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## The Appointed Saviour

**W**e live in a fallen world. Without exception, we as individuals are all sinners. By nature, we are spiritually corrupt, enemies to God and condemned to endless punishment in a lost eternity.

It was to such a world that Christ came. And it was to such sinners that Christ sent out His disciples with the gospel, when He told them that “remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”. They were to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation: that a Saviour had been provided for guilty, lost sinners. They were to make it known that, because this Saviour had died as the substitute for sinners, “whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”. If those who heard the gospel would believe, their sins would be forgiven, they would have God’s care and protection throughout the rest of their lives on earth, they would be delivered from a lost eternity and at last brought safely to heaven. Not even in the midst of the solemn proceedings of the last judgement will any of their sins be brought up against them. For every one who believes in Christ, there is complete salvation, for “He is able . . . to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him”.

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in the Greek city of Philippi, and all the doors of the jail were opened at midnight as a result of the earthquake, they came face to face with the jailor as he was about to commit suicide. He had a vitally-important question to ask them: “What must I do to be saved?” And they had a trustworthy, straightforward answer to give him. They pointed him to this Saviour whom God had appointed for sinners, not just for Jews but also for Gentiles – for sinners throughout the world. So when they told the jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” they were saying in effect, This is the Saviour whom God has appointed for *you* in particular, in whom you are to trust.

In doing so, they were not taking to do with the man’s election; they were not telling him that they knew he was among those for whom Christ had died. And Paul in particular did not speak as he did because of some special knowledge he had as an inspired apostle. They were, as divinely-

commissioned ambassadors, pointing the jailor to Christ as the Saviour who was being brought near to him, in God's kindness, that night in Philippi – and brought near to him so that he might believe on Him.

And that is the way the gospel is presented to us. We are to take seriously the fact that Christ has been appointed as a Saviour – for sinners. All who, in God's providence, are brought in contact with the gospel are under a responsibility to believe in Christ; they have no right to reject the salvation that is set before them. Sinners do not believe in Christ because they have some knowledge that they are elect or that Christ has died for them; they believe because they are sinners, to whom Christ is freely offered in the gospel – as Paul and Silas set Him before the jailor as the Saviour in whom he was to believe.

Yet the doctrine of election has posed great difficulties for individuals who, conscious of their sin, are confronted with the invitations of the gospel. Ebenezer Erskine refers to such difficulties: "The sinner is ready to be scared from taking hold of God's covenant and His faithfulness engaged therein on the account of the decrees of God. O, will the sinner say, it is true, if I were among the number of the elect, I might meddle<sup>1</sup> with God's covenant. But, alas, I think I am none of these, and therefore I need not think of taking hold of Christ by virtue of His covenant."

"But, sinners," Erskine goes on, making clear their responsibility, "let me tell you that 'secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children'. Let God's decrees alone; you have no more business with them in the matter of believing than you have to trouble yourself with what they are doing in Mexico or Peru. Meddle with the things that are revealed, for these are the things that belong to us and to our children. Now, what are the things that are revealed? Christ is revealed, the covenant and the promises are revealed as the ground of faith; the command of God enjoining you to believe is revealed; God's good will to man upon earth is revealed. These are the things that belong to you, and therefore meddle with these. And let not the devil and your own ill heart together brangle [confuse] and confound you by telling you that you do not know if you are elected, for that moment you come within the bow of God's covenant you may know your election, and that God hath loved you with an everlasting love; and no other way can you possibly know it."<sup>2</sup>

Erskine further emphasises the responsibility of sinners to believe in Christ when he considers the objection: "I am afraid that it would be presumption for me to claim a God in Christ for my God". Indeed, what he lays stress on

<sup>1</sup>Probably in the original sense of the word: *to concern oneself with*.

<sup>2</sup>*Works*, Free Presbyterian Publications edition, vol 1, page 383, in a sermon on Rev 4:3.

in his response is the sinfulness of unbelief: “It is so far from being presumption that not to know and acknowledge Him, and to trust in Him as God and as thy own God, is rebellion against the authority of the great God interposed in the very first command of the moral law. And till thou take Him as thy God in Christ, thou art living in open rebellion against the authority of heaven. And wilt thou adventure to be a rebel against God to avoid the danger of presumption, and so dash upon the thick bosses of heaven’s buckler? O that I could persuade you to obey the first command of the moral law, as it stands in a subserviency to the covenant of grace, contained in the preface to the Ten Commandments, which teaches us to believe that He is the Lord our God and Redeemer, upon the ground of His own faithfulness pledged in these words, ‘I am the Lord thy God’.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us remember that the Saviour whom God has provided is one who exactly meets our needs as guilty, polluted sinners. He is a perfect Saviour, perfectly suitable to be a Mediator, for He is both God and man. In the words of Job, He is One who “can lay His hand upon us both” – on both God and sinful human beings. We are therefore to see Him as suitable for us as individuals; we are not merely to see Him as suitable for others but are believingly to say, He is absolutely suitable for *me*, for that is the testimony of the Word of God. Whether individual sinners will believe in Christ or not – and it is also the teaching of Scripture that those who were elected to salvation will believe, while those who were not elected will never believe – yet it remains true that He is a suitable Saviour for each of them.

No one need to point to particular sins as a reason for staying away from Christ; no one need to point to the length of time they have gone on in sin as a reason for not believing now. Christ has been appointed a Saviour to rescue sinners of every kind and, whatever our past has been, we are under obligation to receive the salvation provided in Him. That obligation, as Erskine has pointed out, is involved in the First Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”. To reject Christ, and salvation through Him, is to despise God’s appointment of Him in the matter. To believe in Him is to submit to God in the matter of Christ’s appointment.

That is what the Philippian jailor was brought to: he believed; he trusted in Christ for the salvation of his guilty, polluted soul; he submitted to the appointment made, from all eternity, of Christ as a Saviour for sinners of every kind, throughout the world. And, because of that appointment, Christ is saying to *us* as individuals: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”. We have no right to refuse. Our duty is to believe, without delay.

<sup>3</sup>*Works*, Free Presbyterian Publications edition, vol 1, page 376.

## Is the Spirit Straitened? (2)<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by A L R Foote

Micah 2:7. *O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?*

3. The question, “Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?” is intended to convey *a rebuke to the Church for not sufficiently valuing the Holy Spirit, and therefore not asking for and receiving Him.* The question is evidently designed to intimate to us that the reason why the Spirit of the Lord is so much withheld from us is to be traced entirely to ourselves. If the Spirit is restrained in His actual communications, this must be either because He is unwilling to bestow His influences upon us, or because we are unwilling to accept them. We have already seen that the former is not the case. We have shown that in this sense the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened. There is no lack of willingness or ability on His part. The latter therefore must be the case, for there is no other option in the argument; there is no other way of accounting for the fact of the Spirit being in any degree restrained in His actual communications.

We know that in one sense this is to be resolved into the divine sovereignty. We acknowledge that the Spirit of God is a “free Spirit” and that, as the “wind bloweth where it listeth”, the Spirit breathes upon individuals where and how He pleases. But secret things belong to God; those which are revealed belong to us and to our children. We are here speaking not of the secret purposes of God, but His revealed will, and of our duty and privilege in regard to it. But further, in proof that the hindrance is all on our part – in proof that our unwillingness is the sole cause of our being denied this heavenly gift, this incomparable blessing – we would proceed to appeal to the tribunal of conscience. Let us try ourselves upon this point. Is it not true that we are all naturally very self-sufficient – that we fancy we have ample resources in ourselves for attaining true happiness and are able for every duty to which we may be called? And is it not true that, being thus self-sufficient, we have no inclination to be entirely indebted to another but, on the contrary, a very great disinclination?

Let me apply these general remarks more particularly to the two great classes of the unconverted and the converted. (1.) There are some who are entirely destitute of any work of the Spirit of God upon their hearts. They have never yet received the Spirit. Dare they say that they have long been

<sup>1</sup>The final part of a sermon which is reprinted, with slight editing, from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 1. The first two heads, in last month’s section, were: (1.) The Spirit is not straitened in the sense which our unbelief would suggest, (2.) The question in the text implies that He is often straitened or diminished in His actual communications to the Church.

willing to receive Him but have found it impossible? Their consciences would not suffer them to say so. They must feel that they do injustice to this divine Being. They cannot deny that He has been offered to them; they cannot deny that they have every encouragement to ask Him. They cannot say that they *have* asked Him and been refused. They know, though they may not choose to admit as much to others, that they never once in good earnest and sincerity put up a petition that He would descend upon their souls. And how can they wonder that they have not received Him? Still more, how can they presume to charge upon God a hindrance which exists only in themselves? Their hearts are opposed to the Spirit, being proud, impure, obstinate. This is their guilt now, and this will prove their condemnation at last. They act sinfully in rejecting the Spirit, because they act voluntarily. Their rejection of Him arises from the state of their hearts, and is therefore sinful; and it is our design in all this to convince them of sin – to fasten a charge of guilt upon their consciences.

(2.) As for those who have in some measure received the Spirit, they often complain of the low state of religion in their hearts, and in the world around them. As they contemplate the present condition of the Church and contrast it with what they have been led to believe was its condition in former times, and with what Scripture warrants them to believe it will one day be, they are led to exclaim, “Our leanness, our leanness!” And in despondency and unbelief they ask, “Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?” Hard thoughts of God are suggested to them, as if He had become careless of the interests of His Church and had, in unkindness and unfaithfulness, withdrawn His Spirit from it! But let them beware of this. Let them think for a moment, and they will find reason to exonerate God of all blame and to place it to their own account. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.” The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, as they imagine. O no!

Why then, it may be asked, do we experience so little of His reviving and rejoicing presence? We will endeavour to satisfy them on this point. We appeal too to their consciences; we draw an answer from their experience. Have they cherished as they ought to have done the visits of this divine Person to their own souls? Is it not true that they have grieved and quenched Him by indulging in those desires and actions which are contrary to His character and work as the sanctifier of His people? Have they prayed, with all the intensity and perseverance of which their souls were capable, that the Spirit of the Lord might be shed forth upon *themselves*, and not upon themselves only, but upon the whole Church and upon the whole world according to the extensive, all-comprehending promise: “I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men

shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit” (Joel 2:28,29)? Or is it not true that they have in a great measure ceased to realise their dependence upon Him, and that their desires after Him have become proportionally faint and few; and that thus, religion decaying in their own hearts, they became less concerned about the progress of religion in the hearts of others?

If all this be true, and without doubt it is, how can they complain that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened? How can they complain that there is little of life and peace in their own souls and that the cause of Christ is making so slow progress in the world? Do not their own consciences charge them with great neglect and great sin in this matter? Are they not compelled to own that their unbelief is the cause of it all? Do they not perceive that by their deficiency in faith and prayer they have been standing in the way of the more plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost and of that immediate and general revival of religion of which they admit we so much stand in need? We do not know if these remarks will be interesting, or even intelligible, to all; yet we are sure there is no real Christian who will not acknowledge that he is justly chargeable with coming far short of the duty he owes to the Church and the world, of using all his influence at a throne of grace that the Spirit may be poured out upon us from on high.

4. The question, “Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?” is intended to convey *an encouragement to us to ask Him – and to ask Him confidently and largely*. The encouragement is twofold: drawn (1) from the form of the question itself and (2) from those to whom it is addressed.

(1.) The question, as we have seen, is evidently designed to teach us that the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened – that is, is not limited or confined in the sense our unbelief suggests. And consequently it is also designed to teach us that we ought not to be straitened in our applications for Him. It is as if it were said: Set no bounds to your desires; what you ask for is free, rich, abundant – yea infinite. Therefore ask in faith, doubting nothing; ask more and more; ask again and again. Do not fear that you will offend God by too great urgency, by too high demands. Such a thing has never yet happened, and never will or can happen. God has never yet said to any supplicant at His mercy seat: You have asked too much of My Spirit; I cannot afford to be drawn upon to such an extent; there is a definite limit you must in future take care not to cross. O if we had to deal with God on such terms, who does not see that all our ardour and all our confidence would be checked – and that we would apply to Him, if we applied at all, in fear and distrust?

But God proposes to transact with us on the most liberal terms. His only

controversy with any of His people is that they do not meet His offers in the same frankness with which they are made. He is grieved to find them so suspicious, especially after the many proofs He has given them of His willingness to impart to them whatever they need. O then let us take God at His word! Let us believe that He is as beneficent as He says He is. Let us not transfer to Him, who is infinite, the selfishness of our own hearts and the narrowness of our own resources. God's ways are not as our ways. Here lies our error: we judge of God as we would of a creature; we think Him altogether such a one as ourselves. We look into our own hearts and we find there no such disinterested benevolence, no such unchanging faithfulness; we find there nothing but selfishness and deceit and we cannot give anyone else – not even God – credit for being better than ourselves. Hence we see the sin and guilt of unbelief. Unbelief brings down the all-perfect God to the level and standard of the creature; unbelief invests the Infinite One with all the littleness of the finite; unbelief limits the Holy One of Israel; unbelief makes God a liar, for it will not trust His promises. O then let us beware of unbelief and seek to be strong in faith, that we may give glory to God!

(2.) Notice next to whom this question is addressed, and you will find additional encouragement from this consideration: "O thou that art named the house of Israel". It is addressed to the professing Church and people of God, and so it is designed to put them in mind of the relation God bears to them as their God and the warrant thereby afforded them to ask and expect the Holy Spirit. To the Church belong all the promises of spiritual influence from on high. The Spirit is the purchase and gift of the Son to His Church, and from that Church He will therefore never, never depart. "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (Is 59:21). The words of Haggai in reference to this point are very remarkable: "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not".

Does it not then tend mightily to strengthen the faith of God's people and to encourage their expectations, even in the lowest and least promising condition of the Church, to think of that sure and well-ordered covenant whereby the continued presence and agency of the Spirit are ensured? Often may they be led to fear lest the Spirit, grieved and resisted, should for ever have taken His departure, never again to return to revive and bless His languishing and drooping Church. But the everlasting covenant is their stay, their comfort and the foundation for their faith and hope. If they lose sight of this, the

prospects of the Church will often seem dark enough; but so long as they keep sight of it, their hearts will be filled with joy and confidence.

To look back at how the Church has been recovered from a low and apparently expiring state on many former occasions tends greatly too to strengthen the faith of the people of God in reference to the revival of religion in the Church through the enlarged communication of spiritual influence. Often before did it seem as if the Spirit of the Lord was about to forsake His Church altogether when He, mindful of His covenant, returned and shed forth His benign influences, and then forthwith, to use the beautiful imagery of the Song, the winter of His Church was past, the rain was over and gone, the flowers appeared on the earth, the time of the singing of birds was come, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the land; the fig-tree put forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes gave a good smell. All was again life and beauty and fruitfulness and spiritual prosperity. It was thus in the past history of the Church, and so we may surely conclude it will be again.

It tends further greatly to strengthen the faith of the people of God in reference to a revival of religion to mark any symptoms of its approach, however few and faint they may be – when they perceive an unusual shaking among the moral mass of people, when they perceive a greater degree of interest excited about religion, when they perceive more prayer and zeal and activity, when they perceive extensive conversion work taking place and, finally, when they perceive Satan more than usually busy in disseminating error and impiety of all kinds and more than usually violent in ridiculing and opposing and oppressing good men, whose only crime is too high a standard of piety and too great a zeal for the extension and purity and efficiency of the Church. Then they may well conclude that a great and good work is going on, and that the prince of darkness, the god of this world, is beginning to tremble for his throne. All this, we say, is a proof that the Spirit of God is beginning to bless the Church with more of His presence and power, and should just the more encourage us to pray and hope for His continued and enlarged outpouring.

Should not prayer be redoubled – should it not be increased tenfold in the Church at the present moment? There never was such need for prayer; there never was such encouragement for prayer. Thank God there is more prayer in the Church than there used to be. Yet there is by no means enough.

Let prayer be increased among *ministers*. “Prayer”, exclaims Robert Leighton, “is the converse of the soul with God, the breath of God in man returning to its original. Frequent and fervent prayer is the better half of our whole work, and that which makes the other half lively and effectual; as that holy company tell us when, appointing deacons to serve the tables, they add,



‘But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the Word’.” Yes, it is prayer that makes the rest of our work “lively and effectual”. The minister who neglects “frequent and fervent prayer” – who does not engage in his work in a prayerful spirit, beginning it with prayer, carrying it on with prayer, concluding it with prayer – cannot expect the seal of the Spirit’s approbation to rest upon it. How can he? He is not honouring the Spirit, and the Spirit will not honour him. A prayerless ministry must needs be, to a very great extent at least, a fruitless ministry. The Spirit indeed is not to be limited in the use of instruments any more than in any other matter, and He may – there is reason to believe He does – sometimes employ those who have never been brought under the influence of the truth to lead others to a saving knowledge of it. But unquestionably the most successful ministers have always been the most prayerful and spiritual ministers.

Here it is that so many of us fail. Let us never forget that no amount of labour in public or private – that no faithfulness and ability in preaching, and no diligence and care in visiting and catechising – will make up for the lack of prayer. Precisely in proportion as we do all this in prayer and faith will we succeed in converting sinners and edifying saints. But we work too much in our own strength, and in righteous retribution we are left to our own strength, which, in this cause, is very weakness. We long to see a revival of religion among our flocks and we have recourse to all those expedients which an enlightened zeal can suggest for producing it. Still no revival appears. If an impression seems on the eve of being made, we are doomed to a sad disappointment of all our expectations. Who does not see that there must be some deficiency in our ministrations? There *must* be something lacking; and what can that be but the *lack of sufficiently earnest and believing prayer*. Immediately, then, let this lack be supplied. Let our ministrations be more prayerful; let them be more simple, more dependent, more childlike, if I may so speak – and then let us see what the result will be. O believe it, the result will be glorious.

And let prayer be increased among the *people* as well as among ministers. Not only ought ministers to conduct all their ministrations in a prayerful spirit, but the people ought to be taught to wait upon these ministrations in the same spirit. Who has not reason to complain of how few praying persons there are among us? Is it proposed to increase the number of our elders or Sabbath-school teachers? This is the great hindrance in our way. It is humiliating to think of it. The spirit of prayer would seem all but extinct, and we *must* make an effort to resuscitate it.

That there is a close connection between meetings for prayer and a revival of religion can be established by an appeal to fact. No sooner is a parish

thoroughly awakened than they arise as one of the natural and necessary fruits of such an awakening. They indicate its progress and contribute to its increase and stability. No need for a minister *then* to urge upon his people such a duty; they spring up unknown to him. And where is the minister who has really at heart the cause of Christ – of that Master whom he serves – that does not rejoice at them and offer them all due direction and encouragement? It proves that, wherever the life of religion is imparted to the soul, it will seek vent for its exercise in this particular way if is left to its natural tendency. And where it does not thus put itself forth, it is because violence has been done to it – because, from a groundless fear of abuse, it has been altogether, or in a great measure, checked. Had it been allowed to go forth in this way, how much more progress would the individual himself have made in the divine life – for all our graces, and especially the grace of prayer, improve by exercise – and how much more good would he have done to the Church and the world!

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## Evangelical or Reformed? (3)<sup>1</sup>

*Rev H M Cartwright*

Another term which we would be glad to take to ourselves in its original significance is *Reformed*. What does it mean to be Reformed? We cannot assume that the term as used today is a guarantee of Biblical orthodoxy. The author of an article entitled “Reformed Tradition”, in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, acknowledges that “defining the boundaries of the Reformed tradition has become increasingly difficult because of changes in Churches which were once strongly Reformed. . . . Reunions have removed Reformed landmarks into new positions, and the success of missions has brought genuinely international cultural diversity. Many rejoice in these changes as a sign of healthy diversity, while others continue to pursue the ideal of a unitary theology recognizably continuous with classic Calvinism.”

The difficulty referred to is illustrated in the volume *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846–1996*. Dr Gary Badcock of New College, Edinburgh University, writes: “That we stand historically within the Reformed tradition can hardly be doubted; many of the great names of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Reformed thought are our own predecessors, or have strong links with us. That we still stand within that tradition, and that we are likely to do

<sup>1</sup>The final section of a shortened and adapted version of a paper given at the 2003 Theological Conference.

so for the foreseeable future, may be a somewhat more controversial thesis. It is one, however, that I propose to defend, for I am convinced that New College retains, and will retain, a clear Reformed identity. In fact, I wish to go farther, and to suggest that the truth is that the milieu of faith, and specifically of faith as conceived in the Scottish Reformed tradition, is what has made and makes New College what it is."<sup>2</sup>

What significance this claim has can be judged by the general context of the volume, including Professor T F Torrance's reference to room being made "for a fresh understanding of the gospel by freeing it from the rigid framework of rationalist Calvinism",<sup>3</sup> and Professor Stewart Brown's almost-horrified description of William Cunningham as one whose "theological beliefs consisted of a narrow and rigid scholastic Calvinism, including a belief in predestination," and who "seemed to perceive the Free Church of Scotland as a small bastion of Reformed truth surrounded by the corruption and errors of an expansive Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, as well as by the dangers of Biblical scholarship and infidel philosophy".<sup>4</sup>

Dr Badcock's own idea of what is meant by continuing in the Reformed tradition can be gathered from, among other things, his reference to candidates for the Church of Scotland ministry worshipping, while at New College, "with those who worship differently, or with those who find it difficult to worship, or even worship a different God. Perhaps one of the gains of such experience is a recognition on the part of each that any given theology or tradition is intended only to mediate the mystery of God, and not to be the mystery itself; one recognises the limitations of one's own way by recognising the strengths of others. Such an approach finds a fitting home in a Reformed context, for here the classic ecclesiological *semper reformanda*<sup>5</sup> theme means that one can never presume to have the perfect church, the perfect theology, or the perfect mode of worship, but always and only something provisional and approximate, something that must be ever open to change, even to be what it is." A similar situation prevails in many churches and seminaries throughout the world which claim to be in the Reformed, or Reformation, tradition. The term thus understood is not of much practical use.

The term is also used in a more restricted sense. In his introduction to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland edition of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the late Rev Alexander McPherson noted that, after the Second World War, there appeared "signs that in various parts of the English-speaking

<sup>2</sup>P 277.

<sup>3</sup>P 20.

<sup>4</sup>P 43.

<sup>5</sup>That is, always requiring to be reformed.

world the Lord was turning hearts back to the Bible and its doctrines. Ere long the term *Reformed* began to be used to describe those who accepted the Scriptures as the inspired, infallible Word of God, and who saw in the Confessions of the Calvinistic Churches accurate statements of the principal truths of the Christian religion.” More recently, Edmund Clowney, former principal of Westminster Theological Seminary, introduced a book of essays entitled *After Darkness Light* with the claim that “for almost a biblical generation, the ministry of R C Sproul has been transforming the convictions of Evangelicals. His teaching brought robust Calvinism back into American Evangelicalism.” In these contexts *Reformed* is used in its historical sense to distinguish the Calvinistic section of the Reformation Church from the Lutheran and – in spite of Arminius’ claim to be Reformed – to distance the Calvinistic section of the Church from Arminianism.

*Reformed* is properly equivalent to Calvinistic. B B Warfield asserted in his article *The Present-Day Attitude Toward Calvinism: Its Causes and Significance*: “Calvinism is Evangelicalism in its pure and only stable expression. When we say Evangelicalism we say sin and salvation. Evangelicalism is a soteriological conception; it implies sin, and salvation from sin. . . . It means utter dependence on God for salvation. . . . Calvinism will not play fast and loose with the free grace of God. It is set upon giving to God, and to God alone, the glory and all the glory of salvation. . . . Calvinism is only another name for consistent supernaturalism in religion. . . . The supernaturalism for which Calvinism stands is the very breath of the nostrils of Christianity; without it Christianity cannot exist.”

He gives a more extensive description of Calvinism in his article *Calvinism*: “The roots of Calvinism are planted in a specific religious attitude, out of which is unfolded first a particular theology, from which springs on the one hand a special church organisation, and on the other a social order, involving a given political arrangement. The whole outworking of Calvinism in life is thus but the efflorescence of its fundamental religious consciousness, which finds its scientific statement in its theological system.” Its fundamental principle “lies in a profound apprehension of God in His majesty, with the inevitably-accompanying poignant realisation of the exact nature of the relation sustained to Him by the creature as such, and particularly by the sinful creature. He who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to him in all his thinking, feeling, willing – in the entire compass of his life-activities, intellectual, moral, spiritual, throughout all his individual, social, religious relations – is, by the force of that strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.

“In Calvinism then, objectively speaking, theism comes to its rights; subjectively speaking, the religious relation attains its purity; soteriologically speaking, Evangelical religion finds at length its full expression and its secure stability. Theism comes to its rights only in a teleological conception of the universe, which perceives in the entire course of events the orderly outworking of the plan of God, who is the author, preserver and governor of all things, whose will is consequently the ultimate cause of all. The religious relation attains its purity only when an attitude of absolute dependence on God is not merely temporarily assumed in the act, say, of prayer, but is sustained through all the activities of life, intellectual, emotional, executive. And Evangelical religion reaches stability only when the sinful soul rests in humble, self-emptying trust purely on the God of grace as the immediate and sole source of all the efficiency which enters into its salvation. And these things are the formative principles of Calvinism.”

J G Vos asserted that the battle is between consistent theism, or Calvinism, and consistent humanism – between “God unlimited by man” and “man unlimited by God”. He went on to say: “Between these two logical opposites we find the whole range of inconsistently theistic views (including Arminianism), of which the most basic concept is ‘God limited by man’. These inconsistent views must ultimately break down, and it must finally be recognised that the real issue is man as conceived by humanism versus God as conceived by Calvinism.”<sup>6</sup>

We shall not try to assess the extent to which the term *Reformed* as currently applied by those who accept this definition is a guarantee of commitment to what we understand to be the Reformed Faith in its entirety. Instead, we shall conclude by emphasising our goodly heritage, and especially *the obligation laid upon us by commitment to everything properly involved in the terms Christian, Protestant, Bible-believing, Evangelical and Reformed*. As a Church we assert that we are Reformed in doctrine, worship and practice. What we mean by Reformed doctrine is indicated in our wholehearted commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith. What we mean by Reformed worship is indicated by the way in which the Regulative Principle of Worship is applied. What we mean by being Reformed in practice is indicated in our commitment to the Presbyterian form of Church government, to the exercise of a Biblical discipline and to the endeavour by grace to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).

We must ever guard against, and seek to be preserved from, any slackening of commitment to any of the doctrines which we have avowed in our reception

<sup>6</sup>*Banner of Truth*, September 1961.

of the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of our faith. And in the spirit of the gospel we must maintain the very truths on which compromise is sought for whatever reason. Martin Luther is quoted as saying: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ".

Thomas M'Crie in his *Two Discourses on the Unity of the Church* asserts that "schism is always evil; separation may be either good or evil, according to circumstances". He then comments on what he calls "latitudinarian schemes of unity": "The ground on which this plan is ordinarily made to rest is a distinction made among the articles of religion. Some of these are called essential, or fundamental, or necessary, or principal; others circumstantial, or non-fundamental, or unnecessary, or less important. The former, it is pleaded, are embraced by all true Christians; the latter form the subjects of difference among them, and ought not to enter into the terms of ecclesiastical fellowship.

"On this principle some of them would conciliate and unite all the Christian denominations, not excepting Papists, Arians and Socinians; while others restrict their plan to those called Evangelical, who differ mainly in their views and practice as to the worship, order and discipline of the Church. . . . The relations of truths, especially those of a supernatural kind, are manifold, and incomprehensible by us; it is not our part to pronounce a judgement on them. And if we could see them, as God does, in all their extent and at once, we would behold the lesser joined to the greater, the most remote connected with the primary, by necessary and indissoluble links, and all together comprising to form one beautiful and harmonious and indivisible whole. Whatever God has revealed, we are bound to receive and hold fast; whatever He has enjoined, we are bound to obey; and the liberty which we dare not arrogate to ourselves we cannot give to others."

A similar statement is made in the articles on the 1892 Declaratory Act republished in the *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1893-1970)*: "Certain points are said not to enter into the substance of the faith. No one, we maintain, has a right to cut and carve the faith in this fashion. We are bound to receive and profess the whole revealed will of God, and to receive and profess less is sin and error. What creature then has a right to give his fellows a dispensation in the things of God? . . . We do not deny that there have been and are Christians eminent for personal piety in Churches, such as the Episcopal, where views are held that are contrary to the Word of God. But we are not aware that any Church has a right on this

account to set a lower standard before her people than the Word of God sets.”

We must also value and ever seek to enter into the spirit of the Presbyterian form of Church government and the exercise of Biblical Church discipline which is part of our Reformed heritage. Introducing his discussion of Church Government, *The Apostolic Church – which is it?* Thomas Witherow comments that “though every statement in the Scripture cannot be regarded as absolutely essential to salvation, yet everything there is essential to some other wise and important end, else it would not find a place in the good Word of God. . . . Every divine truth is important, though it may be that all divine truths are not of equal importance. . . . Few would go so far as to assert that correct views on Church government are essential to salvation, and yet it is a subject whose importance it were folly to attempt to depreciate. The Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scriptures, treats of this theme. The Christian world has been divided in opinion about it ever since the Reformation. We cannot attach ourselves to any denomination of Christians without giving our influence either to truth or error on this very point; and the views we adopt upon this subject go far to colour our opinions on matters of Christian faith and practice.”

The doctrine of the Church, its government and its discipline, has an important place in the Reformed understanding of the truth. In the history of the Reformed Church in Scotland it was intimately connected with struggles for the crown rights of the Redeemer. It should be our aim to endeavour to maintain the truth in all its fulness in the context of a Church conformed in its practice to the revealed will of the Lord.

We must seek grace to live – individually, domestically, ecclesiastically and socially – as those to whom the glorious doctrines which we avow are not simply a matter of intellectual satisfaction but the very food of our souls, stimulating us to love the Lord our God and to conduct ourselves as those who know and love and fear Him should. Each must seek grace to be a real Calvinist, truly Reformed – the person, described by Warfield, “who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to him in all his thinking, feeling, willing – in the entire compass of his life-activities, intellectual, moral, spiritual, throughout all his individual, social, religious relations”.

In so far as others adhere to Evangelical, Reformed truth we wish them well in the name of the Lord. But love to the Lord, and to His truth and cause and people, should constrain us to adhere to the truth in all its fulness – to endeavour to conform, personally and ecclesiastically to all that is truly involved in being Christian, Protestant, Bible-believing, Evangelical and Reformed – and to call others to join us in that conformity. The history of the

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Church, and of that line from which we are descended, calls us to value the heritage which we have and to take heed to ourselves that we hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown (Rev 3:11).

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## Fencing the Lord's Table

*Rev D W B Somerset*

To “fence the table” is to deliver an address before communion, for the purpose of distinguishing between those who ought to come to the Lord's table and those who should not. The practice of fencing the table goes back to the Reformation and has been in continuous use in the Scottish Church ever since. The expression *fencing the table* is slightly curious. It is not known when it was introduced, but it appears to be of late-seventeenth-century origin. The earliest instance recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from Walter Steuart of Pardovan's *Collections* in 1709. It is also found in the *Memoirs of Elisabeth West*, which date from the same time but were first published in 1724.

There seem to be two distinct but related ideas giving rise to the expression. On the one hand there is the natural idea that the minister, in making the distinction, is figuratively putting a fence around the table. Robert Murray M'Cheyne uses these very words in one of his recorded “fencings”: “I would now, as was the custom of our fathers, put a fence around the Lord's table”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed in some instances a fence was literally put round the table. In Edinburgh in 1562 four workmen were paid six shillings to erect a paling around the table “for holding furth of the non-communicants”.<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth West seems to think of the expression *fencing the table* primarily in terms of debarring and keeping out. “At length”, she says, “Mr Flint was fencing the tables; there was not one sin that he debarred from the table of the Lord but, in some measure, I could charge myself with it.” This was in 1695. A few years later, she speaks of another minister who, she thought, “cut her off” when he came to fence the table. But once he had finished this work and “declared faithfully who were not worthy to come to his Master's table, then he came to open his commission [to those] whom his Master had warranted to call in”. In this number she found herself, “for I heard my name and surname there, and was persuaded of it, the Spirit of the Lord bearing witness with my spirit to the call, so as it could not be resisted”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>R M M'Cheyne, *A Basket of Fragments*, Inverness, 1975, p 61.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Burns, *Old Scottish Communion Plate*, Edinburgh, 1892, p 14.

<sup>3</sup>*Memoirs of Elisabeth West*, Aberdeen, 1843, pp 33,89.



The other idea lying behind the expression *fencing the table* is that of opening a court. To “fence” a court was to “open it by proclaiming its object and the authority by which it was held”. This seems to have been a common usage in Scotland in the seventeenth century. Samuel Rutherford, for instance, uses the word *fence* a number of times in this sense in his *Letters*. In 1637, writing to Lady Boyd, he speaks of a court being kept within his own soul, but his not knowing whether it “be fenced in Christ’s name”. Later he speaks of another “bastard-court” which the devil had fenced, and to which he had been given a “forged summons”.<sup>4</sup> Steuart of Pardovan (1666-1719) was Provost of Linlithgow and a member of the Scottish Parliament, and there is no doubt that this usage would have been in his mind when he spoke of the minister “fencing and opening the table”. Indeed there is reason to think that he regarded the two terms here as synonymous, but one cannot be sure from the context. At any rate, here is his description of the practice in 1709:

“The minister and session having, according to the rules of discipline, admitted unto or debarred persons from the Lord’s table, the pastor doth now, immediately before he read the words of institution, doctrinally debar from, and inviteth all unto the Lord’s table, according to the state and condition they really are in. If there has been an unexactness or omission in the exercise of discipline, through which some are admitted whom the Word of God forbids to approach on their peril, this doctrinal debarring may scare such from partaking; but if there hath been an imprudent and uncharitable exercise of discipline, in debarring of some wrongously, then the pastor’s doctrinal opening of the table, and inviting such from the Word of God to approach, although debarred by the key of discipline, may nevertheless comfort themselves in the Lord, who will be a little sanctuary unto them who are thus roughly and indiscreetly treated by the watchmen. From all which we may gather that it is safer to err on the right hand of charity than on the left hand of strictness and severity.”<sup>5</sup>

The expression *fencing the table* does not appear to date back as far as the Second Reformation. One writer of that time speaks instead of “the work” or “the action” being “opened” or “begun”.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean, however, that the practice itself was a novelty. In the *Directory of Public Worship* of 1645 the following description is given: “Next, [the minister] is, in the name of Christ, on the one part to warn all such as are ignorant, scandalous, profane, or that live in any sin or offence against their knowledge or conscience, that

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Letters* (77 and 112), ed A A Bonar, Edinburgh, 1891, pp 163,228.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Steuart of Pardovan, *Collections . . . concerning the Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland*, Arbroath, 1802, pp 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> A G Reid, *The Diary of Andrew Hay of Craignethan 1659-1660*, Edinburgh, 1901, pp 31, 37,82,120.

they presume not to come to that holy table; showing them that he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgement unto himself: and, on the other part, he is in an especial manner to invite and encourage all that labour under the sense of the burden of their sins and fear of wrath, and desire to reach out unto a greater progress in grace than yet they can attain unto, to come to the Lord's table; assuring them, in the same name, of ease, refreshing and strength to their weak and wearied souls". That this was no new thing is borne out by Alexander Henderson's description of the practice of the Church of Scotland a few years earlier. He says that after the sermon on a communion Sabbath the minister "useth an exhortation, and debarreth from the table all ignorant, profane and scandalous persons".<sup>7</sup> Similarly in 1623, David Calderwood said that "the minister, when the sermon is finished, reads the words of institution, gives a short exhortation and admonition, then blesses".<sup>8</sup>

Earlier still, however, the *Book of Common Order* of 1564, which was the precursor of the *Directory of Public Worship*, contained an exhortation which amounted to a fencing of the table. John Knox had a large hand in the compilation of the *Book of Common Order*, but the following exhortation was not, in the main, his work. The first paragraph was taken from Thomas Cranmer's English *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549, as modified in 1552, while the third and fourth paragraphs were from Calvin's *Service Book* of 1542, following the English translation of 1550. The second paragraph was a mixture of Cranmer and Calvin's work.<sup>9</sup>

"Dearly beloved in the Lord, forasmuch as we be now assembled to celebrate the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, let us consider these words of St Paul, how he exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that bread and drink of that cup; for as the benefit is great, if with a true, penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us; we be one with Christ and Christ with us), so is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily, for then we be guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's body; we kindle God's wrath against us, and provoke Him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death.

"And therefore in the name and authority of the Eternal God and of His

<sup>7</sup>Alexander Henderson, *The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1641, p 21.

<sup>8</sup>G W Sprott, *Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1882, p 109.

<sup>9</sup>W D Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book*, London, 1965, pp 129-131.

Son Jesus Christ I excommunicate from this table all blasphemers of God; all adulterers; all that be in malice or envy; all disobedient persons to father and mother, princes or magistrates, pastors or preachers; all thieves and deceivers of their neighbours; and finally all such as live a life directly fighting against the will of God: charging them, as they will answer in the presence of Him who is the righteous Judge, that they presume not to profane this most holy table.

“And yet this I pronounce not to seclude [keep out] any penitent person, how grievous soever his sins before have been, so that he feel in his heart unfeigned repentance for the same, but only such as continue in sin without repentance. Neither yet is this pronounced against such as aspire to a greater perfection than they can in this present life attain unto, for albeit we feel in ourselves much frailty and wretchedness, as that we have not our faith so perfect and constant as we ought, being many times ready to distrust God's goodness through our corrupt nature, and also that we are not so throughly given to serve God, neither have so fervent a zeal to set forth His glory, as our duty requireth, feeling still such rebellion in ourselves that we have need daily to fight against the lusts of our flesh; yet nevertheless, seeing that our Lord hath dealt thus mercifully with us that He hath printed His gospel in our hearts, so that we are preserved from falling into desperation and misbelief, and seeing also that He hath endued us with a will and desire to renounce and withstand our own affections, with a longing for His righteousness and the keeping of His commandments, we may be now right well assured that those defaults and manifold imperfections in us shall be no hindrance at all against us to cause Him not to accept and impute us as worthy to come to His spiritual table: for the end of our coming thither is not to make protestation that we are upright or just in our lives; but contrariwise that we come to seek our life and perfection in Jesus Christ, acknowledging in the meantime that we of ourselves be the children of wrath and damnation.

“Let us consider then that this sacrament is a singular medicine for all poor, sick creatures, a comfortable help to weak souls, and that our Lord requireth no other worthiness on our part but that we unfeignedly acknowledge our naughtiness and imperfection. Then, to the end that we may be worthy partakers of His merits and most comfortable benefits, which is the true eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood, let us not suffer our minds to wander about the consideration of these earthly and corruptible things (which we see present to our eyes and feel with our hands) to seek Christ bodily present in them, as if He were enclosed in the bread and wine, or as if these elements were turned and changed into the substance of His flesh and blood; for the only way to dispose our souls to receive

nourishment, relief, and quickening of His substance is to raise our minds by faith above all things worldly and sensible, and thereby to enter into heaven, that we may find and receive Christ where He dwelleth undoubtedly very God and very man, in the incomprehensible glory of His Father, to whom be all praise, honour and glory, now and ever, Amen.”

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## Alexander Matheson<sup>1</sup>

*Rev Neil Cameron*

It is with a keen feeling of our loss that we write this small tribute to maintain in our own recollection and that of our readers the name of one who shall be in everlasting remembrance. The Holy Ghost says: “The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour”, and, “The righteous cry and the Lord heareth” them. In this prayerless generation the removal of one righteous, praying person is a cause both for grief and alarm. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”

Alexander Matheson was born of parents of irreproachable moral character at the Poles, near Dornoch, in the year 1833. As a boy and young man he was quiet, honest, careful, sober and industrious. He lived a very inoffensive life towards men, but was without God and without hope in this world. He continued in this state till he was about 41 years of age. As he was a most reticent man about everything pertaining to himself, very little is known about the mental conflict through which he passed at that time. It is known, however, that the writings of John Bunyan and Thomas Boston, along with the Word of God, were, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, the means by which he not only saw himself a lost sinner but saw also the way of salvation through Christ crucified. He held these two great men of God in the highest veneration, and accounted their works to be of great value. He said to a friend: “I believe if ministers are not faithful, they will not be used as instruments for taking a soul from darkness to light, and if any change came over myself it was by reading the works of great and worthy authors”.

When he felt constrained to profess Christ publicly, he passed through a great conflict. A mother in Israel, the widow of Gustavus Munro,<sup>2</sup> said to him: “If the lepers stayed where they were, they would certainly have died;

<sup>1</sup>This obituary of an elder in Bonar Bridge, Sutherland, originally appeared in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 7. This volume is now in print and costs £16.50. Earlier volumes are also available.

<sup>2</sup>A highly-respected Christian in the parish, who died in 1866.

but when they ventured to go to the camp of the Syrians, they got plenty for themselves and brought good news to the king's house". He was from that day more afraid to stay back than to go forward. There were some known to him in after life of whose godliness he had no doubt, but who refrained from professing Christ before the world, to whom he said more than once: "Ah, will His love not constrain you?"

In 1893 he cast in his lot with the Free Presbyterian Church. He must have felt his position very keenly, as he was of a modest, humble and unostentatious disposition, and had to separate from a man of the late Dr Aird's<sup>3</sup> position and popularity in the Church, and more especially in his own congregation. He told us that the lecture which Dr Aird delivered to his congregation in 1892 helped him very much. He thought the Doctor gave a very faithful warning to them at that time, and pointed out the revolutionary nature of the doctrines and principles of the Declaratory Act in so convincing a manner that no way was left but separation, should the Church adopt it. The Doctor changed his mind, but Alexander Matheson would not change his. He had a well-balanced mind – a comprehensive intellect, sound judgement and tender conscience – and when he saw the path of duty, he concluded that it was the right way and was more conscientious than to abandon it. Taking the Word of God as a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path, he was kept from swerving to the right hand or to the left.

He was a very serious man, but most enjoyable and free from rigidity in the company of the Lord's people. While speaking to his fellow sinners about the great concerns of their souls, he was most solemn and grave. The tenderness with which he would, on the Friday [of a communion season] appeal to the young to make good use of their valuable time and opportunities and to consider their accountableness to God for all, was often very affecting. He was a true lover of the godly; but his great interest in the young, his kindness to them, and the delight it gave him to see them attentive on the means of grace, was noticeable to all who knew him. As an office-bearer he was prudent, tender but very firm, and never consulted with flesh and blood about the affairs of God's house. He went down to the grave deploring the ruin of the Free Church of Scotland. He often said to a friend: "How thankful ought we to be as a people, and weak Church as we are, that we have gospel ministers, not hirelings!"

Two years ago serious symptoms betokening organic disease of the heart caused his own family and the few friends to whom it was revealed a good deal of anxiety. He was quite resigned and composed though realizing the

<sup>3</sup>Gustavus Aird was for over 50 years the Free Church minister of Creich, the parish in which Bonar Bridge is the main village.

danger, and looked after his business to the last. The last thing he did in the world was about the cause of Christ. He went to a neighbour's house to write notices to the people that the following day was to be observed as a thanksgiving day for the harvest, came straight home and complained to Mrs Matheson that he felt pain about his heart. She hastened to procure hot appliances, but was hardly out of the room when he struck his hand across his breast and expired in the arms of his son. The summons was very sudden at last, but his anchor was within the veil.

He left a widow and a large family to mourn his loss. They have many sympathisers both in the north and south, for Alex Matheson was a man greatly beloved. May the Lord take the sons instead of the father, and make them noble princes in the earth!

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## Spiritual Desires<sup>1</sup>

Letters by *Donald Mackay*

*My Dear Brother,*

I am, after coming home, somewhat cast down because I fear that I have grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and if the Spirit will leave me I need not continue this work. My desire and prayer for you is that you may be filled with the Spirit. I long to see you again. May Jesus grant that I may not be separated from you at the Judgement Day, when all will go to their own place.

You may know the way coming home was not very comfortable with these two passages: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption", and, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways". If I should have the Spirit, I could enjoy myself, but when I am in this way, it is very few that I find shelter with. I am thinking my soul longs to meet with you, though I am afraid I am discouraging you with my dull spirit. O that light would break in on my soul once more, and that I would taste of the forgiveness of sins. May His Spirit be with you, to give you a door of utterance. O that it would please Him to bring in other sheep in some place by someone. As for myself, my sins are so great, and I am so

<sup>1</sup>These two letters also are reprinted from volume 7 of this Magazine. The first was written from Portree and has no date, the second from Strathy Head on 5 October 1898. Donald Mackay was studying for the ministry of the Church when he died, aged 33, in August 1900. It was said of him in his obituary: "His exercises in prayer were distinguished by a rare spirituality. They exhibited the case of a soul deeply emptied of self, humbled in the dust of self-abasement, a soul that had no righteousness or strength of its own, but whose desires were wholly towards the Lord as the fountain of its life and happiness. The obituary appears in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 5, p 182ff.

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unwatchful. May Jesus forgive such a sinner! Remember me to all the friends, and tell them to pray in a special manner for me, to see if the Spirit will return to my soul. I have a very kind letter from M\_\_\_ before me as I write. May the love of Christ be in you; and the more I get of the Spirit of prayer for you all there, the happier I will be. Be sure to write immediately, supposing it were only a few lines.

PS. Do pray for me, though you will feel tired in the Lord's work. O that light would come from heaven!

*My Dear Friend,*

I was pleased to get your kind and welcome letter a few days ago, though we would like better if you had come yourself, if that would be His will. A day came on the Apostle Paul when he had to lay aside his own will in order that he might do the will of the Lord. It seems, the more of this spirit is found in any soul, the more he will enjoy of the peace of God. And when the day will come when they will have no other will, this peace will flow through their souls like a stream or river.

What would do us good is that the virtue which flows from the intercession of Christ would reach us. When the woman mentioned in the Gospel touched His garment through faith, virtue went out of Him, by virtue of which she acknowledged that she was healed from her disease. So those who get nearness to Him through faith will realise in themselves that quickening power has come to their souls, and although they shall not be wholly delivered from their diseases in time, their souls will be made perfect in holiness at death, freed from all sin – and at the great and last day their bodies also. And I am persuaded you are among these, because you have been often raised with Him by the power of His Spirit working in you effectually.

Tell our dear friend \_\_\_ that I am thinking of going to Glasgow, but that I am not quite sure yet, as I am far from being strong. I hope you will both pray for me in this matter. I desire to be kindly remembered to all the household, also to all other friends.

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The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

Some need a flaming sword to keep them off the Lord's table; and others need Christ's "whip of small cords" to drive them to it.

Duty is the golden path to walk in, but not a silver crutch to lean on.

The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ.

Presumptuous sins open the mouth of conscience to accuse and shut the mouth of God's Spirit, which should speak peace. Yet cast not away your anchor; look up to the blood of Christ; it can forgive sins against mercy.

*Thomas Watson*

## The Power of Sin<sup>1</sup>

*Archibald Alexander*

That the majority possess very inadequate ideas of the evil of sin is evident from their contentment under its defilement. Many are not only contented to remain under the power of sin, but they embrace the odious monster with a wonderful avidity and repel every attempt to deliver them from this mortal and evil disease. Even those who, for the sake of reputation, maintain an exterior free from gross transgressions, often cherish in their hearts ideas, desires and purposes which contain the very essence of iniquity; and yet they seem not to discern the hateful nature of the lusts of the flesh and of the spirit which they cherish in their hearts.

They appear to be satisfied, like the Pharisee of old, if they can keep the outside of the cup and platter clean. How little the real evil of sin is perceived, even by professors of Christianity, is manifest from the little concern which they feel to be cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. They do not groan as did the apostle Paul, under a painful sense of indwelling sin, but are very much at ease in Zion. If indeed, under the power of temptation, they are guilty of some overt act of transgression, they are often deeply wounded and show much concern and sorrow for what they have done. But sins of greater wickedness are committed in the spirit, in the imaginations and desires of the heart, for which they feel little or no regret, and this is an evidence that this concern, for the most part, springs from a selfish principle.

But souls under the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are led to see that their chief disease is one of the heart. They mourn daily before God over their lack of holy feelings and emotions, and on account of the many evils which they, by the application of the law, detect in themselves. And from the evil thoughts and desires which often spring up in them, they are convinced that the heart itself, which generates such sinful thoughts, must be desperately wicked.

So far indeed as it has been renewed, another principle has been implanted; but the old man has great strength. Even when it was hoped that particular sins were completely mortified, they afterwards, under circumstances favourable to their exercise, sprout anew and with vigour strive for the mastery. The great business of the Christian is to oppose and mortify these corruptions which remain after conversion. Hence there must be a perpetual conflict between the flesh and the Spirit – between the old man and the new. And although the real Christian is often discouraged with his lack of success in

<sup>1</sup>Taken, slightly edited, from a discourse on Romans 3:20 in Alexander's *Practical Sermons*.



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this warfare, yet the Captain of salvation has assured him of ultimate victory. None do truly engage in this warfare but such as have been enlightened to see the evil of sin as reflected from the mirror of the holy law. And the more they are convinced of sin, the more they have recourse to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

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## Obituary

### Mrs Margaret Bruce

Mrs Bruce (née Mackenzie) was born at Mungasdale, on the shore of Gruinard Bay, Wester Ross. Her father was a gamekeeper, and the family lived in rather isolated places where it was difficult to attend a Free Presbyterian church regularly. Nevertheless, her mother attended to her religious education and she was brought up in the Free Presbyterian tradition, to which she adhered all her life.

Her father died in 1927, forcing her to abandon any plans for higher education. She took a business course as soon as she left school and in effect became the family bread winner. After the war she entered the construction industry and was in charge of the contractor's office at the Glen Affric hydro-electric scheme. It was here she met her husband, Ronald R Bruce, a civil engineer. After they married, in 1952, they immediately left for Malaya. They later lived in East Africa; while there they visited the Zimbabwe mission.

Mrs Bruce related to the writer about 10 years before her death that in Kuala Lumpur she had concerns about her spiritual state as she had to undergo an operation. It was then that a portion of Scripture was strongly brought before her mind which encouraged her to believe that she had passed from death unto life. It was also a great encouragement to her that the surgeon was a Christian and engaged in prayer before operating. Some time later, after her recovery, she was tempted that the whole process was altogether far too easy. This gave her concern, but shortly afterwards a further portion of truth came before her mind which comforted her. She quoted both portions accurately but the writer regrets he is unable to remember them.

They returned to Scotland in 1960, where she was at last able to attend Free Presbyterian services regularly. She was admitted a communicant member in Inverness in 1964 following spells in Fort William and Gairloch.

They moved to Aberdeen in 1970, where the Free Presbyterian congregation had recently been established. Mrs Bruce was happy to see the congregation grow, moving from the original small accommodation in Summerfield Terrace to John Street, then to Skene Street and finally to the

present church in Alford Place in 1988. Mrs Bruce refused to have anything to do with those who left the Free Presbyterian Church in 1989 yet held on to the church and manse without authority. When Free Presbyterian services were re-established in Aberdeen, they were at first held in her house and she gave hospitality to those who conducted them. For several years she was the only communicant member, and without her efforts (ably helped by her husband) it is almost certain that today there would be no Free Presbyterian congregation in Aberdeen.

Mrs Bruce was now becoming frail but was able to attend the church, which was a source of great joy to her. It was on her way to church on a Sabbath evening that she fell, necessitating a spell in hospital. She recovered sufficiently to be able to return home, where she was devotedly cared for by her husband over many months before passing away “to be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil 1:23) on Monday, 23 September 2002. The funeral took place the following Wednesday from the Aberdeen church to Allanvale cemetery.

“Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov 31:30).

We extend our sympathy to her husband, to whom we are indebted for most of the information in this memorial, and to her brother. *A M MacPherson*

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## Book Review

***Sermons on Hebrews***, by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 208 pages, £13.95, available from the F P Bookroom.

This book, as the editor, Dr Michael McMullen, explains, is one of three published recently (the others being *Old Testament Sermons* and *New Testament Sermons*) which have been taken from manuscripts of M'Cheyne's sermons lodged in the library of New College, Edinburgh, some years ago. After a brief summary of M'Cheyne's life, the editor goes on to explain in his Foreword that “these have only been lightly edited to make them more suitable for publication. They are presented, not to show M'Cheyne's skill at sermon construction” (though they certainly do that) “nor as a piece of nineteenth-century history, but as a testimony to what God can do . . . and to affirm that what God has done He can do again.”

The book contains 24 fairly-full sermon outlines preached at St Peter's, Dundee. They deal with such precious subjects as: “The Rest that Remains” and “The Word of God” (chapter 4), “The Aaronic Priesthood” and “Christ's Calling as High Priest” (chapter 5), “The More Excellent Ministry of Christ” and “The New Covenant” (chapter 8), and “The Superiority

of Christ's Sacrifice" (chapter 9). The final sermon is on "Christ Always the Same" (chapter 13).

Not everyone would agree with M'Cheyne that the "Word of God" in this instance refers to Christ rather than to the written Word, (though this was Owen's view also), nor that the cherubim represent "the redeemed Church of God". Yet the sermons provide, as one would expect from this saintly servant of God, choice food for the souls of believers as well as very solemn warnings for unbelievers. The following from "The More Excellent Ministry of Christ" is an example of this:

"Aaron had a little compassion. He could say, 'Come unto me, and I will show you where you will find rest'. But Christ could say, 'Come unto Me and I will give you rest'. The high priest offered up sacrifices; Christ offered up the true sacrifice. Brethren, have you gone to this High Priest? Every Jew that ever was saved came, through the shadows, to this High Priest. Brethren, why do you despise Him? Is there any other? Go round the universe; you will not find another that washes out sins. Brethren, why do you not go to Him? There is none other that can save you. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby you can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ. This will seal the perdition of many of you."

We heartily commend this book to all our readers. (Rev) W A Weale

## Protestant View

### The Locust Plague

"The Lord works in mysterious ways" was the opening line of a recent article, entitled "Return of the Swarm", which appeared in a national newspaper. We believe the words were far more apposite than the writer possibly imagined. He went on to seek an explanation for the plague of locusts which was causing widespread devastation north and south of the Mediterranean Sea at the time. Mysterious indeed are the ways of Him who is reigning supreme in heaven and earth, governing all His creatures and sovereign in all His dispensations! Are we not told that the plague of locusts in Egypt, in the time of Moses, was the result of the Lord stretching out His hand to smite that land, and was one of the "wonders" which he promised to perform "in the midst thereof?" And is it not fitting that "the finger of God" should be acknowledged in this current plague also? Is it not a loud call to repentance, sounding not only in the ears of the poor, afflicted people more immediately concerned, but also in the ears of all who hear the report of this dreadful visitation?

One would think that the inhabitants of the little town of Matera in

southern Italy and especially all responsible for the making of the fearfully-blasphemous film, *The Passion of the Christ*, would have reason to ponder the matter. It was in this locality that most of the filming was done and the people living here welcomed it, convinced that they could only benefit from it. Instead, however, of the tourist boom which was expected to follow the publicity gained, this area of Italy was visited by a millions-strong plague of locusts, each one reported to be five inches long, which devoured “every speck of vegetation in Matera and the surrounding countryside”. Are we not to think that He, whose name has been taken in vain in so bold and iniquitous a manner, is no idle spectator after all?

We are told that prayers were being offered up in the churches of the area and that businessmen were calling for a state of emergency to be proclaimed on account of the damage sustained by the town’s economy, but how many turned up and considered the words of God uttered to Solomon: “If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people; if My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land”?

The locusts which arrived in Italy apparently came from Africa, where a cloud of them – described as hundreds of miles long and wide, and half a mile deep – had eaten its way across 16 million acres of Chad and was heading towards Sudan, where multitudes are already suffering as a result of a civil war. In the wake of the cloud, it is feared, there will follow pestilence, famine and mass starvation. Have we not reason to tremble? “The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see Thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” JM

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## Notes and Comments

### The Tyranny of Unbiblical Minorities

Those who fear the Lord have ever been a minority in our land, but the influence of the truth for which they contended provided the religious, moral and social basis on which the liberties and privileges of this nation were built. However, their views are now dismissed as irrelevant, and worse. We are treated to the ranting of ignorant journalists (and even churchmen) laying the blame for what they see as the nation’s ills at the door of John Knox and his fellow Calvinists down the centuries. We seem to have reached the position in the United Kingdom where any reproach can be heaped upon

the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the religion of the Bible and those who endeavour to conform to the pattern of the Word of God in their lives, but howls of protest and even visits from the police may follow any public exposure of the evils of perverted moral practices or the fatal errors of false religion, for example.

The Home Office, professedly concerned to “sideline the extremists”, intends to attempt once more to introduce a law to prohibit “incitement to religious hatred”. The Home Secretary’s ignorant references to “fundamentalist evangelicals” show how his mind is working. The Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Great Britain has described what he regards as “defamation of the character of the Prophet” as “a direct insult and abuse on the Muslim community”. This description and his desire that this be made illegal under the proposed law indicate the pressures which will be brought to bear on the formulation, and especially the implementation, of such a law. This man would no doubt regard as unacceptable a historical and theological criticism of Mohammed and his religion.

It is quite evident that our politicians do not have the moral fibre to withstand the demands of aggressive alien religions backed by various threats any more than they really withstood the demands of those in Northern Ireland who combined the bullet and the ballot box. If the Christian Faith of the nation is practically reduced to the level of other religions, those adhering to the Bible will eventually be unable to assert the exclusive claims of Christianity in a way which implies that these religions and their gods, prophets and advocates are essentially false. Christians motivated by concern for truth, for the honour of the one living and true God, for the good of souls on the way to eternity and for the well-being of our society will be liable to be condemned as guilty of either religious hatred or racism.

As one can see from looking round the world and listening to voices in our own land, this nation has no call to take lessons in tolerance from Muslims. Christians who are most convinced of the errors of Islam are the very people who repudiate violence and racism and who love their neighbour as themselves. It is the true philanthropy, or “love toward man”, of those who love God supremely which motivates their concern that their fellows be alerted to the dangers of false religion of every kind and exhorted to forsake their ways and return unto the Lord (Is 55:7). *HMC*

### **Learning by Rote the Best Method**

Some of us have had the great privilege of being taught by parents and teachers to memorise the Catechism and parts of the Bible, including many metrical psalms. The method of learning by rote has been set aside, not only

in our schools but also by Sabbath school teachers in various denominations. However, this change is seriously mistaken.

Research carried out since the late 1990s confirms this. Dr Sylvia Steel of the Royal Holloway College, University of London, stated recently that she and her research team have found, after studying a group of 241 children between seven and 12, that the children who learned by rote had faster retrieval and more accurate results in calculating arithmetical answers than the children who counted by their fingers or used mental number lines.

This is an encouragement to those who still use the memorisation method of leading their children, in families and Sabbath schools, to acquire a good knowledge of the teachings of the Bible. May we always be attentive to God's requirement: "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut 6:6,7).

*NMR*

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## Church Information

### 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 the following papers will be read:

<b>Recognising Divine Inspiration</b>	Rev H M Cartwright
<b>John Macdonald: Minister, Missionary and Man of God</b>	Rev N M Ross
<b>The Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ</b>	Rev J R Tallach
<b>Evangelicals and Worldliness</b>	Mr R Middleton
<b>The Reformation in the Netherlands</b>	Mr J Freeke

*(Rev) D J MacDonald, Convener, Training of the Ministry Committee*

### Visits Abroad

It is hoped that Revs Neil Ross and Donald Ross and Mr Edward Ross will visit Odessa in early October, God willing. It was our intention to take a load of aid by truck to the Children's Hospital there, but due to problems with Customs, this is not possible.

It is our plan to be two Sabbaths in Odessa. During our time there we expect to ordain an elder in the congregation and to hold a communion season. There will also be a lot of work to attend to in connection with the proposed charity building and the completion of a title deed for the land purchased. It is necessary for Rev Neil Ross and Edward Ross to be present since they have to sign documentation in Odessa on behalf of the Church. The building is being planned as a suitable storage area for Bibles and other

literature for distribution, as well as a place for worship and other activities connected with charity work.

The Chesley congregation invited Rev Barry Whear to give them six weeks' supply in June and July of this year. After Mr Whear's return to the UK, Rev Roderick MacLeod gave three weeks' supply, during which time he officiated at their communion season. We ask our people to remember at a throne of grace all these activities in connection with the spreading of the Word of God. We must obtain a blessing from the Most High; otherwise our labour will be fruitless. *(Rev) D A Ross, Convener, Dominions and Overseas Committee*

#### **Fortieth Anniversary of Ballifeary Home**

Wednesday, August 11, was the fortieth anniversary of the opening of Ballifeary House Residential Care Home, Inverness. To celebrate the occasion, the Home held an open day, when visitors were welcomed by the matron, Mrs Ella MacDonald, and her staff.

In the forenoon it was visited by relatives of the residents and other members of the public, who were impressed by the facilities of the Home and also by the exhibition of photographs and the informative leaflets which showed its history. In the afternoon, members of the Home Committee and friends were present and kindly entertained.

At the conclusion of the open day, Rev James Tallach, the Convener of the Committee, addressed the company, including residents and staff, and then conducted worship. In his address Dr Tallach remarked that at the official opening of the Home on 11 August 1964, the then Committee considered that the most appropriate way of acknowledging the Lord's help in establishing a Home of Rest was to make the occasion one of singing His praises, reading suitable passages of His Word and engaging in prayer. Forty years on, said Dr Tallach, this is how we wish especially to mark this anniversary. He added that 40 years is significant in several places in the Scriptures; in particular, the completion of the 40-year sojourn of the Children of Israel in the wilderness was the occasion of their giving praise to God and glorifying His holy name, as we see in Psalm 105.

At the opening of the Home, the Committee was faced with having to repay a loan of £6000 – a heavy debt to clear 40 years ago. Not only was there a generous response by the people of the Church to the Home of Rest Fund appeal, said Dr Tallach, but many gifts of furniture and provisions were also made, including 10 pounds of tea from as far away as New Zealand. And, he added, “the barrel of meal has not wasted over the years”. At its beginning, the Home had three residents under the care of a matron and a maid; now there are 24 residents and a full complement of staff.

“We ought to note,” said Dr Tallach,” that the Home is primarily for old people of the Free Presbyterian Church.” There have been many sad defections in the professing Christian Church, he went on, but our Church’s witness to a full-orbed gospel has been preserved, and the Home is part of this. If we remain humbly faithful to the Lord, we may trust that He will be with us still. We acknowledge His gracious help in the past and our continuing need of it. “It is the doing of the Lord.” NMR

### Home Mission Fund

By appointment of Synod, the second of this year’s collections for the Home Mission Fund is due to be taken in congregations during October.

*R A Campbell, General Treasurer*

## Acknowledgement of Donations

*The General Treasurer* acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

*College & Library Fund:* Anon, Ross-shire, £200; The McCarter Family, USA, \$250; Anon, USA, “Where Needed”, \$248; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 56:9, £40.

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

*Home Mission Fund:* Huntly Friend, £222.75.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Mbuma Hospital, £100; Anon, USA, for Kenya, \$176; Anon, USA, for Kenya, \$110.

*Legacy Reserve Fund:* Anon, In loving memory of RHS, £100, for a Christian charity in Israel.

*Congregational Treasurers* acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

**Achmore:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £100. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, “thanks for funeral service of Murdo MacDonald”, £100. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Fund, £20.

**Breasclate:** *Congregational Funds:* RJD, £10; Mrs P J MacLeod, where most needed, £30 per Rev DC.

**Daviot, Stratherrick, Tomatin:** Anon, £50 for communion expenses, per Rev AJM.

**Dornoch:** *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, Portree, £20 per Rev DJMD.

**Duirinish:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50.

**Edinburgh:** *Communion Expenses:* A Friend, North Uist, £20 per Rev HMC.

**Gairloch:** *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A Friend, for work among the Jews, £40 per JM. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £20; Anon, £40.

**Inverness:** *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £25; Anon, £25; Anon, £30; Mr & Mrs D J MacDonald, “where most needed”, £1000 per Rev GGH. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £5.

**Lochcarron:** *Congregational Funds:* Anon, “in memory of loved one”, for manse repairs, £100; Anon, for manse carpet, £200; Anon, for manse equipment, £100.

**North Uist:** *Congregational Funds:* Anon, Glasgow, £40.

**Portree:** *Bus Fund:* Anon, £10. *Door Collection:* A Friend, £15; A Friend, £20; A Friend, £10 per SYM. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A Friend, £20 per SYM. *Property Fund:* A Friend, £20 per SYM; Anon, £6.10. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £30; A Friend, £25 per SYM; Anon, £25.

**Raasay:** *Congregational Funds:* P B MacKay, for manse extension, £200. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* A Friend, Portree, for Zimbabwe Mission, £25. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, Portree, £20; all per Rev JRT.

**Staffin:** *Congregational Funds:* DC, Staffin House, £40; A Friend of the Cause, “where most needed”, £20. *Door Collection:* Anon, £20 per Rev WAW. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £20.

**Uig:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40; Anon, £20; Anon, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Mrs P A MacIver, £500.