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Nothing Impossible

Man had sinned. He had fallen from God's favour. He was condemned to eternal punishment. It must have seemed that there was then no possibility of a way back. It should have been clear that a holy God could not pass by sin, so how could there be any possibility of a way being discovered whereby sin could be put away in consistency with God's justice? It was certainly impossible that man could do anything to recover his position before God. Indeed even his best efforts would themselves be sinful, and so would only add to his condemnation. Thus Paul emphasised: "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in [God's] sight" (Rom 3:20); man cannot save himself; it is impossible. But, as the angel revealed to the Virgin Mary, "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Therefore, in spite of the fact that, on the human level, salvation was impossible for man, it was indeed possible for God to provide salvation, and to do so in perfect harmony with His justice. And it was revealed, even before Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden of Eden, that there actually was to be salvation for guilty sinners. The Lord told Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). But it was said in the hearing of Adam and Eve, and no doubt for their spiritual good; through the seed of the woman and through the bruising of His heel, there would be deliverance from the power of Satan and from the destruction which was the consequence of his evil work.

Yet generations were to pass before the seed of the woman would appear in this world. That seed was to come through the line of Abraham, who was emphatically promised that he would have a child. But the years passed and, humanly speaking, it became more and more unlikely that such a child would ever be born. So by the time Abraham was 99 – and his wife was just 10 years younger – it must have seemed absolutely impossible. Yet it was then that the Lord said to Abraham: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Gen 18:14). Nothing could be too hard for the Lord, and

at the appointed time Isaac was born, in whom “all the nations of the earth [were to] be blessed”, because he was one more stage in the line through which the seed of the woman would come.

And as the generations passed, the revelation granted to a sinful world about the Messiah was becoming clearer and more detailed. Among Isaiah’s many prophecies was: “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is 7:14). If any prophecy seemed beyond the possibility of fulfilment, it must have been this one. So when the angel told Mary that she was to conceive “and bring forth a son”, she asked, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). It was then that the angel assured her that “with God nothing shall be impossible”, while he also explained: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (v 35). Here was one who actually could take away sin; He was no mere man. He was conceived by extraordinary generation and thus He was in no sense tainted by original sin; and unless the one appointed was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” he could not be a Saviour.

He was indeed the Son of God; only thus was it possible for Him to work out salvation, for the Messiah must say, “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head” (Ps 40:12). Yes, David could speak in that way for himself in consciousness of the guilt of his own sin; he was not able to endure the anger of God if it had come upon him for even one of his sins, and so he could not bear them away. But when sins more than the hairs of His head came upon Christ, they were of course the sins of others – the sins of that multitude that no man can number who will be in heaven at last – and He took them so that He might bare them away.

Consequently He had to endure the full punishment that was due to that vast number of sins – all of them serious, because committed against a holy God. Only because He was a divine person could the Saviour bear them. Had the holiest person ever in the world – or even an unfallen angel – attempted to bear that punishment, he would have been ground out of existence; he could not have endured when the sword of divine justice came against him. But Christ did endure that sword when it was called to awake against Him, and the result was that He satisfied justice on behalf of all whom the Father had given to Him in the everlasting covenant.

Success was certain in this work; it had been said in prophecy: “The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Is 42:21). When Satan had brought mankind into a

condition of sin and misery, he must have taken it as a belittling of the law – who could keep it if a sinless Adam and Eve could not? Yet Christ came and honoured the law by enduring its penalty to the full. But more, He magnified the law by keeping it perfectly – without coming short in the smallest degree. In both respects, He did what man could never do. Any human attempt to honour the law fully is doomed to failure; it is impossible. But with God nothing is impossible, which is demonstrated more than anywhere else in working out salvation on behalf of sinners, and by doing so in a way in which the law is magnified and in which the Lawgiver is likewise magnified.

It was also prophesied: “When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin . . . He shall prolong His days” (Is 53:10). It was impossible for man to work out redemption, but when Christ put His hand to the work He completed it. It was accepted by the Father and, in token of this, Christ was raised from the dead on the third day; His days were prolonged. Then, 40 days later, He ascended to heaven. And, as the exalted King, He is administering to needy sinners the benefits which He purchased for them in this world.

Thus what God’s creatures must at first have reckoned an impossibility has become a reality. And it calls for a response from us, the response of faith. The Father directs us: “Behold My servant” (Is 42:1). We sinners are called to look, by faith, for salvation to the Saviour who has worked out a redemption which truly is effective. And not merely once. This is what believers are to do again and again until, beyond death, they reach the stage where faith passes into sight.

But, finally, a further response is called for. In view of this great work of redemption, in which so many of God’s attributes are displayed, we are to worship Him. We see His *mercy* displayed in the redemption of rebels, who as such deserved to be cast away to hell for ever to receive the just penalty for their sins. We see His *justice* upheld although the transgressors go free, because justice has gone out instead against the divine Substitute, who endured the penalty to the full. We see His *wisdom* demonstrated in devising the means whereby sinners are restored to divine favour in a way which is perfectly consistent with divine justice. And, without going further, we see His *faithfulness* manifested, for He has been true to the covenant which He made with His Son, and with His people in Him; a perfect salvation has been provided as promised. His greatness has been gloriously revealed in every aspect of the outworking of redemption – which will give added reason to all the glorified people of God to worship Him to all eternity in heaven, and there they will be able to do so perfectly. But, even now, how we should, with Paul, exclaim from the depths our hearts to the praise of the Most High: “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Cor 9:15).

God's Call to Careless Sinners¹

A Sermon by *Ebenezer Porter*

Isaiah 1:18. *Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord.*

The people of Judah, to whom these words were addressed, had become great sinners. Even their appointed feasts and solemn meetings were an abomination to Him who "looketh on the heart". The only alternative before them was deep repentance or speedy ruin. In these circumstances God, by His prophet, called them to pause in their career of sin and think on their own condition and prospects.

To the same duty He calls every careless sinner in this assembly today. If a stranger from a distant world could step into this place of worship and be told the religious advantages which we enjoy and the obligations which rest upon us, he would doubtless take it for granted that every individual here is a real Christian. But no one who has lived in this world, and had any just views concerning the moral state of its inhabitants, would feel authorised to take this for granted concerning any such assembly of human beings. On the contrary, must I not, as a preacher of the gospel, without pretending to know any heart, presume that some of you are without God in the world? Are some of you not perfectly conscious that this is your present condition?

You have perhaps heard hundreds of sermons, which you considered as addressed to others. I ask you now, each one individually, to listen to this sermon as addressed to you in particular. It is addressed, not to your emotions at all, but to your understanding and conscience. The range of my remarks will unavoidably be more miscellaneous than is commonly proper in a sermon, but nothing will be said which you cannot easily comprehend and remember. You have hitherto neglected giving serious attention to religion as the one thing needful, and you intend at present to continue in the same neglect. Is this course justifiable? Is it safe? Is it right? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

If the tomb which is to receive your mortal remains were to cover in oblivion your character and actions, then you might say with careless levity: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die". But if a few short years, at the utmost, will usher you into the unchanging realities of eternity, can it be proper for you to pass heedlessly on without any serious reflection, and yet without any hope beyond the grave? Certainly it cannot be proper. Let us

¹Reprinted, with slight editing, from the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 8, which has now been made available in hardback by Free Presbyterian Publications (£16.50, but £14.50 till October 31). Porter became the first president of Andover Theological Seminary, Massachusetts, in 1827. His *Letters on Revival* was reviewed in the July 2004 issue.

proceed then to look at some of these considerations which demand your present, solemn attention.

1. You know that you have a rational existence. You see the sun and moon above you as they measure out your days. You find yourself possessed of a body "fearfully and wonderfully made". You find a thinking existence within you, something distinct from all that belongs to matter; something that perceives, remembers, loves and hates. You find yourself an inhabitant of this earth – but why? Is this life your all? Was your soul formed, with its noble faculties, just to wake into a momentary existence and then to be extinguished in annihilation? Do you believe that you were placed here, like the animals, to eat and drink, to breathe and walk and sigh, for a few days and then sink into eternal night and nothing? No, a response comes from every bosom, I shall outlive time and all its changes. When "the sun is turned to darkness and the stars to dust", I shall exist still in some unknown hereafter.

2. I shall presume that you believe in the existence of a God. The fool may say in his heart that there is none; but certainly no serious doubt on this point can be the verdict of any man's understanding. Whence did this system of things come from what surrounds us? Who raised this mighty system of worlds? Who preserves it? Is all this the result of chance? Chance is nothing; and nothing cannot produce and govern a system of worlds. Did men or angels create the sun and moon and stars and earth? Men and angels cannot create a fly, nor a blade of grass. Besides, how did men and angels come into existence themselves? They were created by the uncreated God, the former of all things. If there is a God, He is intelligent and omnipotent. He knows all things. At every moment He must see those whom He has made, and whom He upholds continuously. He must be acquainted with all your actions and purposes. You cannot hide from His searching eye; you cannot escape out of His dominion.

3. I shall presume, too, that you believe the Bible to be of divine authority. A flood of evidence, which cannot be even noticed here, proves that it is so. If I supposed that you entertain any doubt on this point, I would simply ask concerning any scheme of infidelity you can name: Why are its disciples generally loose in sentiments and morals? Why do they discard prayer and all other duties of practical piety? Why are they so often filled with dismay at the hour of death? Those must be bad principles which make bad men. That scheme must be fallacious which alienates a creature from his Creator, and in the very proof of his immortality furnishes a motive to take refuge in a cheerless scepticism, or in annihilation. No prudent man will risk eternal consequences on a bold presumption which at the utmost can give but a momentary repose in sin, and then must leave the soul in anguish, without

consolation and without hope. You must therefore admit the Bible to be the Word of God, unless you close your eyes against the light – and resolve, regardless of truth and warning, regardless of all that may be joyful or terrible in eternity, to rush upon the dreadful experiment.

4. It must be further presumed that you believe yourself and all men to be sinful. Here again, if I supposed you to have any doubts, I would ask you to look into the world around you. Read its history. Why all the penal laws of every age and country against wickedness, if men are not wicked? When men make a common bargain, why do they esteem a paper bond as better security than their neighbour's honesty? If men are not depraved beings, how does it come to pass in every period, and on every side of the globe, that they have universally acted like depraved beings, and have invariably considered each other as deserving this character? If, after looking abroad into the world, you have any doubts concerning human depravity, then look into your own heart. If that is not enough, look into the Bible. Here you will find the point settled. Here your character is drawn by the unerring Spirit of inspiration. You are a sinner.

5. You know that God cannot consistently allow the transgression of His own law. The honour of His character and the good of the universe require that He should maintain this law. In the exercise of perfect and unlimited benevolence He has threatened awful destruction to all His impenitent enemies. You know that He is in "one mind and none can turn Him". You know that He is able to execute His threatenings. Who then can hope to harden himself against such a God and prosper? The case is plain: if you die in your sins, you must lie down in sorrow.

6. The subject now assumes a character of very serious importance. In the sober conviction of your own understanding, the point is settled: that you must exist for ever – and exist, either in glory or despair. Have you ever thought on this tremendous subject? Will you be persuaded to think on it now? Have you indeed a soul that must dwell in happiness or misery without end? What then is the worth of that soul? Thrones and empires are trifles in comparison. "Earth and skies are dust upon the scale." We dread severe pain, even when it does not last long. How the hearts of the strong and brave sink under the anguish of acute fever or a broken limb! What man in his senses would think it a light thing to endure such pain for a thousand years, for one year, or one month? Who then can dwell with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? Eternal misery outstretches and overwhelms human comprehension. Do you believe that there is indeed such an allotment of suffering for all the ungodly? Can you deliberately view yourself as exposed every moment to plunge into it and remain as indifferent as an

atheist or a stone? Is it possible that you should feel easy in such circumstances for one hour?

7. If you have given these considerations their due weight, we are prepared to proceed another step in our reflections. The religion of the gospel opens before us the only door for hope for perishing sinners. Have you cordially embraced this religion? Conscience perhaps stirs within you at this searching inquiry and gives the honest answer: "In the midst of light and warnings I have neglected the great salvation". Why then do you neglect it? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." Will you say that the system of the gospel is dark and hard to be understood? Have you faithfully endeavoured to understand it? Have you bestowed on it one half, or one hundredth, of the attention you pay to other subjects comparatively unimportant? *Comparatively*, did I say? O, what other subject is not comparatively unimportant? To the humble Christian, whether his capacity be great or small, the Bible is a plain book. Its essential truths and duties are so plain that the "wayfaring men, though fools, [need] not err therein".

Will you say that you have carefully studied the plan of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures and are, after all, not satisfied with it? Then what are its faults? Does it place God too high and sinners too low? He offers to forgive you if you confess and forsake your sins. Are these hard conditions? Can you ask Him to come down from His throne and save you on terms that would dishonour Him? Can you ask Him to be at peace with you while you love and justify your sins, reject the only Saviour of men, and trample on the law which that Saviour died to honour and fulfil? No, He will not, He cannot, do this. Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle of His law shall fail. Not one sinner can ever be saved unless he confesses and forsakes his sins. You cannot prosper while you are in arms against Omnipotence. The terms of the gospel are written as with a sunbeam; they admit only of submission or destruction. You are shut up to this alternative; you must bow or perish.

You see there is one, and only one, way to escape. That way is as plain and reasonable as you can desire. Indeed it is unalterably fixed, and therefore can never be plainer or easier than it is at this moment. What benefit then can result from delay? Is it not wise to treat things according to their importance? Does a prudent man stand to exchange greetings with a neighbour when his house is on fire? In common concerns men act rationally. They are careful in summer to provide for winter, in health for sickness. A wise merchant watches the state of the market. A wise husbandman observes the changes of the seasons and the proper time to sow and reap. A wise seaman does not sink himself in a storm to save his goods. There was a man among the tombs

who mangled his own limbs, but he was beside himself. There was a profane Esau, who sold his birthright for a morsel of meat; and a heathen Lysimachus, who exchanged his kingdom for a draught of water; but these, you say, were foolish men. What then in the light of eternity must you think of yourself, who can lose your soul and bury your immortal hopes without a sigh?

Serious as this language is, you will know hereafter that it is the language of truth and friendship. You slumber on the verge of ruin! All that the Christian minister attempts to do in this case – all that he is required to do, all that he can do – is to pray for you and say to you, like Paul to the distracted jailer: “Do thyself no harm”. Break from this infatuation. Rouse yourself from this fatal slumber. If you disregard such warnings, given you in love and faithfulness, the day will soon come when you will be exempt from such disturbing importunities. If you should succeed in destroying yourself, you will have as little disturbance as you can desire from the Bible and the pulpit, from Sabbaths and prayers and sermons. But know assuredly there will then be a reprover in your own bosom, whose admonition will be as the sting of a scorpion; and whose gentlest whisper will be thunder in your ear.

8. Your reason and conscience have probably thus far assented to the serious statements which I have made. May I now ask, What is your purpose? Here you are, an immortal being, standing on the small point of probation, between the extremes of endless pain and endless joy, sustained only by the frail thread of life, which the sword of justice is ready to cut, while the voice of mercy cries: “Now is the day of salvation.” Will you embrace this salvation? Two worlds wait your decision. Still perhaps you hesitate, still absurdly presume on the patience of God for a future season of repentance, and dare to suspend your immortal welfare on the issue of that presumption. You say, “I cannot think on these serious subjects now. Religion would make me gloomy and spoil all my happiness.” What happiness? Are you indeed happy without religion? The world may promise to make you so, but does it fulfil its promises?

Have you no disappointments from without? No moments of anguish within? No fearful forebodings about hereafter? You are not happy without religion. To prove this I need only appeal to your own bosom. Be it so that you are among the number of those who are at ease in Zion. Though now and then you are startled by a call from a deathbed or the pulpit, you soon dismiss these alarming subjects and pass along very quietly for weeks and months in sinful indifference. Is this happiness? If it is, will it last? When the rod of the Almighty touches your estate, your friends, or yourself, will it keep you tranquil? Will it stand by you in death and judgement? Will your heart remain cold when the elements shall melt? Will your heart remain firm

when the heavens and the earth are shaken? No; serious reflection may perhaps be put off today; it may be put off tomorrow; it may be put off for a few more days; but, as God is true, it cannot be put off always. In spite of your heart, it will come; it must come finally; it may come speedily.

Will religion make you unhappy – that religion which sweetens prosperity and presents a cordial even in the bitter cup? Go to the dungeon at Philippi and ask what made Paul and Silas sing at midnight while their backs were smarting under the lash of superstition and their feet made fast in the stocks. Go and stand by the stake of the blessed martyrs, and listen to their hallelujahs while their bodies were wrapped in the consuming flame. Go to the house of mourning, and ask what enabled a Christian mother to dedicate her little infant to God, reposing all her hopes for it and for herself on the cross of Christ, and in the immediate prospect of death to say, “This is the happiest hour of my life”. Was it a gloomy religion that could thus bear up her soul and fill it with heavenly radiance in such a moment? Or go to the bereaved Christian husband, and he can tell you that the best consolations of philosophy are utterly cold and comfortless in scenes that wring the heart with agony, while religion can give patience and peace and joy, and that all the books written by men can do nothing to soothe a wounded spirit compared with one short sentence of the Bible: “Be still and know that I am God”.

No, my dear hearers, religion is not a gloomy thing. Angels are not gloomy; men would never be gloomy if it were not for lack of religion. Every step you take towards your last hour, you are liable to be smitten through with some barbed arrow, from which nothing but religion can shield your bosom. And, when you come to that last hour, let me tell you now that without religion it will be cheerless and awful. No light from heaven will radiate its gloom. Perhaps a circle of weeping relatives may stand around your bed. Perhaps the gentle, trembling hand of a mother or sister may wipe away the cold sweat from your face. But what will this avail if you have no inward peace, no interceding Saviour, no reconciled God, no hope nor home beyond the grave?

You say, “These are solemn truths, I admit; but still I cannot think of becoming truly religious today. I must defer this subject for the present.” Then, how long? Shall it be one year, or 10 years? Weigh this matter well. There are two serious considerations here.

The first is: what if you should live to the time proposed and then find within you a heart more stubborn than ever? What if that time should find you frantic or senseless with disease, or bereft of all your faculties by some special stroke of providence? What if God should utterly withdraw His Spirit before then and leave you in judicial blindness under the curse of a reprobate

mind? Your damnation would then be as certain as though you were this moment in hell. "So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust", is the most awful language that has ever yet been spoken by Jehovah concerning any of the human race.

But a second very serious consideration should come into account. What reason have you to presume that your term of probation will last one year, or 10 years longer? Who has given you a guarantee that it will last another hour? "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." You see that men do actually die in every possible variety of circumstances – at home, in the field, on journeys, in bed, at the table. From the common scene of amusement, of business and of idleness, how many are unexpectedly summoned into eternity? And are you proof against the shafts of death? Do not be deceived. The hour may be at hand when some fierce disease shall sweep through your frame and choke the fountain of life. Today you may be strong in the enjoyment of health; tomorrow the colour of your cheek may be exchanged for a mortal paleness, and your body clothed in the attire of the grave.

I know it is painful to think on these serious subjects, but they must be thought of. What will it avail to shut your eyes now? The light of eternity will force them open. What will it avail to keep these things out of your mind for a few days? They must come home to your bosom shortly. What if you can slumber now in sinful security? The day is coming when you cannot slumber. You cannot slumber amidst the confusion of dissolving worlds. You cannot refuse to hear that voice which will rend the tombs and summon the dead to stand before the Son of man. Hearken, even now, to the admonition of heaven: "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it".

A tempted soul, when it is worst with him, may safely argue thus: If God were not my friend, Satan would not be so much my enemy; if there were not something of God within me, Satan would never make such attempts to storm me; if the love of God were not set up within me, Satan would never shoot so many fiery darts to wound me; if the heart of God were not towards me, the hand of Satan would not be so strong against me.

Walk by no rule but what you dare die by, and stand by at the great day.

Pirates make the fiercest assaults upon those vessels that are most richly laden; so doth Satan upon those souls that are most richly laden with the treasures of grace, with the riches of glory. Pirates let empty vessels pass and repass without assaulting them; so doth Satan let souls that are empty of God, of Christ, of the Spirit, of grace, pass and repass without tempting or assaulting them.

Christians usually pray most when they are tempted most. They are most busy with God when Satan is most busy with them.

Thomas Brooks

John Macdonald of Calcutta¹

3. Missionary Work in India

Rev Neil M Ross

Although he had a prominent ministry in London, it is with India rather than Britain's capital that the name of John Macdonald is usually associated. From an early stage – indeed before he was licensed to preach the gospel – he had a strong desire to be a missionary to the heathen. Then there came a stage in his London pastorate when he felt that perhaps the time was not far distant when his desire would be granted. “My present determination is to keep the matter unceasingly before the Lord,” he wrote, “and to wait submissively on His providence, in my present post, until the call for separation or continuance shall become clear.” The visit to London in 1835 of Alexander Duff, the first missionary sent out by the Church of Scotland, and superintendent of its Calcutta Mission, became the occasion, he said, “of much renewed soul exercise on the subject”.

A missionary of another Christian body suggested to him that, as a minister, his call should come through the Church. Such a call did come in the form of a letter to him from Dr Brunton, the Convener of the Church's Foreign Missions Committee, proposing that he work in India. As his main desire was to preach the gospel rather than become involved in teaching secular subjects, he said in his reply to Dr Brunton: “For nearly seven years, my whole time and energies have been devoted to the teaching or preaching of the gospel of Christ, publicly or privately; so that now, both as to disposition, ability, or calling, I could not, with faith, accept any post in which my main work would not be to communicate the knowledge of God's holy Word.”

Dr Brunton's reply satisfied him, and he agreed to go out to India. However, he had yet to be released from his London charge by his Presbytery. His congregation, desiring to retain him, presented a most touching petition to the Presbytery. It concluded with these words: “The congregation would submit their case to the earnest and prayerful consideration of the reverend court, praying that you may be directed by the great Head of the Church to counsel their beloved pastor to such a decision as will best promote the glory of God”. John Macdonald was deeply affected by it. “I knew not that the tie between us was so strong,” he wrote afterward, “or that the Lord had so blessed my work. O my Lord, keep me humble and dependent – hold up my goings!”

He himself delivered a remarkable speech to the Presbytery – later

¹Last month we looked at Macdonald's first years as a minister in a Scots church in London.

published as *Statement of Reasons for Accepting a Call to go to India as a Missionary*. The Presbytery did not stand in his way; two members spoke very strongly against him going; some positively approved; the rest remained silent lest they should resist the will of God.

However, it was not until about a year later that he set foot on Indian soil. During that year he completed the last five months of his London pastorate, and went to the Highlands for two months. He also married Anne Mackenzie, the eldest daughter of Alexander Mackenzie, formerly a London merchant. On his last Sabbath in the Highlands he preached three times in Dingwall, and a day or two later left his family behind for ever (apart from his father, who travelled to London to bid him Godspeed). After being inducted, in St Luke's Church, Edinburgh, to the work of the mission, he went to London; there he attended a prayer meeting the Presbytery had called in connection with his going abroad. "Afterwards," he wrote, "I addressed the numerous congregation present, and I made it a sort of general farewell to my London friends." After embarking at Portsmouth, the last person upon whom his eyes were fixed on the distant quay was his dear father. Then came the wearisome four-month voyage to India.

The first person to greet him on his arrival in India on 3 February 1838 was Rev William Sinclair Mackay, a native of Thurso and a close colleague of Dr Duff, who had been in Calcutta for seven years – one year less than Duff himself. Mackay sent a message aboard ship, warmly welcoming John Macdonald and his wife Ann to his home.

As John Macdonald waited to disembark he wrote in his diary: "I desire to fix and determine the following principles, which, if upheld by grace, will guide me to present duty and future glory: (1.) To abide in Christ – as in John 15. (2.) To yield myself to the Holy Spirit, for all His ends. (3.) To walk with God, in true fellowship. (4.) To hold all things and relations as God's own property. (5.) To count everything loss in order to fulfil my ministry. (6.) To make Christ crucified my theme." Tweedie comments: "Such was the spirit, and such were the resolutions, with which Mr Macdonald arrived in India. His residence of nearly ten years there forms one long comment on these six principles of action."

A few days later, he visited the Mission school and college (known as "the Institution") and was highly delighted by the numbers there, their progress in English, and the senior pupils' knowledge of Christianity. "All this is subordinate, and most useful in its place;" he wrote, "but life is wanting, as in Ezekiel's vision of the full-formed bodies: this I would make my grand concern. May the Lord direct me!" A fortnight later he formulated his plan of work, which included his intention "to carry on the study of the native tongue,

so that in due time I may be enabled, if it please God, to fulfil my ministry by preaching in the full sense of the term. In all this may the Lord help!”

He soon had opportunities to preach the Word, not only in the Institution itself, but also from time to time to the Church of Scotland congregation in the city; in the church of the government chaplaincy; and in Bethel, the place of worship for visiting sailors. One diary entry reads: “On Sabbath last preached in the Scotch Church, from Job 8: ‘The hypocrite’s hope shall perish’. On this point I sought to be faithful. Whilst some evidently showed emotion, others were evidently displeased. O how contemptible a thing is man’s judgement! Lord, help me on the morrow!”

His first opportunity to preach to heathen people came three months after he arrived. “A few young men met together, about twenty, and heard attentively,” he wrote. “If out of these twenty, five hold on to attend on Christian worship and teaching of this avowed kind, I shall be well pleased. May the Lord help me.” He found that the greatest opponent to the gospel, next to Roman Catholicism, was the caste system. He wrote to a friend, “The imperious, haughty and oppressive spirit which it produces on the one hand, and the slavish, mean and cringing spirit which it upholds on the other, are not the least of the evils that flow from it. . . . The dread of losing caste is the grand external barrier to the dissemination of the gospel in India.”

In the absence of Alexander Duff, who did not return to India until 1840, John Macdonald defended in the press Duff’s condemnation of the idea that none of the people could be converted until they had received an education. He also justified Duff’s criticism of the Government system of imparting knowledge without giving instruction in the Christian religion. The Government’s agent for implementing its policies was, of course, the East India Company, which was in effect the ruler of a large part of India. John Macdonald was not only able to vindicate Duff, but also “to testify to all Calcutta and the East”, says Tweedie, “as to the truth of God regarding the heart of man”. His testimony proclaimed man’s depravity by nature, demanded his conversion by grace, and proved that no education could avail to the saving of the soul.

As well as preaching, John Macdonald had the responsibility of regularly teaching classes in Scripture in the Institution, and conducting evening meetings where he preached to any young men who wished to attend. His sad complaint was: “They are encased in prejudice, in spite of knowledge and conviction; they are living against their consciences, and rearing up refuges of lies to shield themselves against truth”. He also engaged with zeal in the work of the Calcutta Christian Schoolbook Society, of which he became secretary. Its objective was to provide textbooks of a thoroughly Christian

character for Indian schoolchildren, aiming especially at the conversion of the people.

His work was sometimes impeded by ill-health. Three months after he arrived, he succumbed to the Calcutta climate and was sick for six weeks. A year later he was again troubled by a weakening sickness and had to go to Burhampore to convalesce. In February 1841, not long after the birth of their first son, his wife was very ill, as was he, and their little girl was, on two occasions at least, at death's door because of attacks of cholera.

Although he was severely tried, he was also encouraged in his work. In looking back over the year 1841, he mentions some of the Lord's mercies to him and adds: "He has granted me the still greater mercy of seeing two young Hindus in my daily Scripture classes converted to Christ, I hope sincerely. For this sight I do indeed bless Him."

In August 1843, when news of the Disruption in the Church of Scotland reached the Mission, John Macdonald and his ministerial colleagues (Alexander Duff, William Sinclair Mackay, David Ewart and Thomas Smith) were in no doubt about their duty to God and to the newly-formed Free Church of Scotland. They were united in standing for the crown rights of Christ. Tweedie comments on John Macdonald as he viewed the event from afar: he "beheld the Redeemer glorified as the unchallengeable Sovereign of Zion".

It was a severe blow to the missionaries when they were expelled from the Mission, but God rewarded them for their faithfulness by making such abundant provision that the work was speedily re-established and went from strength to strength. John Macdonald became the temporary pastor of the newly-formed Free Church congregation in Calcutta, and at the very first service baptised an Indian convert, Lal Behari Singh, who later became a catechist on the Mission. Indeed, the period immediately after the Disruption of 1843 was the most spiritually-prosperous for the Mission. William Mackay told the 1845 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in Inverness that no fewer than 18 of the 22 Indian professing Christians then on the Calcutta Mission had been added to the Church since the Disruption.

It was a great blow to the Mission, and a deep mystery of providence, when three of the professing men, Madhab Basak, Koilas Mookerjee, and Mahendra Basak, were removed by death within a short time of one another. "Koilas has gone to his rest," John Macdonald wrote to a friend, "leaving a savour of life behind him. His end was most easy and happy, and his last articulated words were, 'I am hungering after Christ and His righteousness'."

As interim pastor, John Macdonald superintended the organising of the

congregation, the ordination of elders, and the presentation of a call to Rev John Mackail of Malta to become their pastor. He accepted but was delayed in coming to India. But John Macdonald could record at the end of 1846: “Now, at length, the pastor-elect of the congregation, the Rev Mr Mackail, has arrived, and it will devolve on me, in a few days more, to transfer to him the ministry with which I have been favoured. . . . May the Lord now again guide me to what He would have me specially to do, that in some form or other I may ever be found fulfilling my ministry to the very end!”

That end in fact was not so very far away, although as yet there was nothing to indicate that this was so. He pressed on with his full duties as missionary minister: preaching the gospel, leading his pupils and students in the pastures of truth, witnessing with his pen against worldliness in the visible Church, and reproving the compromise of many professing Christians with Romanism and Hinduism. In his family circle he and his wife Ann had the great joy of being blessed with twin sons.

On Wednesday, August 25, John Macdonald became unwell and feverish. His condition worsened until the Saturday, when he was delirious. Although there was a slight improvement on the Sabbath, he had a relapse on the Monday and sank into a comatose state. Soon after midnight, on Wednesday 1 September 1847, at the age of 40, he fell asleep in Jesus.

Benefiting from Affliction¹

2. Adversity, and Who Has Sent It?

James Buchanan

In the day of adversity, you should consider (1) your *adversity itself*. You should not turn your mind away from it because it is distressing to you, or allow your thoughts to dwell on more pleasing topics with a view to forgetting what has befallen you. But steadily and deliberately you should look at your afflictions in all their real magnitude and probable consequences. This direction may at first sight appear to be unnecessary as affliction can hardly fail to command attention, especially when it is severe. To a certain extent this is true; yet we believe it will often be found that the mind is unwilling to take a deliberate view of its afflictions – as a man on the eve of bankruptcy is too apt to shut his eyes to the fact of his danger, or as a man smitten with mortal disease is unwilling to be convinced that his recovery is hopeless. And the consequence of this is that the mind is not suitably impressed by

¹Taken, slightly edited, from Buchanan’s book *The Improvement of Affliction*. The first article appeared last month.

God's dispensations, nor qualified to derive from them the benefit which they might otherwise confer.

The reason why we ask you to consider your actual condition, and especially the nature and probable consequences of your affliction, is that so long as you refuse to consider it, or take only a partial view of it, you do not read aright the lesson which God has placed before you – a lesson which you cannot understand if you turn your thoughts away from it. Thus worldly men contrive to frustrate the beneficial design of affliction in their own case, and seek to obliterate from the hearts of their friends the impression which it is fitted to produce. They have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, or to frivolous amusements, with the avowed purpose of diverting their thoughts from afflictions, which they cannot endure to think of with calm deliberation. And they are ever ready to prescribe to others the only remedy which they have tried for themselves.

But, if this advice is offered to any of Christ's disciples, we beg him to remember that a remedy has been provided for him of which the worldly man knows nothing. It is a remedy whose efficacy depends on affliction not being forgotten, but on its being duly considered – a remedy which, so far from requiring a diversion of thought as essential to our comfort, acts through the medium of thought and makes affliction itself subservient to our good. The Christian is indeed not precluded from availing himself of any benefit that might arise from change of air or scene – viewed simply as a means of relieving him, under God's blessing, from the physical weakness or disease under which he labours. This may even be his duty, a duty involved in the great law of self-preservation. And in attending to it, he may have a supreme view to the glory of God, his own spiritual improvement and future usefulness in the world, but he is solemnly debarred from seeking relief to his soul by banishing the thought of affliction and death.

It is a dangerous error – it may be even fatal – to act on the supposition that we may lawfully seek relief by forgetting the calamities that have befallen us. These calamities are warnings addressed to us as rational beings and, as such, they loudly claim our serious consideration. To have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, or to frivolous amusement, in such circumstances, is to “despise the chastening of the Lord” – it is to do violence to those feelings which affliction naturally produces and which instinctively point to retirement and reflection as appropriate to our condition – and notwithstanding the favour with which this course is regarded by worldly men, it will be found to be opposed to the common sentiments of society if it were pursued at those seasons when our sorrows are the most overwhelming. If a husband were seen in the theatre on the evening of that day which witnessed

the death or interment of his beloved wife or child, or if a man smitten with poverty were seen to join in the dance, would not the moral sense of the whole community be offended? Yet, if the recipe be good for anything, it should stand in our greatest extremities.

No. Adversity is a serious thing. It calls for solemn consideration. It never can be improved nor endured as it ought, unless we think of it and learn the lesson which it affords. View it in whatever light you please; consider it as a *trial* fitted to exercise your minds or as a *discipline* designed to improve them or as a *chastisement* for past transgression or as a *preparation* for future duty. In every aspect in which it can be contemplated, it claims thoughtful consideration. And if this be refused, it will harden the heart, and all the more if it be superseded by the cares and pleasures of the world. Were no better remedy provided for the afflicted, or were the mind to brood over its sorrows while the remedy is unknown or overlooked, then it might indeed be our wisest course to seek diversion in the world. But a remedy has been provided; and the Christian disciple can well afford to look on his affliction in all its magnitude without incurring the least hazard of troubling the springs of his comfort. If he fall into melancholy or dejection, it is only because he omits some one thing from his consideration which the Bible presses on his attention.

In the day of adversity, you should consider (2) *from whose hand* it has been sent to you. It comes direct from the hand of God. Intermediate agencies may have been employed in inflicting it; a chilling wind may have been the messenger of disease, a treacherous friend the cause of bankruptcy, an avowed enemy the author of reproach and shame, Satan himself may have been allowed to smite you. But through whatever secondary agency it may have been conveyed, adversity comes from God's hand. "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things" (Is 45:7). "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lam 3:38,39). "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). From these and many other passages, it is plain that temporal evil is ascribed to God in the Holy Scriptures; and no one who acknowledges God's providence at all can fail to believe that the numerous calamities of human life are permitted, appointed and overruled by the Supreme Governor of the world.

This is a consideration of great practical importance and should be seriously weighed in the day of adversity. First of all, it assures us that our afflictions are neither imposed by a fatal necessity, nor produced by the uncertain vicissitudes of chance; they come forth from the hand of one who is infinitely

wise and just and good. Secondly, it is fitted to minister at least a certain degree of comfort, inasmuch as it demonstrates that we have the security of all His attributes against the infliction of greater or more protracted suffering than is required by the necessities of our case and the rules of perfect justice and wisdom and love. Thirdly, it teaches us in many of our afflictions, and those which it is indeed most difficult to bear, to look beyond, and to rise above, the consideration of the mere human agency by which they have been inflicted. I refer to such as are brought on us through the malice of our fellow men, in regard to which we are too apt to consider the secondary agency through which they fall upon us, instead of steadily contemplating God as addressing to us, through that agency, the warnings and lessons which we need to learn and improve.

Thus it is that this class of afflictions – comprising calumny and defamation, extortion, oppression and such like – are too little improved. Indeed they seldom fail to produce an exasperation of spirit, diametrically opposed to that submissive temper which other afflictions, recognised as coming more directly from the hand of God, are fitted to produce. Whereas, if we consider *all* afflictions, of whatever kind, as emanating from the same source, we would find that even those which the hand or the tongue of man inflicts are a wholesome discipline and means of spiritual improvement. And finally if we habitually bear in mind the consideration which I am now pressing on your attention, we should be the more disposed, and the better prepared, for inquiring with becoming earnestness into the reasons which may exist for such dispensations, and the grand ends and uses for which they are designed. Let us remember then that every affliction, through whatever channel it may flow, comes to us ultimately from God's hand.

Close with [Christ], and as He lives for ever as your husband so shall you live for ever as His spouse. O who would not accept such a person? Soul, if you receive Him, know He lives for ever to love you, to comfort you, to make you happy in and with Himself. But, if you reject Him, know that He lives for ever to punish you, to inflict wrath and vengeance upon you and to make you completely miserable. But O reject Him not.

If you did not have slight thoughts of sin, you would not refuse the pardon of sin when offered you.

The neglect and refusal of Christ is a sin which binds all man's other sins fast to him. What may our souls expect from [Christ] in case we should close with Him in a marriage covenant? And O happy, happy they that are indeed espoused to Him! . . .

1. He pays all their debts. 2. He supplies all their wants. 3. He heals all their maladies. 4. He bears all their burdens. 5. He sweetens all their afflictions. 6. He subdues all their enemies. 7. He minds and manages all their concerns. 8. He joins them in eternal life and glory.

Edward Pearce

The Unchanging God¹

John Dick

It may be asked: How shall we reconcile with the doctrine of the unchangeableness of God those passages of Scripture which represent Him as having actually changed? Do we not read that it “repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth”, and again that “it repented Him that He had set up Saul to be king over Israel”?

The solution of this difficulty is very simple and is generally known. In speaking of Himself, God accommodates His language to our conceptions, so that we may the more easily apprehend His character and perfections and that the truths signified to us by metaphors and similitudes may make a deeper impression. He describes Himself as having bodily members, but no person supposes that He has eyes and ears and hands and feet. He describes Himself as awaking, but surely no man will think that He ever falls asleep. Common sense directs us to understand all such passages as figurative. Does it not also require that we should put the same construction on other passages which attribute human feelings and passions to God? We might suspect the mind of that man to be deranged who should imagine that He fears, expects, is disappointed, grieves and rejoices; and why then should the idea be admitted that He literally repents?

When a person adopts a new line of conduct we conclude that he has changed his mind. It is on this ground that God is said to repent; the cause is put for the effect by a well-known figure of speech; and the change of His mind signifies merely a change of dispensation. When He destroyed the inhabitants of the earth by a flood and transferred the right to reign from Saul to another person, He acted as if He had repented – in the one case, that He had created a race which had become exceedingly corrupt, and in the other, that He had bestowed the crown upon a man who showed himself unworthy of it. But in both cases the repentance was only apparent, for the events upon

¹An extract, slightly edited, from Dick’s *Lectures on Theology*, a four-volume set which has recently been republished by Tentmaker Publications. It is available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom for the special price of £71.95. Dick (1764-1833) was Professor of Theology in the United Secession Church, formed from the two “New Light” branches of the Seceders; accordingly he does not hold the scriptural view of the Establishment principle. Principal John Macleod comments in his *Scottish Theology* that his work “would do credit to the best days of the Secession. It is true that he was a Voluntary and that he favoured a laxer view of the inspiration of Holy Scripture than was the accepted Reformed teaching on the subject, but his systematic presentation of the Faith in his *Lectures on Theology* was reckoned by as good a judge as Archibald Alexander of Princeton as being the best system extant in the English language.”

which His change of conduct was founded were foreseen from the beginning. God knew that the human race would apostatise from Him, and that Saul would not hearken to His voice.

It may also be suspected that God really changes when He hates a person whom He once loved, or loves a person whom He once hated. Of the former change we have an example in the apostate angels and in Adam, who lost the favour and incurred the displeasure of their Creator; and of the latter, in those who, through the faith of the gospel, pass from a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance. In these cases a change must be acknowledged, but it remains to be ascertained in whom it has taken place.

Has God changed? No more than the sun changes when the different parts of the earth successively come into its light and retire into darkness. That glorious luminary continues to shine with equal splendour, but terrestrial objects are in perpetual motion. It stands still, and they pass away. To ascribe motion to it is an error which science corrects. God does not love at one time, and at another hate, an individual continuing in all respects the same; for, were this the case, we should be compelled to say that He is mutable. Those who are always holy are always the objects of His love, and those who are always impure are always the objects of His hatred. The change is in His creatures who, having lost their righteousness, have fallen under His displeasure; or, having recovered it by His grace, have regained His approbation.

It would be an unequivocal proof of mutability if He entertained the same regard to a creature after it had lost its innocence as before; because the object of His regard, although physically the same, would be morally different, and could not continue to attract His love without a change in Him corresponding to the change which it had undergone. The withdrawal of His favour from a sinner, and the restoration of it to the believing penitent, supply irrefragable evidence that He is governed by an unbending principle of rectitude, and that justice and judgement are the habitation of His throne.

The immutability of God is fraught with consolation. It is a rock on which we can fix our feet while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. Worthy indeed of awe is the idea of a Being dwelling from age to age amidst the fulness of perfection and happiness, to whom time is as a moment and the universe as a span! What is man, that He should regard him? What is man, who yesterday opened his eyes to the light and tomorrow shall close them in the grave? Yet He condescends to be our friend and protector, and consoles us by the assurance that, although we are as the flower of the field, which is withered by the passing blast, yet His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting and His faithfulness to children's children.

This consolation belongs to Christians. The permanence of His character secures to them the performance of His promises, succour in the season of need, a welcome reception when they come to Him with their requests, and happiness stretching beyond the boundaries of time, uninterrupted by death itself and prolonged through an infinite duration. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee" (Is 54:10).

The divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It ensures the execution of His threatenings as well as the performance of His promises; it destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth that God is unchangeable in veracity and purity, in faithfulness and justice.

There is another delusion which this doctrine is fitted to dispel. The thought of hell, as a prison from which there is no release, is alarming; and men, unable to work themselves into a complete disbelief of its existence, have sought to relieve their minds by converting it into a purgatory, or a place of temporary punishment: the Judge will relent and let the criminals go free; future sufferings will prove corrective and prepare for a universal restoration. But here again His immutability meets us. It is vain to expect from Him what is inconsistent with His nature. He will always be what He is at present. As fire will always burn, so His holiness will always abhor, and His justice will always pursue with vengeance the workers of iniquity. There can be no just hope of escape without a change in themselves, and it must take place before the day of doom. This life is the season of trial, the world to come is the place of recompense, and there the allotment is final. The decree by which it is fixed is founded on the eternal principles of justice, and is as immutable as God Himself.

To make our reception of the Saviour depend on the state of our feelings or our humility, our fervent prayers, or aught that is our own, is not merely irreligious, but unreasonable. It is putting the effect before the cause, or redemption before the Redeemer. The sinner's first duty is to receive and rest upon Him; and, till that be done, the soul is not safe. Pungent sorrow, amounting to remorse, may be felt; but it is a sorrow that worketh death, till we come to the Man of Sorrows for rest to the soul. It is Christ received, Christ rested on, that teaches godly sorrow, and then guides to everlasting joy.

W K Tweedie

Mission News from Africa

Zimbabwe: The centenary of our Zimbabwe Mission is now approaching. Preparations are being made by our people there for the anniversary event, on Friday, 9 September, to mark the great goodness of God in preserving and blessing the Mission hitherto. It is expected that Rev N M Ross, Moderator of Synod, and Rev J R Tallach, Clerk of the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee, will be present, God willing, as representatives of the home Church. They will also assist at some communion seasons and engage in other preaching duties during the three weeks they expect to be in the country. Some former members of our mission staff also hope to travel to Zimbabwe for the historic occasion, and it is expected that Ds Tj de Jong, Chairman of Mbumba Zending, and other Dutch friends will be present. We pray that the Lord will make it a time of blessing.

It was a matter of great regret that, at the time of the Church's annual Synod in May, the representatives from Zimbabwe, Rev P Mzamo and Mr S Ncube, were not able to come to the UK. Our government did not grant them an entry visa, despite the fact that Mr Mzamo has visited this country on many occasions and was Moderator of Synod in 1963 – the first occasion on which an African minister presided over the supreme court of any Church in this country.

Rev Alasdair MacLean (who was licensed to preach the gospel last June and now awaits ordination to the ministry), has been accepted by the Foreign Mission Committee as a missionary to Zimbabwe, subject to the approval of the Zimbabwe Presbytery, which will determine a suitable sphere of work for him. Meantime Mr MacLean is in Zimbabwe, and is based in Ingwenya, where his sister, Miss Norma MacLean, is deputy head of the John Tallach Secondary School. He is preaching to our congregations in Zimbabwe and is also doing language study. We pray that both he and the Presbytery will be directed by the Lord of the harvest, and that much blessing will follow.

At Mbumba Mission Hospital in Zimbabwe there is still a crying need for nursing staff with midwifery qualifications. Matron Peta van de Ridder is due back from furlough at the beginning of this month, after which it is expected that Sister Willie Geurtsen will go to Bulawayo to take a midwifery course as soon as possible. The Foreign Mission Committee appointed Miss Erica van Breda (who worships in our congregation in Glasgow and is a nurse in a hospital there) as a new member of staff. God willing, she hopes to travel to Zimbabwe in January next year. Meantime, she hopes to obtain experience in Glasgow as a surgical-theatre nurse in view of the likely re-opening of the theatre at the Mission hospital when

Dr Anneke Snoek commences work there in November, God willing. **Kenya:** In Sengera, Rev K Watkins, Mission Superintendent, is overseeing the implementation of various elements of the Sengera Mission Plan which was formally drawn up by the Kenya Field Committee at the beginning of the year and approved by the Foreign Mission Committee last May. The past years have been a time of consolidation of mission work there, and now the Plan represents a modest move towards expansion locally in preaching, teaching and publishing “the word of the truth of the gospel”, including the development of activities in education and medicine as useful handmaids of the gospel.

On 22 September, Mr Watkins will be rejoined by Mr Hugh Mackenzie, Mission Administrator, who returns to Kenya for another tour of duty. The Committee is grateful to Mr Calum Gunn for stepping in after Mr Mackenzie finished his previous contract and then was much heartened by Mr Mackenzie’s willingness to renew his contract. We wish him and Mrs Mackenzie well in the Lord during their stay there. *(Rev) Neil M Ross*

Ministry in Israel

Behind the presence of our Church in Israel is the fact that our precious Bible came to us through the instrumentality of the Jews. They were the ancient custodians of the “word of salvation” which God has sent to us. With this in mind we feel it to be a great encouragement that in the good providence of God a door has been opened to revive our work and witness in Israel among God’s ancient people, who are “beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom 11:28).

As a Church we have our roots in the old Church of Scotland. Therefore our historical connection with the land of Israel goes back to 1839, when four notable ministers of the Church of Scotland: Alexander Black, Professor of Divinity in Marischal College, Aberdeen, Alexander Keith, RMM Cheyne and Andrew Bonar were sent to Israel on a Mission of Enquiry. In 1928, our Church sent Rev Donald Urquhart to Israel, where he laboured faithfully for some years until ill health brought his work to an end.

At its meeting in July this year, the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee was pleased to grant the application of Rev John Goldby to work as a minister of the gospel in Israel. His release by the Western Presbytery from his pastoral charge of Shieldaig and Applecross opened the way for him to be sent to Israel. His work there will be reviewed after two years because of financial constraints. It is a matter of concern to the Committee that the longer-

term funding of this work is uncertain because, unlike our work in Africa, it does not receive significant financial support from outwith our Church.

Mr Goldby, as most of our readers are aware, has already been doing exploratory work in Israel, and he and his family have been living in a comparatively convenient and secure area of Jerusalem. Not only has he established a base, but he has also been conducting services, making contacts, progressing well in learning the Hebrew language, and all in all has been paving the way for establishing our ministry in Israel. May the Lord, to whom belongs the earth and all that it contains, provide for the work in the future, open more doors, and bless what has already been done in His name.

St Andrews Church of Scotland in Jerusalem has been made available to us for a regular service at 7 pm on Sabbath (Lord's Day). For further information about services, please contact Rev J L Goldby at 2 HaYarden, Talpiot, Jerusalem 93385; telephone from the UK: 00972 26739058; e-mail: jgoldfpc@netvision.net.il.
(Rev) Neil M Ross

“His Hour Was Come”

A Sermon Outline by John Kennedy

John 13:1. *Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.*

There is in these words a certain knowledge ascribed to Christ; and there is also a certain love ascribed to Him.

What Jesus knew. He knew that His hour had come.

He knew what was to happen at that hour.

He knew that He was to depart out of the world.

He knew that He was going to the Father.

He knew that He had to suffer in that hour.

He knew all the shame and agony of that hour.

He knew that it was an hour of the power of darkness.

He knew that it would be an hour of the hiding of His Father's face.

He knew that the enmity and contempt of men would reach their climax.

He knew the hour appointed for pouring out His soul unto death.

How Jesus loved. Think of His perfect holiness in being in this world.

Think of what it was to His love to be wounded by the enmity of men.

Think of His love in what He endured from the assaults of hell.

Think of His love in the hiding of His Father's countenance.

The objects of His love were given to Him in the eternal covenant.

They were given to Him in being drawn to Him by the Father.
 They were redeemed by Him and became His by purchase.
 They were still to be in the world, having the sentence of death in them.
 They were still open to persecution, and liable to temptation.
 They were still poor and needy, still mourners, and liable to faintings.
 He loved them from the beginning, and shall to the end.
 He proved His love in washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus' exhortation. "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

"That ye love one another as I have loved you."

"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples."

"Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me."

Inverness, 2 July 1882

Book Reviews

The Moral Law, Its Place in Scripture and its Relevance Today, by John L Mackay, published by The Christian Institute, booklet, 64 pages, £3.50.

The Christian Institute is a well-known campaign group that lobbies Parliament over moral and religious issues. On the whole they have a scriptural outlook and the Church supports them financially. This booklet, containing in ten brief chapters the substance of two lectures on behalf of the Institute, is a useful contribution on a subject about which there is appalling ignorance.

The author is Professor of Old Testament at the Free Church College, and in his booklet he aims to teach the proper place of the moral law in the New Testament Church. The alarming acceptance of an Antinomian stance in professing Christian Churches highlights the decay in our nation's religious life. The first part of the booklet shows the place of the moral law in the heart of man in his first creation and its position relative to the civil and ceremonial laws given by Moses. It exposes Theonomy (which argues for the abiding validity of all the civil and ceremonial laws) as a dangerous delusion. A brief look at the law as a covenant of works asserts that the Sinaitic covenant was not proposed as a legal way of salvation and did not supersede the gracious covenant with Abraham.

The second part of the booklet looks at the law in the New Testament. The common notion that the Sermon on the Mount replaces the moral law with a new and easier law is exposed as fallacious, and it is shown that Christ taught that the law was spiritual, requiring heart obedience as well as outward conformity. Another chapter entitled "The Law and Love", shows that "love towards God requires that attention be paid to the directions He

has given about what pleases Him” (p 46). In the longest chapter, “Paul and the Law”, it is shown that Christ, as the end of the law for righteousness, is the burden of the Apostle’s message – together with the need for the work of the Spirit, to produce newness of life and obedience to the law.

We commend this booklet with one significant reservation – the use, with few exceptions, of the English Standard Version of the Bible. *(Rev) D Campbell*

Troubled Journey, A Missionary Journey in War-Torn China, by Faith Cook, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 128 pages, £5.95.

Faith Cook has already written a number of useful books, including her biographies of William Grimshaw and the Countess of Huntingdon. This one describes her own childhood as the daughter of parents working for the China Inland Mission.

Lying behind her account are the remarks she makes about her parents in the Preface: “With fortitude and self-denial they gave their all in order to spread the Christian gospel. However, my purpose is also to suggest that sometimes their zeal was misguided. Some of the sacrifices which they, and the missionary societies which supported them, felt they must make for Christ’s sake brought unnecessary suffering to both parents and children.” Much of Mrs Cook’s youth was spent at a boarding school for missionary children; the Japanese invasion of China made it impossible for her to return to her parents and eventually forced the evacuation of the children in a dangerous flight over the Himalayas to India.

As we might expect, the book is written in an interesting way, though it is not the type of book to which one might go expecting a great deal of spiritual content. Apart from presenting the difficulties faced by missionaries in raising their children far from home, the main lesson presented is “how God has supported, protected and added unexpected provisions for our needs along the way. Even the sufferings themselves have proved to be part of God’s design for my life.”

Notes and Comments

Dishonesty in Politics

Neither Church nor state should interfere in the proper sphere of the other. Each has been given its function by God and is accountable to God for its stewardship. The Church as such does not become involved in party politics or the administration of civil affairs but should point out to the authorities biblical principles on matters of policy with which the state takes to do. The

Church's primary interest in state affairs should be to endeavour to secure and preserve the conditions for which we are exhorted to pray in 1 Timothy 2:1-4: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Prayer is not a substitute for action but the spirit in which action should be taken. In our constitutionally Christian and democratic nation, the Church and patriotic Christian subjects should do everything possible to bring the teaching of God's Word to bear on politicians in order to preserve a society in which the Lord's people can "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" and proclaim the truth publicly to all around, whatever their religious or social state, in order that sinners may be brought to salvation.

Legislative and other changes, recently and in prospect, not only promote state intrusion in personal matters but threaten the capacity of the Church and the Christian to practise freely the principles of the Word of God – whether in telling the truth about religious and moral perversions or in applying biblical principles in daily life. What makes the situation particularly difficult to deal with is the lack of honesty and candour on the part of those to whom representations are made on such matters. Words are used to camouflage and mislead rather than reveal true intentions.

Our politicians, of all parties, have played fast and loose with the Protestant constitution of our land, so that it is impossible to believe that it is safe in their hands. Dishonesty has characterised governments throughout the whole process which has led to our present enmeshment in Europe. Dishonesty and double dealing have characterised the process which has brought about the state of affairs in Ulster where, for all the protestations to the contrary, terrorism and criminality have determined government policy. Dishonesty played a great part in the process which brought about the war in Iraq. We fear that dishonesty is vitiating the attempts of government to deal with the current threat to our nation from terrorists of another kind.

We fully support the forces of law and order in the task with which they are confronted and commend them for the courage, diligence and competence with which they set about it. But they are working within a political framework where Christian absolutes are denied. The consequent multi-faith and multi-cultural outlook makes it politically incorrect to acknowledge (a) that Protestant Christianity gave our nation the character which made it a haven for fugitives from tyranny elsewhere and for those who wished to improve

their situation in life and (b) that as Protestant Christianity is progressively undermined in Church and state, we lose the vitality to resist the pressures from non-Christian sources which will take from our nation the very liberties which allow them their freedom to practise and propagate their religions.

No doubt a large proportion of practising Muslims and a large proportion of practising Roman Catholics are content to live their lives and to practise their religions within the context of the British state as it currently exists, but it is surely justifiable and obligatory to ascertain the ultimate aims of any religion which acknowledges an earthly authority which has ambitions to convert states to its own political ideology. Instead of honouring diplomatic popes as men of peace and running to affable Roman cardinals to get from them the “Christian” perspective on matters under discussion, British politicians should be enquiring into the bearing of Romanism’s political claims on the constitution of this Protestant state, to which they have sworn allegiance. And instead of weakly assuming that the activities of men who kill in the name of Islam are as contrary to “the true faith of Islam” as they are to the instincts of rank and file Muslims – what Mr Blair and others are falling over themselves to do – British politicians should be enquiring into whether or not it is the aim of that religion, by varying means, to establish its dominance not only in its traditional homelands but also in the West.

Sadly, their dishonest attitude to the Christianity of our nation and their lack of Christian principle produce in our politicians an inability and unwillingness to face these fundamental and urgent questions honestly. While we long for godly men in government, it would be helpful to have even naturally-honest policies pursued by genuine statesmen. “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted” (Ps 12:8). *HMC*

Justifying Islamic Terrorism

Suicide bombers themselves make it abundantly evident beforehand that, in dying and being instrumental in bringing about the death of many others, they are motivated by the teaching of the Koran. Accordingly, they die under the delusion that “martyrdom” will be rewarded with an honoured place in a sensuous “paradise” where every lust imaginable will be satisfied. In ushering themselves and, at the same time, as many “infidels” as possible into eternity, they believe that they are acting in the interests of their religion and will go down in history as “heroes of Islam”.

Apologists for Islam, and, sadly, the great majority of those in authority over us, regard it as expedient to deny what the bombers themselves assert and are determined to find some other explanation for the wicked and inhuman conduct of these people. One brave journalist, writing in the *Daily Mail*, is

to be applauded for drawing attention to the fact that Islamic terrorism is all about religion and is to be traced to a cult of hatred and death “incited and inflamed by lies and distortions about the history and present actions of the West and above all about Jews and Israel – a world-view based on a wholesale denial and inversion of the truth which has poisoned the minds of millions. . . . And now the government is bringing in a law against incitement to religious hatred, all in order to appease the Muslim community that seeks to outlaw altogether the drawing of any association between Islam and terror.”

The matter is put in perspective in an article by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, and International Director of the Barnabas Fund. “Some in Britain,” he writes, “cannot conceive that a suicide bomber could be a hero of Islam. . . . Since the violence cannot be denied, their only course is to argue that the connection with Islam is invalid. Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Brian Paddick, said that ‘Islam and terrorists are two words that do not go together’. His boss the Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, asserted that there is nothing wrong with being a fundamentalist Muslim.”

Does this mean that the Commissioner would therefore find acceptable the behaviour of fundamentalist Islamic leaders who not only condone the actions of suicide bombers, but speak of them as “praiseworthy” and who – courtesy of the BBC – publicly declare: “We don’t live in peace with the British any more. The banner has been raised for jihad inside the UK, which means it’s allowed for the bombers to attack”? Political correctness demands that these extremists must be allowed to have their say and, moreover, that nothing must be said or done that will alienate the so-called “moderate members of the Muslim community”.

They are regarded as opposed to the extremists but the “condemnations” of the British Muslim leadership, who are supposed to speak on their behalf, “have little value”, according to Dr Sookhdeo, “hedged as they are with provisos and get-out clauses. . . . What good is it to condemn suicide bombings in London and affirm them in the Middle East? . . . While many individual Muslims choose to live their personal lives only by the peaceable verses of the Koran, it is vain to deny the pro-war and pro-terrorism doctrines within their religion. Could it be that the young men who committed suicide were neither on the fringes of the Muslim society in Britain, nor following an eccentric and extremist interpretation of their faith, but rather that they came from the very core of the Muslim community motivated by a mainstream interpretation of Islam?”

Mainstream interpretation! Dr Sookhdeo points out that “contemporary

Islam can be what you make of it". It is, he avers, "like a pick-and-mix selection. If you want peace, you can find peaceable verses. If you want war, you can find bellicose verses. You can find verses which permit only defensive jihad, or you can find verses to justify offensive jihad." The day after the suicide bombers carried out their first attack in London, an article appeared in the *Muslim Weekly* which set out the goal of Islam with transparent clarity. It is "to gain political and military power over non-Muslims, that warfare is obligatory for all Muslims, and that the Islamic state, Islam and shari'a [Islamic law] should be established throughout the world". All these aims are supported by quotations from the Koran.

Few are awake to the dangers which lie ahead if the Lord does not in His holy providence rescue us. Dr Sookhdeo draws attention to the fact that "the Muslim community now inhabits principally the urban centres of England as well as some parts of Scotland and Wales. It forms a spine running down the centre of England from Bradford to London, with ribs extending east and west. It is said that within 10-15 years most cities in these areas will have Muslim-majority populations, and will be under local Islamic political control, with the Muslim community living under shari'a."

It is clear by our departing from God – the living and true God – that we as a nation have procured this to ourselves. Our Queen has violated her coronation engagements by, for instance, attending multi-faith services. In doing so she has publicly validated (whatever her private views may be) false religions such as those centred on Rome and Mecca, which dishonour the Lord Jesus Christ. But He is still reigning supreme in heaven and earth and, when His time comes, the false prophet shall fall and Rome shall perish. Meantime we may take comfort from the fact that not a bomb shall explode without His knowledge and, if they fail to explode, that is His doing also. When four bombs fail to explode in London and the men are caught whom the police were searching for as a result, what shall we think? "The Lord is known by the judgement which He executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of His own hands." JM

"Civil Partnership"

Recently a newspaper columnist stated that, as "the kind of breach with tradition entailed in the civil-partnerships legislation is therefore almost bound to be unacceptable to some, it is arguable that, at least during a long transitional period, registrars should be allowed – not least for the sake of the couples involved – to opt out of solemnising same-sex civil partnerships, rather than celebrate them in a spirit of begrudgery and disapproval" (*The Scotsman*, 6 August 2005). The suggestion that registrars would be obliged to conduct such ceremonies ("solemnising" is a strange description of the

action) only illustrates how many areas of life and work are being closed to biblical Christians.

Joyce MacMillan's "therefore" in the above statement is based on her recognition that "the mainstream Christian tradition – like most other religious traditions – still officially takes the view, although without much New Testament authority for it, that active homosexual relationships are sinful and abhorrent". Apart from ignoring the unity of the Old and New Testaments, this statement regarding New Testament authority sets aside the clear statements of passages such as Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9,10. These passages show that such behaviour, in common with other sinful characters and lifestyles listed, springs from the fact that men are ungodly, and it leads to their exclusion from the kingdom of God. It is not for the Church to encourage sinners of any kind to continue in sin but to expose sin and its condemnation and proclaim the need and possibility of repentance and forgiveness: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). *HMC*

Church Information

Theological Conference

This year's Theological Conference will be held, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 6 and 7. It is expected that the following papers will be read:

The Spirit and Regeneration	Rev J R Tallach
The Doctrine of Forgiveness	Rev N M Ross
Religious History of the Netherlands	Mr J Freeke
The Theology of Mission Work	Rev J MacLeod
Millennialism and Amillennialism	Rev D W B Somerset

(Rev) J R Tallach, Convener, Training of the Ministry Committee

Committee Meetings

These Synod committees will meet, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church as follows on Tuesday, October 4:

- 9.30 - 11.00 Training of the Ministry Committee
- 11.00 - 12.00 Magazines Committee
- 12.00 - 1.00 Sabbath Observance Committee
- 2.00 - 5.00 Finance Committee
- 2.00 - 3.00 Outreach Committee
- 3.00 - 4.00 Religion and Morals Committee

6.00 - 7.30 Publications and Bookroom Committee

7.30 - 8.30 Welfare of Youth Committee

8.30 - 9.30 Dominions and Overseas Committee

(Rev) *John MacLeod*, Clerk of Synod

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Tuesday, September 20, at 1 pm.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Tuesday, September 20, at 3 pm.

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, September 27, at 11 am.

Northern: At Dingwall, on Tuesday, November 1, at 2 pm.

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, on Friday, January 27, at 2.30 pm.

Teachers Required for Zimbabwe Mission.

There will be vacancies for two teachers at the John Tallach Secondary School in September 2006. The preferred qualifications are science, mathematics or computing, and successful applicants would be required to teach Religious Education, but any qualified teacher is encouraged to enquire. The work is demanding but satisfying and every teacher has a place in helping to make the school a true handmaid to the gospel. Details may be obtained from the Clerk of the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee, Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, Kyle, IV40 8PB, e-mail: jamesross@tallach.fsnet.co.uk.

Dominions & Overseas Fund

By appointment of Synod, the Special Collection on behalf of the Dominions and Overseas Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during September.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

Bookroom Fund: AB, £14.86 per KJH.

College & Library Fund: A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 121, £40.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: AB, for Thembiso Children's Home, £100; Anon, CHF 20 000.

Outreach Fund: Dr N Malcolm, £50 per KJH.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Inverness: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £10; Mrs C MacDonald, £20; Mr & Mrs J Campbell, £40. *Communion*

Expenses: A Friend of the Cause, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £30; £25; £30. *Jewish &*

Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, for Kenya Mission, £50; for Kenya Mission Poor Fund, £100.

North Uist: *Congregational Funds:* Harris Friend, £20 per Rev DMD; Anon, Glasgow, £40.

Portree: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £30. *Congregational Funds:* Estate of the late Chrissie Beaton, £500. *Door*

Collection: A Friend, £10; £12; £12 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £30; £30 per SYM.

Staffin: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40. *Door Collection:* Staffin House, £50.

Expenses: Anon, £20; £40; SW, £40. *Congregational Funds:* PA, £10 per Rev DC.

(**Laide:** The reference to two Western friends in the July issue should have read two *Ulster* friends.)