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## Salvation *Is* Possible

Last month we considered how, in spite of its apparent impossibility, God did provide for the salvation of sinners. For, as the angel told the Virgin Mary, “with God nothing shall be impossible”.

There is a further, related matter. We may think of an individual sinner after long years of hardening under the gospel. He knows the truth; he has had many opportunities to prepare for eternity, many opportunities to turn from his sin and look to the Saviour. Is there, we may ask, any hope of him ever being saved, especially if his mental powers are failing and he is unlikely to be able to attend the means of grace much longer? Or we may think of the teenager who has left home and turned her back on the gospel as she immerses herself in a life of sinful pleasures. Is there any hope now that she will believe the gospel and be saved? Or we may think of the multitudes who have no religious background and live out their lives as if there was no God and no hereafter. Is there any possibility that significant numbers of them will come into contact with the truth in such a way that they would be impressed by it, believe in Christ and begin to lead godly lives?

The answer in each case seems obvious. If not quite a definite *No*, it is likely to be very close to it. But we should remember the words of the angel: “With God nothing shall be impossible”. And no matter how much we have seen within our lifetimes of hardness, wilful rebellion and sheer indifference, we have also seen and read of instances of God’s remarkable dealings with such sinners, whom He has brought into His kingdom.

Yet we should also be conscious of the difficulty in any sinner being converted – indeed, its complete impossibility if we only take account of human power. We ought to see the resemblance to every group of fallen humanity as we read the account of the bones in the valley which Ezekiel saw in his vision: they were “very many . . . and . . . very dry” (Ezek 37:2). Each natural man is totally devoid of spiritual life; he has no power to turn from sin (as distinct from particular *sins*), however clearly the preacher may point to its evil and the fearfulness of its consequences; he has no ability to respond in a positive way to the gospel, however attractively presented. We might almost

be surprised that, when the prophet was asked, “Son of man, can these bones live?” he answered as positively as he did: “O Lord God, Thou knowest”.

God’s instruction to Ezekiel was: “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord” (Ezek 37:4). But how could bones hear? And, although a significant transformation took place as a result – when “the bones came together” and “the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above” – “there was no breath in them”. Which meant that they were still dead bodies. So, whatever changes may take place under the preaching of the gospel, it is impossible for such means to bring spiritual life into even one soul apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. This is illustrated by the further command given to the prophet; he was to prophesy: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live”. And he recounts what happened in his vision: “So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army”. Which shows us that, however dead, spiritually speaking, a sinner or a group of sinners may be, the Spirit is well able to bring them to life through prophesying – that is, through the preaching of the gospel. And we are to call on Him to do so.

One might be tempted to imagine that there are at least a few individuals – perhaps some brought up in godly homes – who would readily submit to Christ. Not so. No one could have been more promising than the rich young ruler who came to the Saviour with the question: “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Mt 19:16). Yet this man had no real understanding of his spiritual need. When confronted with some of the commandments, he claimed: “All these things have I kept from my youth up”; and he asked, “What lack I yet?” He had no sense of sin, which showed that he had no idea of the wide demands of God’s law, or of His holiness who made such demands. The young man made it obvious that he was still spiritually dead. And as a result, “he went away” from Christ; he rejected the Saviour, though he did so sorrowfully. It was with a sense of the unlikeliness of anyone turning to Christ – when such a hopeful young man refused to follow Him – that the disciples asked: “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus answered: “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”, which is the appropriate response to all such questions.

The fact is, as the Psalmist sang: “Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee” (Ps 45:5). Christ reigns as the exalted King, and He has real power in His hands. He has authority to send the Holy Spirit, who “will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement” (John 16:8), which is how the gospel call

becomes effective. Times without number the preacher may, as an ambassador, bring to his unconverted hearers Christ's call: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Is 45:22), without there being the slightest effect – except that unbelievers are becoming ever more hardened in sin by their resistance. Yet, when these words are applied by the Holy Spirit to a sinner, there is an effect; the impossible becomes possible; the sinner looks to Christ and is saved.

Was there ever a sinner so unlikely to be saved as Manasseh? He had wilfully thrown away his godly father's spiritual legacy; he had turned enthusiastically to a life of utter wickedness and cruelty – he "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another". It must have seemed that he was altogether ripe for some remarkable judgement, that there was no possibility of him ever experiencing mercy. One would not be surprised to hear that some of God's children assumed it was pointless to pray for him any longer. But other of the Lord's followers would not have been able to stop praying for their king, and their petitions were heard, for with God nothing is impossible. So we read of Manasseh as a captive in Babylon: "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplication . . . . Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God" (2 Chr 33:12,13).

What made the difference? It was not his affliction as such; many others have suffered similar troubles but have become more rebellious against God and more resistant to His truth; it was the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. However hard Manasseh's heart was, and it was remarkably hard, it was by no means too hard for the Spirit of the Lord to soften. However rebellious he had become, it was still well within the power of the Holy Spirit to make him willing to turn from his sins and follow his father's God.

And however hardened in sin people may be today, however rebellious, however far from the Lord, however ignorant of the truth, however securely in the grasp of the god of this world, it is not beyond the power of the Spirit to make them new creatures in Christ Jesus. Therefore nothing – not the power of Satan to deceive multitudes of sinners into ignoring the welfare of their souls nor the eagerness with which such sinners go down the broad way to destruction – should discourage us from praying for individuals or nations or for the whole world. Nothing can hinder God's purposes in salvation; Christ Himself declared: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37). The declaration is sure to be fulfilled. And when all the children of God will gather together on Christ's right hand after the resurrection, it will be altogether beyond the power of man to count them.

## Wisdom's House<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by R M M'Cheyne

Proverbs 9:1-6. *Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

Wisdom here spoken of is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This is plain: (1) From His eternity, described in Proverbs 8:22,30,31. This is true of none but the Lord Jesus. He only was with God in the beginning, before all creatures were. (2) From His having the Holy Spirit: "Behold I will pour out My Spirit unto you" (Prov 1:23). But it is Christ alone who has received the Holy Spirit and pours it out according to His will: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zec 12:10). (3) From the name given in Luke 11:49: "Therefore also said the Wisdom of God". So that in this elegant Old Testament parable we have a sweet and inviting representation of the love and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1. The preparation He has made (vv 1,2).

1. *A house*: "Wisdom hath builded her house". This house may mean two things: (1) *The invisible Church, which Christ is now building*: "Even He shall build the temple of the Lord: and He shall bear the glory" (Zec 6:13). "Upon this rock I will build My Church" (Matt 16:18). "Whose house are we" (Heb 3:6). Just as it was Solomon, the prince of peace, who built the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, so it is Christ, the great Prince of peace, the King of glory, who builds up this house. His hands have laid the foundation; His hands shall also finish it. He chooses the stones, brings them out of the quarry of nature, lays them on the foundation: "I will lay thy foundations". This is the house sinners are invited to enter: Come and be part of "the spiritual house"; come and be one of the living stones; come before He brings out the headstone with shoutings.

(2) *The many-mansioned house*: "In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). "For we know that if our earthly

<sup>1</sup>Taken, slightly edited from *Life and Remains, Letters, Lectures and Poems*, published in New York in 1849. This and another sermon which is expected to appear next month, DV, are not included in the usual British editions of M'Cheyne's works or in the volumes published last year by the Banner of Truth Trust.

house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1). "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb 13:14). This is the house into which Christ will bring all His redeemed at last. Here we live in crazy dwellings that will soon be a heap of smouldering ruins. But Wisdom hath builded her house, and invites poor helpless sinners to take refuge there: Come to Me, and I will provide you a home for eternity – "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens".

2. *The pillars*: "She hath hewn out her seven pillars". Pillars in the Bible seem always to describe eminent believers – not merely stones, but stones which are used to support other stones of the temple: "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them" (1 Sam 2:8). "I bear up the pillars of it" (Ps 75:3). "I have made thee an iron pillar" (Jer 1:18). "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars" (Gal 2:9). And this is what all who overcome will be made: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev 3:12). Of these pillars there are seven, a perfect number – enough to bear up the temple of God, enough to give it perfect beauty and proportion. God will never be without a sufficient number of eminent believers in the world to maintain His cause and bear His name. He hath hewed them; they are all His own workmanship. They are the work of His own hands. By His Word, mercies and afflictions, He hath hewed them. He gives them all their beauty, grace and stability. This is the house you are invited to enter – where patriarchs and apostles dwell – to share in the peace and joy of John and holy Paul.

3. *The feast*: "She hath killed her beasts" (v 2). The peace and joy and holiness to be had in Christ are here described under the image of a feast. So: "In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast" (Is 25:6). And: "Ho, every one that thirsteth" (Is 55:1). And: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fallings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage" (Matt 22:4). So here: "*She hath killed her beasts*". This clearly points to the finished atonement of Christ. Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. With dying breath He said, "It is finished." He is the Lamb as it had been slain from the foundation of the world. It is a finished atonement that you are invited to share in. The great redemption is complete. Christ has died. Christ has not now to die. All His sufferings are past; and if any of you are willing to take Him as your atonement, you are welcome.

"*She hath mingled her wine.*" This clearly points to the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the new wine of the kingdom, "that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak". This also

is free to sinners. "*She hath furnished her table.*" These things are not only in the house, but spread upon the table. All things are now ready. All this is free and ready for sinners now. It is spread out. There is no need of delay.

## **2. The messengers.**

1. *She hath sent forth her maidens*, or young damsels. Prophets, apostles, ministers, missionaries are here called the maidens of Wisdom. No doubt the word is beautiful, suited to the rest of the parable. The Saviour is set forth as a queen, so that His ministers are well represented as maidens.

But there are also other reasons: (1) *On account of their weakness*. The ministers of Christ are not compared to wily statesmen, but to simple maidens. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise. And God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." God has seldom chosen to convert many by men of gigantic mind and attainments, lest we should glory in man. God often blesses weaker brethren, that He may get all the glory.

(2) *On account of the purity of their lives*. Those whom Wisdom sends are in her own image. Christ first sanctifies, and then sends. Ministers should be like Him whom they preach. Hear how Paul speaks: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (1 Thess 2:10). And this he could say without pride or boasting. Hear how Samuel speaks: "Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed, whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you" (1 Sam 12:3). Hear what Paul says to Timothy: "A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). "Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without." Ah pray, brethren, that your ministers may be kept humble and holy. We have more temptations than you. Satan aims most at standard-bearers.

2. *She crieth upon the highest places in the city*. This is the way Christ did when He was on earth in the days of his flesh. How often He stood by the Lake of Galilee and cried to the multitudes that thronged the shore: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" Once He stood in the midst of the temple, and on the great day of the feast He cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." And His last cry over this fallen world was: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." He cries still. We are but the mouthpiece of Christ. He cries by

us: "God doth beseech you by us". We are but a voice; it is Jesus that speaks. He cries in your mercies; He cries in your distresses; He cries through His ministers. He is still carrying on His grand prophetic office, and you are called to hear His voice; "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me".

**3. The persons invited.** *Those who are simple*, and lack understanding. So Proverbs 1:22: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" Simple ones are those who are ignorant of their danger. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov 22:3). Those among you who do not know the weight of your sins, who do not know the plague of your own heart, who do not know that you are over the depths of hell, who are smiling and happy when you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Simple ones are those who are easily deceived by the devil, "who are taken captive by him at his will". Ah, how many of you there are here who are opposed to the truth, who hate serious preaching! Why? You are taken captive. How many of you are taken up with a creature that shuts out all the glories of eternity!

*Without heart:* "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart" (Hos 7:11). How many of you have no heart for Christ! You see no beauty in Him, "no form nor comeliness that [you] should desire Him". You have no heart for prayer. You do not love it; you turn away from it with loathing. No heart for holiness, for the pleasures of God and of heaven. You have a feeling of nausea at the very thought of them.

Such Jesus invites – welcomes, presses – to close with Him. True, Jesus invites His own: "I love them that love Me"; "Come, My people, enter into thy chambers"; "O My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock". True, Jesus invites those who have a sense of sin: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "Ho, every one that thirsteth"; "I will give to him that is athirst". Yet it is as true that Jesus here invites simple ones, those that have no heart for divine things. Ah brethren, many of you are like Gallio, "who cared for none of these things". You have no heart for preaching or praying – no heart for Christ and the eternal world. All your heart is taken up about this world – about your lusts and pleasures. Ah silly doves, Jesus calls for you and does not wish you to perish. You may perish; you may sink into your grave; but it will be with the voice of Jesus ringing in your ear: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"

#### **4. The invitation.**

1. "*Forsake the foolish, and live.*" If ever you are to be saved, you must forsake the foolish. Solomon tells you plainly: "A companion of fools shall

be destroyed” (Prov 13:20). Hear what David said: “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for God hath heard the voice of my weeping” (Ps 6:8). Even though they should be those of your own household, yet God’s command is clear: “Forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house” (Ps 45:10). “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Ah, how many poor souls have been carried away captive and led down to hell, all through foolish companions! Forsake the foolish, and live. You say you cannot. Why? Are they more precious than salvation? If you will be the friend of the world, you must be the enemy of God.

2. “*Come, eat of My bread.*” This is explained in John 6:53: “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you”. You must personally close with Christ and live upon Him as one who, when hungry, eats and drinks and really enjoys the feast. It is not the man that hears of a feast or sees it who enjoys it, but only he that sits down and eats and drinks. So those only who close with Christ are saved through Him – who take Him as their righteousness, and feed upon Him as their strength and daily life.

**Application:** 1. Amazing love, that calls you to a feast, and not to hell!  
 2. Those of you that do not care are the very persons called.  
 3. If you do not obey His call, you will soon be in the very depths of hell.

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## John Macdonald of Calcutta

### 4. A Preacher Used by God

*Rev Neil M Ross*

**H**aving noted that John Macdonald died in Calcutta in 1847, we now glance back at some of the striking features of his life of devoted and unstinted service to his Master. Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ was what John Macdonald lived for above everything else. For this honourable work he could not substitute any other, however pleasurable and profitable. The characteristics of his preaching, says Tweedie, were “solid rather than brilliant, and durable rather than striking,” but “his discourses were marked with a rich unction of evangelical truth. The depth and variety of his thoughts, as well as the whole structure of his sermons, showed with what diligent care they were prepared; while the seriousness and pathos of their delivery made it always evident that not to please, but to profit, the souls of his hearers was the one object of his preaching.”

He “was trained first in the school of his father, whom he regarded perhaps as, upon the whole, the chief of living preachers,” notes Tweedie. He was



also moulded or largely influenced by the profound and spiritual views of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, who were his favourite authors, and therefore “his theology was massive and substantial, while in opening up its treasures, he was fearless and undaunted, but never harsh”. Although mathematics was his favourite subject in college, we are informed that there was “little abstract reasoning in his style, or not much to indicate that he could master the difficulties of higher mathematics, but there was much that was far better – the *results* of a reason matured and invigorated by such exercises”.

He deplored the kind of preaching that was the hallmark of emerging young preachers. “They can give a *fine* discourse,” he wrote to a friend, “they have good styles and composition, pretty ideas, some acute reasonings and, perhaps, an excellent arrangement, but how little of the gospel, of the leading and fundamental doctrines of redemption, do they bring forward! How little of *real divinity* have they in their discourses! If they do bring forward these, do they so like men convinced of their supreme importance, pressing, nay forcing, them on their hearers?”

John Macdonald’s own preaching was characterised by an uncommonly searching directness. With regard to his very first sermon, we noted his comment: “The more close and faithful it was, the more strength did I feel”. He sought increasingly, says his biographer, “to ‘come to close quarters’ with men about their souls, taking Knox and others for his model”. When he read the Reformer’s life again, he said in his typically self-deprecatory manner: “What a poor, soft coward am I! Lord, help me to be bold for Thee!” But he was in fact most faithful and fearless in applying the truth to all classes of hearer.

At the same time he ever felt his need of the help of the Holy Spirit. Tweedie observes that at an early stage in his spiritual struggles, when searching the Scriptures and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, “he was led to entertain those profound convictions regarding the need of the Spirit’s teaching which eventually signalled him among preachers, and formed the explanation of his success in winning souls”.

Prayer was constantly connected with his preaching. “Prayer preceded, prayer accompanied, and prayer followed all his efforts as an ambassador for Christ.” After preaching he often recorded his prayers of thanks for help given and blessing granted, but he also confessed his sins in holy duties. Tweedie says that “his cry was, ‘Vile, vile indeed I am,’ and that his Lord heard him bemoaning himself”.

His preparation for the pulpit was not curtailed even in his busiest London days. It was rather the reverse. “Again and again,” we read, “he refers to the need of systematic preparation for the pulpit, and again and again does

he condemn its neglect. Though he rarely wrote out his sermons at length, he has been known to study nine or ten successive hours on the days dedicated to preparation for the Sabbath; and his diary clearly exhibits the solemn importance which he attached to such work." Like the servants of God in every age he had his trials in preparing to preach. On one Saturday he recorded that, having been severely harassed that day about his choice of subject for the Sabbath, "I have begged from the Lord, and He has not left me empty. O for His mighty converting Spirit!"

He also had deep confidence in the power of the bare word of Scripture in the hand of the Spirit of God. He wrote to a friend: "Nothing will do but 'Thus saith the Lord'. I have tried the wisdom of words, the pathos of feeling, the power of imagination; but I find one 'Thus saith the Lord: Hear, ye *dry bones,*' better than them all. When I have *that*, I feel as if standing on a rock; I feel as if I had a weapon that will not shiver in my hand; I feel that I am safe, and that they to whom I speak have to reckon with Him and not with me. . . . There is in a text of Scripture a something that sticks to the conscience whether men please or not; nay, sometimes so adheres that after many days it puts forth its germ and springs up into life eternal, contrary to our probabilities."

One reason for his intense and constant devotion to Christ and the preaching of the gospel was his entering into a solemn covenant with God, which he wrote out and subscribed on his birthday in 1829. His biographer says, "Without deciding here on the propriety of such a step, regarding which holy men have been much divided, we may mention that, soon after he had subscribed the deed, he became agitated and doubtful lest he had acted presumptuously in the matter. . . . He at once sought to be strong in the grace that is in Christ, and to pay his vows to his God."

In the document is not only the more solemn part of his engagement but also opening paragraphs about the nature of the transaction, his motives for engaging in it, the grounds on which he did so, and the spirit in which he desired to perform it. He was, he said, full of fears, but desired and resolved to pledge himself to the Lord, in the strength of divine grace.

A key sentence in the covenant is this: "And I do solemnly and totally and eternally devote myself unto Thee, and do vow, in the strength of Thy promised grace, henceforth to strive to walk worthy of that high vocation wherewith I am called: and also do vow that I shall ever desire to seek Thy glory as the great aim of all my conduct, and shall also seek to promote that glory among my fellow men to the utmost of my ability". In his final paragraph he prays, "And now, unto Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the only living and true God, my Lord, my Redeemer and Sanctifier, on the ground of the most

sacred obligations, and in the faith of promised grace, do I bind myself to be sincere, faithful, obedient and persevering in all above laid down”.

On his next birthday, his twenty-fourth, he renewed his covenant, concluding with this prayer: “As without Thee I can do nothing, my waiting eyes are fixed on Thee, for the aid of Thy Spirit and the grace of Thy Son, through whom do Thou accept me. Amen.” The whole tenor of the remaining 17 years of his life bore the clearest testimony to his faithfulness, by divine grace, in performing his vows unto his covenant God.

In fulfilling both his covenantal and ordination vows, John Macdonald not only had his eye constantly on the Word of God, but also upon divine providence. The minuteness with which he watched the various events of providence, ever seeking to learn lessons from them, was remarkable. In his solemn covenant with God, he vowed, “I shall ever consult Thee in all the circumstances of my lot and seek only that which shall be most for Thy glory, and shall endeavour to follow the leadings of Thy providence”. He had the strong and abiding conviction that “the Lord makes known His mind to His people in providence as well as in the Word, when the latter is consulted as the interpreter.”

In his sermon on Enoch walking with God, he said, “As the eyes of a servant are to his master, or of a child to his father, so ought the believer to have his faith directed to his God. He should especially seat himself under the vast heaven of providence, and with the glass of the Word sweep the whole canopy of events and providential movements; for these are fulfillments of God’s will, and rich discoveries of His relative character, to the children of men.”

Certain providences formed a crucial element in his coming to a decision about his call to the ministry, and his call to minister in particular places. When he received the invitation from the London congregation, he wrote, “Whether to accept it or not, is my doubt”. But in waiting on the Lord “he was led to a conclusion,” says Tweedie, “which both the providence and the grace of God abundantly ratified”. And when he was in London, he kept his eye on providence for opportunities of further usefulness.

Having later received a number of calls from other congregations to be their pastor, he wrote, “It is remarkable how providence has been trying me since I came here”. He notes four approaches made to him, including one from Fodderty congregation. His prayer was, “O Lord, if Thou wilt have me to remove to the other charge presented to me in Thy providence, then make this manifest to me, so as that I may know it to be duty, and comply cheerfully, notwithstanding all the pain connected with it”.

The place to which he next removed was of course India, and again

the hand of providence was most clearly manifested in directing him. In the middle of 1835 he wrote, “Whilst in regard to my missionary cares I meet with no marked providence to decide me, yet it would seem the design of God, for whatever end, to keep the matter before me by a variety of little incidents of an unexpected kind”. At length he was clearly closed in to the conclusion that it was his duty to go abroad as a missionary, and in the providence of God he received a call from the Church to go forth.

He could not but marvel at the providences connected with the Disruption. Afterwards he wrote, “Events of providence, when so designed of God, try men, in character and system, to the uttermost. Coming like the rolling avalanche, with the force of a present, urgent and irresistible necessity, they compel men to say yea or nay, to flee or fall, to escape or die – deeds, not words; actions, not theory; conduct, not profession must be, and then are, the sure result.”

John Macdonald held that “the Bible is the mind, and providence the work, of one God, and when these two meet, light will arise upon the soul”. At the beginning of one year he wrote, “The providence of the past year has to me been full of God – full of all His attributes and glory”.

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## Benefiting from Affliction<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Sent for Instruction

*James Buchanan*

**I**n the day of adversity you should consider the *design* and *end* of affliction, or the uses which it is intended to serve. As it proceeds neither from blind necessity nor from casual accident, but from the hand of your omniscient Governor and Judge, nothing can be more certain than that it is designed for the accomplishment of some great and useful purpose. Now the design of affliction is expressly revealed in the Word of God. He has condescended to explain the reasons of His dealings with you, and it is alike your duty and your privilege to consider and to concur in His declared design. The general end of affliction, as it is explained in God’s Word, is the moral and spiritual improvement of believers – in other words, their progressive sanctification and their preparation for glory. O how important must the right use of affliction be if it is intended to terminate in such a result! It stands connected with our everlasting welfare – with all that we can enjoy on earth and all that we hope for in heaven.

<sup>1</sup>Taken, slightly edited, from Buchanan’s book *The Improvement of Affliction*. The previous article appeared last month.

But, more particularly, *the day of adversity is intended for our instruction*. The Lord's rod has a voice which speaks to us lessons of heavenly wisdom; and therefore we are required "to hear . . . the rod, and who hath appointed it" (Mic 6:8). "The rod and reproof give wisdom" (Prov 29:15). It presents to our minds many of the same great truths which are declared in Scripture but which we may have overlooked or failed rightly to understand till they were pressed on our attention and made the matter of our personal experience in the day of trouble. Thus it teaches most impressively that great scriptural truth, *the vanity of the world*, and its insufficiency as the portion of rational and immortal beings. This is a truth which might almost be regarded as self-evident; yet it is very slowly and reluctantly admitted by the young disciple, and can only be effectually impressed on his mind and unfolded in all its extent by the experience of disappointment and sorrow.

In the case of unrenewed men, the world is the only portion which is valued; it is the object of their supreme affections, the source of their highest enjoyments. When the day of adversity arrives, even they are made to feel that the world is a poor and empty thing – a broken cistern "which can hold no water". But so long as they know nothing of a better portion, they are fain to cling to it, notwithstanding all their experience of its worthlessness. If, however, at such a season they have their attention directed to the better portion that is provided for sinners in the gospel, their experience of the uncertain and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good is fitted to awaken their desires after that higher happiness and those enduring riches which belong to the people of God. Thus many an individual has been brought by the discipline of sickness – and many a family by bankruptcy or bereavements – to relinquish the world and to seek God as their chief good. No new truth has been revealed to them, for they had often read in the Scripture, and heard from the pulpit, of the vanity of the world. But what was then addressed to their understandings is now impressed with power on their hearts; their own experience has confirmed and strengthened the testimony of God.

On the same subject, the day of adversity administers a wholesome lesson even to God's own people, who in some prosperous season are too apt to attempt a compromise between God and the world and to seek only a part – and perhaps a small one – of their happiness in Him. In such circumstances they are ready to settle "on their lees" and, because their mountain stands strong or because "they have [had] no changes", they have become more familiar with the world, less conversant with God, and more wedded to temporal enjoyments than befits the candidates for heavenly glory. But the day of adversity comes and dispels at once the fond illusions by which they had been deceived. It reveals the world to their view in its true light, and

they awaken, as from a dream, to the thorough conviction that all is vanity. Poverty, disease and death are employed to teach them a lesson which they were slow to understand or believe when they read it in the Bible or heard it declared from the pulpit, while as yet they had no experience of its truth. And so soon as they are thus thoroughly impressed with this practical conviction, they are prepared to rise above all worldly influences and to seek, with greater earnestness than ever, the enjoyment of God's favour, which is life, and His loving-kindness, which is better than life.

In like manner, the day of adversity teaches us the great lesson of our entire and constant dependence on God. Only a little while before, we were rejoicing in the midst of prosperity. Our health was sound, our business prosperous, our families entire; but the sudden stroke has come which has smitten our persons with disease, our business with embarrassment, or our families with death, and that stroke has come from the Lord's hand. In such circumstances we are impressively taught that we are absolutely in God's power, that all we have is at His sovereign disposal, that we depend on Him day by day continually for our personal preservation, our worldly prosperity, our domestic comfort – in short, for all that we desire or love on earth. We are taught that it becomes us never for one moment to forget our obligations to Him in whom we now feel, more sensibly than we ever felt before, that “we live, and move, and have our being” And, finally, our experience of present suffering exhibits to us, in a most impressive and convincing light, some of the great leading principles of God's moral government; it demonstrates His holy determination that sin shall not pass by unpunished and makes it as certain as any other fact in human history that man, as a sinner, is exposed to the righteous judgements of God.

These are some of the lessons which adversity, when viewed as a means of moral instruction, is fitted to impress with great practical power on our hearts. And when these lessons are duly considered – and, above all, when they are submissively embraced and acted on – the disciple will learn from his own experience the value of affliction and admire the wisdom with which God suits His lessons to the most urgent necessities of his soul.

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For a man to be in the world, filling up his station in life in which God's providence has placed him, and God's grace finds him, yet to be crucified to it – to have his affections set on Christ, to be diligent in his lawful business, yet to have his treasure in heaven, and then to desire to have his affections soar and centre even in Him who is on the right hand of God – this is to be crucified to the world.

There is not a doctrine in Christ's ministry that does not tend to abase the creature. Tried believer, see that your affections and troubles are seasons in which the life of God receives a new impulse in your soul.

*Octavius Winslow*

# The Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration<sup>1</sup>

## 1. What It Is

*Rev H M Cartwright*

The title refers to the inspiration of the Bible, the holy book from which the Christian faith is derived and in which it is expounded. The Reformed doctrine of inspiration explains how we are justified in regarding the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God, so that we can be sure that, wherever we turn in this book, God is speaking to us.

*1. Why is this teaching described as the Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration?*

By the *Reformed* doctrine is meant the doctrine of the Churches of the Reformation, particularly the doctrine of the Reformed Churches found, for example, in our *Westminster Confession of Faith* and other Confessions related to it. The term *Reformed* distinguishes this doctrine from that of Romanism and from those of what may for convenience be called liberal Protestantism and liberal Evangelicalism. We claim that the Bible's own doctrine concerning its inspiration is found in the Reformed statements and not in Romanism, liberal Protestantism or liberal Evangelicalism.

It may be alleged that the credal statements of Romanism teach the inspiration of the Bible, with whatever measure of ambiguity the Council of Trent dealt with the subject. But as in the case of other doctrines held by Romanism, the truth is perverted and effectively denied by the error associated with it. The definitive place given to the Roman Church and to tradition, even if it were confined to an alleged interpretation of Scripture, denies in effect the unique authority, clarity and sufficiency belonging to Scripture in virtue of the fact that it alone is the inspired Word of God.

A variety of views may be found in liberal Protestantism and Evangelicalism. Some deny completely any divine revelation or inspiration – the Bible is just a record of some men's search for God or the ultimate reality. Others admit that God revealed himself to chosen men but claim that He left them to communicate that revelation, or the fruit of their reflection on it, as best they could themselves. Others allow for varying degrees of inspiration, some

<sup>1</sup>These articles are based on an address to a Trinitarian Bible Society meeting in Belfast in 1999 entitled *The Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration – Its Relevance Today* and a paper given at the 2004 Theological Conference entitled *Recognising Divine Inspiration: A Study in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1*. This article, after noting why this teaching is described as the *Reformed* doctrine of Inspiration, briefly outlines the doctrine. Future articles (DV) consider the reason we have for believing this doctrine and how it is that a sinner comes to recognise the divine inspiration of the Bible. A final article draws attention to the importance of this doctrine, its significance and relevance for today.

suggesting that parts of the Bible are inspired by God and other parts are the products of the research or reflection of the writers. Some distinguish between the Word of God and the Bible and claim that the Bible is not the Word of God, though it may testify to the Word of God and things written in the Bible can become the Word of God to readers – there may be a kind of “inspiration” for the reader though not for the writer.

People holding some of these views may subscribe to the formula that the Word of God is *contained* in the Scriptures, meaning that it can be found there along with other elements which are not the Word of God. It is clear from the teaching of the Westminster Divines that, when the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (answer 2) uses the expression “the Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments”, it means that only in the inspired Scriptures can we hear the infallible word of God – that it is not found in the Apocrypha or tradition of the Romanist, in the inner voice of the mystic or in any extra-biblical “revelation”. In all of these cases man sits in judgement on the Bible; and what, if anything, is the Word of God is determined either by the “infallible” Church, the critical scholar or the inward consciousness of the reader.

The Reformed doctrine of inspiration is in keeping with the whole scheme of Reformed doctrine, which is centred upon God, who is “a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth”<sup>2</sup> – whose sovereignty finds expression in the revelation of Himself as a God of mercy to His people. God not only purposed their redemption but has done everything necessary for its accomplishment and application. This includes providing the infallible Word through which, by regeneration and the teaching of His Holy Spirit, they come to know Him and the truth concerning Him. The inspiration of men to record infallibly the revelation of God’s grace is as much a fact in the scheme of redemption as any other revealed fact. Like every other fact in the scheme of redemption it emphasises that salvation is of the Lord, that the initiative and the power in every aspect of salvation belong to Him. The doctrine of inspiration fits in with the supernatural, God-centred character of the Reformed Faith. It is perhaps significant that, as a matter of historical fact, it was within the Reformed, or Calvinistic, wing of the Reformation Church, rather than the Lutheran, that prominence was given to Scripture alone “as an objective standard of truth and source of authority”.<sup>3</sup>

2. *What is the Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration?* Two closely related but separate works of God must be noted at this point – revelation and in-

<sup>2</sup>*The Shorter Catechism*, answer 4.

<sup>3</sup>James Bannerman, *Inspiration*, p 136.



piration. We are dependent upon God's *revelation* of Himself for all the knowledge we have of God. And we are dependent upon God's *inspiration* of the writers of Scripture for the infallible and unerring communication of that revelation to us. James Bannerman summed up the relation between revelation and inspiration: "A supernatural communication of truth from God is a *revelation*; the supernatural transference of the truth to the spoken or written word is *inspiration*".<sup>4</sup>

God can only be known in so far as He reveals Himself. Man cannot find out God by his own searching. *Revelation* of God's goodness, wisdom and power, sufficient to leave man without excuse, has been given in the light of nature and in the works of creation and providence, but that revelation is not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary for salvation. If men are to know God as Saviour, it is necessary that He make Himself known. God made known to chosen men what He intended to reveal of Himself.<sup>5</sup>

*Inspiration* is God's method of ensuring that those, to whom He revealed Himself and the mystery of His saving purpose, communicated that revelation precisely as He wished it to be communicated. It is something very different from the "inspiration" felt by poets. It is something other than the gracious enlightenment which is given by God to all whom He purposes to save. Recording what God revealed was not left to the natural, or even the gracious, abilities of men. God took steps to ensure that not only were His revealed thoughts conveyed to us in a generally accurate way, but in words which precisely communicated what was in His mind. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet 1:20,21). They were not left to interpret as best they could what God revealed to them, but God moved them – carried them along – in such a way that the words they used give the precise record of His revelation which God intended.

Had good men been left to themselves to communicate the revelation God gave them, we would have a human, fallible account and could not be sure of the divine truth of what was written. But God gave them not merely the thoughts, but also the words, which convey these God-given thoughts in the best possible way, so that when we read their words we are reading the very words of God. They were the mouth through which God spoke His own words. The Holy Spirit of God so controlled the writers of Scripture that their words were the words spoken by the Holy Spirit. All of Scripture, from

<sup>4</sup>*Inspiration*, p 151.

<sup>5</sup>See *Westminster Confession* 1:1.

Genesis to Revelation – in its words as well as its thoughts – is the product of a supernatural work of God which ensures that it is inerrant, infallible, wholly trustworthy.

The Bible was written by men, not by machines. The circumstances, experiences and characteristics of these men come through in many of their writings. Even the style of one is different from that of another. When they wrote they were generally exercising their own faculties, although there were times when they wrote things by the direction of God which were well beyond their own comprehension. That is why Peter could speak about “the salvation of your souls, of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, 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” (1 Pet 1:9-12).

But the men, their circumstances, characteristics, experiences and faculties were prepared by God. God made Moses what he was, and used Moses to write the law. God made Paul what he was, and used Paul to write his various epistles. God took these men whom He had prepared and carried them along supernaturally so that they wrote exactly what He intended them to write. It was their writing, but it was God’s words that were written.

God the Holy Spirit brought directly to bear on the writers of Scripture a divine influence which ensured that, as long as they thought and spoke and wrote under this influence, all their statements accurately conveyed what God revealed to them of His mind. Thus we have the thoughts of God infallibly communicated to us in what are the words of God as well as the words of men. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16) – it is God-breathed – the exact formulation of what God wished us to know. Inspiration preserved the writers from error, which would be natural to them as sinful men, and guided them in their expression of thoughts and use of words so that what they wrote is God’s own Word – “making the voice of God speak to us in a human accent, and His Word to address us in our own tongue”, as Bannerman puts it.

It is one thing to say what inspiration is – it is something else to explain the divine mode of inspiration. The Bible defines inspiration but does not explain what we might call the mechanics of it. The exercise of their own faculties was harnessed and controlled by the Holy Spirit, so that the human authors spoke the pure truth of God. The manner in which the Spirit’s activity

and the writer's faculties combined in this work has not been revealed to our finite minds. Even on the human level we can be influenced by others in ways which affect our thoughts and utterances.

How presumptuous it is for man to think that God cannot, without doing violence to the nature of the penmen, influence His own creatures so as to ensure that they will convey precisely what is in His mind in the terms in which He wishes it to be conveyed. "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Ps 94:9). Shall He who made man and gave him his faculties be unable to work through these faculties in a way which ensures that the outcome is exactly as He intends? God's grace and wisdom and power are manifested in providing us with a record of His revelation which comes in thoughts and experiences and words that speak to us as human beings, but which is no less His own infallible word to us. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we should, for example, say, "Let us read the Word of God. Let us read the Epistle of Paul to the Romans."

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## The Receding Years<sup>1</sup>

A Letter from *B M Palmer*

We were all startled some days since by the account of a cyclone, given in our papers, which passed over your beautiful city and wrought such damage. Of course, the statements were exceedingly general, with no names given of the sufferers; and we take heart in hoping that you and yours escaped all injury. This hope deepens almost into conviction, as several days have since elapsed during which the news must have travelled to us, if serious injury had happened to any of you. Still I write a brief line, if only to indicate how much your sister and yourself, with the families of both, have dwelt upon our hearts since the dread catastrophe. You may be assured that no lapse of time can dim our remembrance of you both, or weaken our affection. The memory of your dear father abides with me among the consecrated associations of the past; and with him is the living remembrance of all who perpetuate his name on earth.

Doubtless you are not old enough to take in the singular fact that, as we draw near the close of life here, the receding years roll together as the world we look at through a telescope – very much as by Christian faith we contemplate the eternal future which is before us. How sacred it becomes, as an

<sup>1</sup>Written by the noted minister of New Orleans on 26 August 1890 to a Mrs Grace Lea Hunt, obviously a Christian friend, in Pennsylvania; reprinted from his *Life and Letters*. For comment on the disaster which has now struck New Orleans, see p 315.

unchangeable inheritance which is ours by the power of memory – and of memory illuminated with the brightness of human affection! The living flit before our eyes, subject to change or forgetfulness: so many things occur to wreck the friendships we cherish, that we know not which will endure. But death comes with his sanctifying touch: and paradoxical as it may appear, those whom we call our dead are more truly the living than when they breathed and moved around us. I daily wonder at these spiritual, experimental and therefore individual proofs afforded us of the soul's immortality, of the resurrection of the dead, and of certain and eternal existence in the great hereafter. This mortal life is indeed beautiful, sweet, sometimes awful and grand – but it is all this, as it foreshadows the blessed life of immortality which is beyond – where we shall go up. . . .

Be assured of our remembrance and sympathy in all your dangers and alarms: and may the God of Peace be your protector even to the end!

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## Book Reviews

***The Life and Letters of Joseph Alleine***, published by Reformation Heritage Books, paperback, 332 pages, available at £14.50 from the F P Bookroom.

Joseph Alleine (1633-1668) was one of the most famous of the Puritans. His *Sure Guide to Heaven* (also published under the title *Alarm to the Unconverted*) has been reprinted more than 500 times, and was a means of blessing to Whitefield, Spurgeon, and a multitude of others. In 1781 it was translated into Gaelic through the initiative of Lady Glenorchy. In several of the parishes of the Nether Lorn district of Argyll, south of Oban, the precentor would read the translation while the people were assembling for public worship, and the result was a widespread revival of religion. The Moderate-dominated Presbytery of Lorn took alarm and condemned the book for 22 supposed errors, forbidding its people to possess a copy on pain of excommunication!

Alleine was born in Devizes in Wiltshire and studied at Oxford. From 1655 he was the assistant to George Newton, minister of Taunton in Somerset, and in 1662 he and Newton were among the nearly two thousand English ministers ejected following the Act of Uniformity. Alleine continued to preach and was imprisoned more than once, the hardships of prison hastening his early death at the age of 34. He was “a burning and a shining light”, and the following well-known account of him, by George Newton, comes from the book under review (p 54):

“He was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls, wherein

he had no small success in the time of his ministry; and to this end he poured out his very heart in prayer and preaching: *he imparted not the gospel only, but his own soul*. His supplications and his exhortations many times were so affectionate, so full of holy zeal, life and vigour that they quite overcame his hearers; he melted over them so that he thawed and mollified, and sometimes dissolved, the hardest hearts. But while he melted thus, he wasted and at last consumed himself.”

The book consists of an account of Alleine’s life, with chapters contributed by Richard Baxter, George Newton, Alleine’s wife (and cousin) Theodosia, and others (pp 21-135); of 49 letters by Alleine (pp 139-302); and of a valuable funeral sermon by George Newton on the text: “But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children” (pp 303-332). The *Life* is highly interesting and edifying, and the *Letters*, if anything, even more so. Many of them were written from prison, and others in sickness; the book is thus suitable for the anxious, the downcast, for those surrounded by worldliness, for those feeling the sluggishness and deadness of their souls, and for any who “if need be . . . are in heaviness through manifold temptations”. Here, for instance, is a description from the *Life* of the delight that Alleine took in praising God, and of the encouragement he gave to others to do the same:

“His exhortations to Christians did frequently design to raise them to that sublime life of praise and thanksgiving. Often hath he reproved Christians, charging them with the greatest folly and ingratitude in so much neglecting this so pleasing and profitable duty and in [giving it so small a share] in their religious exercises. He much condemned them for that too general practice in thrusting so enlarging a part of their devotions into so narrow a room, as only the close of their prayers. Especially did he excite Christians to this duty on the Lord’s day, as the most proper work for so divine a festival; shaming them with the excellent example of the primitive Christians who welcomed in the sun that brought so glorious a day as the Christian Sabbath. . . . Sometimes the greatest part of his own prayer was thanksgiving; and indeed he was never so much in his element, either in prayer or in preaching, as when he was extolling and adoring the love of Christ, and marvelling at God’s infinite goodness in the gift of His Son our Saviour” (p 131).

In a similar vein, in one of his letters to his flock from prison, he writes: “May your souls and all their powers be taken up with Him; may all the little doors of your souls be set open to Him! Here fix your thoughts, here terminate your desires; here you may light your candle and kindle your fire when almost out. Rub and chafe your hearts well with the deep consideration of the love of Christ, and it is a wonder if they do not get some warmth.

The Lord shed abroad His love in your hearts by the Holy Ghost” (p 172).

Most of this book is a reproduction of the 1840 New York edition, but five further letters have been included from other editions and collections, together with the funeral sermon by George Newton. It seems extraordinary that such a book should have been out of print since 1840, but apparently it is so. The reviewer believes that this book is worthy of a place in every Christian home alongside the likes of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Boston's *Fourfold State*, Rutherford's *Letters*, Guthrie's *Christian's Great Interest*, and Bonar's *Memoir and Remains* of M'Cheyne. (Rev) D W B Somerset

***Princeton and Preaching, Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry***, by James M Garretson, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 304 pages, £16.75, available from the F P Bookroom.

Although this book is primarily directed to ministers, everyone should profit from the excellent account of Alexander's life given in the first chapter. Garretson's purpose is to direct attention to “the lessons we may learn from the way that the professors at ‘Old Princeton’ prepared men to be effective ministers of the gospel”, believing that these lessons “are still of abiding value”. He further emphasises in his Introduction that “Archibald Alexander and his colleagues were deeply spiritual men who understood how best to prepare young ministers in their use of the ‘spiritual weapons’ supplied by God for the battle they faced. Knowing that the battle was a spiritual one that could not be fought with earthly weapons, they prepared their students to go out to fulfil their ministries in the strength of the Spirit.”

The remaining chapters of this book cover subjects such as the call to the ministry, the preparation of the preacher's heart, and the difficulties and challenges of the Christian ministry. What we are given is Alexander's thoughts on such matters – from his books, but particularly from his unpublished lectures on pastoral theology, which he delivered in Princeton Seminary. Those who already know something of Alexander and his writings will not be surprised to discover in this book a wealth of deeply-spiritual observations from a man who was renowned for his sanctified common sense.

Many passages might be quoted, but we will restrain ourselves. First, after quoting in a lecture another writer's comments on the need for gravity and warmth in public speaking, Alexander pointed to the necessity of “that solemnity which arises from the fear of God; and that affectionate manner, termed *unction* which arises from a deep feeling of the truth and importance and excellence of what he utters from the Word of God. This qualification, which is nothing else but piety in a lively exercise, is of the utmost importance to good and useful preaching. . . . Without it he may be a good preacher, a splen-

did orator . . . but there will be an essential defect in his sermons; the right spirit will be wanting. And while the multitude may be pleased and the refined gratified, the hearers will not be edified, nor sinners converted.”

In an address to a minister at an ordination, he emphasised how “essential to the character of a faithful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord is a devotional spirit – a love of prayer and delight in communion with God. He who communes most familiarly and affectionately with God will best understand His will and will be best qualified to declare His counsel. That minister who wrestles much in private with his Maker is likely to plead His cause most earnestly and successfully in public. As the success of preaching is not owing to the learning or eloquence of the organ by which the Word is proclaimed, but on the blessing of a sovereign God, we have good ground to expect that, in common, those ministers who most abound in prayer will see most fruit of their ministry.”

On a similar theme, he stated in another lecture: “It is an encouragement and comfort to the faithful minister that the cause in which he is engaged must prevail. The word of divine promise is sure, the Church of Christ cannot be overthrown. Whatever dark clouds may for a season shower rain, yet she shall rise and shine when the time – the set time to favour her – shall come. Glorious things are spoken in the word of prophecy respecting Zion, the city of our God, not one of which shall fail.”

Alexander called for discriminating preaching. “How often”, he complained, “do we hear a preacher expatiating on the rich consolations of the exceeding great and precious promises of God, when no mortal can tell, from anything which he says, to whom they are applicable. In much preaching there is a vague and indiscriminate application of the special promises of the Covenant of Grace, as though all who had heard them are true Christians and had a claim to the comfort which they offer.”

And again: “It is but seldom that we hear a discourse from the pulpit which is calculated to afford much aid to Christians in ascertaining their own true character, or which will serve to detect the hypocrite and formalist and drive them from all their false refuges. In the best days of the Reformed Churches, such discriminating delineation of character, by the light of Scripture, formed an important part of almost every sermon. . . . This indeed requires something more than a fertile imagination and a ready utterance . . . . It requires that the preacher study much on his knees, that he examine his own heart with unceasing care, that ‘the Word of God dwell in him richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’; and also that he converse frequently and freely with experienced Christians.”

In the light of all this, we might note Charles Hodge’s testimony as to how

Alexander put his own counsels into practice: “Perhaps most of those who remember him with personal gratitude recall him as their spiritual guide, who revealed to them the workings of their own hearts. Under his preaching was realised what the Apostle describes as the effect of intelligible discourse guided by the Spirit (1 Cor 14:24,25). Those who heard were convinced. Their conscience and consciousness bore testimony to the truth of what he said. They were judged, or examined. Their feelings, which lay as a confused, unintelligible mass, were analysed, examined, and their true character discerned and estimated. Thus the secrets of their hearts were revealed. They were brought to know and estimate themselves aright, and so falling on their faces, confessed that God was indeed with the truth and with the preacher.”

And the reasons behind such spiritual power in the pulpit are explained in this book, largely in Alexander’s own words. The material is very well presented and the author’s comments show a mind in thorough sympathy with his subject. The book can be highly recommended. May it help today’s ministers, young and old, in their use of the spiritual weapons which their Master has given them!

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## Eastern Europe News<sup>1</sup>

**A**t the moment of writing I am in the city of Odessa in the Ukraine. Last Sabbath (the first of two to be spent in Odessa) I endeavoured to preach to the small congregation here, where about 20 people gathered for the morning service. Besides those who regularly attend, a number were first-time visitors; others attend from time to time. This service was delayed for some time as the interpreter had been driving the congregational bus, which broke down and had to limp along for the final 6 miles of the journey. The round journey to pick up some of the people who come to the services is 25 miles and it is only possible to pick them up about once a month for the services. Within the last nine months Mr Dmitriy Levitskiy has obtained his driving licence and has undertaken to take people by bus to the meeting place. Mr Igor Zadoroshniy did this before but feels that the journey is rather much for him, so we are thankful to the Most High that Mr Levitskiy can now do this work – at least in the meantime, since the plan is for him to move to Scotland to further his general education before pursuing his specific training for the ministry.

I preached on Sabbath morning from Mark 8:34,35, and in the evening from verses 36 and 37. As is common, after the service was over, a number

<sup>1</sup>This article appears later than intended due to a problem in transmitting it to the Editor.



of people were anxious to ask questions about some doctrinal matters. There has been no real increase in the number attending the congregation, but some strangers do come from time to time. This also opens a door for the spread of more literature – for example, one person who attended yesterday is studying New Testament Greek and other subjects and was given the Westminster Confession of Faith along with the Catechisms. The spread of these excellent summaries of the doctrines of the Word of God has been helpful to others, bringing them to appreciate more deeply the doctrines of the Word; so we hope this will be case for this person also.

Tomorrow (Monday 12 July), God willing, we will meet the lawyer Mr Vladimir Popov on the building site for what should be one of our last meetings in connection with plans for building the Charity House. It was more than disappointing to discover some weeks past that the cost of the building has greatly increased. The first estimate obtained through the services of the lawyer was in the region of £45 000. It was later decided to obtain a number of estimates, which came in at about £60 000. However, a final, more detailed, costing has come to £80 000. On top of this, we have been informed, there will be tax, bringing the final total to £108 000.

In the meantime, we cannot possibly begin building – until in God's good providence, if He so wills, the amount of money will come to hand. As I said in previous reports, the building will be used to store Bibles and literature and the work of distribution will be done from there. More importantly, it will be our first official meeting place for the public worship of God; at the moment the services are in a private home, as is all the other work connected with the mission. May the Lord graciously provide through the good will of those who feel constrained to contribute to this building! "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

Some of the money in the Eastern Europe Fund has been set aside for printing and cannot be used on the building. Indeed, £13 000 has already been spent in the purchase of the site, plus lawyers' and architects' fees. However, the more important work at the moment is to continue with our publishing programme, for which we need much of our present funds – to print such books as the *Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* by Robert Shaw and *Sermons* of Rev Donald Macfarlane.

We trust the Lord will countenance this small work of the gospel for the extension of His kingdom in what were formerly hard-line Communist states. However much or little we may be able to do for the spreading of the Word of God, it will never flourish apart from Him prospering it. "But God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:5).  
(Rev) D A Ross

## Protestant View

### Has Rome Changed?

“It shows how much things have changed that Wheaton College historian Mark Noll and freelance writer Carolyn Nystrom need to remind readers what Catholic/Evangelical relations used to look like. Evangelical polemics lack the bite of yesteryear, as illustrated by this 1873 quote in the introduction: ‘The most formidable foe of living Christianity among us is not deism or atheism, or any form of infidelity, but the nominally Christian church of Rome’.” So begins a review, in a recent issue of *Christianity Today*, of a book by these two writers entitled: *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*.

According to reviews of the book, the authors – charitable though they undoubtedly are – recognise that there are still important differences between Protestant churches and Rome. But the review in *Publishers Weekly* contains a significant comment: “Only scant decades ago, [the authors] point out, Protestants inveighed against ‘the formalism, the anthropocentric worship, the power mongering, and the egotism’ of Rome. But now, they wryly observe, all those qualities ‘flourish on every hand within Protestant Evangelicalism’.” One reason for the change from the robust attitude expressed in the 1873 quotation is the tremendous weakening in faithfulness to Scripture and its doctrines within the Evangelical world since then. It is significant that the authors note how “Charismatic worship further de-emphasises the Reformation legacy, as experience rather than doctrine provides the rallying point”.

But how are we to react to all the assurances that Rome has changed, and decidedly for the better? There is no doubt that she is much less monolithic today than she once was and much more open to dialogue. But what is missing in all the post-Vatican II enthusiasm is the fact that her doctrines remain fundamentally unchanged. She has, for instance, never departed from the multiplied anathemas hurled with such venom by the Council of Trent at those who held to Reformation – that is, scriptural – doctrine. For example: “If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema”.

Rome’s slogan of *semper eadem* (always the same) was ever a myth, given her continuous development of doctrine. Change there has always been in that direction, and it continues. The previous Pope did much to promote the idea that the Virgin Mary is advocate, mediatrix, and co-redemptrix. He wrote, “Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of

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their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself ‘in the middle’, that is to say, she acts as a mediatrix, not as an outsider.”

What is lost sight of in most of the contemporary discussion is that Rome is identified in the Bible. In his book on the Apocalypse, David Brown refers to the apostasy described in 2 Thessalonians 2. On the words *forbidding to marry*, he states, “The reference is not to the mere creeping in of an ascetic spirit. . . . It is this spirit organised into a system and worked out by Church authority, in the specific form of a prohibition of marriage. Now, in point of fact, there is one, and only one, such body existing. The Church of Rome forbids clerical marriage, and holds celibacy forth as a holier state of life” (p 154). It is because of such teaching in Scripture that, not only in 1873, but also in 2005, we are justified in regarding Rome as such a formidable foe of living Christianity. Most certainly, the need for the Reformation is not over.

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## Notes and Comments

### Hurricane Katrina

The devices available to meteorologists in this modern age enable them to forecast the weather with remarkable accuracy. By means of information transmitted by satellites circling the globe they are able to pinpoint where barometric pressure is low and where the conditions are such that a storm appears inevitable. Once the familiar swirl of cloud forms, with the eye in its middle, it is possible to determine that a hurricane is on its way. The direction in which it is travelling, the wind speeds associated with it and where it is to make landfall may all be measured and predicted, but what men, however knowledgeable and ingenious, cannot do is to divert its course or stop it in its tracks. That prerogative belongs to the One who “looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and He weigheth the waters by measure”.

James Durham notes that, as God’s understanding is infinite, He, “with one glance of his eye, takes up and sees through all things in heaven and earth . . . the winds and the weather He has weighed as in a balance, how much wind shall blow, and rain shall fall, that not a blast of wind blows, nor a drop of rain falls, but by His knowledge”. Hurricane Katrina was thus under the sovereign control of Him who has “gathered the wind in His fists”, who has “bound the waters in a garment” and who as the Creator incarnate once walked on a stormy Sea of Galilee, and demonstrated in doing so that He was reigning over it. Eyewitnesses exclaimed: “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!” The same Person is now

exalted at the right hand of God, all power having been given Him in heaven and in earth. Before Him “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” We fear that few acknowledge His hand in what are generally referred to as being no more than “natural disasters”.

The hurricane that devastated New Orleans and the surrounding area did not arrive without warning. Its approach was detected days before it arrived, and those tracking its progress, aware of its intensity, warned those in its path to move inland. Many did so and, when the hurricane hit the coastline, they were safe; others, some of them unable to move, remained where they were, and it is estimated that up to 10 000 of them perished. It is solemn and staggering to think that so many of our fellow creatures were removed from time to eternity as a result of this dispensation of providence. All who perished possessed never-dying souls. It is not for us to know or presume which of the two spheres of eternal existence they were ushered into; that would have depended on their individual relationship to Christ at death. But we do know that our times are wholly in the hands of God and that He has determined when, and in what circumstances, each individual of our race passes from time to eternity.

It is not, however, presumption on our part to endeavour to relate to Scripture what has happened to that area of the Gulf of Mexico coastline. As already noted, it is clear that God is sovereign in all His dispensations. “To everything,” we read, “there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”. Shall we view the spectacle of a devastated city, 60% of it flooded by toxic water, and many of its buildings reduced to rubble, and not be still and know that He is God? “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” New Orleans was apparently a city where the entertainment industry flourished. Along the stretch of coastline devastated there were over a dozen casinos whose rubble was left in the wake of the hurricane – some of them, it is said, simply carried off their foundations in a most awesome manner.

President Bush came on the scene and spoke of restoration and the creation anew of “a magnificent coastline”, with no doubt even more attractive and glittering casinos and haunts of pleasure, but no mention of the fact that there is a God who has declared: “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?”

By this visitation, the Lord’s voice is not only calling unto this city but unto the inhabitants of the earth. If we are wise, we shall “hear the rod and who hath appointed it”. How hard of hearing the children of men are!

It is indicative of the scale of the disaster that a national day of prayer has been appointed. That, in itself, is a hopeful sign, but the President, in announcing it, merely said that it was “in remembrance”. We take that to mean in remembrance of those that died, but what good will that achieve? What is desirable is the proclamation of a day of humiliation and prayer, and we believe that those who are truly God-fearing throughout the United States will keep this day as such. We only wish that our Queen and political leaders would call for such a day to be held throughout the UK to plead that divine judgements might be staved off. At present we as a people are patently under the woe pronounced on such as “draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope”. As in Judah of old, what is observable is obstinate perseverance in sin among young and old as if they wished to provoke divine judgements. Shall we continue to sow the wind and not in due time reap the whirlwind? *JM*

### **Pure Speech**

Among recent recommendations for maintaining classroom discipline has been the suggestion that children should be permitted to swear a limited number of times in class to “let off steam”. The man who prominently promoted “make poverty history” seemed scarcely able to formulate a sentence without swearing. A leading government adviser’s speech leaked to the press was full of vulgarities and a prominent radio interviewer’s speech, leaked similarly, was peppered with swear words. Even the snatches of conversation heard while passing others in public places indicate that such language is far from uncommon.

Speech is a faculty which distinguishes human beings from every inferior creature of God and it is a wonderful thing in itself. The thought which exists in the mind of one person can be expressed in an utterance which can be heard and understood by another and translated into a thought in his mind. Jesus Christ is described as “the Word” and in Him the thought of God has been given utterance. Speech patterned on the speech of God, reflecting likeness to Christ – the Word made flesh, the visible Word – is an essential element of godliness. The significance of speech is brought powerfully before us in the words of our Lord: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt 12:36,37). Words must be used wisely because God will take account even of those which, though not coarse, are empty, meaningless or misleading.

Speech is significant in that it is indicative of the character of the speaker, and influences the thought and character and conduct of others. This aspect

is brought out in Ephesians 4:25,29: “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. . . . Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers”.

Like everything else in human experience here, purity is at best relative – in principle and in endeavour. There must first be purity of heart, the fruit of regeneration. There must also be purity in the sense of conformity to the standards of speech required in the Word of God. This includes not only the absence from our speech of what is evil and offensive but the presence of what is good and beneficial. “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom. . . . The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable” (Prov 10:31,32).

The fact that purity of speech, like any other aspect of conformity to the will of God, is in its fullest sense a fruit of regeneration does not mean that no attempt need be made to enforce standards of speech in society, in literature, in the news media, in the home, in the workplace, in the classroom and playground. It does not follow that, because an unregenerate man cannot keep any of the commandments of God, there is no obligation upon him to do so, or upon the State to enforce outward conformity to the moral law, or upon the Church to inform the State of its duty to God and men in this respect. Pure speech is dependent on the Spirit and Word of God, but human beings should not be permitted, without restraint, to pour impurities, falsehoods or blasphemies into the ears of their fellows, to the further defilement of young and old. The Christian has a duty to use all the means available in his particular sphere of life to promote the maintenance of standards of wholesome speech. In home, at work and as a citizen he should use his influence to secure the prohibition of impure language, including swearing, blasphemy, lying and uncleanness and, on the other hand, to promote language which is not only inoffensive but also contributes to the well-being of the hearer.

The Christian’s influence on others within his own sphere will depend very much on the standards exemplified in his own speech. Christian speech should not be thoughtless, pointless or without regard to its effect on the hearer. The Christian must seek to avoid speech that is sinful in that it gives expression to evil in the heart, or takes a form that is condemned in the Bible, or has a bad effect on other people. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Eph 4:29). Sinful actions ought not to be the subject of unnecessary or flippant speech.

The Christian must cultivate a way of speaking which is beneficial to the hearer – “that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29). Pure speech is part of the character required by the law and produced and promoted by the gospel. While making every effort

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to promote righteousness of speech and conduct in society, let us not isolate our effort from the awareness and the message that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Campaigns on behalf of morality, by the Church or the Christian, cannot be isolated from the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. The absence of pure speech is a symptom of the depravity of fallen man. Pure speech can only exist as part of a gracious regeneration of sinners by God the Holy Spirit. “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). *HMC*

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## **Church Information**

### **Ordination and Induction in Aberdeen**

On Friday, 29 July 2005, at 7 pm, the largest congregation since the division of 1989 assembled in the Free Presbyterian Church in Aberdeen to witness the ordination of Rev Douglas W B Somerset and his induction to the pastorate of the Aberdeen congregation. In the sovereign providence of the Most High, the congregation, which had been decimated as the result of the APC schism, had a pastor set over it by the Northern Presbytery. Ministers from each of the other home Presbyteries joined their brethren in this Presbytery to be associated with it and involved in the historic event.

Following the usual preliminaries, Rev N M Ross, Moderator pro tem, went to the pulpit and preached from 2 Corinthians 4:3,4 on the “glorious gospel”. He then gave a narrative of the steps taken in order to fill the vacancy. Thereafter the questions required to be answered by ministers of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland at their ordination were put to Dr Somerset by the Moderator and answered in the affirmative. Having taken his solemn ordination vows, Dr Somerset subscribed the required formula, binding himself to preach, maintain and defend the Reformed doctrines, principles and practices as maintained in the Free Presbyterian Church.

Dr Somerset then knelt in the presence of God and the congregation, as the ministers present laid their hands upon him, while the Moderator by solemn prayer set him apart to the work of the holy ministry. Thereafter the Moderator, by the authority of the Divine Head of the Church and in the name of the Presbytery, formally inducted and admitted him as a member of the Northern Presbytery to the pastoral charge of the Aberdeen congregation. Each member of the Presbytery in turn gave the right hand of fellowship to Dr Somerset, wishing him the Lord’s blessing upon his future ministry.

The newly-inducted minister was then addressed most appropriately by the Moderator, after which Rev G G Hutton, the retiring Interim Moderator

of the Aberdeen Kirk Session, addressed the congregation. At the request of the Moderator, several of the ministers from outwith the Northern Presbytery spoke briefly. Thereafter the Clerk read letters of greetings from Rev Keith Watkins in Kenya and Rev Donald Macdonald, North Uist, who were unable to be present.

Following the formal proceedings, the public worship was brought to a conclusion with hearty praise and the benediction. The newly-inducted pastor proceeded to the door of the church to be greeted by the congregation.

The congregation, some of whom had travelled considerable distances to be present, then enjoyed a welcome meal as, young and old, they mingled together, sharing the joy of the occasion with their Aberdeen friends.

It is our desire and prayer that the new relationship formed between the pastor and the Aberdeen congregation will be cordial and spiritually-profitable. Aberdeen is a major centre of population in Scotland, standing greatly in need of a distinctive Reformed gospel witness. We have reason to believe that the opportunities for the newly-inducted minister in Aberdeen are numerous but we know the adversary is strong and the gospel is not popular with the multitudes in this generation. The minister will need grace, faith, courage, stamina and divine unction to exercise a faithful ministry in this needy city. May it please Him, who alone provides the Church with “able ministers”, to make the minister in Aberdeen such a one!

(Rev) George G Hutton, Clerk of Presbytery

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## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £500.

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**Dingwall:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, North Kessock, £30; Anon, £40. *Congregational Funds:* Dutch Friend, £20; KA, North Kessock, £40 per Rev NMR; £30 per Mrs McL. *Sustentation Fund:* Mrs KAM, £40 per Rev NMR.

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**Israel Mission:** Friends, £80; A Friend, £50 per SG; Tolsta Friend, £20 per Rev JLG.

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**Zimbabwe Mission:** Anon, £500; BC, £100 per EW.