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“Surely I Come Quickly”

These words are in almost the last verse of the last book of Scripture, almost the last truth to be revealed from heaven. The Saviour had finished the work of redemption in this world and had gone to sit on the right hand of God, the place of power, from where He rules over everything in this world below. From heaven He gave His apostle John – and, through him, His Church in all ages – a view, in the Book of Revelation, of what would happen before He would return to this world. His Church must not become discouraged because of the length of the way or the difficulties to be encountered on it. But would it be long or short before His second coming? His assurance is: “Surely I come quickly” (Rev 22:20).

Christ will come again just as He left the world. When He had led His disciples out from Jerusalem as far as Bethany, He ascended up to heaven “and a cloud received Him out of their sight”. It was then the two angels told the disciples: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven”. When He does return, “every eye shall see Him”, and, in particular, “they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him”. Clearly it will be a tremendously solemn time for those who leave this world unreconciled to the One who was given to be the Saviour of sinners. Then He will call from their graves all who have died, but for unbelievers it will be a resurrection of damnation. From the judgement seat, where on the last day Christ will sit in all His glory, they will be sent away into everlasting punishment because of their sins. But for the righteous – those who in time believed on Christ – the resurrection will be one of life, according to His promise. This will be the completion of their salvation, when their already-perfected souls will be reunited to their now-glorified bodies. When they appear before the same judgement seat, they will be authoritatively declared to be perfectly free from all condemnation. And, accordingly, they will be brought to heaven “with gladness and rejoicing.

In heaven “there shall be no more curse”. God’s children will have left behind, in the world, all the consequences of sin – the sweat of the brow, the

thorns and thistles, and every other element of the curse which resulted from man's fall into sin. Even more importantly, they will have escaped from sin itself – not only from its guilt but also from its corruption. Heaven will be a place of absolute holiness where God's children will serve Him for ever without the least taint of imperfection.

When Christ will come the second time, there will be an end of sin everywhere – except for what is shut away for ever in hell. What an appealing prospect an eternity of sinless service to God ought to be! No wonder that the response of the Church to the prospect of Christ's speedy return is: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Yet, we might ask, how is the word *quickly* to be reconciled with the fact that over 1900 years have already passed since the promise was given? Clearly it is not according to our sense of *quickly*. Yet we must remember that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (1 Pet 3:18). Alexander Nisbet comments that this "is a truth that none within time can well comprehend; only faith can assent to and make use of it, in judging as He judges, that many years' delay to us of the performance of a promise is but a very little time compared with eternity; only it may foster a holy longing to be with Him, when we shall partake of His duration as well as of His glory, when there shall not be such a thing as any sad reflections upon past sweetness, or any painful languor for sweetness to come but a constant present possession thereof".

All God's purposes must be fulfilled; there can be no unnecessary delays in bringing them to pass. Indeed, all apparent delays are part of God's plan, and we can be sure that God's plan was devised in infinite wisdom and that these apparent delays were designed to bring about His greater glory in the end. God's wisdom is altogether beyond ours. We might think that the wise course of events – what would be most to the honour of God – would be for His kingdom to advance relentlessly throughout the centuries until the whole earth was filled with His glory. But it is clearly otherwise, for that is how history would have turned out if it had been God's will. God's thoughts and ways are altogether beyond ours, and we can be sure that He has allowed the opposition against His kingdom – and the success of the opposition – for wise purposes, although we are so limited in our understanding of them.

What is clear is that the nearness of Christ's coming must be consistent with the fulfilment of all the elements of God's plan for this world. All these purposes must be put into effect before Christ's second coming. In particular, all the elect must be gathered into His kingdom before then; all whom the Father gave to Him in the everlasting covenant must first be delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought to a living faith in the One who died

for them and rose again. Those who are to be saved will by no means be a small number; John saw them before the throne of God as a “great multitude which no man could number”. And they must *all* be delivered from Satan’s kingdom before Christ will come again.

Christ will indeed return *quickly*, in the true understanding of the word – God’s understanding, not ours. The Thessalonians understood Paul’s teaching, in his First Epistle, about Christ’s second coming as implying that it would take place without any delay. But, in his Second Epistle, Paul had to make clear that there were certain events which must occur before Christ could come. There must first be “a falling away” from the faith, and “that man of sin”, the Roman Antichrist, must also appear. These events have long since occurred, yet there are other prophecies which have not been fulfilled. But fulfilled they will be before Christ will come, and yet the fact remains that He will come quickly.

We are promised that Satan’s chain will be shortened for a long period of time – Revelation 20 refers to it as 1000 years, which is, to our understanding, long. During that time, his power will be restrained far beyond the extent to which God restrains that power today. Today Satan is allowed great success in hardening the hearts of sinners, even under the preaching of the pure gospel. He is permitted to have huge success with his temptations, so that “the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed”. And ordinary people likewise oppose the interests of the cause of God.

Yet there is one thing that prevents the complete success of Satan and his followers; it is the pronouncement of God the Father in heaven: “Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion”. The fact that Christ is King over His Church means that the Church can never be overwhelmed. He was victorious over Satan at the cross, and He will yet rescue from Satan’s kingdom everyone given to Him by the Father; none of them will be lost. And when the time is right, Christ’s victory will be made evident to the whole universe – on the day of judgement. Because Christ is ruling over everything – all principalities and powers have been made subject to Him – every promise in the Word of God pointing to the spread of the gospel will yet be fulfilled. So, in God’s appointed time, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. Not only will multitudes of Gentiles throughout the world be brought into the Church of God, but the Jews also will be restored to their place in the Church, and this will be as “life from the dead” for the Gentiles.

But will this happen quickly? If we were to think of answering in human terms, we should realise that it is beyond our power to do so and we ought

at once to give up the attempt. But if we look at the matter in relation to eternity and to the purposes of God, we must say that it *will* happen quickly. There will most certainly be no delay; it will be brought about at the time appointed by God from all eternity.

There can be no delay in the progress of Christ's kingdom, in the sense that everything has been foreordained and nothing is out of control. Christ is on the throne and He will bring everything to pass that has been revealed in the Word of God, and it will all happen at precisely the time appointed. In particular there will be, to an extent never before seen in the world, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in days of gospel blessing. Finally there will follow in due time the second coming of Christ – not to convert the world but to bring it to judgement.

The timing of that last event is surrounded by much mystery. Accordingly it becomes us to be humbly submissive to what it has pleased God to reveal in His Word. Yet we are to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”, echoing the words already quoted: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus”. Prayer is called for. We are to seek the coming of that blessed time when evil will be banished to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. We are to seek that final manifestation of the glory and the victory of Christ on the day of judgement, when all the fallen angels and unregenerate human beings will go without resistance to their own place and when all the holy angels and believing men and women will go to take their place before the throne in heaven.

Meanwhile, the people of God have an opportunity to serve Him in this world, however limited their sphere of usefulness. If nothing else, they are all in a position to pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom – for the fulfilment of all the purposes of God in connection with His Church in this world until all the elect are gathered in. And they are to go on in faith, even when everything seems out of control. They are to grasp firmly the fact that their King is on the throne. This is what the Scriptures reveal, in truths which have been given for their encouragement in all generations. These truths cannot fail; however dark the present may be and however dismal the future may seem, Christ will come at the appointed time to bring to an end all the opposition to His kingdom.

Yet let us ask ourselves if we have become subjects of this kingdom. If we refuse to submit to Christ's authority, there can be no hope for us. Still we have an opportunity of obtaining salvation through Christ, however brief that opportunity may turn out to be. Only thus can we be safe when Christ will come the second time; only thus can we be safe at the judgement; only thus can we be safe throughout eternity. Let us not squander our opportunity!

Prayer¹

A Sermon by *W M Hetherington*

Philippians 4:6,7. *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

In this passage, two important subjects are brought before us: prayer and the answer to prayer. But we may divide the subject into three distinct heads.

1. The true nature of prayer.
2. The true answer to prayer.
3. The proper state of mind in, and encouragement to, prayer.

1. The true nature of prayer. The simplest idea of prayer is the approach of an intelligent creature into the presence of its Creator to make known its needs and requests, expressing its desires and hopes, and looking up humbly and adoringly to Him as both able and willing to grant more than we ask or think. Prayer is primarily an act of homage due from every rational creature to the Eternal God. This view of it tends to give us right conceptions of ourselves and of God – of our weakness and necessities, and of His all-sufficient grace. The language of the Psalmist: “O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come,” conveys to us the idea of the infinite Sovereign of the universe, seated on the throne of grace, listening to the prayers of His creatures, more ready to hear than they are to ask.

Surely if this view were rightly understood, it might suffice to repel some of the objections occasionally used against prayer, for it constrains us to perceive prayer as essentially an act of homage rendered by a dependent creature to his Creator, which it is his duty to render at all times and in all circumstances. But consider such texts as the following: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”; “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination”. Nothing can be more evident than that they refer to iniquitous desires, to wilful rejection of the law, and therefore to wicked prayers such as the Lord cannot answer unless He has pleasure in iniquity – a blasphemous supposition. But are applications of such a nature entitled to be called prayers, in the right sense of the word? There may be the bended knee, clasped hands, upraised look, and a loud and earnest cry in what are not prayers. But not one of these texts can, by any

¹Taken from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2, and abridged. Hetherington (1803-65) was then a minister in St Andrews. He later became Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology in the Free Church College in Glasgow. He is perhaps best known as the author of a *History of the Westminster Assembly*.

possibility, have the least reference to the cry for mercy of a contrite sinner, or to the duty of a creature to render homage to his Creator.

The cry of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner", was not rejected because he was a sinner. The prayers of Cornelius were answered while he was unacquainted with the gospel. Simon the sorcerer was exhorted by the inspired Apostle to pray while he was still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. The prayers of Nineveh were heard and judgement delayed though they were not worshippers of the true God. The fasting, humiliation and prayers of even Ahab were heard, and the destruction of his house and kingdom postponed, though he continued to adhere to the idolatrous worship of Baal even to the hour of his death. But we need not further refute an objection which is contrary to nature, reason and Scripture.

But revelation shows man not merely as a creature, but as sinful and depraved – in a state of rebellion against God and incapable of recovering His favour. He cannot therefore appear acceptably before God in his natural state of sinfulness and enmity; he needs a Mediator. Scripture also reveals that Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Advocate with the Father, so that this miserable state may not deter man from drawing near to God. Christ not only makes intercession for sinners, pleading His own perfect righteousness and finished work, but sends down the Holy Spirit, as a spirit of grace and supplication, to teach us to pray. This is not in the slightest degree incompatible with the view which regards prayer as the primary act of homage due from man to his Creator, for in the altered circumstances of sinful man it is still his duty to pray. And it is his duty to present those prayers through the Mediator, through whom alone he can now have access to God.

When we understand what Scripture teaches concerning the Mediator, as having taken upon Himself our nature – and in that nature both offered up an atonement for sin and set before us a perfect example – we receive a perfect conception of the true nature of prayer. To the question, What is prayer? we can answer, "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies". This is true prayer, not only the due homage of a creature but the humble adoration of a Christian.

The full view completely answers another class of objections. Men will sometimes gravely ask, "How can the prayers of feeble man change the purposes of the eternal and unchangeable Jehovah?" But who presumes to insinuate that the prayers of man *do* change the eternal purposes of God. Not the humble Christian, whose language and spirit in prayer to God is, after the example of the Mediator Himself: "Thy will be done".

But the objector may be met on his own ground and told that there is a

previous question. How does he know but that, from all eternity, the prayer offered up for some specific object may have been connected in the divine mind with that object? Certainly, throughout the whole range of nature, we nowhere behold effects produced without adequate causes. It would be considered sheer insanity in anyone to expect the *end* without the previous use of the right *means*. The prayer may be the necessary connecting link in the sequence of spiritual things, fore-arranged in the eternal counsels of God. To reply that we cannot understand why prayer should be such a necessary connecting link is not an adequate objection. The very same objection might be urged against the use of means in nature; for we often cannot detect what in the essential nature of a thing enables it to operate on another, producing invariably similar results under similar circumstances. We only know that God has given to material existences certain qualities, the effect of which is that particular results flow from them. And it will not be easy for the objector to prove that a similar law does not regulate the spiritual world and that prayer may form the last connecting link in the chain of invisible agency between humble, dependant and supplicating man and the free bounty of the all-gracious Jehovah. If prayer be thus viewed, the objection before us disappears, for it does not *change* but *complete* God's decree.

But when the Christian looks more closely into the Word of God, he obtains a more complete conception of the true nature of prayer. He there finds it invariably represented as a necessary step to avert judgements and procure blessings in the experience of various holy men of old, whose example has been recorded for our instruction. No possible objections, however plausible, can counterbalance God's sovereign injunctions and gracious encouragements. Still further, a Christian is enabled to apprehend the precious truth that, when "we know not what we should pray for as we ought . . . the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered".

Then how unspeakably sublime must be the character thus imparted to prayer! It is the will of God revealing beforehand in the mind of man its own fulfilment. It is the infinite mind of the Spirit working in the soul of man to will and to ask what it was the eternal purpose of the Almighty God to grant! This prayer was regarded by the omniscient mind of the Father from all eternity; this prayer was included among the objects which the Son of God suffered on the cross to purchase, and which He now sits on the right hand of divine power to present. This prayer the Holy Spirit entered into the soul of the believer to inspire, so that heaven and earth, eternity and time, God and man might meet together. And thus every believing prayer is an earnest of the Spirit, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption, when the rich grace, infinite wisdom and eternal love of God shall

be made apparent to the whole adoring universe by the salvation of man. **2. The true answer to prayer.** The direct statement of the text is, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". It will be at once observed that the Apostle does not say that the very object for which we pray will be granted, but he suggests an immeasurably more important line of thought. Let us explore it.

When we reflect on our own ignorance, folly and short-sightedness, we may well shrink from wishing that our prayers should always be granted expressly according to what we ask. Who has not often prayed earnestly that some affliction might be averted, or some advantage gained, and yet has soon had ample reason to rejoice that his prayer was not answered according to his request? Many have been constrained to say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted". And perhaps more have had reason to think that, if they had obtained the object of their intense desire, they would have drawn down upon themselves a judgement rather than a blessing. To receive the very thing for which we pray would not, therefore, be the true answer to prayer, for the proper spirit of prayer is expressed in these words, "Thy will be done". And it is impossible that a prayer, conceived in such a spirit, can fail to obtain a suitable answer.

The very essence of the Fall is rebellion, and the very essence of sin is "enmity against God". In this condition it is impossible from the heart to say, "Thy will be done". So long as we are in a state of rebellious enmity against God, we can have no peace with Him or with our own conscience. Never can a fallen sinner know what true peace is till he knows what it is to be reconciled to God through the mediation of the Prince of Peace. Even after conversion, we are prone to relapse, and every such relapse is injurious to our peace. After recent sin, until we have obtained fresh access to the fountain which washes away all sin, we cannot go to God in prayer with the same filial love as formerly. Should affliction overtake us in this state, we are liable to fret and strive with our Maker. Yet He does not smite us in anger but in mercy. He humbles us till, with deep abhorrence of our guilt and in the spirit of submissive homage to His sovereign authority, the contrite heart exclaims, "Thy will be done"; "Good is the will of the Lord".

When this is accomplished, the object of the affliction is so far answered, and its removal may be expected speedily to follow. When we kiss the rod of our heavenly Father, He will not continue to smite us. Yet the ending of the chastisement was not the direct object of that prayer; it was peace with God. Perhaps we were not duly conscious of the full extent of our relapse into sin. The chastisement came, and we felt our criminality in the degree to which our peace was lost. And in the very utterance of the

words, "Thy will be done", God's will *is* done and our peace is restored.

When a child has done wrong, there must be chastisement – both for the child's sake, that the offence may not be repeated; and for the sake of the entire family's peace and welfare, which would be utterly ruined by continued rebellion. But the little culprit's heart is still too full of guilt and pride, and he will not yield. You must repeat the chastisement. Still he retains his stubborn obstinacy and will not submit. What is now to be done? Your heart bleeds for your child, and refuses to repeat the infliction. Yet let it be repeated. In wise mercy to him and the whole family, we entreat you to persevere till he submit, or else his respect for you and your influence over him are gone for ever. He yields! He does not run from you but *to* you; he looks up through gushing, submissive tears. He is willing to bear the chastisement but cannot endure the displeasure any longer. And will there not then arise in the hearts of parents and child a stronger love to each other? Even so with the chastened sinner: no sooner can his subdued heart utter the cry, "Father, Thy will be done," than he is again consciously clasped in the embrace of everlasting love and enjoys anew the very peace of God.

But it is the Holy Spirit alone that works such contrite submissiveness in the otherwise-stubborn heart of rebellious man. Mere chastisement would never produce so gracious a result. Do we not often see men rousing all the energy of their proud hearts to stern endurance under some severe affliction? They will cry neither to man or to God for help. But when the Holy Spirit enters into the soul, He humbles its pride, inspires the hope of forgiveness, and teaches the reclaimed penitent to pray. And, since the Mediator sends the Spirit who inspired the prayer, the prayer is its own answer to a very great extent. No humble believer could wish for more than to have his own will in perfect harmony with the will of his great God and Saviour.

How perfect is the peace which consists in entire submission to the will of God! Nothing can then distress us greatly; there is nothing which we can with sinful eagerness desire. Are we in health? We are the more able to labour in His service. Are we in sickness? His grace is sufficient for us, and His strength is perfected in our weakness. We ought not intensely to desire either prosperity or adversity, enjoyment or affliction; for we could endure none of them without Him; and we need dread none of them, for with Him we can endure all things. Therefore, while a Christian can freely state to God what he thinks he needs, he will at the same time cheerfully leave it to God Himself to grant or refuse, according to His infinite wisdom and goodness, making "Thy will be done" the ruling spirit of every petition, and this will certainly be granted. Why should he ever repine or doubt or dread while the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth? Let even the sternest trials and severest

sufferings come, so long as they are under His control. If He sees that to be necessary, it must be well. It must be for His glory, and for the good of those who truly love Him. He cannot wrong, He will not injure them.

3. The proper state of mind in, and encouragement to, prayer. In the first clause of these verses, “Be careful for nothing”, the word *careful* implies such a degree of care as amounts to distracting anxiety. It might be rendered, “Let nothing disturb or distract your minds”. Such a state of mind could not be suitable for appearing before God in prayer. Why are you so disturbed and distracted? Can you doubt His power, His wisdom, or His goodness? Banish all such improper thoughts and feelings. God is the hearer of prayer; and the proper spirit in which to appear before Him is one of deep humility, acknowledging unworthiness and confessing sin; yet, in the name of Christ, supplicating forgiveness. And if the true spirit of prayer be best expressed by the words, “Thy will be done”, there ought to be no such distracting anxiety in prayer; for the will of God cannot but be done. And if we truly love and trust Him, we can have no wish that it should be otherwise.

But this very idea gives the highest encouragements to prayer. We are indeed helpless creatures who cannot protect ourselves from innumerable dangers around us. But let this not disturb God’s children, for their protection does not depend on themselves. The arm of Omnipotence is around them, and why should their minds be distracted with idle fears? We are sinful creatures, utterly unfit to appear in the presence of the high and holy God, but the Son of God has, in our nature, by one sacrifice, finished transgression and brought in an everlasting righteousness. And we are invited to come to God through Him with the blessed assurance that God will in no wise reject those who thus come. We are ignorant creatures and know not what to ask. But the Spirit helps our infirmities, and is sent to be in us a spirit of grace and supplication, so that we may by His teaching ask, in a spirit of entire submissiveness, only what is agreeable to the will of God – and, so asking, never ask in vain.

We are naturally in rebellion against God and might therefore dread to enter His presence. But the Holy Spirit, sent by the Redeemer to complete His great conquest, quickens sinners, who are dead in trespasses and sins, takes away the stony, rebellious heart and gives them hearts of flesh, writes in those hearts the laws of God, and gives the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father. Thus they can come to God in prayer, dismissing all distracting anxiety, and submitting to His holy and all-wise will. This is the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and it will keep the heart and mind through Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and intercessor. To pray is itself the very essence of peace, for it hands over every suffering, every sorrow and every care to God, looking up to Him in calm confidence for all that

they can require in time, and for all that they can enjoy throughout eternity.

The encouragements to prayer arising out of this view of the subject are as innumerable as the needs of man; rather they are as boundless as the unsearchable riches of Christ. God has been pleased to let us know how we may be elevated to the dignity of being fellow labourers with Him in accomplishing His glorious work on earth. Shall we then sit in indolent contemplation of the wonderful dignity wherewith human prayer is invested without attempting to put it into practice?

We unhesitatingly believe that the lack of unity and earnestness in the prayers of Christians is a cause of the slow progress of vital Christianity. Because we do not adequately understand the nature of prayer, we pray as if we do not expect to be heard. And we dismiss our supplications so entirely from our minds that we often could not recognise the answer, should it be granted. How different would the spirit of our prayers be if we really felt our humble voice mingling with the counsels of eternity! With what solemn awe would we weigh every petition so that we might never ask anything contrary to the will of God, or likely to harm our neighbours or ourselves! With what fervency would we pray for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom and glory! By means of this idea, the saints might even now become rulers and judges of the world. For the Lord Jesus Christ, who governs all things for the good of His Church, will answer the cry of His own elect.

The welfare of any individual congregation must depend in a great measure on the efficiency of its pastor. And God may have suspended the prosperity of His Church on its own prayers on its pastor's behalf. This, at least, is certain: when people pray for their pastor, their petition is in its own nature such as it must be consistent with God's will to grant – not, perhaps, in the very way they prayed for, but in some way best for him and them. And would not the pastor engage in his arduous duties with increased energy by being conscious that many pious souls were interceding for him?

Again, if our hearts were filled with ardent longings for the universal extension of the Messiah's kingdom, our prayers would be warm and constant, not only for those who labour at home, but also for those among the heathen. By this we would both secure the blessing and contribute our proportion of the means. What almost incredible difficulties have been surmounted by men who were upheld by the hope of future applause! And to the tried heart of the suffering missionary, when the human weakness of his nature droops, would it not be a great comfort for him to know that the prayers of the whole household of faith were with him?

It is also our duty and privilege to make specific supplication in our private prayers for particular objects in our own lives. When trials and afflictions

assail us, we may spread the black page of our calamities before the Lord, as Hezekiah did Sennacherib's threatening letter. We may ask in faith for strength and direction from on high. Although we may not receive the precise answer for which we prayed, our prayer itself is part of its answer – perhaps the most important part. The whole of a Christian's life is a process of training into conformity with the will of God. If his trial have occasioned a prayer in which this conformity was strongly felt, that may be the entire object for which the trial was sent. But every prayer ought to be offered up in the strong conviction that it will be answered in the most suitable manner. Sorrows beset the path of the Christian, for "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth". And many such can tell that, but for the privilege of casting their burden upon the Lord, they would have perished in the midst of their pilgrimage. O blessed be God that in the fiercest of their trials – even when death tears from them those whom they could have died to save – the Spirit makes intercession for them and fills their souls with humble acquiescence in God's will and with the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

But are there not some here to whom this is unintelligible – some who have never raised their souls in earnest prayer to God and have no idea of its inestimable value? It is not regular attendance on public worship, or joining in the words of public or private prayer, that can constitute the true prayer of faith. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." You may deceive yourselves and others, but your most secret thoughts are known to God. Are you not alarmed when you think that your guilty soul stands ever exposed to the eye of its Judge? Flee then from the wrath to come. Flee to His mercy-seat; throw yourselves prostrate before His throne of grace; cling to the cross of Christ; do not leave it without pardon and a blessing. Raise to Him the earnest cry of urgent necessity for mercy through the blood of Jesus. You complain that you are a guilty sinner, and so you continue to stand aloof. Strange infatuation! It was for guilty sinners that Christ died. Come then to Him polluted as you are, and He will make you whiter than the snow.

Do you still hesitate? Read the warrant we have for proclaiming this full, free and unconditional invitation in the language of our Lord Himself in Matthew 7:7,8. Place full confidence in this ample invitation, and yield at once a willing and thankful obedience; thus you shall both render glory to God and become partakers of His grace. You shall escape the coming judgement and obtain a portion of heaven's everlasting blessedness. May God forbid that your refusal this day to obey should be numbered among the aggravations of your guilt and contribute to plunging your souls deeper, deeper, deeper into the gulf of unutterable, unimaginable woe!

The Origin of Fellowship Meetings

Rev D W B Somerset

A fellowship (or “question”) meeting is a public meeting, nowadays held almost invariably on the Friday of a communion season, for the consideration of religious experience. Meetings for “Christian conference” have been a feature of Christianity from the beginning, especially in times of persecution or revival, but in the Highlands of Scotland such meetings have developed a particular form, here described by John Kennedy:

“The minister presides, and after prayer, praise and the reading of a portion of Scripture, he calls on anyone, who is anxious to propose a question to the meeting, to do so. This call is responded to by some man who rises, mentions a passage of Scripture describing some feature of the Christian character, and expresses his desire to ascertain the marks of those whom the passage describes, and the various respects in which they may differ from merely nominal Christians. The scope of the passage of Scripture is then opened up by the minister, and the exact import of the question founded upon it is explained. He then calls by name, successively, on such as are of repute for piety, experience and gifts to ‘speak to the question’. One after another rises, as he is called, states briefly his view of the question, and, without attempting either to expound Scripture, or to deliver an exhortation, or venturing to parade his own experience, speaks from the heart what he has felt and feared and enjoyed under the power of the truth. Thereafter the minister sums up all that has been said, correcting, confirming and expanding, as may be necessary, and makes a practical improvement of the whole. The person who proposed the question is then usually called to engage in prayer, and, with praise and the benediction, the meeting is closed. Such was the fellowship meeting in the good days of the fathers in Ross-shire.”¹

In former times, fellowship meetings were far more common than they are today. In the 1740s John Balfour of Nigg used to preside at two separate meetings “for prayer and spiritual conference” in his parish, each of which took place every third Monday. In 1762 James Calder was holding a “monthly fellowship meeting” in the parish of Croy; and Gustavus Aird, quoted below, indicates that such monthly fellowship meetings were normal in the Highlands in the nineteenth century.² In some cases the practice persisted into the twentieth century.³ The earliest mention of fellowship meetings on the Friday of a communion season is in an Act of the Synod of Sutherland

¹John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, Inverness, 1897, pp 86-7.

²William Taylor (ed), *Diary of James Calder*, Stirling, 1875, p 14.

³Murdo Macaulay, *Aspects of Religious History of Lewis*, Inverness, nd, p 218.

and Caithness in 1737, and as this Act was seeking their abolition, they must already have been well-established in the northern Highlands.⁴ It seems likely, then, that they originated in the seventeenth century, and there has been considerable speculation as to their precise beginning. There are four principal theories.

1. The first theory, due to Gustavus Aird, traces the origin of the fellowship meeting back to the famous Covenanter Thomas Hog of Kiltearn (1628-92). Hog was minister of Kiltearn from 1654 until his deposition in 1661, and was restored to the parish in 1690, a little while before his death. Gustavus Aird (1813-1898) was the Free Church minister of Creich for over half a century, and it was said of him that “no man in his day knew more accurately and extensively the past religious history” of Ross and Sutherland. He was far from dogmatic in his suggestion that fellowship meetings had their rise under Thomas Hog’s ministry. Here are his views, expressed in a letter written shortly before his death.

“As to the origin of the Monday monthly meeting and then of the Communion Friday meeting, I really am not sure. I thought, from a paragraph in Mr Steven’s *Life of Mr Hog of Kiltearn*, that I saw there the origin of the monthly question meeting, and that it originated in a revival of true religion, and that where true religion manifested itself in other parishes the minister set on foot the question meeting, just as Mr Hog did in Kiltearn. Then, during the time of persecution, such as would not hear the curates assembled in meetings on the Sabbath, and this was to some extent the case until the Revolution. Then, after the Revolution, as Presbyterian ministers were got and settled, this practice was followed on Mondays once a month. It was from 30 to 40 years after the Revolution ere Presbyterian ministers were got over the whole of Ross and Sutherland. Then a revival took place to a considerable extent along the coast of Sutherland and the Reay country, and the most part of the Synod of Ross, and then, I suppose, the question meeting on the Communion Fridays was set on foot.”⁵

The passage in the *Life of Mr Hog* is as follows, and probably relates to the year 1656: “So soon as it pleased the Lord to bless Mr Hog’s parochial labours with a gracious change wrought upon a considerable number of people, he took care to join the more judicious amongst them in a society for prayer and conference; these he kept under his own special inspection, and did heartily concur with, and assist them in, exciting and edifying one

⁴Donald Beaton, “Fast day and Friday Fellowship meeting controversy in the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness 1737-1758” in *Transactions of the Inverness Gaelic Society*, 1917, pp 159-182.

⁵Alexander Macrae, *Life of Gustavus Aird*, Stirling, nd, pp 143-4; *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis*, p 219.

another".⁶ It seems likely that this "society for prayer and conference" would have survived until Hog's restoration in 1690, because it is said that, after his deposition, "there was not a parish in Scotland that complied less with the corruptions and defections of the time than his did".⁷

2. A second theory, due to Lewis Rose of Tain, traces the origin of the fellowship meeting to a slightly earlier date. Lewis Rose (1791-1876) was minister successively of Nigg, Duke Street Gaelic Chapel in Glasgow, Kincardine, and Tain. In the earlier years of his ministry he was an Evangelical, and friendly with Dr Kidd of Aberdeen, but some time before the Disruption he became a Moderate, remaining in the Established Church in 1843. In a footnote to one of his books, Professor J S Blackie refers to a manuscript in his possession, written by Lewis Rose, in which it was stated that "the Friday question meetings had their origin at Inverness 200-odd years ago [that is, about 1650] from the action of a very zealous minister of that town named Alexander Mackenzie".⁸ Unfortunately, no further information is provided in the footnote. It happens, however, that the present writer has a cutting of a letter to a newspaper, without name or date, pasted into the back of a book. It is entitled "Origin of 'The Men' etc", and it seems likely from its contents that it was written about 1850, and probably by Lewis Rose. Part of the letter is as follows:

"It may not be uninteresting to your readers to know when and where the 'Question' and the 'men' first originated in the north. I may state that it was in the year 1641, at Kingsmills, Inverness, in the house of the Rev Murdo Mackenzie, one of the ministers of that town, where, during his incumbency, he regularly had, on the Friday preceding the communion, a select party of pious men assemble together for the purpose of expressing their views on passages of Scripture, thus edifying and instructing each other in the words of eternal life. In 1645 Mr Mackenzie was translated to Elgin, but the solemn exercises he had begun with at Inverness were subsequently followed out by keeping meetings in both churches, and that publicly, and some years thereafter adopted in the surrounding parishes, and ultimately in the counties of Ross and Sutherland. Whether Mr Mackenzie continued to follow the same good practice in Elgin, I never could learn." Unfortunately the writer of this letter gives no clue as to the source of his information.

The Murdo Mackenzie who is here referred to had a chequered career. He

⁶*Memoirs of Mrs William Veitch, Mr Thomas Hog of Kiltearn, Mr Henry Erskine, and Mr John Cairstairs*, Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1846, p 88.

⁷*Memoirs of Mrs William Veitch . . .*, p 102.

⁸John Stuart Blackie, *Altavona*, London, 1883, p 353n. This statement is repeated in *Life of Gustavus Aird*, p 144n, and in *Aspects of Religious History of Lewis*, p 218. Each time the name of the minister is given as Alexander, but undoubtedly it should be Murdo.

was born in 1600, ordained as a chaplain to a Scottish regiment in the Swedish army in 1634 and settled as minister of Contin in 1636. In 1640 he became one of the ministers of Inverness and in 1645 he moved to Elgin. At this stage he was a zealous Covenanter and “was famous”, says Wodrow, “for searching people’s kitchens on Christmas day for the superstitious goose, telling them that the feathers of them would rise up in judgement against them one day”.⁹

By the 1650s, however, he had either changed his views on Christian conference, or else become excessively jealous for ministerial oversight. An Act of Assembly of 1647 had approved directions drawn up by Robert Blair for “secret and private worship and mutual edification, for cherishing piety, for maintaining unity and avoiding schism and division”. Among the particular directions for masters of families was one enjoining “reading of Scriptures, with catechizing in a plain way, that the understandings of the simpler may be better enabled to profit under the public ordinances, and they made more capable to understand the Scriptures when they are read; together with godly conferences tending to the edification of all the members in the most holy faith”. Extraordinarily, by 1656 Murdo Mackenzie was publicly opposing various parts of the Act, including this one, maintaining among other things that parents should *not* catechize or explain Scripture to those under their charge. On 6 June of that year, the godly Alexander Brodie of Brodie, near Elgin, recorded in his diary his distress at hearing of “the strong-rooted prejudices which Mr Murdo Mackenzie had against the act for promoting piety”.¹⁰

In 1661 Murdo Mackenzie conformed to Episcopacy, and the following year he became Bishop of Moray. He had a principal hand at this time in the persecution of Thomas Hog of Kiltarn, and was Moderator of the Synod which deposed him in July 1661, he himself pronouncing the sentence. Wodrow records the strange influence that the Synod seemed to be under and how “the sentence was pronounced with a peculiar air of veneration, and looked rather like their consecrating him to a higher office than a deposition, and that the moderator, in a kind of consolatory discourse after the sentence, spoke very near nonsense. Among other things, he was pleased to remind Mr Hog that our Lord Jesus Christ had suffered great wrongs from the scribes and Pharisees.”¹¹ In 1677 Murdo Mackenzie became Bishop of Orkney, dying in 1688.

⁹Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1838, vol 1, p 237.

¹⁰*Diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie*, Aberdeen, 1863, p 181.

¹¹*The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, vol 1 p 129.

3. A third theory, attributed to Donald Munro of Ferintosh, puts the origins of the fellowship meeting somewhat earlier still. Donald Munro (1860-1937) was Free Church minister of Ferintosh from 1894 to 1936 and then of Rogart for the last 18 months of his life. He was an authority on “the old religious life of the North”. Rev J P MacQueen, in his article on fellowship meetings, states that Donald Munro was emphatic that the fellowship meeting derived from Scottish soldiers in the army of Gustavus Adolphus. “He told the present writer,” says Mr MacQueen, “on more than one occasion, that God-fearing soldiers from Sutherland, who took part in and survived the Thirty Years War under the command and leadership of the great Christian Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, became accustomed to the spiritually-edifying practice while serving in the army of that Protestant hero. On their return home they continued the good custom in their native Sutherland.”¹²

Gustavus Adolphus was killed in 1632, and many of the Scottish soldiers returned home about 1638, at the time of the signing of the National Covenant, so this provides an approximate date, according to this theory, for the introduction of fellowship meetings in the Highlands. Unfortunately, once again we are not told what sources Donald Munro was relying on for his claim. Perhaps one piece of evidence was that fellowship meetings seem to have arisen in the very same areas where the six “long tunes” of Gaelic Psalmody were found, and it is supposed that these tunes were brought back by soldiers from Gustavus Adolphus’ army.¹³ It is interesting to notice that Murdo Mackenzie, mentioned above, had been a chaplain with the Swedish army, so that there is no incompatibility between this present theory and that of Lewis Rose.

4. The final theory is that of John Kennedy (1819-1884), that fellowship meetings had a gradual development, with no particular event originating them. “[They] arose”, he wrote, “spontaneously out of the lively feeling pervading the first groups of believers [in the Highlands]. We cannot conceive of a party of exercised Christians met together without some converse regarding the fruits and evidences of true godliness. Such converse would naturally arise if there was any unsuspecting interchange of thoughts in their intercourse. One of them would be sure to have his doubts and difficulties; these he would state to his brethren, and they, from the Word of God and their

¹²*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 63, p 302. In an undated letter, however, which forms the Appendix to Rev Kenneth MacLeay’s booklet *Alexander MacAskill* (1969), Rev Donald Munro states: “Many think that [fellowship meetings] began during the ministry of Mr Hog in Kiltarn, and I am inclined to believe that such a commonly-accepted opinion has a good basis in truth”.

¹³*Life of Gustavus Aird*, p 244.

own experience, would endeavour to afford him suitable counsel and comfort. Finding such converse to be edifying, and remembering that Christians are exhorted to comfort and to edify one another, what would be more likely than that they should set apart seasons for that duty . . . In order to conduct the exercise in an orderly way, what would be more likely than that they should choose him whom they accounted the most advanced among them to preside over them, and that he should ask each one who could do so to speak to the question in course? Thus the fellowship meeting would at last be set up. Why should not the minister then adopt it and, by taking the direction into his own hands, do all he could to provide for its being conducted ‘decently and in order’? And this is just the story of the rise and establishment of the Highland fellowship meeting.”¹⁴

Rev Donald Beaton, in one of his articles on fellowship meetings, indicates that he was inclined to accept Kennedy’s view. He acknowledges that the origin of fellowship meetings is involved in obscurity, but then gives an approving summary of Kennedy’s position: “According to Dr Kennedy’s testimony, exercised believers used to meet in private houses and for their mutual edification discussed their religious experiences. In this way the fellowship meetings began, and in order to have them under the control of the ministry it was ultimately decided that they should have a place in the religious exercises of the Church and especially on the Friday of the Communion, when they would be presided over by a minister.”¹⁵

Whichever of these theories, if any of them, is correct, we believe that it is important to recognise that the fellowship meeting is not something unusual, irregular, or distinctively Highland. As Kennedy says, “It was the product, not of the peculiar natural temperament of Highlanders, but of the lively spiritual feeling of Christians, fostered by the warm brotherly love that prevailed in the days of its origin”.¹⁶ While certain historical events may have contributed to its development and its present form, it is in itself simply a feature of true religion in times of revival. Where there is a revival of religion, fellowship meetings of one sort or another will arise; and where there is a decline in religion, and a disinclination to talk about religious experience, fellowship meetings will die out. Where there is the fear of the Lord, there will be spiritual conversation: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name” (Mal 3:16).

¹⁴*Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, pp 122-3.

¹⁵*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 43, p 201.

¹⁶*Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, p 123.

Arminianism (1)¹

Rev D A Ross

James Arminius was a minister of the Calvinistic Church of Holland and a professor of theology in the University of Leyden from 1602 to 1609. He developed views very different to the Calvinistic tenets in which he was trained and propagated a scheme of theology which has been associated with him ever since. Just as Calvinism took its name from the teachings of John Calvin, Arminianism is named after James Arminius.

After his death a considerable number held to his views, but they were firmly opposed by the Calvinists. Forty-six pastors who rejected orthodox Calvinism in favour of Arminius' teachings, drew up a Remonstrance, or Protest, in five articles, which publicised their views on predestination and grace. The articles were presented to the States of Holland with the request that these pastors be allowed to continue in their places in the Church without having their orthodoxy examined by the ecclesiastical courts. The Calvinists put forward a counter-Remonstrance in five points, which marked the origin of the famous Five Points of Calvinism. The importance of this controversy drew the best and most learned of theologians from many parts of Europe to the Synod held in Dordrecht in 1618-19. William Cunningham comments: "The Synod of Dort, representing as it did almost all the Reformed churches, and containing a great proportion of theologians of the highest talents, learning, and character, is entitled to a larger measure of respect and deference than any other council recorded in the history of the Church".²

The Arminians, like the Calvinists, were bound by the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism but were now advocating a departure from them. It appears that they conducted themselves in a devious fashion at the Synod and an exasperated president eventually dismissed them with the vigorous words: "You are sent away. Go! You began with lies, and you have ended with lies!"³ In their absence, the Synod got down to the serious business of dealing with their theology and proceeded to formulate 93 articles, the famous Canons of Dort. John R de Witt sums up the work of the Synod: "The divines of Dort were not first of all concerned with scholastic questions which bore no relationship to life. To them the controversy was not in any sense an academic one. It was utterly practical. In their view, as in that of Athanasius in his struggle against Arianism twelve hundred years before, the ultimate issue was salvation itself."⁴

¹The first section of a paper given at last year's Theological Conference.

²*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformers*, p 367.

³"The Synod of Dort", in *The Banner of Truth*, December 1968, p 5.

⁴"The Synod of Dort", p 7.

Arminianism, as John R de Witt goes on to stress, was no slight error: “If the Arminians had their way, and their doctrines were introduced into the Church, the end result would be destructive to the Christian doctrine of salvation”. No doubt these words express the deep concern the Calvinists had in their stand against the views of Arminius as they emphasised the doctrines of the Word of God. “Hence the Canons – the unconditional and gracious character of election, the atonement of Christ limited as to its design and extent, the total depravity of man, the irresistibility of grace, and the perseverance of the saints – were all in answer to the five articles of the remonstrance, intended to establish clearly and unmistakably the utterly gracious character of salvation: that ‘it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy’ (Rom 9:16).” It was inevitable that the Arminians who would not submit to the Canons would be forbidden to exercise their ministry in public. For this the Calvinists have been charged with persecuting the Arminians, but it was in keeping with biblical church discipline. These five points opposed the Arminian errors: man’s ability to do good, conditional election, universal atonement, resistible grace, and the possibility of falling from grace.

1. Man’s Natural Power. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “We are utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil” (6:4). Also: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation” (9:3). Some Arminians maintain that man, in spite of the Fall, has not lost all ability to do good. Others accept that man by the Fall did become thoroughly depraved but maintain that God makes up this loss by giving to man, through Christ, “sufficient grace, and hence gracious ability, to obey the gospel”.⁵ In either case they hold that man can do spiritual good accompanying salvation should he so desire.

Such teaching has no warrant from Scripture, which assures us that all are, spiritually, “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Under the covenant of works, man was to stand or fall in Adam, as he was the root and representative of mankind. Sadly, Adam fell and, in consequence, all mankind fell in him. “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). The Word of God confirms again and again – for example in Romans 3:9-18 – that the natural man is spiritually dead. When Paul wrote: “There is none righteous, no, not one . . . there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one”, he was addressing Jews and Gentiles alike – but showing self-righteous Jews in

⁵A A Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, pp 294.

particular that they were as much subject to total depravity as the Gentiles.⁶

Of course, as Louis Berkhof points out, total depravity does *not* mean “that every man is as bad as he can be, but that sin has corrupted every part of his nature and rendered him unable to do any spiritual good. He may still do many praiseworthy things in relation to his fellow-beings, but even his best works are radically defective because they are not prompted by love to God nor done in obedience to God.”⁷ Furthermore, total depravity does not mean that man is deprived of natural liberty. He acts freely, but according to his fallen nature. What he does, he does freely. He always deliberately refuses the remedy offered in the gospel; he freely and willingly rejects Christ. The Saviour told certain Jews: “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40), and this is true of every sinner until God makes him willing to come to Christ. Thus Robert Shaw says: “In his natural corrupt state, man freely chooses evil, without any compulsion or constraint on his will; and he cannot do otherwise, being under the bondage of sin.”⁸

This is radically different to the Arminian teaching of man’s freedom and power to choose good and, in particular, to receive Christ as a Saviour. The Word of God makes it evident that fallen man will not receive Christ or do anything that is truly good. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). Until he is given a new nature by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, man cannot do good. How crystal-clear the witness of God: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgements and do them” (Ezek 36: 26-27). Only then will the sinner receive and rest on Christ alone for salvation and begin to go in the way of holiness.

2. Election. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, *some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.* . . . Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God . . . hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto” (3:3,5). Arminians are deeply opposed to the doctrine of *unconditional* election – God choosing some of fallen mankind to eternal life,

⁶See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2, pp 327-8.

⁷*Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p 70.

⁸*Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, p 117.

not because of any gracious quality in them, for they had none, but simply because He wished to do so. They are particularly opposed to the teaching that God passed by the rest of mankind, who are condemned to a lost eternity because of their sin. Arminians do accept an election, but it is based on conditions to be fulfilled by man, and it is only when these conditions are fulfilled that he is finally chosen to salvation. Arminians accept that the decree of election is from eternity, but only in the sense that God foreknew who would make choice of Christ as their Saviour.

John L Girardeau expresses both views as follows: “Does God eternally elect individuals to believe, and to persevere in holiness unto the attainment of everlasting life? The Calvinist answers, Yes. The Arminian answers, No, He purposes to elect to everlasting life those who of their own free choice believe and persevere in holiness to the end.” The election, then, taught by the Arminian depends not on what God, but on what man, will do. Should he choose to be saved, God will choose him to be saved. If he does not choose to be saved, God cannot choose to save him and so, in effect, He cannot save the sinner. Girardeau says of this Arminian election: “What the purpose to elect signifies, how it accomplishes any more than the individual’s own perseverance to the end achieves, it is impossible to see”.⁹

It seems that no doctrine offends the natural man like the biblical doctrine of election. Man’s fallen nature wishes it were not there and tries to devise a way round it. John Wesley spoke of “the horrible decree of predestination”.¹⁰ But however much man is offended by the doctrine of election as it stands in the Scriptures, it is quite impossible to evade the faithful statements on the subject in the Reformed Confessions. “For whom [God] did foreknow, He also did predestinate . . . Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30).

The doctrine of election naturally follows from that of total depravity. A totally-depraved creature needs a total, divine deliverance. Because of the sinful disposition of man’s heart, he will not and cannot turn to God. A person in some dire situation may not be able to reach safety because of the forces against him, although he is willing to be delivered. It is otherwise with fallen man. He is at home with all that opposes his salvation, including the devil and his own corrupt nature. Therefore, while he needs to be saved, he is unwilling to be saved in the manner God lays down; he is at enmity with God. But God in mercy chose some of Adam’s lost race to salvation. If He had not done so, they would all have continued eternally in enmity to God.

⁹*Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, p 46.

¹⁰*Classics of Protestantism*, p 176.

But just as God in Elijah's day reserved to Himself 7000 who did not bow the knee to the image of Baal, "even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:4-7).

Others have not been elected to eternal life, but there is no injustice on God's part in leaving them in their lost state. All mankind, as fallen, clearly deserve a lost eternity. Had God chosen to do so, He could justly have sent all to outer darkness, but instead it has pleased Him to choose some of them to eternal life. But, as Loraine Boettner rightly says in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, "the non-elect are simply left in their previous state of ruin, and are condemned for their sins. They suffer no unmerited punishment, for God is dealing with them not merely as men but as sinners." These mysteries are too deep for us, but they are set before us in the Word of God. It is a great consolation to know that there is an election of grace and that sinners will indeed be saved. On the other hand, how painful to think of sinners being eternally damned! Nevertheless, we are sure that God, who is good, will ever do what is good. In one sense there is no mystery in God passing by the whole of mankind and ordaining them to destruction for their disobedience. The great mystery is that He would ordain any sinner to eternal life.

It is also important to note that God appoints the means to bring to heaven those who are elected. That is, He has provided a Saviour, in the person of His Son in our nature, and calls sinners by the gospel. All the elect, and no others, the Holy Spirit, "doth persuade and enable . . . to embrace Christ Jesus freely offered to [them] in the gospel" (*Shorter Catechism*, answer 31). And they are enabled to persevere in the way of salvation to the end.

The sight of Christ on the cross is a judge upon the bench against all temptations. The consideration of three things keeps one from the power of temptation: the worth of a soul, the heinousness of sin and the love of Christ. And you see all these in Christ upon the cross. When temptation comes, stand and look upon Him.

As a man is unable to overcome any sin, so also, if he be fallen, he is unable to rise again. Peter himself must have a look from Christ before he could repent.

The priest when he blessed, indeed he could wish well, and he could pronounce a man blessed, and he might absolve, but he could go no further . . . he could not bestow the blessing; but our Lord Christ, being a High Priest beyond all the high priests that were ever before Him in this respect too – where He doth bless, He bestoweth the blessing, being God and man.

There are three we read of in Scripture especially that did bless: the father, the king and the priest: the father did bless his children, the king blessed his subjects, and the priest blessed the people. Now the Lord Jesus Christ He is our Father, "the everlasting Father"; He is our King, "I will set My King upon My holy hill"; and He is our great High Priest; and therefore, all these relations meeting in Him, it belongs unto Him above all for to bless the people.

William Bridge

Mission Notes

Miss Rhoda MacKay has, yet again, responded to a plea for help from Zimbabwe. She returned in September at very short notice to teach in John Tallach Secondary School. Mr James Macleod, Leverburgh, newly-graduated in computer studies, went out to Ingwenya in July for a year to teach his own subject and religious education at Ingwenya. James' father, Rev K D Macleod, hopes to join him for three weeks in January, DV. Eleanor Wylie of the Larne congregation, a science graduate, hopes to start teaching at Ingwenya in January, DV. This injection of fresh blood from the home Church is encouraging.

Dr Anneke Snoek, a well-qualified Dutch doctor, was accepted for work at Mbuma Mission Hospital by the Foreign Mission Committee earlier this year. Dr Snoek is free to leave for Zimbabwe at the beginning of next year and has agreed to go out on a visitors permit for three months to begin to learn the language while her application for a work permit is being processed. The old London Missionary Society allowed their workers six months' orientation and language study before taking on other responsibilities. Ours is a less leisurely age but Dr Snoek, and her patients, should benefit from this arrangement.

Rev K Watkins, Sengera, is in Zimbabwe at the moment for the Ingwenya communion and for a Presbytery meeting. Mr Calum Gunn, Ness, is spending six months in Sengera as temporary Administrator and is due home in January. The Committee is presently looking for a permanent Administrator for the Mission there.

Rev J L Goldby obtained a 12-month temporary residence permit from the Israeli Government in July and expects to travel to Israel with his family on November 16 for six months, DV. Preparatory arrangements in Israel have gone well so far and we trust that the Lord has a purpose of mercy in it all towards His ancient people.

Miss KM MacAulay has just e-mailed to say that the revised Ndebele New Testament which they have been working on for so many years is now ready for publishing. It is hoped that the Trinitarian Bible Society will print 10 000 copies. JRT

The Spirit ordinarily conveys comfort by shining in upon His own work, making it perceptible to the believer himself, and enabling him to draw from it clear and satisfactory inferences with respect to his religious state.

Though vain thoughts may sometimes step into thy heart, yet suffer them not to lodge there; for thy heart is not thine own; thou dost but keep it for thy Lord and Master. *Oliver Heywood*

Book Review

Old Testament Sermons, by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 191 pages, £13.95, available from the F P Bookroom.

This is another volume in the same series as *Sermons on Hebrews* reviewed last month, and edited also by Dr Michael McMullen, who teaches church history at an American theological seminary. Most of the sermons have not been previously published, though a few were in print for a time in the nineteenth-century. M'Cheyne (1813-43), minister of St Peter's church, Dundee, should need no recommendation; his first biographer, Andrew Bonar, described him as one "who, during the last years of his short life, walked calmly in almost-unbroken fellowship with the Father and the Son".

These 23 sermons are printed in the order in which the texts appear in Scripture. The titles include: "The Cities of Refuge", "Things That Must Be Done Now", and "His Name Shall Be Called Wonderful". They focus mostly on the themes of sin and salvation, but M'Cheyne's concern for the observance of the Sabbath is reflected in a sermon on Isaiah 58:13-14. Plain, solid, faithful exposition was this preacher's hallmark, and it is much in evidence here, though there are a very few expressions one would disagree with.

A few quotations will give something of the flavour of the book: "It was more glorifying to God that sin be punished in a divine Surety than in the worms that committed it. Therefore He delighted to do God's will. 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God' (Heb 10:9)." "An unawakened man never had so much as one admiring thought of God or of Christ." "They that have been jewels together amid the scoffs of a scoffing world shall be jewels set together everlastingly in the crown of their Saviour."

It is appropriate to conclude this review with the final words of the Publisher's Note: "May these sermons, fragrant with the sweetness of Him whose Name is as ointment poured forth, bless a new generation of readers and preachers in the twenty-first century!"

Protestant View

A Sense of Sin

A priest in Rome has complained that what he calls the sacrament of penance is not drawing the faithful as it once did. He attributes this to a "weakening of the sense of sin".

One is not surprised that people's sense of sin should be seriously weakened in an intensely secular age. But it is at most an outward sense of sin that will

draw people to Roman Catholic confession and penance. What they need is to recognise that sin is “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, *the law of God*” in heart, speech or behaviour. Looked at properly, the law of God consists of the commandments of Scripture, but Rome has added her own tradition. This, like that of the Jews’, has, as the Saviour told them, the effect of making “the commandment of God of none effect”.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* admits that “only God forgives sins”, yet goes on to contradict itself by claiming that the Lord has imparted to His apostles “His own power to forgive sins”. And, without any authority whatever from Scripture, the *Catechism* goes on to claim that “*Christ* instituted the sacrament of penance for all sinful members of the Church”. Protestants should be very thankful to be the children of the Reformation, when such unscriptural additions were jettisoned with great spiritual benefit.

The whole system of the confessional, it should be noted, itself contributes to the weakening of a sense of sin. It is cheap forgiveness that is dispensed there – forgiveness dispensed by a fellow mortal, following confession to that fellow mortal, rather than the professed penitent going directly before God through the divinely-appointed Mediator, Jesus Christ. Apart from being in itself unscriptural, this arrangement militates against a real sense of the sinfulness of sin as what is committed against a holy God.

Notes and Comments

Free Church v Free Church

The dispute between the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), reached the Court of Session in the middle of last month. Proceedings were expected to last for three weeks. Both sides had previously entered into mediation and appeared to have reached a compromise. However, this compromise was rejected by the Free Church (Continuing).

One can understand that no compromise is possible on the question as to which body are the true successors of the Free Church. No doubt, if the court case continues to the bitter end, some decision will have to be made on the subject. But it should be clear that all that is at stake here is who are the true successors of the Free Church of 1900; the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland are the true successors of the Free Church of 1843. In 1893 Rev Donald Macfarlane and those who supported his stand took with them the testimony of 1843, which the then Free Church had rejected by passing the Declaratory Act of 1892.

It seems strange that the Free Church (Continuing) have come to insist on

the “right of continued protest” against decisions of the General Assembly. It seems a recipe for disorder. Any member of Assembly who disagrees with a decision is at liberty to dissent, the effect of which is to keep his conscience clear from what he does not approve of.

The Islamic Threat

In a recent article in *The Daily Telegraph* Charles Moore has courageously drawn attention to the threat that Islam poses to our civil and religious liberties. “Islam”, Moore points out, “means ‘submission’ (not ‘peace’) and it is the aim of Muslims (‘those who have submitted’) to make the whole world submit.” It is ironic that the writer himself, being a Roman Catholic, supports a Papacy that has the same objective in view! However, that does not detract from the fact that he is correct in his forthright judgement that “Islam is not an exotic addition to the English country garden”. It is rather to be feared that it is a noxious weed and that it is dangerous to interfere with it or in any way impede its growth.

As a further step in advancing their own interests, Muslims have now launched their own “fully regulated and Sharia-compliant bank” known as the Islamic Bank of Britain. This is regarded as a landmark, indicative of the power and influence which they now wield in this nominally-Christian land. Already they have begun to seek legal acceptance for their marriage laws, and their campaign for state money to support their Muslim schools is far advanced. Our leading politicians tell us that “diversity” is to be welcomed, not opposed; that it will strengthen our nation and further its economic prosperity. But integration and acceptance of what is called “Britishness” is incompatible with Islam and Sharia law.

“What happens”, Moore asks, “if an important element of the mixture does not itself believe in diversity, but solely in the advance of its own interest?” He goes on to quote one of Islam’s most militant theologians, a prominent sheik who supports suicide bombings and regards all Israelis as legitimate targets; he was permitted to enter Britain in July to air his views freely. Moore quotes from a book printed under the imprimatur of the “influential and long-standing” Muslim Educational Trust, entitled *Islam: Belief and Teachings*: “Religion and politics are one and the same in Islam”. Moore further comments: “Mohammed did not only preach in Mecca; he also ruled in Medina, and he conquered. The Sharia is a code of law to be imposed, in all societies, by the public authorities. It calls, among other things, for apostates – those who have abandoned Islam – to be put to death. . . . David Blunkett wants a law to prohibit religious insult. He presumably does not see this as a step along the road to item 295c of the Pakistani penal

code, which makes defiling the name of Mohammed punishable by death. But many Muslims would.”

This intolerance of, and opposition to, all that does not conform to Islamic law is very evident in the Middle East, and especially in Iraq, where terrorists have recently dealt with their hostages in accordance with what they, no doubt, regard as allowable in Koranic teaching. The gruesome and awful manner in which they decapitated American hostages, glorying in their barbarity, illustrates the depths to which man sinks when restraining grace is removed and when he is totally under the power and influence of the god of this world. The British hostage, Kenneth Bigley, was filmed caged within steel bars, manacled, and pleading pitifully for his life. It would appear that his captors, from the outset, had no intention of releasing him and eventually his life was brought to the same cruel end as the Americans. We would surely have hearts of stone did we not feel sympathy for the relatives of these men.

What is happening in the Middle East alerts us to what might happen if Islam were ever to become ascendant in the UK. That is the fear. “Once there are Islamic financial institutions,” Charles Moore writes, “how long will it be before Muslims insist that the state and business direct all their monetary dealings with Muslims through these institutions (boycotting businesses with Jewish connections en route)? How long before Muslims, extending the logic of their concentration in places like Bradford and Leicester, seek to establish their own law within these areas, the germ of a state within a state? And how diverse would such a state be?”

It is clear that our only hope of deliverance from these two evils – Romanism and Mohammedanism – lies in an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That they are both to fall is certain from the Word of God. It is equally certain that Christ’s kingdom is eventually to flourish, for “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth”. We must look to Him and pray: “Arise, O God, plead Thine own cause”. JM

“Programmed Aging”

According to newspaper reports, an “expert in aging” at the University of Southern California, writing in the *Journal of Cell Biology*, has come up with the theory that human beings may have “molecular pathways regulating life-span”, meaning that they are programmed to die “earlier than they have to”. Dr Valter Longo bases this idea on observations of baker’s yeast and suggests that, if it proves to be true, it may mean that “aging is no accident, but deliberately programmed in order to clear the way for new generations with beneficial mutations in their genes”. He recognises that this goes against “some of the fundamental tenets of Darwinian evolution” and hastens

to assure his readers that he is not saying that Darwin was wrong but just that “there appear to be some big missing pieces in his theory”.

If Dr Longo and his colleagues would only accept the authority of the Word of God and its explanation of the human condition – and, as is to be expected, all humanly-verifiable facts fit in with this explanation – they would not need to study yeast to deduce that human beings are indeed programmed to die sooner than they might. They would find that human beings were originally created capable of living for ever but that death came into their experience on account of God’s judgement upon them for their sin. They would also find that, even when mortality took hold of the human race, people lived at first to a great age, one man living for 969 years. But by his time, Moses had to say: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps 90:10).

The reduction in the length of human life is no doubt accounted for by both the justice and the mercy of God, cutting short the time which sinners have to further their ungodly schemes. However much progress medical science may make, it cannot be that a human being should “live for ever and not see corruption” (Ps 49:9). Whatever the physical mechanisms by which it is brought about, the programming behind the death, and the time of death, of a human being reflects the fact that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement” (Heb 9:27). The reason behind this is: “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

Nothing but native antipathy to God can account for the way in which hypotheses are maintained for which there is no evidence, and against which there is evidence beyond that of the Bible. But we have no doubt that, sooner or later, it will be demonstrated to the whole human race that God’s Word is truth in the matters which scientists study, as it is in every other matter.

The great concern of many to live longer, and of some to live here for ever, is largely accounted for by the fact that they do not entertain a good hope, through grace, in the One who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) and who has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim 1:10). Paul was able to say: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). That left him with the happy predicament – the solution of which he gladly left in God’s hands: “I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith” (Phil 1:23-25).

HMC

“Wrap-around” Care to Children in Schools

One of the features of modern society is that parents are distanced from their children, particularly when both parents go out to work. Successive governments have encouraged mothers to take up employment, and this government is going further again by setting up a new pilot scheme. The UK Education Secretary, Charles Clarke, recently announced that 1000 primary schools are to be open for 10 or more hours each day to provide “wrap-around” care from early morning to evening to help working parents. The scheme, to be extended throughout England, will include the provision of breakfasts, after-school clubs and learning support.

While many mothers have no alternative but to go out to work to support themselves and their children, we feel this scheme is another wedge driven between parents and children and will be detrimental to family life in the long term. The state, instead of taking over more parental responsibilities, should be encouraging mothers to remain at home with their children as much as possible, and should implement fiscal policies to help them do so.

It is high time that ministers of state recognised that God has instituted the basic family unit – that is, one man united to one woman in Christian marriage, together with their children – and that the government ought to encourage the preservation of this key corner stone of society. The more parents themselves, instead of schools, provide “wrap-around” care for their children, the more cohesive family life will be. *NMR*

Church Information

Ordination and Induction of Rev J Bruce Jardine

On a pleasant autumn evening, a substantial number gathered for the ordination of Rev J Bruce Jardine, Probationer, and his induction to the North Harris congregation. At 7 pm on Wednesday, 28 September 2004, the Outer Isles Presbytery met in the Tarbert church. After the Moderator, Rev Angus Smith, had constituted the Presbytery, Mr Angus Macleod was appointed Officer of Court and made the usual proclamation at the door of the church. When there were no objections to Mr Jardine’s life and doctrine, Rev David Campbell went to the pulpit to conduct public worship and preached an appropriate discourse from 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts”. He took the following heads: (1) Who are put in trust with the gospel? (2) How is a man so entrusted? (3) How does this trust influence his ministry? (4) Some application.

When public worship was over, the Clerk gave a brief narrative of the proceedings in the Call, and the Moderator addressed to Mr Jardine the Questions appointed to be put to Probationers at their ordination and induction to a pastoral charge. After returning satisfactory answers to these questions, Mr Jardine signed the Formula in the presence of the congregation. He then knelt down, and the Moderator, with solemn prayer to God ordained Mr Jardine to the holy ministry, the ministers present joining in the imposition of hands. Following the ordination prayer, the Moderator, in the name of the Presbytery and by the authority of the Divine Head of the Church, admitted Mr Jardine to the pastoral charge of the North Harris congregation and along with the other members of Presbytery gave him the right hand of fellowship. Rev Angus Smith then suitably addressed the newly-inducted minister, and Rev Kenneth D Macleod the congregation. The Clerk read a number of messages of good wishes from other ministers.

It was estimated that about 200 were present, mostly from the Islands, but a few visitors came from farther afield. Among these visitors were Revs James R Tallach, Raasay, and Barry W Whear, who were associated with the Presbytery for the occasion.

The ladies of the congregation had prepared an abundance of food, and most of those present moved down to the nearby community centre to avail themselves of it. This settlement brings to an end the vacancy created when Rev Roderick MacLeod was translated to Glasgow three years ago. The Presbytery are thankful to see the charge filled again and would express the wish that Mr Jardine would experience much of the Lord's blessing in his ministry in Harris, and that the congregation would be much profited through his work among them. *(Rev) K D Macleod, Clerk of Presbytery*

Theological Conference

This year's Theological Conference will be held, DV, in St Jude's Free Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 7 and 8. It is expected that Rev K D Macleod will be chairman and that the following papers will be read:

Recognising Divine Inspiration

Rev H M Cartwright

Tuesday 2.30 pm

The Reformation in the Netherlands

Mr J Freeke

Tuesday 7.00 pm

The Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ

Rev J R Tallach

Wednesday 10.00 am

Evangelicals and Worldliness

Mr R Middleton

Wednesday 2.30 pm

John Macdonald: Minister, Missionary and Man of God*Rev N M Ross*

Wednesday 7.00 pm

The paper on Wednesday evening is to be given in public.

*(Rev) D J MacDonald, Convener, Training of the Ministry Committee***Meetings of Presbytery****Southern:** At Glasgow, on Tuesday, November 2, at 3 pm.**Western:** At Laide, on Tuesday, November 2, at 6 pm.**Outer Isles:** At Tarbert, on Tuesday, November 30, at 7 pm.**Australia & New Zealand:** At Auckland, Friday, January 28, at 2.30 pm.**Mission Administrator**

Applications are invited for the post of Administrator at our Mission at Sengera, Kenya. For further information please contact Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, Kyle, IV40 8PB.

Ballifeary Care Home – Staff Urgently Required

This is an appeal for staff – for carers and an assistant cook. The work is interesting and rewarding. Applicants should apply in writing to the Matron, Ballifeary Care Home, 14 Ness Walk, Inverness, IV3 5SQ, for an application form.

Outreach Fund

By appointment of Synod, the Special Collection on behalf of the Outreach Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during November.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:*College & Library Fund:* The McCarter Family, USA, \$300; Anon, “where most needed”, Ps 100:2, £40; Anon, USA, “where needed”, \$105; Anon, USA.*Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, for Odessa congregation, £100.*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Mbuma Hospital, £100.**Congregational Treasurers** acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:**Bracadale:** *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £25.**Dingwall:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40; Anon, North Kessock, £20; A Friend, £50.**Lochbroom:** *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, “where most needed”, £60.**North Harris:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, Tarbert, £10; Anon, £10. *Congregational Funds:* EML, Scalpay, for Induction expenses, £20; JN, MacQueen St, “where most needed”, £60. *Door Collection:* MMK, £400.**Portree:** *Bus Fund:* MG, £10; Anon, £40; A Friend, £10 per SYM. *Communion Expenses:* DM & AM, £50; KML, £40. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, for Minister’s petrol, £20 per FM. *Door Collection:* A Friend, £16 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £30 per SYM. *TBS:* A Friend, £40.**Stornoway:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £100. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, “Thanks for funeral service of Murdo MacDonald”, £100 (wrongly listed last month under Achmore). *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Fund, £20.