

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

Vol 110

January 2005

No 1

“Made a Curse for Us”

Over the last number of months, a serious controversy has blown up in Evangelical circles in Britain over the doctrine of penal substitution. At the focus of the controversy is a book, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, whose principal author is Steve Chalke, a London minister and founder of the Oasis Trust, which, among other things, provides facilities for homeless people.

In an introductory chapter, he quotes another writer's comments on the general attitude to Christianity today: “Presumed familiarity of Jesus and His message has led to unfamiliarity, unfamiliarity has led to contempt, and contempt has led to profound ignorance”. Mr Chalke seems to consider the doctrine of penal substitution as the biggest obstacle to the average person receiving the Saviour. In his book, he interprets this doctrine as “a vengeful Father punishing His Son for an offence He has not even committed”. One might justifiably object to the irreverence of this caricature of what is indeed a scriptural doctrine – and another part of his sentence, not quoted here, is more offensive still – but the most serious matter is that such teaching seriously undermines the righteousness of God in the salvation of sinners. And the fact that Mr Chalke's teaching is accepted as *evangelical* is a sad comment on how elastic that particular term has become. This article, however, is not so much intended as a refutation of his position as an attempt to present an outline of the Scripture doctrine on the subject.

The first point which has to be made is that Christ entered *willingly* into all that He endured as the substitute for sinners. In a passage in Psalm 40 containing what Christ said “when He cometh into the world”, we read words which express the spirit in which He approached His work and all the suffering it involved: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me; *I delight to do Thy will*, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart”. There can be no question of God the Father imposing anything on an unwilling Son; what we see in Christ enduring all that He endured flows from His entering, from all eternity, into the covenant of grace with the Father – when His “delights were with the sons of men” (Prov 8:31). He rejoiced in the prospect of man's salvation. This is included in what was written of

Christ “in the volume of the book”, and with total willingness He entered into His work when He came into the world.

He came as a substitute for sinners. Mr Chalke does not dispute that; what he disputes is *penal* substitution – that is, Christ, as the substitute for sinners, suffered the punishment due to the sins of others. Mr Chalke quotes Isaiah 53:5: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed”, and claims that he has “no desire to become involved in a technical debate about how the cross works”. But the careful interpretation of Scripture is by no means necessarily part of a technical debate.

Clearly, the verse speaks of substitution – that what Christ suffered He suffered because of the transgressions of His people. But there is more here than substitution; the idea of punishment is also present. J A Alexander, a very careful expositor, refers as follows, in his *Commentary* on Isaiah, to the word rendered *chastisement*: “As [it] is often applied elsewhere to correction by words, some explain it here to mean instruction as to the means of obtaining peace with God. But the stronger sense of *chastisement* or punishment not only suits the context better, but is really the most consistent with the usage . . . in such cases as Job 5:17, Proverbs 22:15, 23:13, as well as with the subsequent expression *on Him*, which is hardly reconcilable with the supposition of mere precept or example. . . . The chastisement of peace is not only that which tends to peace, but that by which peace is procured directly. It is not . . . a chastisement morally salutary for us, nor one which merely contributes to our safety but . . . one which has accomplished our salvation.”

Thus Scripture is used to interpret Scripture and to show that Christ in His substitution endured the punishment due to the sins of His people. God is just in all that He does and, in particular, He must be just when He is “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). No one who takes Scripture seriously would dispute that God is love. But we must not use that fact to obscure any of His other attributes, and Mr Chalke’s insistence on God as love does obscure His justice. What is the significance of God’s justice in this discussion? It is that He cannot leave sin unpunished. So Habakkuk addressed Him: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (1:13); in other words, as John Calvin explains the words: “It is not consistent with Thy nature to pass by the vices of men, for every iniquity is hateful to Thee”. And it is important to note, as Calvin adds, that “the Prophet sets before himself the *nature* of God”. It is not because God wills to punish sin that He does so; in punishing sin – whether in the sinner himself, or in Christ as the substitute – God is acting according to His holy and just nature. God cannot leave sin unpunished.

The wonder is that He has provided a substitute. Not only did the Father send Him into the world to suffer the punishment due to the sins of His people, He Himself came willingly with that purpose fully in view – to endure all that was necessary for the salvation of sinners. Paul, as an inspired writer of Scripture, expresses the matter very strongly: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, *being made a curse for us*” (Gal 3:13). If we have reason to believe that we are in a state of salvation, we can say that Christ was made a curse in our place, or, as James Macgregor expresses it in his commentary on Galatians: “He redeemed us by undergoing God’s wrath as our substitute”.

The anger of God is a concept with which Mr Chalke seems to have real difficulty. Yet it is a totally scriptural concept; it is God’s holy disposition to punish the guilty, which, as we have already noticed, is a reaction, not of His will but of His nature. And when the guilt of sin is transferred to Christ the substitute – when, as Isaiah expresses it on behalf of the whole Church in all ages, “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6) – the liability of the sinner to punishment is laid upon the Substitute. Then divine justice could only be satisfied when the cry went out: “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7). And because of how Christ Himself quotes part of this verse (Matt 26:31), we can be certain that it applies to the Saviour in His substitutionary suffering. The sword, representing divine punishment had never gone out against God’s chosen ones. Many of them had already gone to glory on the strength of what Christ was yet to do and suffer in their place. But punishment there must be, for God is just. Accordingly, when the substitute came into the world, the punishment must come upon Him. He must suffer at the hand of the Father.

There is no conflict between God’s love and His justice. Charles Hodge emphasises: “The Scriptures, in representing the gift of Christ as the highest exhibition of the divine love, do thereby teach that the end to be accomplished was worthy of the sacrifice [of Christ]; and, secondly, that the sacrifice was necessary to the attainment of the end. If the end could have been otherwise attained, there would have been no exhibition of love in the gift of Christ for its accomplishment.”¹

Today’s “profound ignorance” must be overcome by the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, being used as it was intended to be used – and not by denying its doctrines. Unquestionably it is impossible for us finite, sinful creatures to plumb the depths of these doctrines. But although we cannot understand them fully, it is our duty to accept them – and to worship.

¹*Systematic Theology*, vol 1, p 488.

The Salvation of the Jews¹

A Sermon by *Thomas Boston*

Zechariah 12:12. *And the land shall mourn, every family apart, the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart.*

It has been, for some time past, a time of penal mourning through the land – families, congregations and the nation mourning under the calamities of war, and the very earth mourning also, and the beasts, under an extraordinary storm. Though both sword and storm are removed, so severe have they been that the cheeks of the mourners are not yet dried. God grant it may be done before the clouds return after the rain. These things call for dutiful mourning and reformation – national, family and personal. With a view to these, I am to press two duties, family and personal fasting.² The rareness of these at this day is sad evidence that the land is in a back-going condition. We have both in the text. The scope of the text is to show the universal mourning that shall be among the Jews when they shall see their sins.

1. A *general* mourning is foretold: “The land shall mourn, every family apart”. As to the time to which this refers, it is plain that this is an effect of that outpouring of the Spirit (v 10) which shall make them mourn for crucifying Christ, as that piercing is applied as literally fulfilled: “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (John 19:37). So this outpouring of the Spirit, and consequently the mourning, refers to the time of the gospel, after the death of Christ. Now if it be fulfilled already, it must refer to Acts 2:5,37,41. But as the Scripture does not say that it was fulfilled then, I judge that this was not the fulfilling of it, though it might be a pledge thereof. For this outpouring and mourning are to be in a day when God “will seek to destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem” (v 9). But the outpouring and mourning in the Acts were in a day that the Lord was about to destroy Jerusalem itself. Therefore I judge it is yet to be fulfilled in the time of the calling of the Jews, when their deliverance (v 9), the outpouring of the Spirit (v 10) and this mourning shall go together.

It was written for our learning. And it is sweet to obtain deliverance from enemies, an outpouring of the Spirit and national reformation. We have something of the first, but alas the two last have not come along with it, and therefore there is less sweetness in the first, and it is likely to be the more

¹Preached in Boston’s parish of Ettrick, in the Scottish Borders, on March 11 1716. Reprinted, with slight editing, from his *Works*, vol 3.

²The last part of the sermon, on personal and family fasting, was omitted from the published version as Boston had included it in a treatise on that subject.

short-lived. God governs the world according to His Word, however little men regard it in their management of it. And comparing Scotland's case with the Word, we have ground to think that one of three will be the fate of this land.

(1.) In a way of judgement, God will let us go on in our peace and ease, continuing an unsanctified deliverance with the generation, so that religion will grow weaker and weaker, and the generation more and more corrupt, till they stink in His nostrils.

(2.) In a way of sovereign mercy, He will with our peace send an outpouring of the Spirit to the advancing and reviving of reformation, which will put life in our deliverance and establish it to purpose.

(3.) In a way of a mixture of judgement and mercy, He will send on us a heavier stroke than any we have yet met with, and join reformation and deliverance together by an outpouring of His Spirit, as in the text, producing a general mourning.

Now, in the text, I say a general mourning among the Jews at that day is foretold. This is a mourning in the way of duty. The word properly signifies the outward gesture of mourners, such as smiting on the breast or thigh; not that it shall merely be an outward mourning, for it is the effect of that (v 10). But it shall be more than that habitual mourning and tenderness to which God's people are always called – an extraordinary, solemn and stated mourning, a mourning in the way of a solemn fast and humiliation. So the word signifies (Joel 2:12), for that duty is sometimes called fasting, sometimes mourning (Est 9:22,31, compare Zec 8:19). The prospect of these days was the matter of the Jews' fasting. And that this mourning is so to be understood appears from the text itself, where we find those of one family meeting together for this mourning, the whole family going together into some place apart where they might not be disturbed by their neighbours, and consequently setting apart a time for it. All this is surely not to sit and gaze on one another, but to spend it in exercises suitable to a fast. Now here observe:

(1.) The generality of this mourning and fasting. The *land* – that is, the inhabitants of the land, the body of that now-unbelieving people – shall set about it, not here one and there one as before. The cause of this mourning is their fathers' sin in crucifying Christ, their own sin in approving of it, and so long rejecting Him. When the Spirit is poured out on them, they will see His glory and be convinced, and then this mourning will spread over all their nation wherever they be.

(2.) It shall be general or national: not by gathering together into the temple, for they shall then have none, nor yet as being enjoined by authority for public celebration. But God will stir up the spirit of families to keep it

privately, every family apart. In the times when the gospel has had more effect than normal, people walking the streets have sometimes been sweetly surprised to hear this and the other family, at family worship, who never used to have it before; so the Jews in that day will be engaged in family mournings or fasts. Observe that they will go apart for it – give over the business of the family for that time, shut doors and windows, refuse conversing with other families – that they may not be interrupted.

2. *Particulars* are mentioned on both branches of the royal family: Solomon's and Nathan's. These as being nearest of kin to Christ should have been most zealous for Him; but neither did his brethren believe in Him. But now their posterity shall see their own and their fathers' folly, and bitterly mourn for it. This seems to aim at their rulers, who in that day shall be with the foremost in this reformation. In both these, their wives shall go apart and mourn. Whether this be meant of their going by themselves in the very time of the family mourning – as some think – or at other times, it holds forth the duty of personal fasting and humiliation, particular persons going about that duty by themselves.

There is an emphatic Hebrew mark on the wives of the house of Nathan, and the same on all the rest following. Therefore I think the true reason why the wives are singled out for instances of personal fasting and humiliation is that, being of the delicate sex, they may be least able or willing to undergo the hardship of stated fasting and mourning. But such a portion of the Spirit shall they then have that even they shall not refuse the work – they shall not only join in the family, but at other times go by themselves. The family of Nathan was the top branch of the royal family in Zechariah's time, for of that branch was Zorobabel (Luke 3:27,31). So the meaning is that even their ladies, however delicate, shall put off their ornaments and humble themselves in personal fasting and humiliation (v 13). Levi's family is mentioned in particular, and among them that of Shimei, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi (1 Chr 6:17), a family which seems to have been of note in the prophet's time. In verse 14 the chapter is shut up generally: all the families that shall remain shall take part in this. Thus magistrates, ministers and people shall all mourn, repent and reform.

Doctrine 1. A day is coming in which there shall be a national salvation of the Jews. The Jews, now blinded and rejected, shall at length come into the faith of Christ and join themselves to the Christian Church. There are many promises of this in the Old Testament, but I shall confirm it from Romans 11 where the Apostle purposely insists upon it.

(1.) Though that people have dreadfully stumbled, the more dreadfully since Christ was the stumbling stone to them, yet they have not fallen so as

never to rise again. “Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy” (Rom 11:11). Now as their stumbling by unbelief did eventually cause the Gentile world to rise to their feet, after they had lain long immersed in ignorance of God and wickedness, so God will make use of the grace bestowed on the Gentile world to awaken the Jews to consider their true interest, by way of holy emulation, so that they shall think with themselves, as the prodigal did (Luke 15:17).

(2.) The covenant made with their fathers, particularly with Abraham (Gen 17), that He would be the God of his seed after him, secures the ingathering of that people. It is with that covenant as with some rivers: they run a good way above ground and then are swallowed up in the earth and so run many miles underground, but at length break out again and run above ground till they come to the sea. So that covenant runs visibly till the days of the Apostles, but now its visible efficacy is interrupted; yet it will break forth again in their ingathering, never to be rejected more. So the Apostle tells us that they are thereby still the holy nation (Rom 11:16), the nation particularly dedicated to God, and He will not always be without what is consecrated to Himself. The national election is still their privilege, for as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes (Rom 11:28). By virtue of the covenant made with their fathers, God has a love to that nation, and God’s will will certainly terminate in good deeds at length, because the gift and calling of that nation to the adoption and covenant are irreversible, “for the gifts and callings of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29).

(3.) The Apostle expressly asserts it (Rom 11:25,26). In these verses he shows that the blindness of the Jews is only in part and to last only a certain time, when there shall be a national ingathering, and so all Israel shall be saved. This is not meant of the spiritual Israel, for their conversion could be no mystery, as this is. But as the conversion of the Gentiles was a mystery to the Jews, and to the Gentiles themselves under the Old Testament (Eph 3:3-6), so is that of the Jews – to the Gentiles and the Jews themselves – under the New Testament. And, as many Jews then would not believe the one, so many Christians now do not believe the other.

Use: Believe it and help it on by your prayers. Ply the throne of grace earnestly for it. Join cordially in the public prayers for it and remember it in your family and secret prayers. Be ashamed to say, What is it to us?

Motives: 1. They were concerned for us when we were in their case, and they in ours, and therefore it is but just that we repay them thus (Song 8:8,9). O remember the case seriously. What do you think of Pharaoh’s butler that remembered not Joseph, who was so kind to him in the prison? Brethren, we

of the Gentile world were shut up in the prison of unbelief; then they walked at liberty, but minded us. Now they are in that prison and we are let out, and shall we forget them? "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all."

2. Have you any love to our Lord Jesus Christ, to the advancing of His kingdom and glory in the world? Then pray; yea, pray earnestly for this. Are you not taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come"? O what an accession to the Mediator's glory will the conversion of the Jews be! If you would see the crown set on Christ's head in the world more solemnly and gloriously than ever it has yet been, then let us join with the great multitude: "Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev 19:6). And if we wish to see a great marriage day for Christ in the world, then "let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). O brethren, spread out your narrow spirits, be public-spirited and show it here. True, we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, to His glory. But O what a farther rich revenue of glory would accrue to Him if they, whose countryman He was and who crucified Him as a malefactor and justify their deed to this day, were brought to repentance and, with us, to own Him to be so!

3. Have you any pity to a nation of perishing souls? Then pray for their salvation. Common compassion should engage you to pray for such a case as theirs, which is, for the present, hopeless for eternity. "He that believeth not shall be damned." But there is more to challenge our concern for them than for any other nation in the world:

(1.) God Himself has shown a peculiar concern for them, not only of old, when He took them for His peculiar people; but since, in that He has made a particular promise of the salvation of that nation, when that of other nations has been wrapped up in a general promise.

(2.) All the means that we now have, of grace and acceptance through Jesus Christ, we had originally from them. They were our masters in the knowledge of God and first put the book of God into our hands (Is 2:3, Luke 24:47). It was their Moses, their prophets and their apostles (all of them Jews) who wrote this book by which eternal life is brought to us. Nay, it is their countryman Jesus who is the ground of all our hope, who we believe is the Son of God, for of them "as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." It was the light that came out from among them that enlightened our dark part of the world. And, now that our teachers are blinded, will we not put up a petition for them: Lord, that they may recover their sight?

(3.) The Church and all its privileges, which we enjoy this day, were

originally theirs, for to them “pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises”. We are well this day, and all the churches, in comparison of our fellow Gentiles who are yet abiding without. And how so but because we have got into the tents of the Jews, where the Lord shows His glory? “God shall”, said Noah, “enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.” But alas! The original possessors are out; they have left them in a fit of madness; but there is room enough for them and us both, and shall not we pray that they may come to themselves and return? It is their olive into which we are engrafted; they are the natural branches (Rom 11:17-21).

(4.) Have you any love to, or concern for, the Church, for the work of reformation – the reformation of our country, the reformation of the world? Have you any longing desire for the revival of that work now at a stand, for a flourishing state of the Church, that is now under a decay? Then pray for the conversion of the Jews. Are you longing for a revival of the churches, now lying like dry bones? Would you fain have the Spirit of life enter into them? Then pray for the Jews. “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world; what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” It will be a lively time, a time of a great outpouring of the Spirit, that will carry reformation to a greater height than yet has been. Are you longing for the increase of the Church? Then pray.

Alas, our mother that has born seven languisheth and waxeth feeble. Dry breasts and a miscarrying womb are much her plague this day. But then she shall renew her strength and bring forth many. “For if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?” Not only shall she be increased with the coming in of the Jews, but with more of the Gentiles. For their conversion shall be more the riches of the world than their fall was; yet all the gospel riches this day among the Gentiles are due to that fall. “Then shall the light of the moon be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound” (Is 30:26).

Are you longing for a prosperous time to the members of the Church, by a full table spread for them in ordinances, and that they be liberally fed there? Then pray. Our Lord in His housekeeping always brings the best to the last course. The best wine comes last. And His dinner which He prepares is good. The Church has been sitting at it for more than 1700 years, and many have been brought in to it and sweetly filled. But the world’s day is far spent; now it is near night and therefore supper time is drawing on, and that is the

best meal in our Lord's house. When the Jews are called in, the supper is served up. Happy are they who have got a share of the dinner, but more happy they who shall share of the supper before the marriage be consummated in heaven. "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Rev 19:9).

Are you longing for the increase of the knowledge of heavenly mysteries? Then pray. At the rising again of the witnesses that had been slain by Antichrist, John saw the temple of God opened and the doctrine of the gospel clearly made known (Rev 11:19). But when the Jews are converted, he sees heaven itself opened (Rev 19:11) and receives a yet deeper insight into these mysteries. And we have no ground to doubt but, upon that great event, there will be a greater insight into the Bible than there is now among the most knowing. That promise, however begun to be fulfilled, seems not yet fully accomplished: "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Is 11:9).

Do you ardently desire purity in the churches, the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy and profanity? Then pray. Whatever may be done in these matters before the conversion of the Jews, we have ground to believe that event shall be accomplished with such a purity of the Churches as hath not yet appeared in the world (Zec 14:20,21).

4. We have more encouragement to pray for this than the generations of the people of God that have gone before us, because we are nearer the time of the accomplishment of the promise than they were. The Church has long prayed for it. The Church of Scotland has ever had a particular concern that way, when it made this one of the causes of our national fasts. It is particularly mentioned in the first which we had after the revolution (1690), and I find it in one kept about the year 1653. Let us follow the footsteps of the flock; who knows but some now living may see the accomplishment of it? But though none of us should live to see it, yet let us leave prayers behind us for the conversion of that people. The sins of some live after them for evil, as Jeroboam's did, and the prayers of others for good.

Two things stand in the way of their conversion. Let us earnestly pray for the removal of them.

(1.) The horrible idolatry of the Papists scandalizes that poor people at Christianity. When they see Christians sunk in the sin of idolatry, which they know was so provoking to God in their fathers, they are hardened against Christ. Now God has promised to remove that obstacle out of the way, and it will be removed, that they may come in (Rev 16:10-12). O help this forward by your prayers. See our Lord's prophecy to this purpose (Luke 21:24).

(2.) The prevailing power of the Turkish Empire, which has swallowed up so many Christian churches and keeps so many Christians in bondage, scandalizes them also. But God has promised to remove that obstacle likewise (Rev 16:12). They possess the Jews' land, but that cruel empire will be broken in due time. Whether the Jews shall possess their own land again or not, I will not positively determine, but I confess I incline to think they will. What mainly sways me in that point is what the Apostle teaches in Romans 11. He concludes their national conversion from the covenant made with their fathers, which states that He would be their God and the God of their seed; while the gift of the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession to them, is comprehended in the same covenant, though their possession thereof, as of the visible privileges of the covenant, have been long discontinued together (Gen 17:7,8).

Great are the strivings among the Turks and the Papists also at this day. And though by them terrible things may be brought to pass in the nations, for shaking of the nations and churches in the just anger of the Lord, who knows what God may have on the wheel of providence? Let us pray that it may prove a fatal struggle to both these kingdoms, for they are the eminent adversaries of our Lord's kingdom. It is usual before a great revolution in favour of the Church that there are great wrestlings in prayer for the mercy that the Lord is about to give (Dan 9:2, Ezek 36:37). He that has a mind to give gives a heart to His people to ask it of Him. And if there were strong cries to the Lord for these great things at this day among His people, it would be a good sign that the promises, that have been so long big with these mercies, were near to bringing forth.

Arminianism (3)¹

Rev D A Ross

Let us now notice a series of ten points which further emphasise the errors of Arminianism.

1. The Word of God. It is rather extraordinary to find both Calvinists and Arminians affirming their position from the same Bible. This should certainly make every true believer go back to the throne of grace again and again for guidance as to what the Scriptures really say. We humbly conclude, along with millions of Calvinists over the centuries, that Arminians are patently astray in their conclusions although they claim to find support for their views in the Word of God. They most certainly do not interpret Scripture by

¹This article concludes a paper presented to the 2003 Theological Conference.

Scripture. Rev Kenneth A MacRae says of Arminianism: “It quotes Scripture copiously, but it does not treat Scripture fairly, for it does not hesitate to distort its doctrines to suit its theories”².

In all matters of controversy it is absolutely necessary to take Scripture as our infallible rule in interpreting Scripture. Wrong conclusions regarding the great doctrines of salvation do not arise from any lack of clarity in the Word of God but from the darkness of the heart of man. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to *this word*, it is because there is no light in them” (Is 8:20) – and so it is with those who propagate the erroneous Arminian scheme of salvation.

2. An old heresy. The errors of Arminianism are as old as the Fall of man. The doctrine of sovereign grace displeases the natural man, particularly the doctrines of unconditional election and a limited atonement. To be told that he is totally corrupt and unable to contribute to his salvation is offensive to proud man. He rises up in rebellion against these teachings and proceeds to formulate the opposite; he wants to obtain salvation on his own terms. One has to be careful in using robust language, but we must not forget that Arminian doctrine interferes with fundamental truths. Rev William MacLean says of Arminianism, “These doctrines are a perversion of the truth of God and the way of salvation. . . . Arminianism appears as the gospel of Christ, but in reality is ‘another gospel’. It is a heresy, deadly and soul-ruining, and all the more so because subtle, plausible and popular.”³

3. Its baneful results. The sinner is wrongly assured that Christ died for everybody, and so for him. To believe what is not true – Christ died for everyone and therefore for me – cannot be an exercise of saving faith wrought by the Holy Spirit. The scriptural warrant for the sinner to believe in Christ is that Christ died for the ungodly and that he is commanded to believe in an all-sufficient Saviour who is perfectly suited to his need as a sinner. Another baneful Arminian teaching is that sinners have in themselves sufficient power to choose Christ. The great work of the Arminian evangelist is simply to persuade the sinner to use his ability to believe. Should the evangelist succeed, he has made yet another convert – who is, however, a self-made believer. We are sure these Arminian errors account for many of those who profess to be saved but have not undergone a saving change by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, and are thus going to eternity under a delusion.

4. Effectual calling. Arminians speak of the sin of grieving the Holy Spirit – and rightly so. But can anything be as grievous to the Holy Spirit as the Arminian view that regeneration is not exclusively His work? As Louis

²*The Resurgence of Arminianism*, p 9.

³*Arminianism – Another Gospel*, p 5.

Berkhof points out: “According to the Arminians regeneration is not exclusively a work of God, nor exclusively a work of man. It is the fruit of man’s choice to co-operate with the divine influences exerted by means of the truth. Strictly speaking, the work of man is prior to that of God.”⁴ This offensive teaching is calculated to deprive churches of the presence of the Holy Spirit in His efficacious work, and to leave them with a multitude of man-made converts.

5. The gospel. Does the gospel really declare that Christ died for everyone – that Christ only provided for the *possibility* of salvation, leaving the absolute success of His work to man’s decision to believe? These tenets are decidedly not part of the gospel. Yet hearers of the gospel are required to believe in Christ; and on believing they will most certainly be saved. We cannot separate the requirement to believe from the whole scheme of salvation. However, the success of the gospel is entirely in the hands of Christ. Not only has He opened up the way for complete reconciliation with God, but He has also procured the grace of faith, and He imparts it by His Holy Spirit, so that the sinner is persuaded and enabled to receive and rest on Himself alone for salvation. The success is entirely Christ’s, and therefore “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

Is Arminianism another gospel? Its deviations from the gospel of God’s grace mark it as such. How solemn are the pronouncements against such a gospel in Galatians 1:9: “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed”.

6. Preaching the gospel. There is a vast difference between Arminian and Calvinist preaching. The Arminian declares a universal atonement and the sinner’s ability to believe in Christ – what is not true. And, as already noted, such a message is responsible for deceiving countless sinners for eternity. The Calvinist, on the other hand, knows full well that Christ did not die for all mankind. He knows also that the sinner will never of himself submit to the gospel way of salvation. Nevertheless, because God commands him to preach to the dry bones, the Calvinist declares that the work of Christ is sufficient even for the chief of sinners. He declares that God commands everyone to repent and believe the gospel. Under such biblical preaching, countless souls have been brought to a true saving interest in Christ, when the Holy Spirit has made it effectual.

7. Unity. The Bible calls for unity. However, Calvinism and Arminianism are poles apart. How great was the disunity at the Synod of Dort! In the extensive Methodist movement, there was dissension between Whitefield and Wesley and between their two camps of Calvinists and Arminians. In the

⁴*Systematic Theology*, p 478.

old Free Church, the Declaratory Act – which leant towards Arminianism – led to a split and to the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church. There is a unity which has its basis in the Scriptures and in the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers must strive after this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by seeking to be faithful to the Word. Arminianism, on the other hand, by departing from cardinal Scripture teachings, is bound to bring disunity and division.

8. Justifying righteousness. Robert Shaw says: “Arminians maintain that faith itself, or the act of believing, is accepted as our justifying righteousness”.⁵ How different to the Shorter Catechism answer, which is based on the Word of God: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, whereby He accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone”. Rev D A Macfarlane, defending the imputed righteousness of Christ as the *only* ground of justification, used to say that it made him tremble to think of going into eternity with as much of his own righteousness as would go on a pinhead.

9. Spiritual experience. True Christian experience is bound up with sound doctrine. And the experience that flows from the doctrines on which Arminianism and Calvinism differ separates people into two different camps. The doctrines of sovereign grace have a most humbling effect on those who know that they would have continued in rebellion against God, were it not that He renewed their wills. The Arminian system of salvation, in which man plays such a great part, tends to breed pride.

10. Election. The Word of God exhorts the believer to make his “calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10). Election is sure from God’s side but this verse encourages us to use the evidence of our effectual calling to discover if we were elected. When the Holy Ghost makes the call of the gospel effectual, there is conviction of sin, a sense of our need of Christ and of faith – receiving and resting on Him alone for salvation – with repentance and new obedience. Where these spiritual exercises are present, a sinner may humbly conclude that he is of the elect because it is only the elect who will actually come to faith in Christ, repentance and new obedience. According to the Arminians, on the other hand, election is based on the sinner exercising faith in Christ, which is very different from what the Bible teaches.

Conclusion. Today Arminianism has a firm grip of many churches and theological seminaries. Some that were once soundly Calvinistic have become Arminian in outlook, or else hold on to a watered-down Calvinism. To many people, theology matters little, but this is a sure sign of spiritual declension. What should our attitude be?

⁵*Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, p 128.

Some may readily agree with Augustus Toplady, who branded John Wesley when championing Arminian teachings as the “old fox tarred and feathered”, and others may agree with George Whitefield, who referred to Wesley as one who would “shine bright in glory”. But the point we should keep before our minds is that Arminianism is a dreadful error, and that we need to expose it *continually* as such. Christopher Ness insisted: “Lest this overflowing deluge of Arminianism should bring destruction upon us, there is great need that some servant of Christ should run to stop the further spreading of this plague of leprosy”.⁶ We must pray to be kept from this great evil, which is a hindrance to the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and destructive to precious souls.

On the other hand, may we be preserved from the opposite extreme: the unscriptural doctrine of Hyper-Calvinism. Rev D A Macfarlane commented that both Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism are rationalistic. Both extremes are offensive to the Most High, contrary to His Word, and obstacles to the success of the gospel. We hope and pray that there will be a reviving of Calvinism throughout the visible Church everywhere. Its doctrines truly exalt the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and, with the blessing of God, they will bring about true revivals in the Church of Christ.

“The whole earth let His glory fill. Amen, so let it be” (Ps 72:19, metrical).

The Providence of God¹

1. The Doctrine

Rev H M Cartwright

In Romans 11 the Apostle Paul discusses the way in which the histories of the Jews and the Gentiles would interact to bring about the salvation of all those in both categories whom God has purposed to save. As he considers the way in which God makes everything work together for the accomplishment of His purposes, the conclusion to which he comes is: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:33-36). It is in that spirit we should consider the providence of God, and

⁶*An Antidote against Arminianism*, p ii.

¹This is the first part of a paper given at the 2004 Youth Conference, which had as a subtitle, “The Doctrine and its Application to Personal Life”.

believing consideration of the providence of God should produce and promote that spirit in us. The *Belgic Confession* wisely cautions us: “As to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously enquire into it further than our capacity will admit of, but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgements of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word without transgressing these limits” (Article 13).

Here we shall merely try to outline certain aspects of this vast subject, which really takes in everything that God has done in the world since the creation. The plan is to consider (1) *what is meant by the providence of God* and then to refer to (2) *some problems which are raised in connection with the doctrine*, (3) *some solutions which are offered to these problems*, and (4) *some applications of the doctrine which are to be made in our personal lives*.

(1.) We must begin by considering **what is meant by the providence of God**. The *Shorter Catechism* (answer 11) states: “God’s works of providence are His most holy wise and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions”. The *Larger Catechism* (answer 18) adds: “ordering them and all their actions to His own glory”. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* begins its fifth chapter, on providence, with this statement: “God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy”. The *Heidelberg Catechism* (answer 27) explains the providence of God as “the almighty and everywhere-present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand”.

Put quite simply, the doctrine of providence is that God has not abandoned His creation but continues personally and actively to sustain it and control it and direct it, in a way that pleases Him, towards the accomplishment of the purposes He has for it. This is true not only of the general course which the life of the individual and of the whole creation takes but also of each detail, good and bad. God is active in every moment and event. God is acting in keeping with His character in every moment and event, as “the most wise, righteous and gracious God”, manifesting

His “almighty power, unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness”.²

In all His activity in providence, in His preservation and control of everything in the material and moral realms, God is taking particular care of His Church and the interests of His people. All He does is intended to demonstrate His glory as God. With John Calvin, “we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things – that from the remotest eternity, according to His own wisdom, He decreed what He was to do, and now by His power executes what He decreed. . . . Not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which He has destined. . . . Fortune and chance are heathen terms.”³ An old Scottish theologian says: “Providence is the care which God takes of all things, to uphold them in being, and to direct them to the ends which He has determined to accomplish by them, so that nothing takes place in which He is not concerned in a manner worthy of His infinite perfections and which is not in unison with the counsel of His will. More particularly we may observe that two things are included in the notion of providence: the preservation and the government of all things.”⁴ The older theologians spoke of God’s providence as including the knowledge of His mind, the decree of His will and His efficacious administration of the things decreed: “directing knowledge, commanding will and fulfilling power”⁵.

Several points may be made here:

(a) The God who feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the grass of the field, who counts the hairs of your head and without whom a sparrow does not fall to the ground, is described in each of these connections as the heavenly Father of His people. His providence is serving the purposes of His grace and securing that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). Providence is not something impersonal or mechanical, the working out of pre-set laws which are independent of God even if set in motion by God. Providence is the God of our salvation at work. It is something completely different from fictional fate or chance, or from a clockwork view of the universe. As someone has put it, ideas of providence without Christ are confusion, “a groping in the darkness. . . . The words of Christ, ‘No man cometh unto the Father but by Me’, apply as well for coming to the knowledge of the Father’s providence.”⁶

²*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.

³*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Beveridge ed, vol 1, p 179.

⁴John Dick (1764-1833), *Lectures on Theology*, 1846 ed, p 217.

⁵As in Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 1, p 489.

⁶G C Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, p 46.

(b) The providence of God is all-embracing. It is concerned with both the good and the bad actions of men. We can understand the inclusion of the good, but we must not exclude the evil. This is illustrated most significantly in the history of Joseph and in the history of Christ. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen 50:20). "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). There are many other instances in Scripture where God is said to bring about His purposes by means of the wicked works of wicked men. Providence is concerned with the smallest matters as well as the largest. A God who did not control the smallest matters could not control the flow of history. Momentous consequences may follow seeming coincidences or trivialities, such as the babe Moses crying when discovered in his basket, so that Pharaoh's daughter had compassion on him, or a bird hitting a windscreen and causing an "accident" in which someone central to world affairs would be killed.

(c) In His providence, God uses means and generally acts in accordance with well-established and recognised procedures. This is what makes scientific research and conclusions possible. This is what makes it possible for ordinary people to believe that what goes up will come down and that a certain course of action will be followed by certain consequences. What we call the laws of nature are just God's ordinary way of working, and without them stable human life in this world would be impossible.

(d) When it pleases, God He can act in ways that are out of the usual, without, above or, indeed, against the means or methods He normally uses. This is what we know as the miraculous. A Dutch theologian comments that God "is great in might in the common things of life, but it is especially in the unusual deeds, the miraculous signs, that He arouses the attention and amazement of His people and shocks Israel's enemies with the invincibility of His works. . . . These miracles are presented to us in the Scriptures without suggestion of anything problematic being created in the relation between God and nature. We are simply pointed to the invincibility of God, for whom nothing is too miraculous. His deeds are always inscrutable, His ways unsearchable. But we are shown in miracles the unexpected and surprising, which, in turn, suggests afresh His Divine invincibility."⁷

(e) God works in such a way that, while His purpose is infallibly secured, those used as instruments are properly liable to approval or blame for their actions. No taint of the sin of those who, by their sin, bring about the secret purpose of God clings to Him. While the Fall of man was according to the

⁷Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, pp 205,214.

infallible decree of God, the guilt is shared exclusively by Adam, Eve and Satan. God justly inflicts His curse upon them. In the passage already referred to in Acts 2, the hands which took and crucified Christ are described as wicked, and those whose hands they were are called to repentance as those who had set themselves up in opposition to God.

(f) The basis for our belief in the providence of God is His self-revelation. The word *providence* may not be found in the Bible, as the word *Trinity* is not found, but the doctrine is there. The seventeenth-century theologian Turretin suggests that “there is no need to heap up the Scripture passages establishing this point. They are almost as many as there are pages in the Bible, since nothing is inculcated more frequently, nothing more clearly, in the Word of God.”⁸

It is taught dogmatically. It is illustrated in the Biblical history. It is acknowledged in the experience and praises of God’s people recorded in the Bible. It is, for example, illustrated at length in Job (with its emphasis on the agency of Satan) and Esther (in such events as the sleeplessness of Ahasuerus at a critical point). It is illustrated in the Book of Psalms and in the history of Israel. “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord” (Prov 16:1). “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). “Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). “He giveth to all life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:25-28). Although five sparrows were sold for a half-penny, not one is forgotten by God and He numbers the hairs of our heads (Luke 12:6,7). God “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). The Son of God is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). “And He is before all things and by Him all things consist” (Col 1:17). The chariot wheels of Ezekiel 1, with their wheels within wheels (v 16), and the opening of the sealed book in Revelation 5ff by Christ, present pictorially the workings and unfolding of providence. The very nature of God, as He is revealed in the Bible, makes us expect an all-embracing providence.

So, put quite simply, the doctrine of providence is that God has not abandoned His creation but continues personally and actively to sustain it

⁸*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 1, p 490.

and control it and direct it – in a way that pleases Him – towards the accomplishment of the purposes He has for it. This is true not only of the general course which the life of the individual and of the whole creation takes but also of each detail, good and bad. And all is done in the interests of God's glory and His people's salvation.

The Wisdom of God in Redemption¹

1. The Saviour

W S Plumer

The wisdom of God is displayed in the choice of His incarnate Son as the Redeemer. Neither an infinite God nor an enlightened sinner would be satisfied with the doings or sufferings of a mere creature. What our case demanded was something far above the power of worms. Any redemption wrought out by men or angels must have been wholly inefficacious; yet *if* it could have saved anyone, it must have resulted in idolatry. No sinner saved from hell could have failed to give his heart to his deliverer. But the Lord Jesus Christ was every way fit to be our Redeemer.

(1.) He was divine, and so able to lay His hand upon God. He did not count it robbery to be equal with God; He was the eternal Son. To worship Him was no idolatry. Before all worlds He was the well-beloved of the Father. If any redemption could avail, His would not be powerless. He had no superior in nature. He was chosen, appointed, ordained of God to this very work.

If anyone asks, Why was the Second person of the Trinity – and not the First or the Third – chosen to be the Redeemer, we may not be able to tell what we shall know hereafter, and we ought both to think and speak reverently. But we may safely say that the Father could not fitly become incarnate and our surety, for then He must have stood in the relation of one answering for our guilt before the Judge of all the earth. This would have subverted the order of the Trinity. The Father is the first person in order. As such, there is a special fitness in His demanding satisfaction for sins and receiving applications for mercy. He is the fountain of the Godhead. Besides, He could not properly be sent into the world, as it is of the Father to send the Son, and of the Father and Son to send the Holy Spirit. The order of subsistence in the divine persons is properly the order of their operations. The Father is of none. He was neither begotten, nor does He proceed from

¹Taken from the volume *The Rock of Our Salvation*, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom. Plumer was a nineteenth-century American Presbyterian minister.

any. The Son is of the Father – eternally begotten. Whatsoever the Son does, He does of the Father: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do” (John 5:19). When the Son came, it was as He was sent of the Father, and to “do the will” of the Father. Thus it appears that the Father was not the proper person to do the work of redemption.

Nor was the Spirit the proper person to undertake that work. True, He proceeds from the Father and the Son and is sent by them, yet it was fit that the Third Person should glorify the Second in calling men to believe on Him, rather than that the Second should call men to bow before the Third, for this would invert the order of divine operation. The Redeemer is the object of saving faith. The agent of saving faith is the Holy Ghost. It is meet that the Spirit should apply the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Thus we see wisdom in sending the Second, and no other, person of the divine nature to be our Redeemer. His eternal Sonship in heaven well consists with His supernatural Sonship on earth. This double Sonship well fitted Him to be our elder Brother, by whom we become sons and heirs of God.

(2.) This leads to the remark that God’s wisdom is gloriously displayed in the incarnation of His Son. The glory of redemption much depends on its being effected in the very nature whose fall made redemption necessary: “By man came death; by man came also the resurrection of the dead”. “As by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” The first Adam was earthy, and sank us in ruin; the second Adam was heavenly and saves us from wrath. By the sin of one being imputed to us we fell; by the righteousness of the other being imputed to us we rise to sonship with God.

Thus by His two natures Christ is equal with God in glory and authority, and equal with man in lowliness and suffering. None is higher; none is humbler. The Father greets Him with gladness: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. The sinner hails Him with joy: “My Lord and my God”. Thus we see the wisdom of God in the choice of the Redeemer – one who can be safely trusted with the honours of God’s throne and with the sins and sorrows and salvation of men; one who can be worshipped without idolatry and approached without terror.

Wherever thou canst say, I am safe, be sure thou art in danger. Where thou hast fear and trembling, there thou art probably secure; but where thou art carnally secure, there it is that the evil comes.

Nothing is too good for the Father to give to the man who delights in His Son Jesus.

C H Spurgeon

John Munro¹

Alexander Auld

John Munro was a native of Ross-shire and by both his parents descended from worthy ancestors. John Munro of Kiltearn (mentioned in the memoir of Thomas Hog) was Mr Munro's great-grandfather, and the race downwards from father to son was eminently godly. His mother also was descended from a family of "Israel's nobles", being granddaughter of Andrew Sutherland, another Ross-shire "father", who, though poor in this world's goods, was rich in faith. Mr Munro used to tell that, on her deathbed, his mother called her family around her and, after giving them suitable admonitions to "follow on to know the Lord", she added, "My mother told me before she left the world that she had obtained from the Lord a promise that none of her children would be the prey of Satan; and I have obtained a similar promise in regard to you, my children".

His mother's expectations were early realised; for the Lord began to deal with him while he was only nine. When at play one day, John was unexpectedly called to attend a catechising. This annoyed him so much that he felt his heart rise in enmity against God and all divine things. This feeling immediately gave rise to a sense of guilt and hardness of heart, and in this state of mind he entered the meeting. But the Lord did not give to someone of his tender years a view of his own soul's sinfulness and misery, without giving him also a glimpse of what such a soul may, through grace, be brought to. The question put to him was: "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?" And he gave the answer: "At the resurrection believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgement, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity". As he repeated these words, thoughts of the blessedness God's people, as contrasted with his own felt unhappiness, melted his heart. His whole soul desired to obtain this blessedness, and from that day he began to follow after that to which, through grace, he has now attained: "the full enjoying of God to all eternity".

After receiving in his native parish an ordinary elementary education he was put to the trade of a carpenter. After serving his apprenticeship, he went to Aberdeen to work at his business. He occupied his spare hours in study, acquiring some knowledge of languages. Ultimately becoming fonder of books than tools, he gave up the latter entirely and entered university. After

¹Reprinted, with some editing, from *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*. A longer version appears in Auld's *Ministers and Men of the Far North*, which has been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications; it costs £11.95.

going through the due course of arts and divinity, he was licensed to preach the gospel.

He came to Caithness in 1806 to occupy the Achreny mission. This charge was at that time a most laborious one, including the three preaching stations of Achreny, Halsary and Halladale, extending over more than 20 miles of hill country destitute of roads. Mr Munro entered on his work with that cheerfulness which characterised all he subsequently did in his Master's service. The gospel had been preached in this mission in purity and power by a succession of able ministers during a period when the country was ecclesiastically a wilderness. Their labours had been greatly blessed, and fruits of the ministry were spread over the district. In this sphere Mr Munro was greatly beloved by his flock. A dry eye, it is said, was not to be seen in the Halladale meeting-house the day he preached his farewell sermon there. To the godly fathers and mothers, of whom in these days there were not a few in the north, he especially endeared himself by his frankness and simplicity of manner and genuine warmth of heart. Mr Munro continued in the mission for about 10 years, when he received a call to the Edinburgh Gaelic chapel. There he remained until 1825, when he was presented to the parish church of Halkirk, through the influence of the excellent Lady Colquhoun, much to the joy of the parishioners, who for 50 years previously had as a minister a man whose only aim in life seemed to be to secure his own worldly comfort and advantage.

In personal appearance Mr Munro was of middle height, but of portly figure, and a countenance beaming with benevolence. His mental power was evident from the position, weight and influence he attained in his office. One who knew him well used to say that he never knew any man who, without premeditation, could so edifyingly enlarge on any portion of Scripture – a power which someone of mediocre gifts, although equally gracious, could not have possessed. The facility also with which he used to turn his thoughts into verse, which at times rose into the region of true poetry, evidenced a mind of unusual capacity. His memory was a rich storehouse, whence were readily reproduced those facts and truths that he felt an interest in. Surviving friends remember what a flow of anecdote and interesting reminiscence enriched his godly conversation. Probably the most distinguishing feature in Mr Munro's character was his large and loving heart. His affections flowed out plentifully in every appropriate channel, and they centred with special strength and constancy on the "household of faith".

At communion seasons the joy it gave him to greet the brethren in the Lord, and the pain it gave him to part from them, were very manifest. With what depth of feeling he would say in prayer, at the conclusion of the

Monday service: "Lord, fit us for the place where no foe enters, where no friend departs, and where the word *farewell* shall never be heard!"

As a preacher Mr Munro had a method very much his own. He would set death and life before his hearers at almost the same time – death by the first Adam; life by the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Depicting forcibly man's guilt and pollution by reason of original sin, and his slavery and misery by reason of actual sin, he would set forth over against that a free, full and holy salvation in a way alike edifying and satisfying. He never lost sight of man's utter depravity and helplessness and he delighted to exhibit the suitability of Christ to such. His own faith was so lively and his love so fervent that he never wearied of this theme. Unfolding the dignity of the Saviour's person and the grace of His suretyship, he would go on to trace the steps of His incarnation, obedience, sufferings and death with rare solemnity and tenderness. Then proceeding to speak of His resurrection, ascension and intercession, he would enlarge on these doctrines in a way singularly fitted to exalt the glory of the Mediator and to encourage the believer in his risen Lord, who (to use one of his favourite expressions) was "He who never had lost, and never would lose, a battle". Turning to the sinner, he would seek to win him to this glorious One by every gospel allurements. "Christ", he would say, "is this day coming to Satan's family in quest of a spouse, and vile and destitute though she may feel herself, yet have her He will, that He may save and sanctify her, and present her to His Father as His ransomed bride."

The lack of an early course of education, and his devotedness to the study of divine truth to the comparative disregard of other knowledge, were probably the reasons why at times Mr Munro's preaching did not attract a certain class of hearers. True Christians, on account of their confidence in his personal godliness, and because of his uniform weight of doctrine, heard him not only patiently but pleasantly in his least attractive moods. But those among his audience who were captivated rather by the language in which the gospel message was conveyed, the variety of illustration and the sequence of thought were too ready to undervalue him. There were often times, however, when such a rich tide of thought flowed in on him and such majesty of manner and force of expression appeared in his preaching, as not only swayed the hearts of believers but impressed the most unconcerned. For example, on an occasion when John Macdonald, Urquhart, was expected to preach in Wick, Mr Munro went from Halkirk to see and hear him. But the preacher had been unexpectedly recalled south, and Mr Munro was asked to preach. To this he agreed and, after announcing as his text Psalm 45:2: "Thou art fairer than the children of men", he began his sermon thus:

"Coming here this afternoon, I was struck with the loveliness of creation.

The green fields, the sparkling brooks, the blossoming hedges, were all smiling in the sunshine. Seeing the fairness of creation, I thought of the Fair One who made and upholds all things. I remembered the fairness of His divinity and the fairness of His humanity. Was He not fair in the manger, fair in the cradle, fair in His life, fair in His death? Yea, so fair is He that my soul was led captive by Him, and I began to preach Him to the birds of the air, and now I will preach Him to this congregation.”

Mr Munro was pre-eminently a man of prayer. He prayed literally without ceasing; and in his prayers he had much of a public spirit. The Lord’s goodness in bestowing favourable weather during a long series of Sabbaths in the year of the Disruption, when so many congregations had to worship in the open air, was very manifest. The Sabbath morning of the Halkirk communion that year was cold and windy, with occasional showers of rain. One of the elders expressed to Mr Munro his fear that they would have a disagreeable day, referring to the threatening look of the sky. “No, Donald,” he replied, “it will be a good day; what the Lord gives will be good; many a good day He gave us, and He will give us a good eternity.” About the hour of worship, the sky cleared, and the air became so tranquil as not to affect the flame of the candles required at the evening service.

Mr Munro heard that an esteemed friend at a distance had been taken seriously ill and he prayed for him regularly at family worship for some time. When Mrs Munro observed that he had not done so for a day or two, she asked the reason. “I am thinking”, he said, “that he does not now need our prayers.” They afterwards received intimation of his death, and Mrs Munro noticed that the date was exactly the day on which her husband had ceased interceding for him. At a time when Mrs Munro was herself so ill that she was not expected to survive, Mr Munro, prayed beside her and said, “Although you are now, my dear, so weak, yet I shall be in heaven before you”. She outlived him more than a year. Mrs Munro was the sister of the well-known Mr Forbes, minister of Tarbat in Easter Ross, and was highly esteemed for her prudence, amiability and piety.

At the Disruption, Mr Munro had no misgivings. To one who asked him if he had Scripture warrant for that step, he replied, “I can answer you that at once, ‘And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth’ (Matt 28:18). Now those who infringe on this kingly prerogative touch a jewel of Christ’s crown more precious than the life of the universe!” Nor was Mr Munro much concerned as to his temporal support in relinquishing his stipend. The factor on the Scotscladder estate said to him, “I am surprised that you have left the Establishment”. “Why?” “Because the people will not give you sufficient means of subsist-

ence; you won't get £40 a year." "And do you think", answered Mr Munro, "that they will give me £40? Why, I would preach the gospel if they would not give me 40 pence."

This suggests to us one or two of those prompt replies for which Mr Munro was remarkable. A bitter lay partisan of the Moderate side met him in Edinburgh. Holding out his hand to him, he said, "I suppose, Mr Munro, you will not be willing to shake hands with me now". "O yes; why would not one sinner shake hands with another?" was the response. Sir George Sinclair, who did not see his way to join the Free Church until a few years after the Disruption, sent a message by a friend to Mr Munro to the effect that he was sorry he could not follow him in the step he had taken. "Well, tell Sir George," was the reply, "that I am going to heaven, and let him be sure to follow me there."

On 25 March 1847, he came to Thurso to attend a meeting of Presbytery and was suddenly taken ill. During his illness his mind was quite collected to the last; and the manner in which he endured his sufferings and looked forward to death was such as might be expected from the tenor of his life. Though in much pain, he exclaimed, "He hath done all things well! He never did anything wrong, and He never will!" Afterwards, speaking of the glorious prospects before him, he said, "O I shall be ashamed when I enter heaven!" He then added, as if correcting himself, "But there shall be no shame there". The night before he died he suffered much. Nature's struggle with death was evidently severe. It was said to him, "You appear to be very uneasy". He replied, "The Lord's will". Someone then referred to the Saviour's sufferings, and he exclaimed very distinctly: "He trod the winepress alone!" And, in reply to another observation made to him, he said, "I shall soon be at my rest". A few hours later, on the morning of 1 April 1847, after breathing peacefully for some time, he calmly fell asleep in Jesus.

Thus died this venerable servant of Christ, in the seventy-ninth year of his age and forty-first of his ministry. His body was interred in the churchyard of Halkirk on the Monday following amid an immense concourse of mourners. His loss was much felt, not only by his widow and relatives and flock, and his brethren in the Presbytery of Caithness, but over the country generally. In proof of his decided and unswerving attachment to the cause of the Free Church it may be mentioned that on his deathbed he stated that he would not be comfortable were he in the Establishment. Not the Free Church merely, but the Church universal sustained a great loss in his removal. Those who knew him intimately believed this and felt cause to exclaim with the prophet, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof".

Book Review

New Testament Sermons, by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, published by Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 336 pages, £15.50, available from the F P Bookroom.

These New Testament sermons are 48 in number, arranged in the order of the Biblical books. Some are relatively complete notes of up to 10 pages while others are only two or three pages long. There are useful and instructive sermons on the Lord's Supper, the Sabbath, the work of the Spirit, the gospel ministry and obedience to rulers. Besides, there are beautiful discourses on the heart-warming themes of "The Lost Sheep", "Christ Weeping over Jerusalem" and "Desiring to Depart to be with Christ". More than half of the sermons form a series on the first two chapters of 1 Peter, but these notes are very brief.

These sermons reveal something of the preacher's compassion and also the zeal he had for the salvation of his hearers. They also show his own spiritual exercise about the deep things of God. Speaking of Christ's sufferings, in a sermon on "The Rent Veil", he interjects: "Ah! I am a child; I cannot speak of these things" (p 30). Eternity is frequently brought to the attention of the hearers, and one senses that the preacher lived continually in the light of it. The great sin of rejecting Christ is also conspicuous. Addressing sinners in a sermon on Agrippa being "almost persuaded", he says with much earnestness, "O, your sin is far greater, in thus lightly esteeming Christ, than all that you ever committed before. . . . Who has so much sin as the soul that comes nearest to Christ, yet is not ravished with His beauty, and attracted to Him by His loveliness?" (p 102). There is also strong emphasis throughout on applying the subject to the hearers, an essential part of preaching. These and other features make many of these sermons suitable for reading aloud.

The Gospel Standard magazine for September 2004 contains a short review by the editor of the three volumes in this collection. After commending the spirituality of the sermons and the preacher, we have a very disappointing criticism of the free offer of the gospel. It is astonishing that good men can reject this glorious doctrine as "flies in the ointment". Suggesting, as is done, that the reader will appreciate the sermons more if he ignores the free offer of the gospel in them is like asking a child to taste the sweetness of a piece of bread while removing the honey from it. We heartily endorse the freeness with which M'Cheyne beseeches sinners to receive Christ. It is as Christ is freely offered in the gospel, and as sinners are commanded to believe on Him, that they are by grace persuaded and enabled to embrace him in effectual calling. Unbelief remains the sinner's crowning sin.

Many of the sermons in this volume were used more than once; footnotes detail up to four different occasions when a sermon was preached, to different audiences. The history of this collection of sermon notes, together with those on Hebrews and the Old Testament, has already been referred to in this Magazine (see the reviews in the issues for October and November 2004). Michael McMullen, the Editor of these volumes, is to be congratulated for his efforts in bringing these excellent discourses before the public. We hope that they will be read with the same interest and profit by discerning readers as M'Cheyne's other sermons. *(Rev) David Campbell*

Notes and Comments

Private Morality and Public Office

The question of the relation between personal morality and public office has been raised once again by the claims of the Home Secretary to have fathered the children of another man's wife. It appears from the media that, for many, the concern arising from this matter largely relates to whether or not Mr Blunkett used his government position to secure favours for the woman. This has been made the subject of an investigation, the findings of which will no doubt have appeared before this note is published. The fact that the Home Secretary had an adulterous relationship, which he wishes to have proved and publicly acknowledged, seems to be regarded as much less significant than whether or not a visa application was "fast-tracked" or a rail ticket was secured inappropriately through his "good offices". He has apologised for making a "mistake" regarding the rail ticket and promised to pay back the cost. In defending himself from allegations relating to the speedy granting of a visa he said, "I wouldn't be standing here this morning, and I wouldn't have had the support of the Prime Minister, if I thought there was any doubt whatsoever about what I have done, my openness, my integrity" (*The Scotsman*, 1 December 2004).

Mr Blair expressed every confidence in his Home Secretary, claiming that "politicians are entitled to private lives the same as anyone else" and that he was confident that problems in his personal life had not strayed into the political domain. Mr Blair, Mr Blunkett and many on all sides in politics, the media and society today seem to consider that a politician's integrity is intact and his position secure provided he has the capacity to do his job, irrespective of his private morality. Not to be outdone, Conservative officials were at pains to explain that, when their leader Michael Howard dismissed Boris Johnson from his front bench, it was not on account of

adultery but because he misled party officials about the affair (*The Scotsman*, 1 December 2004).

Undoubtedly God in His holy providence has used the natural skills of ungodly and immoral men in the past for the accomplishment of His purposes, but this does not justify ungodliness or immorality on their part. What we are seeing today is justification of immorality on the basis that there is no essential connection between what people are in their private lives and their entitlement to, and capacity for, positions of public trust and power. We are being asked to accept that a man who can publicly glory in his immoral personal relationships and his sinful intrusion into the relationship of a husband and his wife can yet be trusted to promote legislation to regulate the lives and relationships of others without his integrity or judgement being questioned.

When this is the received wisdom of politicians, it is no wonder that their legislation increasingly intrudes into, and undermines, the divinely-ordained family relationship and endorses and promotes relationships which have caused the wrath of God to be revealed from heaven against them in the past. It is no wonder that they have manifested such deceit in, for example, their progressive enmeshment of our nation in the European Union. It is no wonder that under the banner of cultural plurality and multi-faith diversity they show themselves averse to recognising the religion of Jesus Christ as the only true religion, and describe as bigots those who are faithful to biblical truth and morality. It is no wonder that they cannot distinguish between the tribal warfare of thugs and drunkards and, on the other hand, a gracious contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, and against every false way – tarring both with the brushes of “sectarianism” or “inciting religious hatred”. It is no wonder that while they busy themselves (at Westminster and at Holyrood) with matters which, when they are not harmful, are at best peripheral to the welfare of the nation, they show no concern to be true to the character of powers ordained of God: “for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil” (Rom 13:3). Private morality cannot be divorced from public duty.

Is it any wonder that, when the “powers that be” show themselves so regardless of the law of God in their own lives, and in their legislative and administrative activities, their attempts to regulate society are like the vain attempt to hold back the force of the sea by placing a finger in a hole in a crumbling dyke? “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted” (Ps 12:8).

Well may it be asked, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps 11:3). We pray for godly men to be raised up in positions of authority in our land. But the electoral system renders unlikely the success

of a consistently Christian candidate who is not endorsed by a political party; the party system ensures that, should such a person gain a Parliamentary seat, he would be excluded from any position of influence; and the parties are so ambivalent at best on moral and religious issues that it would be very difficult for a person to represent them without implicitly endorsing at least the right of others in the same party to promote ungodly policies and practices.

“What can the righteous do?” We should not do nothing. We should do what we can, as Christians and as citizens, each in his or her sphere, to promote the interests of truth and righteousness. We should remember that “the Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men” (Ps 11:4), and find encouragement in His promises to His people, and to their prayers, for the nations where their lot is cast in providence. Accordingly, we should seek grace to follow the example of Daniel: “I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth and ashes” (Dan 9:3).

HMC

The Paranormal Supplanting the Bible

The news organisation Ekklesia reports that far fewer households in the UK now own Bibles than was the case 50 years ago. It had been obvious that this was so, but it has now been confirmed in a survey carried out by ICM Research (a body which does work for the Government and leading charities and businesses). Whereas 90% of all adults owned a Bible in 1954, the figure now is only 65%. The figures for households with children are 98% for 1954 and 62% at present – an even more serious decrease.

On the other hand, the survey reveals that belief in the paranormal has increased by 10% since 1954, with 42% of people now believing in ghosts. We would have been inclined to expect a higher figure when we consider the increase in superstitious beliefs and practices in recent decades. In any case, the figures confirm a continuing departure from God and His ways, as more and more people turn to what many fancifully describe as “the spiritual” – but it is certainly from a spirit other than the Holy Spirit of God.

Britain once avowed God to be her God but is as surely condemned as Israel was long ago: “My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13). That is God’s message to us today. This deplorable situation is a loud call to all who profess the name of Christ to implore Him to exercise His power in mercy towards our nation. Only then will we be brought back to God in repentance; only then will we acknowledge Him as our God. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old” (Is 51:9). *NMR*

Increasing Drunkenness

According to a survey, firms in the UK were likely to lose up to £65 million in the period before Christmas 2004 as workers took time off to get over their hangovers. Workers interviewed admitted that they were likely to drink as much as, if not more than, in previous years.

This figure is an indication of the increasing irresponsibility of people in their misuse of alcohol as the restraining influence of true religion becomes less and less. More serious than the loss of money is the heartache and misery caused by drunkenness. But why will the Government not take serious action to reduce consumption of alcohol?

Protestant View

The Immaculate Conception

The Vatican has been busy making preparations around the world for celebrating, on December 8, the 150th anniversary of the dogma of “the immaculate conception” of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Some nominal Protestants mistakenly believe that this teaching refers to the virgin birth of Christ, but it is, of course, a doctrine about Mary herself. The original decree, issued by Pope Pius IX in 1854, begins as follows: “We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin . . .”. This teaching is reiterated in the latest Roman Catholic *Catechism*.

How contrary it is to the Scriptures, which teach that everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). No one can claim to be what Christ alone is: “Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26). Mary knew well that she was a sinner in need of the Saviour, and acknowledged and rejoiced in Him as “my Saviour” (Luke 1:47).

The “immaculate conception” is one of the later heresies of Rome and did not appear until more than 18 centuries after Christ was born. It is not founded on the Scriptures (although Rome claims in vain that it is); nor has Rome any right to claim that it is founded even on tradition. It is simply, as one theologian says, “a natural outgrowth of their worship of Mary, a further step in her deification. Their Mariolatry demanded it!”

May the day soon come when those who are deceived by this dogma see the heinousness of their Mariolatry! And may they have repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of Mary herself and of all others who have believed in Him!

NMR

Church Information

Licensed to Preach

At a meeting on 30 November 2004, the Outer Isles Presbytery licensed Mr Donald Macdonald to preach the gospel. The Presbytery wish Mr Macdonald much of the Lord's blessing in his labours in the vineyard.

(Rev) K D Macleod, Presbytery Clerk

Visits Abroad

In the month of December Rev John MacLeod was to supply the Singapore Congregation for three Sabbaths, and Rev Neil Ross the Congregation in Richmond, Texas, for two Sabbaths. In both places a communion season was to be held. These congregations are most grateful to those ministers, who travel long distances to preach the everlasting gospel to them. It is not often that they obtain supply. Therefore, as well as asking the Lord's blessing upon the labours of these ministers, pray also that He would give them pastors of their own.

(Rev) D A Ross, Convener, Dominions & Overseas Committee.

Meetings of Presbytery

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, Friday, January 28, at 2.30 pm.

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, February 8, at 11 am.

Northern: At Dingwall, on Tuesday, February 22, at 2 pm.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, February 23, at 5 pm.

Western: At Laide, on Tuesday, March 8, at 6 pm.

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: The McCarter Family, USA, \$250; Anon, "Where Needed", USA, \$260, \$307.50; Anon, for Theological Conference expenses, £20.

Home Missions Fund: A Friend, Huntly, £71.50

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, for Mission to Africa, £175; R & D, for Rev J Goldby in Israel, £150; Mrs A B, Morayshire, for Thembiso Childrens' Home, £100; Anon, W Isles, for Mbuma Hospital, £200; Anon, W Isles, for Thembiso Childrens' Home, £200.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Breasclete: *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, Wick, £10 per NT.

Edinburgh: *Congregational Funds:* DM & AM, £50 per Rev HMC; Anon, £500.

Fort William: *Congregational Funds:* A & MM, £100; FCRM, £100; J & MM, "In memory of a much loved brother", £100; Where most needed: MM, £50.

North Harris: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £20; Anon, for Outreach, £50. *Home Mission Fund:* Anon, Stockinish, £10 per Rev JBJ.

Raasay: *Communion Expenses:* JA, £25. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Friend, for Zimbabwe Mission, £25 per Rev JRT. *Manse Renovations:* JA, £50. *Sustentation Fund:* Friend, £20 per Rev JRT.

Stornoway: *Congregational Funds:* For bus hire to Harris: Mr & Mrs MM, Mrs JM, Mrs ML & Mrs SMI, North Tolsta, £50. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Relief Fund, £20. *Manse Expenses:* Anon, £40.