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Respect

As British prime minister Tony Blair set out his programme for a third term of government, he declared that people were fed up with thugs, binge drinking, vandalism and graffiti. He asserted that what he called “yobbish behaviour” would not be tolerated in Britain’s streets and schools. He emphasised the need for “respect towards other people” and commented that it is “a modern yearning as much as a traditional one”.

The trouble is, however, that modern society lacks a proper basis for the respect which Mr Blair so much wants to encourage. Indeed the philosophy lying behind much of the legislation passed by the governments over which he has presided provides no proper basis for *treating others with due consideration* (which is no doubt the sense in which he uses the word *respect*). Much contemporary legislation encourages the situation in the time of the Judges in Israel, when “every man did that which was right *in his own eyes*”.

What then is that proper basis for respect? Belief in God as the Creator of the whole human race – of others as well as ourselves – and the One to whom we must all give account at last. We must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ to give in our account for how we treated our fellow creatures in this world. The fundamental principle revealed in Scripture is: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). We are to treat everyone as we would wish them to treat us – for they, like ourselves, are God’s creatures. This is the proper definition of respect for others. It was given by Jesus Christ, the Son of God; so it cannot be improved on. But while God is despised and ignored, and while His Word is despised and ignored, we cannot expect a consistent degree of respect for others in this nation, or anywhere else.

Many of those whom the Prime Minister accuses of yobbish behaviour are youngsters who are still in, or have only recently left, an education system into which more money is now being poured than ever before. When problems arise in society, the cry goes up: Education is the answer; schools must point children in the right direction. No doubt, schools could have much to offer by way of pointing today’s young people to the right pathway through life.

But education, described by the Government as its “top priority”, no longer has a right foundation; it assumes that all religions are equally valid, as are all conceivable ways of thinking – except the idea that there is a unique body of truth, revealed from heaven and therefore non-negotiable. Indeed, if a Religious Hatred Bill is passed, it may become dangerous to say that other people’s views on particular matters are wrong – as some have discovered to their cost in Sweden and in the Australian state of Victoria.

Education is naively touted as a universal cure-all for society’s ills; in particular, it is seen as the solution for the problems which arise when the Seventh Commandment is ignored. Yet any proposal to make God’s law the basis for the solution meets with massive opposition. Increasingly, children are being taught that there are no boundaries, except mutual consent, on relationships between the sexes; they are encouraged to believe that they may, in this area of life as in every other, do what is right in their own eyes. But what education has sown, society at large is reaping.

And what are today’s youngsters taught to believe about human origins? That mankind evolved, stage by long-drawn-out stage, from more primitive creatures; that everything happened randomly, beginning with a causeless big bang; that there was no supreme power in control of anything – which is to reject God and His revelation. But mankind did not evolve from more primitive creatures; nothing has happened at random; God has been in control of everything since He created all things out of nothing. Yet can we expect a generation brought up on a constant diet of evolution to understand everyone’s duty to respect each individual with whom they come in contact? Can we really expect those who have not been taught to respect their Creator to treat others in the way they would wish others to treat them?

However imperfect the respect shown by individuals to others in past generations, there is no doubt that it was more pervasive than now. And that was because the sense of responsibility to God – however limited in many cases – was more pervasive. But Britain, in common with many other nations, has lost sight of its obligation to respect God. We seem now to be in a situation where almost no one in authority has a sense of the duty of individuals and nations to show their respect for the Most High by living in obedience to His commandments.

Mr Blair referred to what he called deep-seated causes of nuisance behaviour. They were “to do with family life in the way that parents regard their responsibility to their children, in the way that some kids grow up generation to generation without proper parenting, without a proper sense of discipline within the family”. There is no doubt he was right. He could bring in laws, he added, but could not raise people’s children for them. But he has

been at the head of a government which has done more than any other in this country to weaken the institution of the family, that fundamental building-block of human society. God's Word teaches that marriage, between one man and one woman, is the context within which children should be conceived and reared. Recent governments have done nothing to strengthen, but much to damage, this position. Tragically, in the current, largely-atheistic environment in Britain no Government politician would want to be seen recommending the Bible, and certainly not for its directions for the rearing of children. Yet, if these directions were followed, they would help to bring about a generation willing to show a degree of respect to others. Let us make no mistake; God has spoken. We ignore Him at our peril.

The one alternative to further deterioration in standards of behaviour is to return to the law and to the testimony – to the revelation which God has set before us for our good. He has given clear, practical directions as to how we should live. Yet He has also made it clear that we, fallen creatures that we are, are totally unable to follow these directions as we ought. But – and what reason there is to praise Him for this! – He has made provision for the deliverance of human beings from their fallen condition. He has given His only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world. And, for Christ's sake, He sends the Holy Spirit to give new hearts to sinners. It is those who are thus transformed in heart and life that will begin to show respect to others from a proper foundation – because they have begun to show respect to their Creator.

Unless there is a return to God and His ways, society must continue in the direction of disintegration. Apart from such a return, disrespect for others can only increase. Back in 1993 Mr Blair, then a rising opposition politician, spoke of the need for “the rediscovery of a sense of direction as a country and, most of all, from being unafraid to start talking once again about the values and principles we believe in and what they mean for us, not just as individuals but as a community”. These were true words, but the values and principles we must believe in cannot be the product of any merely human philosophy, especially because all human thought is marred by sin. As fallen creatures, we must be dependent on values and principles which have their source in the mind of God. He is our Creator and knows our needs. He knows how we should live. He has provided infallible guidance for us.

May people generally be brought to open their ears to God's law – and to His Word generally! Then we can have every confidence that they will begin to show sincere respect, not only to their fellow creatures, but to the Most High Himself, which is where we ought to begin. The modern yearning for respect must have the same foundation as the traditional one. If politicians think otherwise, they are doomed to utter failure.

The Thirsty Invited¹

A Sermon by *J W Alexander*

Isaiah 55:1a. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.*

Who among us remembers some cool spring near the home of his infancy that burst forth from a rock and freshened all the scene around? Such an object of natural scenery lives long in the memory. We resort to it again and again without weariness. What attracted us first charms us still, because it is living, constant and inexhaustible, yielding supplies to wants which perpetually return. As long as men thirst, they will value the clear cold fountain. But if, even in this temperate region, we often understand how invaluable this great gift is, how much livelier must be the feeling in those hotter regions where most scriptural scenes are found!

Consider this and you will no longer marvel at the large place which is occupied by wells and fountains in the beautiful pastoral pictures of the Old Testament. The literature of the patriarchs is eminently an outdoor and a summer literature, which we best understand when we leave the luxuries and constraint of cities and dwell outside amidst the bright surroundings of oriental life. The Bible reader is familiar with such objects in the ancient landscape: the wells of Abram, Isaac and Jacob; the fountain opened to despairing Hagar; the well of Jethro and Moses; and the palm-tree wells of Elam. Bearing these associations in our minds, we can the better catch the meaning of promises which declare that the thirsty land shall become springs of water, and that God will lead His people to fountains of living water. But why seek remote illustrations of what finds its prompt response in the bosom of all who were ever athirst? It is to such, in a spiritual sense, that the invitation of the text is addressed, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" And we may, without laboured investigation, consider it as offering the benefits of the gospel to those who are perishing. I ask you on this holy day to examine with me the fulness, the freeness and the universality of the offered gift.

1. The fulness of the offered gift. It is water; it is abundance of water. There must be something in this natural object which is suited to symbolise the provision made in the gospel for the salvation of mankind. Man is so constituted that he must have water, or perish. Give him all things else, but

¹Taken, with some editing, from a reprinted volume of Alexander's sermons: *A Shepherd's Heart* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 465 pp, paperback, £16.95 from the F P Bookroom). J W Alexander (1804-59) was a son of Archibald Alexander and was minister of various American congregations, including more than one in New York. Some readers will be familiar with his communion addresses, reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust as *God is Love*.

deny him every liquid, and you destroy his life. Nothing more forcibly shows this than the familiar fact that, even on the vast ocean, the mariner, surrounded by a world of waters, must nevertheless carry with him fresh water. The appetite for this supply is so strong that, when long unsatisfied it becomes a frenzy. And how bountiful is the supply! The springs of water bubble up in hill and valley, or the human hand digs deeply for it. The evaporation from earth and ocean and the descent of copious showers maintain this great reservoir for mankind. It is indispensable to the natural life of the race.

And so is the gospel to the spiritual life. Men must partake of it, or perish. When duly enlightened, they feel this to be their condition and thirst for righteousness. Such an invitation as that of the text implies that the supply is large, or it could not suffice for all. The provision of grace leaves nothing lacking for the worst conceivable individual case, or for the utmost number of persons to be saved. We must be careful not to undervalue the remedial methods and so limit the Holy One of Israel. In this case God has acted like Himself, with a sublime liberality, more striking than even the wonderful arrangements of the original creation and of providence – because these do not contemplate a creature rebellious and self-destroyed. If anything, even the slightest, had been left undone which was necessary to the salvation of the sinner, the work would not have had this completeness. But all is accomplished.

It need not here be made the subject of argument that the great demand is for a righteousness for those who have none – what shall heal the difference between heaven and earth, answer the claims of law, turn away the wrath of Jehovah, cleanse the guilt of sin, give a title to life, and afford a pledge of continuing in a holy state and of everlasting blessedness and perfection beyond the grave. The all-comprehending gift is the gift of God's own Son. "God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." The incarnation, obedience and substitutionary suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ are the source of all the streams which here issue in such fulness.

But the point where, above all others, the waters gush forth from the smitten rock is the cross of our Redeemer. There, when his last cry of pain is over, and out of His side issue water and blood, we have the consummation of a gift to man which is full beyond expression. Sinners by myriads may come in, and yet there is room. The invitation may be large, for the provision is vast. Not only is the springhead of these mercies great, but it cannot be greater. To consider this is highly necessary for the steady confidence of our faith; and this is felt most deeply in hours when conviction of sin is peculiarly pungent. The righteousness of Christ is infinite. We are made just by this, and by nothing else.

Now that which gives to this righteousness any merit, gives it all merit.

The divinity of Him who obeys and suffers, exalts the meritorious obedience and suffering to a maximum. Were all the sons and daughters of Adam who have been, are and shall be, to gather in one numberless mass, with the cross for its centre and object of desire, there were enough for all. When Jesus bowed His head and gave up the ghost, He completed a sacrifice which is absolutely without limit. Yea, though all worlds were peopled with sinners, here were enough for all – not in God’s purpose, nor in His covenant growing out of that purpose, nor in the actual application of redemption according to covenant, but in the value of the atonement. If more were to be saved, it would need no more righteousness and no more effusion of Christ’s blood, although the contrary has been alleged as our belief. If this is not fulness of redemption, we must despair of communicating this idea by language.

And yet we must proceed to add to this statement in a particular respect. The atonement might be complete, and yet not be effectual. In God’s holy purpose, it needs to be applied. Some have represented the covenant of grace as simply placing man in “a salvable state”. We go further than this. Man may be in a salvable state, yet never reach a state of salvation. The plan of God proposes to bring men actually into the kingdom. The invitation is to come to a provided fulness of effectual grace, to faith and its consequences, to perseverance in holiness and everlasting life. These waters break over the verge of their receptacle, and seem to fall like the inviting spray of a great fountain, holding out the promise of infinite capacity beyond all that is seen. Till we can conceive of something greater than God, we need have no fear of trusting the whole weight of our salvation on the method which He has revealed; for He has made it, so to speak, commensurate with Himself, by laying His very divinity in pledge and causing the value of the salvation to repose on the eternal glories of His own nature.

2. The freeness of the offered gift. This is implied by the strong terms of invitation: “Ho every one, come ye!” It is still more clearly signified by the words immediately following, where the figure is slightly modified, though the general idea of thirst remains prominent: “yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price”. It is not to a purchase, but to a gift. The freeness of the communication could not be more strongly expressed. It is here proclaimed, with divine earnestness, that he who comes to the salvation of the gospel receives it without any offer of recompense or any worthiness on his own part. The fountain of life has indeed a price, a price which has been paid. It cost the agonies and death of the Son of God. To secure man’s salvation it was necessary that a struggle and a humiliation hitherto unknown in the universe should take place. The price has been laid down – for the sinner, but not by the sinner. Eternal justice has been satisfied

on his behalf, but to him the invitation is without money and without price.

The repetition of this truth may strike some as needless. They are ready to exclaim, Who doubts that the gospel is free? In reply we must observe that, while no truth is more clearly affirmed in our creeds, none is more denied in our practice. It is hard to make men believe that they may come to the Lord Jesus Christ freely – that is, without any previous condition.

There are few believers who do not remember the moment when this unconditional freeness of the gospel broke upon their minds as a great revelation. They had been lying long beside the pool of healing, waiting for someone to put them in. They thought there was a long and difficult preparation before they could venture to come to Christ. They interpreted the invitation as made to persons having particular qualities, and they were not sure that they had these qualities. They could not approach the fountain because they did not feel enough; they dared not believe because they did not grieve enough. Or, in some of the endlessly-shifting varieties of delusive experience, they were setting a price on pardon and seeking to make up the amount themselves; they were working on their own hearts to make them more fit for Christ; they were attempting a half-way work which, without erasing the word *grace* from the record, would leave to self some of the glory of preparation. And the moment when all this was swept away is memorable in the believer's history. It is the moment which immediately precedes faith. Up to this instant, he has been trying earnestly to do something which shall make him more fit to receive Christ. Now he sees that the whole deed of righteousness is done already, that its full value is offered to him in the gospel, and that he is authorized to accept it.

But so subtle is self-righteousness that even the free words, *every one that thirsteth*, of the invitation may be distorted into a legal condition. The busy demon at the ear, who dreads nothing so much as that the sinner should believe, here whispers, "But perhaps you do not thirst, or you do not thirst enough, or you do not thirst aright". Such queries might indeed be urged for ever, if any sort of preparatory condition were required. The question might still be, Do I possess this condition? And it is a question which can never be answered. We have known persons who were engaged during the entire course of their lives in agitating the inquiry: whether they feel enough, whether they feel their need of Christ, whether they are not too unfeeling, whether they hate sin enough, whether they are sufficiently in earnest.

All these are proper questions in relation to another matter, but here they are out of place and serve only to keep the sick away from the physician. These lingerings and scruples arise from a source to which I beg your profoundest attention. They arise from founding hope on feelings of our own,

instead of founding it on God's veracity. The truth of God's promise is the everlasting rock. Here build and be safe. All else, especially all within us, is a quicksand. The Word of the Lord endureth for ever. True faith utterly forgets itself and credits the assurance of God's free pardon. It looks away from its own worthiness and its own unworthiness, and hears God saying "Ho!" "Come ye!" Come without money and without price! And it comes, without turning to the right hand or to the left. The question no longer is: What am I? but, What is God? Is He true? Has He spoken? It sets to its seal that God is true. It acquiesces in a righteousness already finished. So it saves.

The doctrinal truth which lies at the basis of all these exercises is that the procuring cause of our acceptance with God is not anything done by us, or in us – not any work, preparation, frame or feeling, but only the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. From over the fresh fountain, the trumpet sounds thus: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life, freely". And the persuaded soul, now taught the great lesson of self-renunciation and self-forgetfulness, and swallowed up in admiration of the stupendous gift, falls into the open arms of dying Love.

When a wretch, just at the point of expiring with thirst, opens his lips to receive the cool reviving draught, does he think of this act of his as constituting any previous claim? As little does the believer ascribe any meritorious virtue to his sinful believing, which is no more than his acquiescence in the method which God has provided. Thus unbounded is the freeness of the offer which is made of all gospel blessings, including pardon, peace and eternal life.

3. The universality of the offered gift. "Ho, every one that thirsteth." Salvation – or, in other words, Christ the author of salvation – is offered to all nations of mankind. The topic is so large and inviting that I must confine myself to a few words. Nothing is more familiar to us, nothing was more strange to the ancients, than that the favour of God should be made co-extensive with the world. And while it was a stumbling-block to Judaism, it was the theme which, of all others, lifted Paul to the highest rapture, as the apostle of the Gentiles. The middle wall of partition was broken down. The veil of the temple was rent. The waters of life, seen in vision by Ezekiel, broke over the eastern threshold of the temple and flowed in a mighty stream. Jesus offered Himself a sacrifice, not for Israel only, but for all nations. "He is the propitiation for our sins," said John, "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." And coincident with this purpose was the great commission: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". It was foreseen by Isaiah, the evangelical prophet. In God's wonderful providence, grace had been limited to a chosen nation, but now the

system was enlarged so as to be a universal religion; and henceforth “God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent”.

This blessed gospel is now on its triumphant progress through the earth, and the day is fixed in the counsels of heaven when it shall be “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith”. The blessings of religion are hereby offered to all realms and peoples, to men of every state, class and character. To be a human creature, and to hear the gospel, is to come within the bounds of this grace. It proclaims its fulness and freeness to young and old, rich and poor, learned and simple, high and low. It does not single out certain classes as those who may be saved, but declares that all may be saved, even as all who are athirst may drink. It does not indeed promise that men shall be saved in their sins, for this salvation delivers from sin. This water is in each who tastes it a well of water springing up to everlasting life, manifesting its virtue by holiness of thought, affection, speech and work.

But as to the prerequisite for accepting the offer, the gospel does not demand holiness; this does not yet exist; it is to be produced; it is part of the benefit to be sought. No one should suppose himself excluded from the promise of free pardon and life because of anything in his condition or character. Provided he comes as a sinner all athirst for pardon, and believes in Him who justifieth the ungodly, he is sure of a welcome. And, as no man’s proper name is in the grant, the only warrant which anyone has is the promise which is made to all. The general invitation becomes particular when it is appropriated by faith. If the commander of a mutinous army publishes an act of forgiveness to all who are willing to receive it, the rebel who hears, believes and submits, makes the amnesty his own. Thousands hear the terms of the gospel yet do not accept them. But the reason why anyone accepts and is saved is simply that he, an undeserving wretch, yields to the moving of the gracious Spirit, takes God at His word, and makes the universal offer his own particular salvation. To the very end of the present dispensation, the preaching of the gospel authorises all sinners of mankind to come and be freed from sin.

More particularly, the salvation is free to the chief of sinners. This is necessary to its universality. If there were one degree of turpitude which was excepted from the general pardon, what sinful heart is there that would not sometimes be tempted to think that degree its own? But there is none such. The infinite merit of Christ, which is the sole basis of the offer, proves that there is none such. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. He is able to save, to the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him. There is no dye of guilt which these waters do not cleanse. Considered in itself, there is no amount of iniquity which transcends the virtue of Christ’s atoning sacrifice,

or is beyond the reach of God's gracious invitation. The murderous treachery of Judas might have been pardoned – nay, would have been pardoned – on his faith and repentance.

If there is a sin in our day which is unpardonable, it is not so because the blood of Christ lacks efficacy, or because the promise of the gospel excludes it, but because such sin, by its very nature, rejects and despises the sacred blood and the gracious promise. Everyone that thirsts, though all crimes were concentrated on his head, may approach and be made whole. There are moments of conviction in which you might attempt to convince the sufferer of anything rather than that such sins as his can be forgiven. He admits that others may be saved, but not himself. The Spirit of God, in foresight of such cases, converted Saul of Tarsus, and has left on record for all ages that golden passage which ends thus: "I am chief". It is a doctrine most important to be preached, and often to be reiterated, in the spirit of the text, lest any rebel, however atrocious, should fail to admit the glorious universality of the offer. Some of the most signal trophies of grace, in whom sovereign power and love have shone in the brightest colours, have been men whose crimes seemed to outrage heaven, but each of whom has learnt to cry with David: "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great!"

The offer of life ought therefore to be considered by each individual hearer as addressed personally to himself. This applies to all divine communications made in the house of God; but pre-eminently to this, which offers eternal good to all without exception who will receive it. The day and hour have come in which, after such long delays, you may find in Jesus a merciful Saviour. The providence which has brought you hither, and the influence which has opened your ear to hearken, make the message as truly your own as if the voice of God distinctly uttered your individual name from heaven. Christ, with all His benefits, is yours if, forsaking all things else, you accept Him as offered in this gospel. O be persuaded to bow your stubborn neck and bring the long reluctant lips to these celestial waters!

And let me add a word to Christian believers, whether newly converted or far advanced in pilgrimage. To you also is the invitation given. This is not a well in the desert, of which you may taste only once and then you must leave it for ever, but a river of life at which you may perpetually slake your thirst. The Israelites all drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them; and that Rock was Christ. The water from the smitten rock pursued the journeyings of the camp. The unchanging Redeemer in His fulness is always beside you and within your reach. As ye have received the Lord Jesus, so walk ye in Him. Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. You may be already justified indeed; but are there not a thousand wants within

you which crave supply? Has not your path been through a wearisome land, and are you not conscious of an inward thirst which nothing but spiritual refreshment can assuage? You need daily purifying; you need daily increase of knowledge; you need strength for the remaining journey, and healing for the fevered wounds of your conflict. Behold the boundless provision and hearken to the liberal summons. Approach anew to Him who is the source of all your life and who cries anew, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

Blessed be God, the source to which we are invited is a familiar fountain. In regard at least to our knowledge of it, it was the household spring of our childhood; and it has been our cool resort from the arid journeys of our mature years. And though we have, days without number, forsaken the fountain of living water, and hewed us out cisterns which can hold no water, yet are we not deeply convinced that there is none so full, none so heavenly, none so free? Many a time have we gone to it, all parched with the ardours of our wearisome path, and found the Diffuser of gracious refreshment ready to take us back and satisfy us with His love. Again the sound of falling waters is in our ears. From the clefts of the saving Rock, the holy stream breaks forth in profusion. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say. Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

John Macdonald of Calcutta¹

1. Early Years

Rev Neil M Ross

The name of John Macdonald of Calcutta was once well known in Scotland; many homes had his *Life* by W K Tweedie, which was based largely on Macdonald's own diary. As Tweedie says, "John Macdonald himself becomes our guide in this narrative".

John Macdonald was born on 17 February 1807 in Edinburgh, where his father was the minister of the Gaelic Chapel. His next home was the Urquhart manse, when his father became minister of the parish of Urquhart (Ferintosh) in 1813; (the father, also John, was later renowned as Dr Macdonald of Ferintosh, the Apostle of the North). About nine months after this, John's mother died. Although he was only seven at the time, he retained many precious memories of her.

Not surprisingly, impressions of a religious nature were made upon him

¹This is the first section of a paper given at the 2004 Theological Conference.

while he was still young. It was from his mother that he learned his first lessons about his own spiritual need. He later “recalled the lessons by which she had showed ‘the good man’s happiness, and the bad man’s fate’”. He always had a profound regard for his father and sometimes accompanied him on his preaching tours in the Highlands and beyond. He thus came to understand that religion must indeed be important when people flocked in such crowds to the preaching of the gospel.

One moving experience was when he saw the parish catechist (who was completely unaware of the presence of his minister’s son) beside the Burn of Ferintosh, laying aside his broad blue bonnet and praying for a blessing on the water he was about to drink from the burn. That day, John felt that there must be, in the religion of the godly men in the parish, something to which he was still a stranger. Another incident which caused him serious reflection was the death of a cousin. Although he occasionally had deep thoughts such as these, he continued in an unregenerate state. “Amiable he had ever been,” says Tweedie. “Solemnised he sometimes was by the services of the sanctuary, and of his home. But amiability is not grace. Seriousness is not necessarily conversion.”

John Macdonald gained his early education at home under a tutor, and then proceeded to King’s College, Aberdeen, at the early age of 13. Shortly after arriving he won a substantial bursary against considerable competition. At the end of four years in Aberdeen he gained his degree of Master of Arts, but his most notable achievement was winning the prestigious Huttonian Prize. Professor Tulloch of King’s College later said that John Macdonald “carried with him, when leaving college, an amount of knowledge which but few young men at so early an age possess”. Many years later, a fellow student and friend said that, youthful as Macdonald was then, “he was, without doubt, the first scholar of his time at college”. Despite his great success and the high praise heaped on him by fellow students and teachers, he experienced a certain emptiness. “When I met with compliments,” he said, “I found that they conveyed me no real pleasure; but I felt as if there was an indefinable something beyond what I obtained, which I sought after.”

In the spring of 1824, as he approached the end of his college course, he asked his father for advice about whether or not he should study for the ministry. “I am inclined to think that at present I would prefer divinity to any other study,” he wrote. “I am fully aware that I am quite unfit for such an important office as the clerical; but I hope that if the Lord designs me for it, He will, by the influences of His Spirit, qualify me for the proper discharge of it.” His father’s response is not known, but it would seem that he did not discourage him. Had he done so, we doubt if his son would have proceeded

further in that direction. In any case, John Macdonald began his theological studies that year. When he entered the Divinity Hall in Aberdeen in autumn, he already had a reputation for theological knowledge and religious seriousness. His biographer states, “Both his fellow students and professors discovered in the son of the minister of Urquhart an amiability that gave grace, and a vigour that gave something like moral grandeur to his character, and signalised him above most of his fellows”.

Although he was yet unregenerate, he was enthusiastic in his divinity studies and earned the high praise of his teachers. But thoughts of the responsibility of being a minister sometimes overwhelmed him. “I cannot think seriously of the important office of the ministry,” he wrote, “without shuddering. O God, wilt Thou not give me correct and clear views of the office to which I am, perhaps presumptuously, aspiring?”

The Divinity Hall at that time operated a system of partial attendance. John Macdonald lamented the results of such a defective method, and wrote to a fellow divinity student, “Is not your experience the same as mine, that we have hitherto taken too little to heart the preparation necessary for the office to which we aspire?” Had not theology been his “absorbing and much-loved study” (as Tweedie says), he would have been more disadvantaged by the system.

When John Macdonald concluded his first session at the Divinity Hall, he went to Westerton, near Elgin, as tutor in the family of Colonel Hay. There he resided for the next five years, except when his studies called him back to the Divinity Hall. It was at Westerton, after a painful and protracted struggle, that he underwent a saving change. He had always been most diligent in his religious duties in Aberdeen, and was regarded by his contemporaries as having a high moral character. He himself thought otherwise: “These were the effects of early education and example, which often, when they fail in the way of *principle*, still retain their influence in the way of *habit*”.

As one follows the record of his inward struggles, and how earnestly he sought salvation, how fervently he prayed, and how wide and deep was his knowledge of the Scriptures, one wonders at various points in the narrative if the great change has already taken place. In reality, at each of these points, he was yet unsaved and in spiritual darkness (if we are to believe his own testimony – which we do). At one stage he was in such a state of perplexity that these words poured from his pen and heart: “What am I to do? O Almighty God, enable me to strive to enter in at the strait gate – give me faith in Thy dear Son, and true repentance.”

The reading of certain books deepened his concern. His perusal of Edwards on *The Religious Affections* caused him to acknowledge, “Never before had

I such a view of the state of the human heart; and never had I such a view of Christian experience, and the difficulty of attaining to it". After reading Paley's work on natural theology, he asked, "Can a man be an atheist after reading this? Ah yes; I am afraid that a *perverted will* can hold out against a *convinced understanding*." Although there was such earnestness, says Tweedie, "he still halted between two opinions, and had, as yet, advanced only so far as to be unsatisfied with the world, without having learned to glory only in the Lord".

Tweedie adds, "We cannot but notice here, however, the mingling of the solemn with the frivolous which the mind of man in its unconverted state frequently displays". He then refers to John Macdonald yielding to temptations to folly which later caused him nothing but sorrow. One entry in his diary states: "Last night was at the Mason Ball, given in the Lodge here. . . . When I returned home at night and threw myself on my bed, I began to reflect on how I had spent the evening. The excitation of spirits was then gone. The verdict was most *unfavourable*." Nevertheless, a few days later he records: "Was out at a party last night till pretty late. Often does my mind dwell on how vain and unsatisfactory are the pleasures of this world! 'Tis but a short moment of enjoyment, and they are over – 'tis but a moment of excitation, and depression follows."

About the middle of 1828 John Macdonald, in his deepening concern of soul, was coming to his wits' end. "I am perplexed, and what am I to do? O, where is now my pride of intellect? Where the clearness of my mind in solving a difficulty which my friends give me credit for? Miserable comforters are ye all." He was not left in his perplexity and darkness. A few weeks later he wrote, "I have been comforted by these words of the great apostle: 'We are saved by *hope*' . . . A strong hope is all that I feel – O may God, who begins every good work, also carry it through, and strengthen it more and more!"

As he prepared to partake of the Lord's Supper for the first time, he considered his past experiences. He saw that he was always cutting his own heart to deepen his conviction of sin so that he would *compel* himself to come to Christ. "But how vain have I found it," he said, "to endeavour to attain a knowledge of sin without coming to the cross of Christ!" He adds, "I had been all along looking into my mind for faith, intending, if I first found it, to come with it to Jesus – thus making faith a condition, and therefore an obstacle, to the acceptance of the free offers of the gospel".

On the last day of his twenty-second year, he recorded, "That the year now closing has been the most important of my past life I cannot deny, unless I be awfully mistaken. I humbly trust that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, I have, during that time, passed out of a state of condemnation into a

state of acceptance with God. It is with reverence and trembling that I would say this; but still I dare not deny it.” This wonderful change was thus briefly described many years later by one of his early friends: “He was quite carried over to Christ, and continued devoted to Him till the last”.

It was as a transformed man that he now proceeded to his trials for licence to preach the gospel. The Presbytery of Elgin licensed him on 6 January, 1830. After recording the event in his diary, he adds, “O my heavenly Father, the blood of Thy Son is powerful, the working of Thy Spirit is efficacious, and Thou art gracious: this is all my hope – all my strength.”

He preached for the first time a few days later at Pluscarden, in the neighbourhood of Westerton. Writing to a friend afterwards he said, “I dare not deny the mercy of my Lord, in that He did support me by the precious promises of His Word. . . . I had some paragraphs of my discourse, indeed the most of it, in the style which some call *wild*; but the more close and faithful it was, the more strength did I feel.” He continued living at Westerton and preaching in Pluscarden and nearby congregations for the next four months. His preaching was much appreciated by the Lord’s people, one of them being the singularly-godly Isobel Hood of Elgin (whose memoir he later wrote). Some others were savingly blessed under his preaching, and some under his teaching in the Sabbath School class which he had begun at Pluscarden two years earlier.

The time for him to leave Westerton and return to the Urquhart manse came on Tuesday, 25 May 1830. “O Westerton,” he wrote, “thou art dear to me, dear indeed. Here did Jesus first meet me; here He won my heart; here did He first employ my poor worthless services.”

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There are two reasons why God should be loved with all the heart: the first is His infinite excellence and loveliness in Himself; the second, His goodness exercised toward us in creation, providence and redemption.

Archibald Alexander

A Ross-shire Praying Society¹

Invergordon Ness, 17 September 1788. The after-subscribing persons have, by the kind providence of God and as the outward fruit of the gospel, attained to an intimate acquaintance of one another, although from different parishes, yet as members of one Church, of which Christ is the professed Head. After spending some time in considering privately together, and secretly alone, the too many undeniable proofs (from the light of the Word of God and our own woeful experience) of our own deadness and unfruitfulness, and the deadness and unfruitfulness of the day, with the prevailing of all manner of sin in the land, we have come to the following resolution, that is: To meet four times in the year, or as oft as shall be judged fit and most convenient, and in the places that shall be agreed upon, to humble ourselves before the Lord by prayer and supplication, that He would avert the threatened and deserved judgement (in which we acknowledge our own guilty hands) which is already making too visible a progress one year after another. It is generally owned by the most considerable part of ministers and professors that the Lord hath withdrawn His wonted presence, in a great measure, from His people and ordinances (and we own, though others would deny this, that we have daily experience of it), which calls for such a duty; and among other causes we briefly name the following:

1. The woeful deadness and decay that hath fallen on ourselves, our heart backslidings, our closet coldness, our family formality, our dry and careless reading of the Word of God, our barren minds as to meditation on the Word with love, profit and delight; from whence has proceeded an untender walk, unguarded expressions, carnality in heart, inclinations and actions, worldly in our minds and pursuits, resisting the remonstrances of our consciences, checks from providence and the Word of God, grieving the Holy Spirit, whereby our evidence of His love to us, and our interest in Christ, is darkened, which makes us go doubting in the dark.

2. The deadness and decay of the day we live in as to a work of the Spirit on the generation. There are few or none crying, "What shall I do to be saved?" The Lord hath been calling home His faithful labourers and people these many years bygone, and few rising in their room; whereby the hands of those that remain are weakened when they are not seeing a seed rising to

¹The following document is taken, with a minimum of editing, from William Findlater's *Memoir of Rev Robert Findlater*, Glasgow, 1840, pp 27-32. The final signatory, Robert Findlater (1753-1814), was the father of the subject of the *Memoir*, and the first 80 pages of the *Memoir* are devoted to an account of his life. He was buried in Kiltarn, in the same burying-ground as Thomas Hog. The document was probably drawn up at the house of Hector Holm (see below).

serve Him according to His promise, but instead of that, all manner of vice and immorality rising in our land – adultery, fornication and uncleanness among all ranks (of which it were to be wished that professors of religion were free), murders, robbery and thefts, hatred, malice, lying, Sabbath-breaking etc, contempt of godliness and the people of God, religion evil spoken of, and the sincere practisers of it branded and stigmatised as the troublers of the peace of Israel and as a people that turn the world upside down, which is a matter of lamentation, and should be a lamentation to us.

3. The low case of the Church of Christ and His cause in our land: great men setting up their power and interest to oppose Christ in His rights, prerogatives and members. In His rights as sole Head of the Church, and His prerogative to reign and rule in it; they (the great men) are thrusting in ministers on reclaiming congregations with the force of the law of *patronage* – ministers who have nothing in view but the fleece; their manner of entry and their after walk proves it is not sparing the flock but scattering them – which is a sin greatly to be mourned for, and has turned common in our day, and is practised without a parallel.

And when we add to this sin the sin of the judicatories of our Church, that so few of them witness for Christ and His members, with the neutrality of almost all professors in our day, which in the light of the Word is clear to be against Christ (Mark 9:40) and His interest, and nothing but men-pleasers – when they comply and fall in with whatever is proposed to them; they would not venture on the frown of men for a good conscience and the favour of God (how learned Peter and John divinity of God rather than men!) which [sin] we desire to acknowledge to be matter of humiliation before that – [namely] the professors of Christ are not *confessors* of Christ (O what can be found among a people to bring on wrath, that is not found in our land this day!); when to this we add corruption in doctrine, legalism generally taught (which is laying too much stress upon works), or of more refined pressing of evangelical duties without an eye to the Spirit of God. Some press duties so as they seem to think that their own reasonings are able to enforce a compliance, and more than that. As of old, so of late we hear that some broach awful errors, and that with impunity.

4. The case of the young generation, who are generally given up to irreligion, and contempt of all that is serious, despising even the form of religion. What will become of the cause of Christ and His interest in our land if they continue as they are?

And being together for the above causes we resolve to keep the following order, namely:

First. That each meeting shall choose a Preses [that is, a President] (only

for order's sake), whose province will be to read and sing a portion of the Word of God, and call one about to pray; and during the intervals betwixt the said duties, if one of us have a doubt upon which he would have the mind of his brethren, that each give his thoughts freely upon it for our mutual edification.

Second. That none of us bring any other person into this our meeting without consent of the rest asked and obtained.

Third. As the Word of God requireth that we should "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works", therefore if one or more of us see or hear anything unbecoming in the walk, conduct, or expressions of one another that we be free with one another according to the scripture rule: "Go tell thy brother his fault . . ." (Matt 18:15). "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke him and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev 19:17).

We are aware that this our meeting together out of different parishes will be misconstrued, but so far as we know ourselves, we have no divisive views in it, nor do we make a faction, and we desire to give none offence; but if the following of our duty give offence, we cannot help that. If we could meet unobserved it would be our choice – not that we are ashamed of our duty, to find out about which we have been at pains, and searched the Word of God and found it to be His command, and the exercise of His people in such a day as we live in, to meet together for prayer and spiritual conference as in Malachi 3:16: "Then they that feared the Lord spake . . . one to another". The command in Zephaniah 2:1-3 seems to be to the same purpose: "Gather yourselves together . . .", and Hebrews 10:24,25: "And let us consider one another . . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . and so much the more as ye see the day approaching".

These portions of Scripture, besides others that might be mentioned, prove that fellowship-meetings of the Lord's people, mutual prayer, and spiritual conference (being held within the bounds of men's station), are necessary duties and special means of life in a declining time, and of strengthening against the temptations of such a time. Wherefore seeing our call and warrant from the Word, the example of the people of God, and the Lord's dispensations in the day we live in calling for it, our own needy cases calling for it (being a day of famine), we have now come this length as to appoint the first Wednesday of November coming for our first quarterly meeting. And may those more near the Lord be stirred up for such a necessity in a day of so much deadness and lukewarmness that the Lord may justly complain as in Isaiah 64:7: "There is none that calleth on Thy name . . .". O for the spirit of prayer to cry, "Return, we beseech Thee, O God

of hosts, look down . . .”. “Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name”.

[The signatories were: Charles Ross, Tarbet; Daniel Denoon, Fearn; John Gair,² Loggie; John M’Nuctar,³ Loggie; John M’Inlay, Loggie; Donald Mitchell,⁴ Kilmuir; George Ross, schoolmaster, Calrichie; Hector Holm,⁵ Invergordon; Hugh Ross or Buie,⁶ Roskeen; Alexander Munro, sen, and Alexander Munro, jun, Kiltearn; and Robert Findlater, Drummond.]

Mbuma Zending Meeting 2005

Rev J MacLeod

On Saturday, April 30, the annual mission-day meeting of the Mbuma Zending was held. The more central and more convenient Geldermalsen venue being now permanently unavailable on account of the redevelopment of the site, the gathering this year took place in Utrecht. The change of venue, however, does not appear to have significantly affected the numbers attending and, by the time proceedings started at 10.30 am, over 4000 people were already seated in the arena.

As usual, the Mbuma Zending Board Chairman, Ds Tj de Jong, gave the opening address, in the course of which he extended a warm welcome to me as representing the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland among them. He referred to the work being done in Zimbabwe and Kenya and intimated that Mbuma Zending had recently increased its quarterly contributions to the work by 15%. Addresses were given by several ministers and one layman, who spoke more particularly to the children present. Apart from the writer’s

²John Gair was a relative of the celebrated Alexander Gair. A curious anecdote concerning him is given in John Noble, *Religious Life in Ross*, Inverness, 1909, pp 157-8.

³John M’Nuctar was “a pious and useful” catechist. See *Religious Life in Ross*, p 159.

⁴Donald Mitchell was catechist of Kilmuir, and regarded as one of the brightest Christians in Ross-shire, see *Religious Life in Ross*, pp 142-3, and John Kennedy, *Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, Inverness, 1897, pp 102-3. He died in 1833.

⁵Hector Holm was the “Gaius” of the Men of Ross-shire. He lived near the ferry at Invergordon and extended hospitality to many. John Macdonald, Ferintosh, stayed with him as a student on his way from Caithness to Aberdeen, and Hector was later instrumental in securing his call to Ferintosh. He was still alive in 1830; see John Kennedy, *Apostle of the North*, Inverness, 1932, pp 19,39,150,152; *Religious Life in Ross*, pp 201-3; *Days of the Fathers*, p 221.

⁶Hugh Ross or Buie, though unable to read, was one of the most eminent Men of Ross-shire. He died suddenly during dinner on Sabbath afternoon at Donald Sage’s manse at the age of 98, perhaps about 1830. In his early years he had been a hearer of James Fraser of Alness, author of the work on *Sanctification*; see Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, Wick, 1899, pp 317-8; *Religious Life in Ross*, pp 47-53; *Days of the Fathers*, pp 99-102.

address, and some brief remarks by Ds Tj de Jong at the beginning of the meeting, all the proceedings were in Dutch. The writer is unable to comment on the content of these addresses, but he can say that the atmosphere was cordial and that the support of our Dutch friends continues unabated. This was the forty-second consecutive mission-day gathering and their help over the years is unmeasurable. This year – on this one day alone – the sum collected was £22 000.

At the gathering, it was a pleasure to meet three members of our staff, all nursing sisters, who were home in Holland on well-earned furloughs: Peta van de Ridder, Gilia van Wijngaarden and Petra Beukers.

With Mr van den Breejen acting as precentor, the singing of the selected psalms by the thousands present – unaccompanied by instrumental music – was melodious and impressive. We would like to pay tribute again to the work done behind the scenes by Mr H van Vliet, the Secretary of Mbumba Zending. It is he who is largely responsible for organising these annual meetings, and the fact that everything goes so well, year after year, bears testimony to his ability. To him and his wife and also Mr and Mrs Slabberkoorn, in whose hospitable home we stayed overnight, we are especially grateful.

Address: To begin with, I would like to thank the Mbumba Zending Board for inviting me to attend this meeting and for giving me the opportunity of addressing once again this large gathering of people. Your continuing support of the mission work of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is, I assure you, much appreciated by the Foreign Missions Committee and by many throughout the Church, in the United Kingdom and abroad. It is appropriate that I should take this opportunity of thanking you most sincerely. There are many in Africa today who have benefited from the educational and medical facilities which the Church has provided, largely as a result of your generosity. But while we would all wish to see poor children in Africa given the same chance as children in Holland and Britain to receive a good education – and likewise sick people to receive help and treatment – we, above all, desire the salvation of never-dying souls. We hope that we are following in the footsteps of those who were first of all commissioned by the Saviour to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”. This is the duty that the great Head of the Church has laid upon us; but it is only through the blessing of the Holy Spirit that our preaching will lead sinners to repentance and salvation.

The prophet Isaiah, after labouring for many years, was found enquiring: “Who hath believed our *report*, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”. The *report* is, of course, the gospel, as the Apostle Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Romans. “But they have not all obeyed the *gospel*,” he wrote, as moved

by the Spirit of God, “for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” A report is something that is spread abroad and therefore heard. The gospel is the most wonderful and glorious report ever heard in this fallen world. It is “the gospel of peace”, “glad tidings of good things”; it is the report of what has been accomplished by God’s righteous Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, in coming to save lost and ruined sinners.

That is what we all are by nature, every one of us present here, whether we are young or old; by nature we are alienated from God and exposed to His wrath and curse on account of our sins. The gospel is a report of the amazing love of God to sinners. We teach that the eternal salvation of that multitude which no man can number of the race of Adam, whom Christ came to save, is to be traced back to His sovereign purpose, love and grace. We are told that those redeemed by the shed blood of Christ are to be “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”. Repentance and remission of sins are therefore to be preached in His name among all nations. The gospel is a report of the most wonderful events that this world has seen – events which are linked to man’s highest interests for eternity. It makes known the way of salvation through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God, the Lord of glory.

Since there is none righteous by nature – all having sinned and having come short of the glory of God – poor sinners need Christ as their Saviour, whatever their background, nationality or colour of skin may be. If they are to be saved, they must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. “There is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved.” But sinners cannot believe in one of whom they have not heard. Faith cometh by hearing, and it is the Word of God that they are to hear. That Word is the record that God has given to us of His Son. Moses and the Prophets spoke of His sufferings and the glory that was to follow – that is what they were instrumental in revealing – and it is the same theme that was taken up by the Apostles. “Unto whom it was revealed,” Peter wrote, “that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

We seek to follow Paul’s example. Whatever opposition he met with – from the Jews, who regarded the preaching of the cross as a stumbling block; and from the Greeks, who regarded it as foolishness – he steadfastly continued to “preach Christ crucified”. This was the gospel which was preached by Scottish ministers of old, some of whom found refuge in Holland in times of persecution. We firmly believe that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland,

whose mission work you support, is the true representative of the Reformation Church of Scotland. We are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth”. That gospel remains as unchanging as its Author – Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever”. When accompanied with power, it is “the arm of the Lord revealed”.

We appeal to the praying people of God present here to seek, at the throne of grace, that that mighty arm would be revealed in Zimbabwe and in Kenya – and, yes, also, throughout the nations of the world, Holland and Britain included. Nothing short of that is going to bring men to faith and repentance! May the One who has been given all power in heaven and in earth hasten the time when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

“The Lord Reigneth”

A Sermon Outline by *John Kennedy*

Psalm 97:1. *The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.*

Here is a statement, and a counsel. The statement is the grandest that can be uttered, and the call is addressed to the whole earth.

Jehovah reigneth. His right to reign rests upon what He is as Jehovah.

His is the throne of universal government.

His right, who can challenge?

He is infinitely above and eternally before all.

His actions are infinitely wise and holy.

He is perfectly effective in the fulfilment of His pleasure.

Jehovah Jesus reigneth. His is a Mediatorial government over the earth.

To His right as Jehovah belongs this government.

As Mediator all power is given to Him.

He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father.

He is the Word made flesh, on the throne of universal government.

He was the Man of sorrows, and died upon the cross.

He is upon the throne now to give eternal life to sinners.

The whole earth should rejoice. He rejoiced in the earth from everlasting.

His reign shall benefit all places of the earth.

His true Church should be glad of His reign.

He is their Prophet, Priest and King.

He gives the command to preach the gospel to all.

Some are attempting to cut the cords that bind Church and state.

Those still rebels. How awful such rebellion against Jehovah and His Jesus!

How can you prosper in this war? Death must be the result.

All His foes shall be for ever under His feet.

Those willingly subject to Jesus. Be glad for what He is.

Rejoice in the grace and efficiency of His reign.

Rejoice in being honoured to serve Him.

Rejoice in your prospects here and hereafter.

Rejoice in the future conquests of Christ on the earth. *Inverness, 2 July 1882*

Knowledge and Grace¹

J C Ryle

These verses show us, for one thing, *how useless knowledge is in religion, if it is not accompanied by grace in the heart.* We are told that some of our Lord's hearers knew clearly where Christ was to be born. They referred to Scripture, like men familiar with its contents. "Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" And yet the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened. Their own Messiah stood before them, and they neither received nor believed nor obeyed Him.

A certain degree of religious knowledge is, beyond doubt, of vast importance. Ignorance is certainly not the mother of true devotion, and helps nobody toward heaven. An "unknown God" can never be the object of a reasonable worship. Happy indeed would it be for Christians if they all knew the Scriptures as well as the Jews seem to have done when our Lord was on earth!

But while we value religious knowledge, we must take care that we do not overvalue it. We must not think it enough to know the facts and doctrines of our faith, unless our hearts and lives are thoroughly influenced by what we know. The very devils know the creed intellectually and "believe and tremble" but remain devils still (Jas 2:19). It is quite possible to be familiar with the letter of Scripture and to be able to quote texts appropriately and reason about the theory of Christianity, and yet to remain dead in trespasses and sins. Like many of the generation to which our Lord preached, we may know the Bible well and yet remain faithless and unconverted.

Heart knowledge, we must always remember, is the one thing needful. It is something which schools and universities cannot confer. It is the gift of God. To find out the plague of our own hearts and hate sin, to become

¹Taken from Ryle's comments on John 7:40-53 in his *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2.

familiar with the throne of grace and the fountain of Christ's blood, to sit daily at the feet of Jesus and humbly learn of Him – this is the highest degree of knowledge which mortal man can attain to. Let anyone thank God who knows anything of these things. He may be ignorant of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Mathematics, but he shall be saved.

Book Reviews

The Acceptable Sacrifice, 128 pages, £3.75; ***Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ***, 240 pages, £4.50; both by John Bunyan, paperback, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Spurgeon once said that you could prick Bunyan anywhere and you would find his blood bibline. We may add that his writings, like all blood, come warm from the heart. Both these classics by the tinker of Bedford bear out these claims.

The Acceptable Sacrifice is an extended exposition of Psalm 51:17: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise". He writes on page 45: "Once being at an honest woman's house, I, after some pause, asked her how she did. She said, 'Very badly'. I asked her if she was sick? She answered, 'No'. 'What then', said I, 'are any of your children ill?' She told me, 'No'. 'What,' said I, 'is your husband amiss, or do you go back in the world?' 'No, no,' said she, 'but I am afraid I shall not be saved'. And broke out with heavy heart saying, 'Ah, Goodman Bunyan! Christ and a pitcher; if I had Christ, though I went and begged my bread with a pitcher, it would be better with me than it is now!' This woman had her heart broken, this woman wanted Christ, this woman was concerned for her soul." The nature, causes and necessity of a broken heart are portrayed in a manner calculated to grip the imagination and instruct the mind.

Bunyan is equally instructive in his book, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*. Here he expands on John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out". When dealing with the first part of the verse, Bunyan alludes to the covenant of grace and observes "that this contrivance resolved itself into a covenant between these Persons in the Godhead, which involves giving on the Father's part and receiving on the Son's. 'All that the Father giveth Me'" (page 131).

It is however in removing stumbling blocks out of the way of sinners coming to Christ that he excels – in keeping the ways clear and the signs large on the ways to the city of refuge. Dealing on page 45 with objections raised in the mind of the seeker, he writes: "Objection 5: 'But', says another, 'I fear

I come too late; I doubt I have stayed too long; I am afraid the door is shut’.

“Answer: You can never come too late to Jesus Christ, if you do come. This is manifest by two instances.” He goes on to cite, by way of removing this difficulty, the case of the man who had been idle all day but came at the eleventh hour. At the end of the day he received the same pay as the rest (Matt 20:14,15). The second case cited is the thief on the cross: “Behold the Lord Jesus, when this wicked one even now desired mercy at His hands, tells him, and that without the least reflection upon him for his former misspent life: ‘Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise’ (Luke 23:43). Let no man turn the grace of God into wantonness. My design is to encourage the coming soul.”

Altogether these are two books worth having and worth reading on these fundamental subjects.

(Rev) J R Tallach

Protestant View

ARCIC

The Counter Reformation commenced formally with the Council of Trent (1551-1563), and continued through the First (1869-1870) and Second (1962-1965) Vatican Councils. It is represented today by the less formal Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commissions (ARCIC). Though these Commissions do not speak with ecclesiastical authority, members are appointed by the Vatican and the Archbishop of Canterbury. ARCIC has been described by its Roman Catholic co-secretary as “the official instrument of theological dialogue between the Catholic Church (sic) and the Churches of the Anglican Communion”. Reports are submitted to the Roman and Anglican authorities as a basis for a consensus which is intended to result in “the restoration of full ecclesial communion” between these bodies.

The first ARCIC began work in 1970 at the instigation of Pope Paul VI and Anglican Archbishop Ramsey, and its final report on Eucharist, Ministry and Authority was published in 1982 just before the Pope visited Britain. The statements on Eucharist and Ministry were accepted by a majority of the Church of England’s General Synod as substantially consonant with the Thirty-Nine Articles and the statement on Authority was considered sufficiently acceptable to be the basis of further study. The outstanding problem was how the primacy of the pope would fit in with collegiality in the structures of the Church, the proposal being that the Bishop of Rome should be the head of a reunited church.

A second ARCIC, with Evangelical Anglican participants, was established in 1983 as a result of the Pope’s visit to Archbishop Runcie, and still exists. It reported previously on salvation in relation to faith, justification, good works

and the Church. It concluded that each side, at the time of the Reformation, misunderstood and caricatured the views of the other, that there is no fundamental difference and that both views can be amalgamated. In these reports the compromises are all on the side of professed Protestants. Roman dogma (with the practices implicated in it, including penance, masses, indulgences and purgatory) emerges unscathed even when presented in deceptively conciliatory terms. ARCIC uses what a commentator in 1987 described as “its recontextualising methodology as a means for minimising the theological differences of the Reformation”. The “spin” of a current participant is: “The ‘ARCIC method’, which is by now well tried and tested, is to go behind entrenched positions or statements of doctrines which have proved divisive and to see, as much as we can, what, as Anglican and Roman Catholic Christians, we hold in common. Often ARCIC has used new language or perspectives, or revisited old language and perspectives, to bring out what we have in common and what we can say together”.

ARCIC II has just published its latest report, entitled “Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ”, officially launched in the UK on May 19 in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, where the Westminster Assembly laboured over our *Confession of Faith*. This document affirms that “it is impossible to be faithful to Scripture without giving attention to the person of Mary” (para 77), whom it regards as being, of all believers, closest to the Saviour, having a distinctive place in the economy of grace and typifying and embodying the elect of whom Paul speaks in Romans 8:30. It professes to show that the claims that Mary was sinless from her conception and that, at the end of her life, she was taken soul and body into heaven – and also the practice of praying to Mary – are “consonant with Scripture”. Rome and Canterbury are said to be “heirs to a rich tradition which recognises Mary as ever virgin, and sees her as the new Eve and as type of the Church” (para 51).

In support of the 1854 papal proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary it states: “In view of her vocation to be the mother of the Holy One (Luke 1:35), we can affirm together that Christ’s redeeming work reached back in Mary to the depths of her being, and to her earliest beginnings. This is not contrary to the teaching of Scripture” (para 59).

In support of the 1950 papal proclamation of Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven it states: “We affirm together the teaching that God has taken the Blessed Virgin Mary in the fullness of her person into His glory as consonant with Scripture, and only to be understood in the light of Scripture” (para 77).

In support of praying to Mary and the saints it states: “Asking our brothers and sisters, on earth and in heaven, to pray for us, does not contest the unique mediatory work of Christ”, which operates through human beings (para 68). It is claimed that “asking the saints to pray for us is not to be excluded as unscriptural, though not taught by the Scriptures to be a required element of

life in Christ” (para 70). “Affirming together unambiguously Christ’s unique mediation, which bears fruit in the life of the Church, we do not consider the practice of asking Mary and the saints to pray for us as communion-dividing . . . we believe that there is no continuing theological reason for ecclesial division on these matters” (para 79).

The Roman Catholic co-secretary of ARCIC anticipates “that a third phase of work for ARCIC will be initiated in due course”. No doubt this will result in concluding that, if something is allegedly not denied in Scripture, it can be accepted on the basis of tradition or papal pronouncement and so open the way to full accord.

Whatever deluded Anglicans involved may think, ARCIC is an instrument whereby Rome seeks to regain control of their Church. The Anglican Canon Sagovsky, speaking at the UK launch of this document, asserted that “as Anglicans and Roman Catholics, we believe that through our baptism into Christ we already share a deep unity and we look forward in prayer and hope to the day when we shall no longer be separated at the eucharist. . . . We are now one more significant step along the road to unity and that is something truly to celebrate. But we must recognise that this is only a step and we cannot and should not pretend we yet have all the answers or have fully addressed the questions in some very difficult areas. . . . We think ARCIC is pointing a way forward, when we suggest to our authorities that, though diversity of Marian doctrine and understanding exists and will doubtless continue to exist within and between our Communions, the breadth of that diversity is not such as to justify continued separation at the eucharist.”

This note cannot provide an in-depth critique of the falsehoods which ARCIC endeavours to clothe with Biblical authority. Its purpose is merely to alert readers to how far down the road to incorporation in the Roman system the Anglican Church has travelled, with all the sad consequences for our nation. Calls for disestablishment and agitation for abolition of the Protestant constitution of the Throne combine with subtle means such as ARCIC to prepare the Church of England for complete capitulation. While we do not trust in princes or men’s sons for the preservation of truth among us, we cannot but mourn over how the foundations are being destroyed. *HMC*

Notes and Comments

The Church of Scotland General Assembly

The General Assembly met in Edinburgh on Saturday, May 21, for seven days. After the new Moderator, Rev David Lacy, was installed, the Lord High Commissioner, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, addressed the Assembly.

The Moderator was in the news shortly after his installation because in an interview he criticised the Scottish Executive's proposals to allow homosexual couples to adopt children. "I believe marriage is the way God intended society to procreate and strengthen itself," he said. It is a sign of the decadence of our generation that his remarks were condemned by "equality groups" and MSPs as "very offensive" and "intolerant".

Probably the most concerning business for commissioners was the Report of the Council of Assembly, which has restructured the Church's many boards and committees into six councils in the hope that these will operate more efficiently and cost-effectively. A former moderator complained that there were no long-term plans for dealing with the Church's operating deficit of £2.7 million. He pointed out that "if it continues to be placed on the ministry, it could cause problems, as it may mean a cap on the number of ministers."

According to a press report, there is a fundamental issue behind unease about the Council of Assembly: while it was given *carte blanche* to seek an answer to the challenges the Church faces, some believe the body took to itself powers it was not given in its remit. "Indeed, some are saying that, while the Church of Scotland avoided having bishops, in appointing the Council of Assembly it could inadvertently have imposed a set of 'archbishops' upon itself."

Commissioners were encouraged by the Board of Ministry report of an increasing interest in training for the ministry. In 2004, a total of 75 people, compared with 59 in 2003, have applied. Of these 75, no fewer than 36 are women, who very obviously dismiss the Scripture prohibition: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim 2:12) – which should have taken away the sense of encouragement!

The convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee reported that warm discussions with the Free Church of Scotland have developed into substantial theological engagement. He expressed the hope that a proposed covenant being presented for discussion throughout the two Churches will be formally agreed at the General Assemblies of 2006. The Free Church itself says in its Ecumenical Relations Report that it "believes in a national Presbyterian Church and would like to be able to co-operate [with the Church of Scotland] in church planting in new housing areas." We ask, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). But if they can be so agreed as to walk together in these times of ecclesiastical laxity, it can only be by the dilution of Free Church teaching and practice.

A representative of the Roman Church addressed the Assembly, which underlines the fact that the Church of Scotland is no longer truly Protestant. And the convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee welcomed the new Pope's statement that his first job was to unify all Christians and to have "open and sincere dialogue" with followers of other religions. "When [Ratzinger's]

name was mentioned [as the possible new pope],” the Convener added, “we had fears because he did say about two years ago that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true church. That kind of made us uneasy, but that was Cardinal Ratzinger speaking, now as Pope Benedict he has a different role. . . . His statement has sent huge waves of relief around the world.” Since when, we may ask, has the Roman Catholic Church ceased to believe that it is the only true church? Either the Convener is gullible or has the blindness which afflicts those who refuse to see; he has cause to be alarmed rather than relieved by the Pope’s statement.

In seeking to meet the needs of the people, the Church of Scotland, is ever resorting to new methods, but no success is possible until it returns to the preaching of the old, full-orbed gospel. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16). *NMR*

Financial Crisis in the Church of England

When a newspaper such as *The Times* gives front-page coverage to a report of a financial crisis in the Church of England, it must surely be one of very significant proportions. Apparently the situation is so dire that bishops are being forced to consider “radical moves including cutting clergy numbers by up to a third and making worshippers meet in each other’s homes.” Notwithstanding our opposition to Episcopacy as a form of church government, and our disagreement with some of the doctrinal statements in the Thirty-Nine Articles, we find it sad that a professedly Protestant Church should come to be in such a low condition.

But how has this come about? The answer, in our view, is obvious: it is the outcome of a long course of backsliding. The Church south of the border was not as thoroughly purged of the errors and heresies of Rome as the Church of Scotland was, under the leadership of Knox, and in the seventeenth century the English Church’s refusal to adhere to the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant was clearly detrimental to her spiritual interests. Her subsequent departure from her own defining statements of doctrine and the disregard of the Regulative Principle was to lead to the introduction of unscriptural, God-dishonouring ritualism in her public worship.

And then there was Rome with her Jesuits spearheading the campaign to destroy the Church of England and bring “Mary’s Dowry” back within her pale. It would appear that Rome arrogantly views that longed-for prize as now almost within her grasp. Recent events, including the well-publicised deference to the Papacy, after the death of the Pope, by the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister and the agreement on Marian doctrine known as the Seattle Statement, makes Rome more confident that this will be the outcome of her policy.

The following quotation, written by one of her priests, sums up Rome’s

candid assessment of the present situation: “Once consecrated, England has never been deconsecrated. Can the promise of God be revoked? Surely not! Men can desecrate it but the promise remains. The interesting thing is that Our Lady, far from being a source of division amongst non-Orthodox English “Christians” in recent times, has become a focus of unity and even renewed devotion. The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for example, was a Society created in 1967 and has an active Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist participation. Arguably there has been more agreement and quiet commitment to the Mother of God amongst “Christians” of many different traditions over recent years . . . it might not be too fanciful to suppose that the English are now happily rediscovering the role of Mary in our “Christian” lives if not yet our national life.” (The inverted commas around the words *Christian* and *Christians* are ours and they are placed there because we regard the Church of Rome as unworthy of that name.)

Even the compilers of the report, which is to be submitted to the General Synod in July, bemoan the fact that the Anglican Church has allowed itself to “drift apart from society”, thus undermining its mission. According to the newspaper, the authors say that “some parts of the Church are little more than a club for existing members”. There is some admission of guilt to be detected here, but no indication of repentance, nor awareness of the danger of being absorbed by Rome. How the General Synod responds to this Report remains to be seen. As things are, it is to be feared that the blind will continue to lead the blind. Reducing clergy numbers and selling off its assets will not save the Church of England – only Divine intervention and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will do that. That is what we all need! JM

The European Union Constitution

The people have spoken. For too long the EU machine has rushed on apparently unstoppable. Now, for the time being at least, the No votes in the French and Dutch referendums have stopped it in its tracks. And in both cases there were significant majorities on substantial turnouts.

Concern about European integration has been repeatedly expressed in these pages, and not without good reason. For the United Kingdom to be part of a bloc of countries with a strong built-in Roman Catholic majority is manifestly not for our spiritual good.

A columnist in *Time* magazine confirms what has often been denied: that, from the start, “the ‘European project’ (as its fans call it) always had a political dimension. The Treaty of Rome committed its signatories to an ‘ever-closer union’.” He goes on: “For more than 30 years, most of those whose job it was to make the EU work hoped and believed that, one day, Europe would take its place in the world as a mighty, democratic, federal state”. He backs up his view with a statement from an aide to Paul-Henri Spaak – Belgian Foreign

Minister in 1957, when the Treaty of Rome was signed. At the ceremony, Spaak turned to the company and asked: “Do you think we have been putting [down] the first stone of a new Roman Empire?” It would be a great mercy if no further stones were added to the new Roman Empire, and indeed if demolition were to take place.

Principal Macleod and the “Christian Vote”

Many readers of the *West Highland Free Press* were no doubt shocked to read the views of Rev Donald Macleod, Principal of the Free Church College and Professor of Systematic Theology, in a recent column. He bewails the loss by Labour candidate Calum MacDonald of his Western Islands parliamentary seat. He claims that it was especially the “Christian vote” which went against Mr MacDonald. He refers to the former MP missing votes in Parliament on abortion and homosexual issues and says, “Had I been an MP . . . I would have been in even deeper trouble: I would have tended to vote on the ‘liberal’ side”. To suggest, with Principal Macleod, that social abortion and the homosexual lifestyle are not condemned by Scripture, because abortion and homosexuality are “two issues never even referred to by Jesus”, is a practical denial of the whole Bible being “the word of Christ” (Col 3:16).

He then scoffingly asks, “What is the real concern behind those so-called Christian values? On the face of things, the Christian Right simply want ‘laws against abortion and laws against homosexuals’. That means one simple thing: criminalise these activities. This, we are asked to believe, is now the supreme and overriding concern of a Christian MP: declare homosexual acts a crime; declare same-sex partnerships a crime, like bigamy; declare embryo research a crime; declare abortion a crime. The end result would be prisons full of gays. For the ‘abortion doctors’ we would need gallows, since they are ‘murderers’, a concept slightly befogged by the fact that God Himself permits 50 per cent of pregnancies to abort spontaneously. Why is the Christian Right doing so little to end this ‘natural’ Slaughter of the Innocents?”

Christians cannot but respond with the question, Is it really a Professor of Systematic Theology in a reformed church who wrote these words? Alarmingly, it is. If his scornful article reflects his mindset in instructing his students, the Free Church must fear for the future of its ministry. NMR

Damaging Revision of Scottish Adoption Laws

Four years ago, the Scottish Executive set up a review group to consider existing adoption laws. The Executive has accepted the “overwhelming majority” of the group’s recommendations, and intends to change the law “at the earliest opportunity”. Euan Robson, the Executive’s deputy education minister, explained that the revised laws will enable unmarried couples, including same-sex couples, to adopt jointly. He added that unmarried couples could “to all intents

and purposes” adopt at present, but only one could actually apply to adopt while the other had to seek a residence order.

Despite its fine words about their proposals being in “the best interests of the child”, the Scottish Executive is acting disgracefully by thus promoting homosexual relationships and undermining marriage. Worse still, it would put adoptive children in situations which would lead them to believe that these immoral relationships are right, to the children’s serious detriment.

The details of the proposed legislation will now be the subject of a public consultation exercise, but we fear that a deaf ear will again be turned to the Christian viewpoint. In practice, the Executive is showing its heartless contempt of the Saviour’s command, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not” (Mark 10:14). NMR

Church Information

Student Received

At its meeting on 22 March 2005, the Northern Presbytery, on the recommendation of the Dingwall/Beaully Kirk Session, received Mr George B MacDonald BSc as a student for the ministry of the gospel in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. (Rev) George G Hutton, Presbytery Clerk.

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