which I myself heard him preach and took him a full hour to deliver, may be read, even deliberately, in near the half of that time. One reason of which is this: the Scriptures which he brought as proofs of the points he was handling are only cited chapter and verse in his notes,² and he left several enlargements on them to delivery, for he had a talent peculiar to himself in pointing out the propriety of such proofs. And his more than ordinary critical knowledge of the original languages in which the Scriptures were written enabled him, in a brief but comprehensive way, to glance at the meaning of the Spirit of God in them, which was both surprising and edifying to the hearers. Could this have been recovered, it would have added greatly to the beauty of these discourses; but neither this, nor the lively, spirited manner in which they were delivered, can be put in print and set before the reader. But where the Scripture proofs are not inserted at full length, and only chapter and verse cited, if the reader will

¹This account of Thomas Boston's preaching was given by Thomas Davidson of Braintree, Essex. It has been taken from Boston's *Life* in Erasmus Middleton's *Biographia Evangelica*, vol 4, pp 256-7. Davidson was an "eminent Dissenting minister" who had sat under Boston's ministry in the 1720s. A letter which he wrote to Boston's grandson in 1776, giving a description of Boston's dissent at the 1729 General Assembly, is included in the the Banner of Truth Trust edition of Boston's *Memoirs* (pp 513-5).

²In the sermon printed above, the references for Boston's numerous chapter and verse citations have been supplied.

be at the pains to turn to his Bible, as he goes along in reading, he will find himself amply repaid for his pains, by the satisfaction it will give him. And it will convince him of the justness of what I have now suggested.

Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig

3. Set over a “Noble People”

Rev J L Goldby

Mr Macdonald began his theological studies in Glasgow under professors of outstanding piety and learning. Mr Macfarlane comments that there were “no heretical professors in the Free Church colleges then; or, if there were any, they dared not give vent to their views in their public teaching”. All Mr Macdonald’s examinable discourses were sustained and we are told of one in particular of which his professor said that it afforded him immense delight, and that it reminded him of the highly spiritual discourses of Samuel Rutherford. During his time in Glasgow he heard Rev J R Anderson “with much appreciation” but he mostly attended the ministry of Rev Ralph Smith. In Glasgow he was friendly with some eminent Christians such as John MacConnel and Margaret MacPhee, who was often the means of relief to the famous “Rabbi” Duncan at times when he was downcast.

After completing his College studies, Mr Macdonald was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Skye and Uist on 2 May 1866. The godly Rev Alexander MacColl was then a member of that Presbytery and he later served with Mr Macdonald on the Presbytery of Lochcarron. Mr Macdonald laboured as a probationer for six years in various parts of the Highlands and Islands before being ordained and inducted in 1872 to the pastoral charge of Shieldaig by the Presbytery of Lochcarron.

In the past, this Wester Ross district was favoured with many godly ministers. The Free Presbytery of Lochcarron recorded in their minutes that ever since the Presbytery was set up in 1724, the gospel of the grace of God was fully and prayerfully preached by such men as Aeneas Sage of Lochcarron, Angus MacAulay of Courthill (the first Presbyterian minister of Applecross), MacAulay of Gairloch, Robertson of Lochbroom, Lachlan MacKenzie of Lochcarron, Thomas Ross of Lochbroom, Alexander MacDonald of Plockton, Donald MacRae of Poolewe and Colin Mackenzie of Shieldaig.

Rev John Kennedy of Dingwall (the most influential Highland minister of his day) in his *Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*¹ thus describes the ministers sent to Ross-shire in previous generations: “As preachers they were

¹Published 11 years before the subject of this essay began his ministry in Shieldaig.

all remarkable. There are some who preach *before* their people, like actors on the stage, to display themselves and to please their audience. Not such were the *self-denied* preachers of Ross-shire. There are others who preach *over* their people. Studying for the highest, instead of doing so for the lowest, in intelligence, they elaborate learned treatises, which float like mist, when delivered, over the heads of their hearers. Not such were the *earnest* preachers of Ross-shire. . . . There are others who preach *at* their people, serving in a sermon the gossip of the week, and seemingly possessed with the idea that the transgressor can be scolded out of the ways of iniquity. Not such were the *wise* preachers of Ross-shire.

“There are some who preach *towards* their people. They aim well, but they are weak. Their eye is along the arrow towards the hearts of their hearers, but their arm is too feeble for sending it on to the mark. Superficial in their experience and in their knowledge, they reach not the cases of God’s people by their doctrine, and they strike with no vigour at the consciences of the ungodly. Not such were the *powerful* preachers of Ross-shire. There are others still, who preach *along* their congregation. Instead of standing with their bow in front of the ranks, these archers take them in line and, reducing their mark to an individual, never change the direction of their aim. Not such were the *discriminating* preachers of Ross-shire. They were all of the Lord’s making, but each one was adapted to the place he had to fill, and to the work which was given him to do.” These remarks might have been written of the ministry of Mr Macdonald, who was raised up for the time, the place and the stand he was called to take.

Kennedy gave Rev Lachlan Mackenzie of Lochcarron the chief place among ministers: “Owing to his genius, his peculiar Christian experience and his great acceptance as a preacher, he has retained a firmer hold of the memories of the people than any other besides”. It is noteworthy that, after taking his degree in Aberdeen, Mackenzie was first appointed schoolmaster of Applecross, and was then transferred to the school in Lochcarron in 1776, before being licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Lochcarron in 1780. He also went to the mission in North Uist and was eventually ordained and settled in Lochcarron on 4 April 1782. It was said of him that his “heavenliness of mind spurned the objects of time and sense, while his imagination shed a bright lustre on every subject which he handled, and the unction in his ministrations endeared him to his people”.

That the ministry of Donald Macdonald was cast in this spiritual mould, is illustrated by a paragraph in one of his sermons. Speaking of Christ coming to His people at special seasons, he said, “They know when they are in the spirit, for then they like to turn away their thoughts from the world unto

Jesus. He is the object they love most, and they behold the glory of God in His blessed face. 'My beloved is mine and I am His.' Your contemplations are then absorbed in Christ; none but Christ. One of the martyrs cried out when he was being burned: 'O Christ, none but Christ!' If we suffer worldly loss for His sake, He will make it up."

Among the godly people of this district were many who were strong in faith and discernment. The whole population of the district of Shieldaig, including their minister Rev Colin Mackenzie, joined the Free Church at the Disruption of 1843 with only one exception. Like many other ministers, Mr Mackenzie faced severe difficulties on his return from Edinburgh after taking his stand with the more than 400 others who, with their elders and congregations, formed the Free Church of Scotland.

From that time he ceased to preach in the parish church. But he was not able to leave the manse because, he explained, "there was no house of any kind to be got within the bounds of the parish, or within many miles beyond it, to which I could remove with my aged mother and other two members of my family. Meantime I made several applications to the proprietor [of the Shieldaig Estate] by letter, who always replied with a positive refusal, at the same time assuring me that the Free Church would get no footing on any part of his property. Before going south to the General Assembly, I determined to make one more attempt to obtain a house site by applying to him personally at his residence at Applecross House, hoping, from the intimate and friendly terms on which he and I always were from boyhood, that on my own account, as a near relative, he might consent. On the contrary, he received me coldly and expressed his wonder that I had taken upon myself to call upon him and expect that he would receive me, after acting so foolish a part as to bring myself and my family to beggary at the very time when, as MP for the county, he had it in his power, and was determined, to promote me to a better living; at the same time giving me to understand that, not only would he not grant my request, but I must quit the manse and remove myself from the parish of Shieldaig and from his estate, otherwise he would make my life bitter to me, as he was determined to interdict all his tenants from giving me so much as one apartment in any of their poor dwellings."

The people of the Shieldaig district also endured severe hardships. From 1843 they had no shelter of any kind in which to worship. In 1845 Rev James Begg visited Applecross and preached to the people in the open air. "A more noble people," he wrote, "I have never seen, and the eagerness with which they listened to the preaching of the gospel was indeed remarkable. We were particularly struck with one woman, who told us that from her youth she had occasionally walked 50 miles to hear the gospel. We announced a

sermon at Shildaig the following day, a place at least ten miles from Applecross. The first thing I saw when I looked out in the morning was people starting for this sermon. The way was over a rough mountain without a road. We performed the journey on foot, and it was no easy task to climb so steep a hill, and to leap from point to point over such rude stepping-stones. . . .

“A large congregation had been waiting for two hours, but this is thought nothing of in the Highlands. Here was another scene like that at Applecross. The tent [pulpit] was placed amid the naked rocks on the seashore; the sound of the Psalms literally mingled with the roar of the waves of the Atlantic. The tent was fastened down with strong ropes to prevent its being upset, and there were grey-headed men sitting uncovered in the cold, and several of them with tears streaming down their cheeks, whilst Mr Glass preached to them the blessed gospel in their native tongue (Scottish Gaelic). Every new spectacle I witnessed deepened my impression of astonishment. These poor Highlanders must face all the storms of winter on the bare sea-beach, denied a single inch of land on which to erect a place of worship. We were told by the catechist, a worthy and somewhat picturesque-looking man, called in Gaelic ‘White John’, that there had lately been a revival of vital godliness in this district, especially amongst the young, and produced by the simple instrumentality of reading the Word of God. And the whole aspect of the congregation bore evident marks of the power of the Spirit of God.”

Samuel Rutherford’s phrase, “Grace grows best in winter”, was at this time true of many people in Shildaig and district. Soon after the Disruption, Rev Colin Mackenzie was called from Shildaig by the Free Church congregation at Arrochar. The people now had no minister or church building. Their faith and patience were to be sorely tried, and 29 years were to pass before another minister was set over them. Furthermore, the people were poor and, despite their large number and strong desire for the gospel, they could ill afford to support a minister.

In February 1871 the Free Presbytery of Lochcarron met at Shildaig. The Moderator for the occasion, Rev William Rose, preached and then Revs Donald Forbes and William Sinclair addressed the people on their position without a settled minister since the period of the Disruption. The Presbytery regretted to find that their financial state did not seem to allow them to call a minister. The people were so poor that the total Sustentation Fund collection in 1871 for the ten congregations of the Lochcarron Presbytery was a mere £670 12s 3d. Shildaig’s contribution was just £28. At a Presbytery meeting a year later, the Clerk read the following letter from the Shildaig Congregational Finance Committee:

“On the return of our deputation from the Presbytery, we did what the

Presbytery advised us, and we are here met this day to consider what should be done by our congregation. After mature consideration we now resolve to . . . promise sixty pounds sterling as the minimum annual contribution to the Sustentation Fund in the event of a minister being settled among us. We are: Duncan Mackenzie, elder, John Mackenzie, Angus Macrae and Duncan Grant.”

As a result of this undertaking, permission was given to proceed with a call in favour of Mr Donald Macdonald, probationer. The call was signed by one of the two elders, 18 of the 22 communicants and 537 adherents, a total of 556 individuals (over the age of 14). There were no dissents or objections. Duncan Mackenzie, elder, and Duncan Mackenzie, teacher, were heard in support of the call, which was sustained. Mr Macdonald was present and the call was put into his hands. The Presbytery then presented to him the following subjects for trials before ordination: a lecture on Luke 7:36-50, a homily on Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”, and a sermon on John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him”. His subject for Latin exegesis was: “Is the Holy Spirit divine?” The text for the Greek exercise was 1 Peter 2:22, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”, and the Hebrew exercise was on Genesis 1:26-31, “And God said, Let us make man in our image and after our likeness . . .”. At the Presbytery meeting on 9 April 1872, Mr Macdonald delivered discourses on all the subjects prescribed and was further examined on the usual points. The Presbytery were satisfied and agreed to ordain and induct him to the congregation at Shieldaig.

When the Presbytery met again in Shieldaig on 25 April 1872, the people gathered from all quarters, including a boatload from North Uist. What a scene it must have been, the hillside black with people and the portable pulpit placed down beside a dry-stone wall known locally as “the preacher’s wall” at the foot of An Cosh! (This rocky enclosure was in use until fairly recent times for open-air services.) Rev William Rose preached from the last three verses of Matthew 28: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Afterwards, Mr Macdonald was ordained by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery and was inducted to the pastoral charge of the congregation. Pastor and people were then suitably addressed by Mr Rose. As they departed, the people shook hands with their minister and cordially welcomed him.

Christian Experience¹

3. Sanctification

Archibald Alexander

That God leads His once-blind but chosen people in the way which they know not is true also in relation to the means and progress of their sanctification. All the children of God are inspired with an ardent love of holiness, and they are much delighted with the thought of having the power of sin destroyed. And it is often the burden of their prayer that the very principles of iniquity within them may be eradicated.

But little do they know or consider how this is to be effected. They have no idea how slow and painful will be the process of mortifying the old man with his deeds, which are corrupt. On their first conversion, they were often filled with comfort, rejoiced in hope, and found sweet satisfaction in attendance on divine ordinances. And they entertained the fond hope that it would always be thus, or better. They were like little children dandled on their parent's knee, not exposed to hardship or required to labour.

But the scene soon changes: darkness hangs over them; difficulties perplex them; conflicts discourage them. They are conscious of inbred corruption beginning to stir, and evils appear which were not believed to exist. The power of temptation is felt; and the Christian finds it to be literally true that he is engaged in a warfare. Pride rises and attempts to regain its former mastery; passion swells and becomes impetuous; the baits which the world presents to avarice, ambition and the love of ease and pleasure are found to be far more fascinating than was expected. The pleasures of religion too have subsided, and the lively relish for the service of God is abated. Prayer, meditation and self-examination, once so delightful, are now too often a burden, and are therefore frequently neglected, or hastily and carelessly performed. A distressing reluctance to spiritual duties is experienced, and all the pleasures of religion have vanished. Now the Christian may be compared to a weaned child, from whom the mother turns herself away and refuses it its wonted refreshment, or perhaps the Christian is better represented by the child sent off from his father's home to shift for himself in a wide and unfriendly world.

To increase his affliction, external troubles often combine with those which are inward and spiritual. Malignant enemies rise up to annoy and persecute;

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". The previous sections have dealt with conversion.

friends die or become unkind; ministers, on whom perhaps too much dependence was placed, are removed; zealous professors turn back to the world; religion is wounded in the house of her friends; truth lies bleeding in the streets; family comforts decay; and poverty and debt succeed to affluence and comfort; and, to crown all, Satan comes forth with a frightful roar and endeavours to worry those whom he knows he cannot devour.

Now indeed the feeble, timid soul is pressed beyond expression. It groans "being burdened" and almost wishes for death, not because conscious of preparation for a better world, but as a release from trouble. Sometimes under these afflictions, especially when bodily health is impaired or a good name blasted by the tongue of calumny, the soul grows pettish and impatient. And the feelings, if expressed in words, would be something like this: "Why am I thus? Why am I left to buffet the storm without help or refuge? Why am I abandoned of God, and made a reproach to my enemies, who daily say, scoffingly, "Where is now your God, in whom you trusted? There is no help for him in God." Or, more commonly, the afflicted and heavy-laden soul sinks into despondency and concludes that it never has been in the right way; that surely, if it was one of God's dear children, it would never be thus forsaken and left to sink in the horrible pit and miry clay. "Surely", it exclaims, "this cannot be the way in which Jehovah leads His own dear children, whom He hath redeemed." Were it not that now and then there is "a little reviving" in the midst of these years of affliction – unless, after long intervals of thick darkness, some rays of cheering light gilded the dark scene, and some drops of refreshment fell into the cup of sorrow – the soul would be overwhelmed with a burden which human strength is unable to bear.

But how is this the way of sanctification? It looks more like the path of declension and apostasy. But remember that, before we can ascend, we must descend; before we can be filled with the divine fulness, we must be emptied of self and sin. To bring us to feel our weakness and entire dependence, we must be left to try our own strength. And to convince us of the evil of sin, we must be left for a season to struggle against its power and to learn the "depths of Satan". To cure us of the undue love of the world, the world must be crucified to us, and we to it. And to preserve us from idolising the creature, the objects of our too-fond affections must be snatched away from our embrace. But doubtless this is a way which the people of God did not know until they were led into it. Even when experienced Christians forewarned them of the difficulties and dangers of the way, they did not heed them – either not understanding what they meant, or not giving full credit to their testimony.

Where you die, when you die, or by what means, is scarcely worth a thought, if you do but die in Christ. *Rowland Hill*

Christian Advice¹

A letter by *Jonathan Edwards*

As you desired me to send you, in writing, some directions how to conduct yourself in your Christian course, I would now answer your request. The sweet remembrance of the great things I have lately seen inclines me to do anything in my power to contribute to the spiritual joy and prosperity of God's people there.

1. I would advise you to keep up as great earnestness in religion as if you knew yourself to be in a state of nature and were seeking conversion. We advise persons under conviction to be earnest and violent for the kingdom of heaven; but when they have attained to conversion, they ought not to be less watchful, laborious and earnest in the whole work of religion, but more so, for they are under infinitely greater obligations. For want of this, many persons, in a few months after their conversion, have begun to lose their sweet and lively sense of spiritual things and to grow cold and dark and have "pierced themselves through with many sorrows". Whereas, if they had done as the Apostle did (Phil 3:12-14), their path would have been "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day".

2. Do not leave off seeking, striving and praying for the very same things that we exhort unconverted persons to strive for, and a degree of which you have had already in conversion. Pray that your eyes may be opened, that you may receive sight, that you may know yourself and be brought to God's footstool, and that you may see the glory of God and Christ, and may be raised from the dead and have the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart. Those who have most of these things have need still to pray for them, for there is so much blindness and hardness, pride and death remaining that they still need to have that work of God wrought upon them, further to enlighten and enliven them, that shall be bringing them out of darkness into God's marvellous light and be a kind of new conversion and resurrection from the dead. There are very few requests that are proper for an impenitent man that are not also, in some sense, proper for the godly.

3. When you hear a sermon, hear for yourself. Though what is spoken may be more especially directed to the unconverted or to those that, in other respects, are in different circumstances from yourself, yet let the chief attention of your mind be to consider: In what respect is this applicable to me? And what use ought I to make of this for my own soul's good?

¹This letter, to a young woman who had recently made a public profession of faith, is reprinted with some editing from the Memoir in *Edwards' Works*, vol 1. It was written in reply to a request for advice as to the best way of maintaining a Christian life.

4. Though God has forgiven and forgotten your past sins, yet do not forget them yourself. Often remember what a wretched bond-slave you were in the land of Egypt. Often bring to mind your particular acts of sin before conversion, as the blessed Apostle Paul often mentions his old blaspheming, persecuting spirit and his injuriousness to the renewed – humbling his heart and acknowledging that he was “the least of the apostles” and not worthy “to be called an apostle” and the “least of all saints” and the “chief of sinners”. And be often confessing your old sins to God, and let that text be often in your mind: “That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God” (Ezek 16:63).

5. Remember that you have more cause – on some accounts, a thousand times more – to lament and humble yourself for sins that have been committed since conversion than before. This is because of the infinitely greater obligations that are upon you to live to God, and to look upon the faithfulness of Christ in unchangeably continuing His loving-kindness, notwithstanding all your great unworthiness since your conversion.

6. Be always greatly abased for your remaining sin and never think that you lie low enough for it, but yet be not discouraged or disheartened by it; for though we are exceeding sinful, yet we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The preciousness of His blood, the merit of His righteousness, and the greatness of His love and faithfulness infinitely overtop the highest mountains of our sins.

7. When you engage in the duty of prayer, or come to the Lord’s Supper, or attend any other duty of divine worship, come to Christ as Mary Magdalene did (Luke 7:37,38). Come and cast yourself at His feet and kiss them, and pour forth upon Him the sweet-perfumed ointment of divine love out of a pure and broken heart, as she poured the precious ointment out of her pure broken alabaster box.

8. Remember that pride is the worst viper in the heart, the greatest disturber of the soul’s peace and of sweet communion with Christ. It was the first sin committed and lies lowest in the foundation of Satan’s whole building and is with the greatest difficulty rooted out and is the most hidden, secret and deceitful of all lusts and often creeps insensibly into the midst of religion, sometimes even under the disguise of humility itself.

9. That you may pass a correct judgement concerning yourself, always look upon those as the best discoveries and the best comforts that have most of these two effects: (1) making you least and lowest and most like a child, and (2) most engaging and fixing your heart in a full and firm disposition to deny yourself for God and to spend and be spent for him.

10. If at any time you fall into doubts about the state of your soul, in dark and dull frames of mind, it is proper to review your past experience; but do not consume too much time and strength in this way. Rather apply yourself with all your might to an earnest pursuit after renewed experience, new light, and new lively acts of faith and love. One new discovery of the glory of Christ's face will do more toward scattering clouds of darkness in one minute than examining old experience through a whole year by the best marks that can be given.

11. When the exercise of grace is low and corruption prevails, and by that means fear prevails, do not desire to have fear cast out any other way than by the reviving and prevailing of love in the heart. By this, fear will be effectually expelled, as darkness in a room vanishes away when the pleasant beams of the sun are let into it.

12. When you counsel and warn others, do it earnestly, affectionately and thoroughly; and when you are speaking to your equals, let your warnings be mixed with expressions of your sense of your own unworthiness and of the sovereign grace that makes you differ.

13. If you would set up religious meetings of young women by yourselves, to be attended once in a while, besides the other meetings that you attend, I should think it would be very proper and profitable.²

14. Under special difficulties, or when you are in great need of, or have great longings after, any particular mercy, for yourself or others, set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself alone. And let the day be spent, not only in petitions for the mercies you desire, but in searching your heart and in looking over your past life and confessing your sins before God. Let it not be as is wont to be done in public prayer, but by a very particular rehearsal before God of the sins of your past life, from your childhood hitherto, before and after conversion – with the circumstances and aggravations attending them – and by spreading all the abominations of your heart very particularly, and as fully as possible, before Him.

15. Do not let the adversaries of the cross have occasion to reproach religion on your account. How holily should the children of God, the redeemed and the beloved of the Son of God, behave themselves. Therefore walk as children of the light and of the day, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour. And especially abound in what are called the Christian virtues and be like the Lamb of God: meek and lowly of heart, and full of pure, heavenly and humble love to all. Abound in deeds of love to, and self-denial for, others; and let there be in you a disposition to account others better than yourself.

²These would be informal gatherings and would in no way be considered as services; they may have consisted of no more than Christian fellowship (Editor).

16. In all your course, walk with God, and follow Christ, as a little, poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hand, keeping your eye on the marks of the wounds in His hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin, and hiding your nakedness under the skirt of the white, shining robes of His righteousness.

17. Pray much for the ministers and the Church of God – especially that He would carry on His glorious work which He has now begun, till the world shall be full of His glory.

A Hairbreadth from Eternity¹

Alexander M'Watt

We would now say a few words to the careless, impenitent sinner, who is wholly occupied with the tantalizing and transitory objects of time, and indifferent to the all-important interests of eternity. It is declared, in no uncertain or doubtful terms, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Ps 9:17). Thus the unpardoned, impenitent sinner shall die the awful second death; his soul and body shall be cast into the place of unutterable woe, there to endure throughout the endless ages of eternity the unmitigated sufferings of an outcast from God. And there he will have no hope of deliverance from the worm that dieth not, and from the fire that is not quenched. Should this not startle him? Should it not arouse him from his stupor, his fatal security, his spiritual indifference?

Impenitent sinner, you are advancing every moment to the verge of eternity; you do not know whether you are a hairbreadth from it; and the condemnation of God is impending over you. What then more dreadful and alarming than your state? You are now possibly on the very brink of the eternal world – yea, as it were, nodding in your spiritual slumber on the very edge of the burning lake – and you do not know but the next nod may dash you headlong into it. O how can you sleep in your sins? How can you thus slumber and take your rest, when you do not know but the next hour – yea, the next moment – may close your eyes in death and send you into the eternal world, to place you at the bar of an offended God and put you beyond all possibility of relief? Another moment and your life may be gone! Another moment and your soul may be lost!

¹The conclusion of a sermon on Jeremiah 33:8: “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me”. It is reprinted, with slight editing, from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2. M'Watt (1801-1880), a native of Inverness, was the Disruption minister of Rothes in Morayshire.

Ah sinner, what charm is it – what fascination, what delusion – that weds you thus to your sins, shuts your eyes to their manifest consequences and carries you on unconcerned and unalarmed into the gulf of ruin and unending wretchedness? Your condition is fearfully perilous. It is indeed alarmingly dangerous and, if you persist in it, there remains for you nothing “but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:27).

But perilous as it is, it is my privilege, it is my commission, to announce to you this day that your condition is not altogether desperate. “The Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear” (Is 59:1). “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?” (Ezek 18:23). “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 33:11). “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 55:7). Such are the affectionate terms in which “the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious” is now addressing this wicked and rebellious world, and inviting all its sinful inhabitants to come unto Him that He may be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities He may remember no more.

May He give you grace to believe and comply with His invitation, so that when you turn into Him, He may cleanse you from all your iniquity, whereby you have sinned against Him, and pardon all your iniquities whereby you have sinned and whereby you have transgressed against Him. And to His ever-blessed name be all the glory in Christ!

In the beginning of the Christian life, the eye is naturally and properly fixed on those separate acts of transgression upon which we can put our finger – that more external part of our sinfulness which it is our first and easiest duty to put away. But we soon learn, if we are progressive, that all these particular transgressions are but different modes in which the great and primitive sin of human nature manifests itself – are only varied exhibitions of that disinclination and aversion to glorify God and extol Him in the heart, which is the ultimate and original sin of man. He therefore who does not, after putting away swearing, lying and stealing, look down a little lower into his heart and detect the yet subtler ramifications of his corruption, will be likely to degenerate into a mere moralist, instead of becoming one of those spiritually-minded Christians who become more lowly and humble and broken-hearted as they become more and more upright and obedient in their external conduct.

W G T Shedd

Edwards' *History of Redemption*¹

A Review Article by Rev David Campbell

This excellent work by the renowned American theologian, philosopher and preacher, Jonathan Edwards, first saw the light of day as a series of 30 sermons preached to his congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1739. It was published after his death by his son, also Jonathan, in Edinburgh in 1774, with the subtitle, "Containing the Outlines of a Body of Divinity, including a View of Church History, in a Method Entirely New". The work is not the finished product of the author, who had intended to produce a more substantial book on the theme. It does however give his basic design for the larger work and has received well-deserved acclaim. This edition has been published to coincide with the three-hundredth anniversary of Edwards' birth, on 5 October 1703. This work is also included in the present publishers' two-volume edition of Edwards' *Works*. The principal virtue of this new publication is that its format and typeface are considerably easier for the ordinary reader than the two cumbersome volumes with small print, which are more suitable for use in a study than by the fireside.

Edwards sets out to give a complete overview of the Scriptures and presents the chief events of its history as they illustrate the great work of redemption by Christ. To this he adds a measured overview of the history of the world from the close of the canon of Scripture until the end of time, drawing from secular history as well as from the prophecies of Scripture. His thesis is that every event in the history of the world is part of the plan of redemption and advances that work under the government of Christ the Redeemer. With such a theme, we would expect to find considerable reference to the Scriptures and their relation to one another. This is what makes Edwards' work so valuable: it helps greatly in understanding and appreciating the Scriptures of truth.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first begins with the Fall and the first promise and ends at the incarnation. The second treats more fully the central event in redemption and world history – the life, death and resurrection of the Redeemer. The third section takes up the history from the ascension until the end of the world. The logical mind of the author is seen in the way each section is carefully divided. (The arrangement of sections and sub-sections on the contents page of this new publication is slightly different from that in the two-volume edition.)

In considering the first period, Edwards identifies a significant advance in the work of redemption at the following times: the flood, the calling of

¹*A History of the Work of Redemption*, by Jonathan Edwards, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 448 pp, price £14.50, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Abraham, the life of Moses, the reign of David and the Babylonian captivity. This can be seen in the progressive accumulation of inspired writings and in the development of typical institutions and persons pointing to the Redeemer and the redemption He purchased.

Throughout the necessarily brief summary of the Old Testament, the reader will find many very interesting and illuminating views expressed. In particular, Edwards highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in His gracious influence on individuals as well as on the Church as a whole. He also emphasises the remarkable preservation of the Church. What he says on this point is encouraging to the people of God still: "When the enemies of the Church have done their utmost, and seem to have gained their point and to have overthrown the Church, so that the being of it is scarcely visible, but like a living root under ground, yet there is a secret life in it that will cause it to flourish again, and to take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (p 137). Edwards attaches considerable importance to the period between the Old and the New Testaments. He argues that secular history is to be used to interpret what the prophets wrote of events taking place during this time. He demonstrates the general proposition that the events from the Fall to the incarnation were preparatory to the coming of Christ and makes a gracious application of the whole.

Although the second period is much shorter, its importance at the centre of the history of redemption, and therefore of the world, is clearly expressed. This portion of the work is considerably more theological and shows the brilliant mind of Edwards being exercised on a subject of the highest importance. He looks at the purchase of redemption under the normal divisions of obeying and satisfying the law and justice of God, and makes some interesting distinctions.

He sets forth the law which Christ kept in fulfilling a righteousness for His people as firstly *moral*, then as *Jewish* and thirdly as what he calls *mediatorial* law, "which contained those commands of God to which He was subject, not merely as a man, nor yet as a Jew, but which related purely to His mediatorial office". Edwards comments that "Christ's righteousness, by which He merited heaven for Himself and all who believe in Him, consists principally in His obedience to this mediatorial law, for in fulfilling this law consisted His chief work and business in the world". Further, he says, the gospel history "is chiefly taken up in giving an account of His obedience to this law: and this part of His obedience was that which was attended with the greatest difficulty of all; and therefore His obedience in it was most meritorious" (p 217). He applies this usefully by drawing attention to the folly of man in seeking to present his own righteousness to God when

such great works were done to provide a sufficient righteousness in Christ.

The third period relies on the New Testament and on non-biblical history, which is very usefully summarised until Edwards' own day. The Book of Revelation is used extensively as pointing to the history of the Christian Church; yet he handles unfulfilled prophecy in a guarded manner. The Antichrist is very clearly identified as the Pope, in accordance with Reformed views on the subject given expression in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Edwards emphasises the progress of the work of redemption, while referring to the many hindrances the gospel has met. He considers the phrase *Christ coming in His kingdom* to refer to four major events which he calls great dispensations of providence. They are: (1) Christ appearing in the apostles' days to set up His kingdom and destroy its enemies, especially in the destruction of Jerusalem. (2) What was accomplished in Constantine's time in the destruction of the heathen Roman Empire. (3) What is to be accomplished at the destruction of Antichrist. (4) His coming to the last judgement, which Edwards believes is "the event principally signified in Scripture by Christ's coming in His kingdom" (p 264). Each of the first three are considered as "a lively image or type of the last". They are not to be considered as different dispensations or as the setting up of different kingdoms, but as "so many steps and degrees of the accomplishment of one event". The whole period until the fall of Antichrist is viewed as a time of suffering, affliction and persecution, in which God is pleased to give intermissions whereby the days of tribulation are shortened. It is not until the fall of Antichrist that peace and prosperity can be looked for and, until it comes, Edwards sees the Church travailing and crying out for that deliverance (p 287).

Speaking of the prosperous state of the Church in the latter days, Edwards is very encouraging. He uses Revelation 20:4 and Isaiah 60:15 to identify its duration. He also lists eight characteristics of that time, which should stir up all those who mourn in Zion to give God no rest until He establishes this glorious state of the Church. There are several indications that Edwards expected the better days to dawn in his own time, yet he states explicitly that he could not tell when they would begin. The book concludes with a useful spiritual application of the whole history of redemption.

This book is an excellent summary of Scripture for those engaged in any form of public teaching. It is a devotional work which yields much spiritual profit and illumination in understanding the sacred oracles. It could well be used as a textbook for educating young people in the history and truths of Scripture. It might also be used as an introduction to the history of the Christian Church and its future prospects. The style is plain and simple, with a minimal use of theological or technical language. It retains that spiritual

flavour which the original sermons must have had. We congratulate the Banner of Truth on this new publication in its attractive, substantial binding, and heartily recommend its purchase and perusal by all Christian readers.

Thankfulness to God¹

John Calvin

Paul uses here a thanksgiving to lift up men's hearts to acknowledge how much they are indebted to God, especially considering that He has shown Himself so bountiful towards them in giving forth Himself in all kinds of ways. Since the chief sacrifice which God requires at men's hands is that they should acknowledge His benefits and be thankful to Him for them, Paul considers first of all how these benefits may provoke them to do their duty – for we are so slack in our duty that it is frightful to see it.

We can well enough confess that our chief concern and endeavour ought to be to have a well-ordered life, namely, a life of praising and glorifying God. For if a man asks us why we are found in this world, why God has such a care for us, why His goodness feeds and cherishes us and, finally, why He, as it were, dazzles us with the great number of benefits He bestows upon us, we must say that it is in order that we should yield some acknowledgement of them to Him. For we, for our part, cannot profit Him at all, neither does He require anything else of us in exchange but thanksgiving. As it is said in Psalm 116, what shall we render to the Lord for all the benefits which we have received from Him, except to take the cup of salvation at His hand and to call upon His name?

You see then that all that we can ever bring to God is but to acknowledge ourselves bound to Him for all things. And yet, for all that, no man discharges this duty – no, not the hundredth part of it – but rather, all of us from the greatest to the least defraud Him of it, inasmuch as we do not cease through our baseness to bury His praise, which ought to resound in our mouths. For this reason our Lord rebukes us for our negligence, for when the holy Scriptures exhort us frequently to praise God and use many words for that purpose, let us not think that they are superfluous, but let us acknowledge them to be so many upbraidings of our unthankfulness and of our malice and wickedness in failing in the thing that is so requisite and (as we might say) the principal thing in life.

¹An edited extract from John Calvin's *Sermons on Ephesians*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust and available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom at £17.95. Calvin was here preaching on Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus".

Book Reviews

Proud to be a Protestant! *The Essence of the Protestant Faith*, by Timothy J E Cross, published by B McCall Barbour, paperback, 93 pages, £3.50, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This little book provides a simple statement of a number of doctrines which are fundamental to Protestantism – what the author calls “some of the essentials of true Protestantism”. The writer of the foreword makes a valid point: “One of the greatest tragedies to befall the true Church of Jesus Christ is the abandonment by many believers of the term *Protestant* when publicly declaring their faith. They are ashamed of their Protestantism, being fearful of appearing bigoted, negative and intransigent in the eyes of those who have embraced the ecumenical and charismatic spirit of the age.” Presumably the title is intended to be the opposite of: “ashamed to be a Protestant”, but some of us would hesitate to use the word *proud* in a positive way; in the Bible it is always the opposite of *humble*.

Chapter headings include: “Protestantism’s realistic view of the human condition”, “The centrality of the cross to the Protestant faith” and “Justification by faith: a cardinal Protestant truth”. Readers should note that the book is intended as a brief, *positive* exposition of Protestant doctrine; with very few exceptions does it attempt to rebut error. Dr Cross points to the duty of believers seeking assurance, which, as he says, “is far removed from presumption”. On the other hand, it would have been useful to draw attention to the great danger, especially in today’s religious environment, of sinners presuming that they have been converted when they are not.

The author is to be commended for his attempt to portray Protestantism for what it is – the expression of what Scripture actually teaches.

On the Reliability of the Old Testament, by Kenneth A Kitchen, published by Eerdmans, hardback, 662 pages, \$34.30.

The author, an emeritus professor of Egyptology at the University of Liverpool, needs no introduction to anyone familiar with the field of biblical archaeology. Over the past 40 years he has published several interesting books on biblical history and the ancient Near East, each of which solidly defends the narratives of Scripture as sound history, in opposition to the theories of the higher critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In another of his books, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (IVP, 1977), he writes, “Biblical studies have long been hindered by the persistence of long-outdated philosophical and literary theories and by the wholly inadequate use of first-hand sources in appreciating the earlier

periods of the Old Testament story in particular”. In this book he makes relentless use of the archaeological discoveries of the last 150 years to demolish the theories of those who challenge the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. He dismisses the grand theories of Julius Wellhausen as flights of fancy created in a cultural vacuum that bear no reference to the facts of the ancient world. Instead he shows that the Old Testament, far from being “pious fiction”, is supported by a firm foundation in historical fact.

Professor Kitchen takes the reader on an interesting tour of the history of the cradle of civilisation. He moves seamlessly from the exile to the Kings, to Exodus and the covenants and back to the Patriarchs. With a flowing style, he explains the history and interrelations of these periods. He does not start with creation – although he does comment on other creation narratives in the Ancient East – as he views this as beyond his area of expertise.

Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton Seminary in his article “Historical Accuracy of the Old Testament” (reprinted in *Truth Unchanged Unchanging*, The Bible League, 1984) makes the following observation, “What we need in the Church today are more men that are able to follow the critics up to their lair, and slaughter them in their den. It makes me sad to hear these old ministers of the gospel and Christians lament all the time about the attacks being made here and there upon the Bible, and they never do one thing to train the men to fight their battles for them, and you know perfectly well that you cannot defend the Old Testament Scriptures unless you have made the preparation.” The efforts of Professor Kitchen are worthy of our attention as they provide a valuable set of corroboratory evidence in favour of the historicity of the Old Testament and an interesting tour of the wider history of the period.

A R Middleton

Protestant View

Enforced Priestly Celibacy

Protestant Truth reports a surprising recent admission by the former Master General of the Dominican Order, Timothy Radcliffe. On the BBC Radio 4 programme *Analysis*, he stated that priestly celibacy had “largely broken down” in many parts of the world, and that “we have to explore the possibility of [priests] being married”.

An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* states that the “Catholic left” believes that the most serious problem the church faces is clerical celibacy, and that it should ordain married men. However, the Pope has repeatedly asserted that clerical celibacy is to remain. The article claims that the “Catholic right”,

on the other hand, wants to blame everything on homosexuals. The sexual-abuse crisis, they say, resulted from the ordination of large numbers of homosexuals from easy-going seminaries after the Vatican Council. Although the writer argues that neither celibacy nor homosexuality are causes of the abuse scandal, they in fact lie at the heart of it. History shows that the unscriptural prohibition of marriage for priests has led to much uncleanness. The Bible is clear: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife" (1 Cor 7:2). As for sodomy in the priesthood, the *Kansas City Star* revealed in 2000 that "priests are dying of AIDS at a rate at least four times that of the general US population".

Such immorality proclaims Rome to be far from God's Word. May her devotees yet heed His Word when it says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor 6:17). NMR

Britain Under Siege

Continuity Journal has as its motto: "The rediscovery of our Catholic roots and the renewal of the Catholic Faith in the British Isles". It identifies its function as promoting "a return to the Christian Faith of these lands, as established by St Augustine of Canterbury, through inspiring testimonies of converts to the Catholic Church, and presenting the role of the Church in the development of the history and culture of England for over 1500 years". In its February 2004 issue it reproduces an article by John Gummer from the *Catholic Herald* of 26 December 2003. John Gummer, who describes himself as a "convert" to Roman Catholicism, is introduced as "a Patron of the Continuity Movement and President of the International Path to Rome Committee". He discusses what Roman Catholics should hope for in 2004. Mentioning peace, the alleviation of poverty, justice and environmental protection as global issues which should concern them, he concludes that most important is the conversion of the world. This, he writes, is a gospel imperative; religion is no optional extra and the solution of the other matters of concern depends upon the acceptance of the truth concerning God.

However, the faith which Mr Gummer wishes to see proclaimed is that of Rome and what he has in mind as an immediate objective is the conversion of England to Romanism. "In 2004 we should make it our firm intention to seek the conversion of England. We could take as our symbol of rebirth the proposed building of a new church in Walsingham to replace the temporary building that has served us so long. Next year [2004] we shall be raising the money to build a church worthy of the great Mother of God in England's Nazareth. This ought to be the sign of our commitment to the return of our

nation to the one true fold. Buildings are not enough. 2004 must become the year in which we Catholics rediscover our apostolate. Our first duty is to recall the lapsed to their faith.”

Mr Gummer expresses concern at the existence of lapsed, nominal, lukewarm Roman Catholics and wishes in 2004 to reclaim them. He also sees a field for mission among Anglicans, “so many of whom are at the end of their tether – faithful men and women for whom the end seems nigh. It is as if all that they have believed in and all they have stood for is collapsing around them. The faith of the Church is denied by bishops who were appointed to uphold it and the teachings of the Fathers ignored in Synods that were intended to preserve it.” With both of these targets in view, Mr Gummer concludes that 2004 “should be the year when we begin again to reclaim England (and the British Isles) for the Faith”.

Many readers will be aware that Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, who brought the Romanism of the day to England at the end of the sixth century, was a very different person from Augustine of Hippo (354-430), to whom Calvin and other Reformers owed much, though he retained errors fundamental to the Roman Catholic Doctrine of the Church. B B Warfield described the Reformation, inwardly considered, as the ultimate triumph of Augustine of Hippo’s doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the Church. Readers may also be aware that the shrine at Walsingham and the ecumenical pilgrimages associated with it are central to the promotion of the worship of Mary, something dear to the heart of the present pope.

Sadly, Established British Protestantism is in a poverty-stricken condition; it has abandoned the authority of Scripture both in theory and practice – and also the cardinal doctrines of the Christian Faith – and maintains a sometimes-ambivalent but usually-friendly attitude to Rome. All this makes Romanism an attractive alternative to those, like Mr Gummer, who are ignorant of the reality and power of truth but crave something which appeals to divine authority and which seems to uphold the doctrines of the ancient creeds. People who will not accept the authoritative declaration of the truth as the Bible reveals it will accept error which claims the authority of truth and which uses a mixture of truth to give credibility to its claims. “But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in My Father’s name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (John 5:42,43). No doubt this partly explains why Romanism comes over in politics and the media as if it were the authentic and authoritative voice of Christianity in Britain and why it appeals to persons who do not know the truth but are seeking something substantial and firm by which to live.

Islam also aims ultimately at the conversion of Britain or the imposition

of Islamic rule. Whatever “moderate” practising Muslims in Britain may say in opposition to violence, and however genuinely they may say it, there can be no doubt that nothing less than the creation of an Islamic state in Britain will satisfy them. Again the extensive departure of our nation from authentic Christianity and the self-projection of Islam as the defender of absolute truth, and of family values and morality over against the decadence of the West (which is regarded as the expression of Christianity), together with the multi-faith culture professed by our leaders and their obvious fear of offending Muslims in Britain or elsewhere, make Britain an encouraging ground on which to build the basis of further advance.

We believe that truth will triumph ultimately over error and we pray, as generations past have done and as the Lord’s people still do, that King Jesus will yet return in the power of His Spirit and truth to take possession of Scotland, and the United Kingdom generally, for Himself. But we need to be shaken out of our complacency and become more urgently aware of the dangers which threaten to engulf our nation. This is necessary so that we may be instant in prayer and also seek to use whatever means of sounding an alarm are available to us in our disfranchised condition where there is scarcely a candidate for office in national life who will contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and for the society which that faith produced. *HMC*

Notes and Comments

Escalating Alcohol Abuse

Churches (including our own) and social welfare groups have warned about the detrimental consequences of legislation which gives longer opening hours to licenced outlets. However, the drink trade is powerful and has repeatedly got its way. But there is a price to pay.

The Academy of Medical Sciences, an independent body of senior doctors and researchers, states in its report *Calling Time*, that alcohol consumption has increased 50% over the last 30 years. During that period, the incidence of chronic liver disease has escalated by 450% and the resultant deaths of people aged between 45 and 54 have increased more than six-fold in the case of men and almost five-fold in the case of women. How much tragedy and misery is reflected in these figures! The affordability and availability of alcohol, says the report, should be limited.

When this is the opinion of those who are involved in picking up the pieces caused by alcohol-related broken health and broken homes, one would expect our legislators to take heed. We hope therefore that the Depart-

ment of Health report on reducing the harm caused by alcohol, at present in preparation, will make definite proposals for significantly curtailing access to alcohol.

Of course, our supreme rule of conduct, the Word of God, is unequivocal in repeatedly condemning excessive drinking. It should also be noted that when the Apostle Paul advised Timothy to take wine for the sake of his health, the prescribed amount was “a little” (1 Tim 5:23). *NMR*

Scottish Executive – Sexual Health Strategy

The Minister for Health and Community Care is concerned that “sexual health in Scotland remains poor”, and that “sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are widespread and increasing, while teenage conceptions are amongst the highest in Western Europe”. The Executive’s draft Sexual Health Strategy (SHS), which has been sent out for public consultation, purports to offer solutions for these problems.

However, the SHS is seriously flawed in many respects. For example, among its seven stated objectives there is no strategy for promoting marriage. Also there is not even a hint of the axiom, “Chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage”, which accords with both common sense and the Bible. Furthermore, the SHS makes no provision for promoting “abstinence only” programmes which have been very useful to young people in the USA in helping them to resist peer pressure to break the Seventh Commandment. Instead, the SHS states that it “cannot recommend ‘abstinence only’ programmes for Scottish schools”, and proceeds to promote an “abstinence plus” policy, the “plus” being, among other things, contraception by young unmarried people.

There is, in fact, more “plus” than “abstinence” in these programmes. They have resulted in, not only the promotion of contraception, but also increased pregnancy rates and a higher incidence of STIs. This is confirmed by the report of a new study, based on data collected by 95 health authorities in England between 1998 and 2001. It was conducted by Nottingham University under the leadership of Professor David Paton, the author of the report. “The study throws into question the Government’s entire teenage sexual health strategy,” says a press report. “Its attempts to reduce high-risk sexual behaviour among teenagers have had exactly the opposite effect.”

We hope that this survey will influence the Scottish Executive and that the results of the consultation will convince them that many parents are concerned about the disturbing proposals— some of them shocking – in the SHS. Any government sexual health strategy which aims to be useful must be undergirded by the morality which God prescribes in Holy Scripture. *NMR*

Church Information

Meeting of Synod

The Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland will meet in St Jude's Church, Glasgow, on Tuesday, 18 May 2004, at 6.30 pm, when the retiring Moderator, Rev H M Cartwright, will conduct public worship.

(Rev) John MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

Glendale Communion

The Kirk Session of the Glendale congregation have decided to discontinue the communion there, owing to the depleted state of the congregation. There will therefore be no Glendale communion on Sabbath, June 20.

(Rev) W A Weale, Moderator of Kirk Session

Home Mission Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of two special collections on behalf of the Home Mission Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during May.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

Bookroom Fund: Anon, North Tolsta, £20.

College & Library Fund: Anon, Ross-shire, £2500; Anon, USA, \$170; The McCarter Family, USA, \$500; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 116, where most needed, £40.

Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund: Anon, Ross-shire, for the poor in African congregations, £500.

Outreach Fund: Anon, £105 per AG.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Daviot: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where most needed, Jer 15:16, £200.

Dingwall: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40; Anon, N Kessock, £40. *Congregational Funds:* Friend, where most needed, £50 per Mrs McL.

Inverness: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £100. *College & Library Fund:* Anon, £8; Anon, £10. *Door Collection:* Anon, £40; Anon, £20. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £10 per ANM.

Kinlochbervie: *Congregational Funds:* Friend, Wick, £10.

Larne: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where most needed, £80. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, £120.

Lochbroom: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £30 per collection plate. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where most needed, £80 per collection plate.

Ness: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £20; Friend, Stornoway, £20.

North Harris: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, Tarbert, £10. *Congregational Funds:* Friend, MacQueen St, where most needed, £40 per AJM.

Portree: *Bus Fund:* A Friend, £10 per SYM. *Communion Expenses:* DM & AM, £75. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, In memory of loving parents, £20. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £32 per SYM. *Tape Fund:* AB, £10 per SYM.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds:* K MacLeod, Portree, for manse renovation, £60. *Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund:* A Friend, Portree, for Zimbabwe mission, £30. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, Portree, £16. All per Rev JRT.

Shieldaig: *Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund:* Friend, Shieldaig, for mission work among the Jews, £25.