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## Testimony from Heaven

The Saviour had spent 40 days and 40 nights with His disciples after the resurrection. The time had now come for Him to leave them and to ascend to heaven. They were to go out, He told them, and bear witness for Him “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

No one could be an apostle unless he had seen the risen Christ; he must be able to speak as an eyewitness. So Peter told the other disciples that the apostle to be appointed in place of Judas Iscariot must be one “of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21,22). When the Apostles went out, at their Master’s command, to preach the gospel, they could say, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you” (1 John 1:3). These first preachers of the Christian Church were proclaiming what they knew through personal experience. They had been with Jesus and, when they spoke about Him, their statements were first-hand testimony.

When the Apostles went out to speak on the day of Pentecost, they had been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, all who heard them were amazed. What they said at first we are not told, but Peter’s response to those who mocked them as being “full of new wine” is recorded. He spoke as a witness of what he had seen of Jesus and had heard of His words over the previous three years and more, and particularly of what he had heard within a matter of weeks before then, after the Saviour’s resurrection. He told the assembled crowd – and everyone was able to hear him in their own language – of “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23,24).

Yet, as these verses make plain, Peter did not merely report on the events surrounding Christ’s death; he was able to set them in the context of the eternal purposes of God. How wonderfully he and the other disciples had

benefited from the time, especially after the resurrection, that they had spent with the great Prophet who had come from God! As Luke tells us, He had “said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me”. He had pointed the disciples to various passages throughout the Old Testament which formed part of the revelation concerning Himself.

And He did more, for Luke goes on to tell us: “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day”. He then told them “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”; He commissioned these disciples, in view of all that they had seen and heard, to go out in every direction to make known the spiritual blessings that He had come into the world to make possible.

Yet it was not merely as bearing witness to Jesus’ life and death that the disciples spoke on the day of Pentecost; they had further vital testimony to bring concerning Him: “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). Death was not the end for Christ. Though He had come into this world as the sin-bearer, and had gone to Calvary – for “the wages of sin is death” – yet by His sufferings and death He had satisfied divine justice. Therefore death could no longer hold Him in the grave. So His resurrection was divine testimony that His sacrifice at Calvary had been fully accepted; clearly every sinner now believing in Jesus as the divinely-appointed Saviour would be free from all the claims of divine justice. This was all part of the testimony that Peter and the other disciples could bring to sinners in Jerusalem, and also to every other part of the world where they went to preach the gospel.

But where does all this leave *us*? We live far too late in this world’s history to have any hope of hearing an apostle, or any other witness of Christ’s death and resurrection, bring us the good tidings of salvation. No doubt many feel that they have lost much because they can never expect to receive such eyewitness testimony. But that is not so. Listen to Peter as he reminds those who read his Second Epistle of what took place on the Mount of transfiguration: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy

mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Pet 1:16-19).

We are not merely to notice how Peter emphasises that he wrote as an eyewitness rather than someone whose account was no better than a craftily-devised fable. We are also to notice how the “word of prophecy” is surer than even Peter’s personal testimony to the voice from heaven, or the voice itself. “A transient voice”, explains Alexander Nisbet in his commentary, *1 & 2 Peter*, “is more easily mistaken or forgotten than a standing authentic record; therefore the written Word is a more sure ground for sinners’ faith to rest upon than a voice from heaven could be.” Clearly then we are in the best possible position because, in Scripture, we possess the complete, inspired record of what God has been pleased to reveal for our instruction. We do not need to hear personal witnesses give us an account of, for instance, what Christ did and said. We have an absolutely-accurate revelation, to which – to repeat Peter’s words – we do well that we take heed.

Today’s preachers are not apostles; this was a temporary office not intended to survive beyond the first generation of the Christian Church. But when preachers go out with the infallible testimony of Scripture, we are to receive that testimony just as if it came directly to us from heaven. The full authority of God lies behind it. When they speak about sin, they no doubt bear testimony to what they have discovered in their own hearts and lives – yet individual human experience is in no way authoritative for anyone else. But preachers bring testimony from heaven about the human condition. It is because God has placed such testimony in Scripture that everyone is to receive it as perfect truth when they declare that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). And we are to respond by saying to ourselves, with total conviction: I have sinned in Adam, and I am continually coming short of the glory of God.

Likewise, when preachers come with the testimony of the gospel, they bring testimony which carries the imprimatur of heaven. When they proclaim the glorious fact that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”, they speak with all the authority of heaven. This is a message we have no right to reject; we are to receive it as if God Himself was speaking directly to us. From the pages of Scripture and through His ambassadors, the Saviour calls with full divine authority: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). May we then come, for we have no right to stay away from Him whom the Father gave to be the Saviour of the world. Even if we live in the uttermost parts of the earth, we are under obligation to respond with immediate believing obedience to the whole body of testimony that comes to us in the Scriptures.

## The Universal Calls of the Gospel (1)<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by John Bonar

Proverbs 8:4,5. *Unto you, O men, I call; and My voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.*

These are the words of Christ. They are the words of Christ to men in general – “to the sons of man”. They are the words of Christ to all men – to every child of Adam, to hear and to be of an understanding heart. Now, we lay it down as part of divine truth, that all men are by nature dead in sin, and utterly impotent to spiritual good. And we lay it down as equally part of revealed truth, that Christ has a people, that He died for their redemption, and that their being brought out of their state of sin and misery, into a state of salvation, is the direct fruit of His suffering in their room and stead.

If these things be so, if all men are dead in trespasses and sins, and yet all men are called – if Christ died for His people, to redeem them to God, and yet salvation is offered to all – it follows necessarily that an obligation to spiritual duty is not inconsistent with total spiritual inability, and that a universal offer of salvation neither rests upon nor implies a universal atonement. Many think otherwise, and many who do not are yet greatly perplexed by what such individuals advance. On both of these points, therefore – the call to spiritual duty, and the ground on which sinners are thus called – we would now make a few observations; and having thus sought to clear the way to the full impression which the text should make, we would endeavour to do the thing which it expresses and call all men everywhere to repentance now.

**1. The call of the text to spiritual duty, as addressed to all men** – “to the sons of man”. As means, these calls are, in their own nature, fitted to produce a right state of mind; they are addressed to beings who, in their nature, ought to be moved by such calls. Nothing more is required to vindicate this way of dealing with men, and to show that it is consistent with the highest wisdom. But many cannot be satisfied with this. In the pride of their heart they say, God could not call unless man could comply. Nay, it would be unjust in God to exhort, call and urge man to do that for which he yet needed the help of God. And, increasing in boldness as they advance in this course, they ask, Is it not a mockery, unworthy of God, to call dead men to walk and impotent men to rise – to do what He knows no man can do without His special grace?

<sup>1</sup>This sermon, reprinted with slight editing from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 1, was originally entitled, “The universal calls and invitations of the gospel consistent with the total depravity of man and particular redemption”. Bonar (1799-1863) was at first minister of Larbert and Dunipace, in central Scotland, where at one stage he had R M M<sup>c</sup>Cheyne as his assistant. He later had charges in, successively, Aberdeen and Glasgow.

Now, if the inability of man was the inability of “natural brute beasts”, as the apostle Peter speaks, and the call was to the service of rational creatures, or if the inability was the inability of men and the call was to such to yield to God the service of angels or of archangels, or if the inability was the physical inability of a lame man to walk and the call that he should rise and walk – though we would wish, even then, to speak with more reverence – there would be more weight in the vaunting words of these objections. But if the inability is the voluntary act of an intelligent being preferring the darkness to the light; if the inability is the inability of such a being to love his God, not with the love of an angel, but with all *his* heart and all *his* soul and all *his* strength; if the inability is that of a being who walks after the flesh, because he minds the things of the flesh and not of the spirit; if the inability is that of a man who cannot find it in his heart to love and to serve the blessed God, but can find it in that very heart to give that love and service to the creature; then there is neither truth nor power in such statements, however vauntingly put forth as unanswerable.

This is the real state of man. There is utter inability in him to spiritual duty, but it is just because sin is preferred. This inability is hopeless, but it is just because this is the governing power of the mind. There is utter helplessness in man, but this is just because this power will always prevail if help does not come from God. There is in all this the deepest and darkest depravity, and that surely can never remove man from his obligation to serve God, or take away God’s right to deal with man as a responsible being. Such being the true nature of man’s inability, it is evident that every hour of continuance in it is an hour of chosen rebellion, and therefore of deepest sin. And such being the true characteristics which God sees every hour, there is no inconsistency in God demanding obedience, and no injustice in His punishing those who are not subject to His law, and no mockery in His calling these men to turn from their sins. That this is indeed the case will further appear if we consider the following plain truths, to which, as helping to a right judgement of the matter before us, we earnestly entreat your attention.

First of all, however startling it may appear at first sight, God can command what men are utterly unable to fulfil. Otherwise men must be able to keep the whole law of God in thought and word and deed (for, beyond all question, God does command this); God could not command anything whatever which man could not perform; God’s right of sovereignty would be measured by man’s willingness to comply with it; and God’s moral government over the wicked would be at an end.

Second, God can blame and punish man for not doing what he *cannot* do. Otherwise, the more depraved man becomes, the less blameable he will be.

For, if total inability is a complete excuse, partial inability is a partial excuse; and thus the more a man's heart becomes set in him to do evil, the less blameable he will be; the more thoroughly hardened a man becomes, the less responsible he will be.

Third, God can demand from man what he is only able to do by the aid of His Spirit. Otherwise what the Spirit of God works must be something which man, as the creature of God, is not bound to possess. If the Spirit alone works in me what it is my duty as a creature to be and to do in such circumstances, it must still be my duty whether the help of the Spirit of God is sought or refused. In this case, as in every other case of a moral nature, my want is my wickedness – my weakness is my condemnation.

Fourth, God cannot demand less of man than what His Spirit alone can work in the soul, for God cannot demand other than spiritual service. God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; God looks on the heart, and any other service offered to Him is a mockery; God is truth, and the Father seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Fifth, God can and does demand of man, and cannot but demand of man – of sinful man, of man lost, undone and dead, of man without strength and utterly impotent – repentance and conversion; for what is conversion but just the right state of such a creature towards the blessed God? What is the meaning of me not being able to convert myself but just that I am so utterly depraved that I cannot love the ever-blessed God and that I love the sin which He hates? What is this but darkest and deepest sin? And what is repentance but just that state which I cannot lack for a moment without, in that moment involving myself in deeper rebellion and contracting to my soul new guilt.

But still, it may be said, if in *any way* man is so utterly unable, without special grace, to comply with the call of God, why should God use this way of dealing with him? Why multiply, as the Word of God does, calls and exhortations and warnings? Why press him to turn and live, to make to himself a new heart, to repent and be converted? To this we answer generally that such calls certainly do not imply an innate power of compliance; they only imply that the state of mind to which these calls direct men is the right state of mind which they should have toward God, and that this is the state of mind, therefore, which God must claim, and claim every moment. But, along with this, such calls and invitations serve most important purposes, some of which we shall merely state:

(1.) They show us our duty and obligation – duty which lies on us at every moment, duty from which nothing can set us free. This is the great design of all the calls of God to the sons of men. They set forth, not man's power, but

God's claim – not what we are able to do, but what we ought to do; not our ability, but our duty.

(2.) These calls of God show the connection between the state to which we are called and the enjoyment of the blessing promised. There is a connection of co-existence, though not of cause and effect, and it is of vast importance to hold this constantly before us. As certainly as without Christ there is no salvation, so certainly without a personal union to Christ there shall be no salvation for us. As certainly as without shedding of blood there is no remission, so certainly without our washing in that blood shed, there will be no participation. And hence the gracious and constant and urgent call to *take and live*.

(3.) These calls hold before us what must be accomplished in us if we are ever to be saved. They show us what we are perishing for lack of – if it is never found in us, we shall never see life; and if it is found in us, it will certainly write us among the heirs of salvation.

(4.) These calls are all designed, and most blessedly fitted, to shut us up to the faith now revealed – to the only way of life for fallen man. In the gracious procedure of God, what is required as duty is promised as grace; what He demands from us, He promises to work in us. And the demand is not intended to show us *our strength*, but to shut us up to *His promise*.

(5.) These calls and exhortations are intended to shew us what we ought to pray for. Some have concluded that men ought not always to pray. They have concluded that, as we cannot pray without faith, so we should not pray till we know that we have faith. And instead of being on their knees crying to God, they have learned to argue on the uselessness and impossibility of unconverted men praying. We enter into no controversy, but we do know that one at least who was unconverted – who was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity – was by infallible authority directed to pray. “Pray God”, said Peter to Simon, even when he perceived that he had neither part nor lot in the matter, “if peradventure the thought of thy heart be forgiven thee”. Doubtless he that cometh unto God must believe that He is; doubtless he that cometh acceptably must come in the new and living way. But, without fixing any degree of precedence in things which, when they exist, brook neither the order nor the bounds which men would set, we would say that it is at once the duty and privilege of every soul to cry to God, and these calls, exhortations and warnings teach them what they ought to pray for, and how they ought to ask it.

(6.) Above all, these pressing calls are designed by Him who knows all that is in the heart of man, and how he clings to refuges of lies, to shut us out of all so-called neutral ground in spiritual things and to shut us up to that in

which all our safety lies, even the present reception of Christ and conversion to God. The great delusion of men in general is that they are doing something for their souls – that they are from time to time taking a step in advance and that their path will at length wind its way to salvation. The great anxiety of men is to get something to do, *in the meantime*, which may bear the look of religion and yet leave them to pursue their own course. It ministers to this delusion if you advise them to read as if, while reading, they might rest without an interest in Christ. Or if you advise them to pray as if, while praying, they may be satisfied without receiving. Or if you advise them to seek as if, while seeking, there is a degree of safety without finding. It meets this delusion – and there is no other way of meeting it – to leave no resting-place in all the cursed field of nature, to tell all men plainly that God requires of us, at once, faith in Jesus Christ and repentance unto life, and thus to shut men up to where safety can alone be found.

Yes, what God requires – what He cannot but require, if compliance with His requirement is to result in salvation – is conversion, saving faith, repentance unto life. Till this is done, nothing is done. Till Christ be received, death reigns. If you live on, separate from Christ, you only add sin to sin, and therefore treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. If you die in that state, you perish for ever, notwithstanding all your anxieties. If you pray and yet keep back your heart from God, you sin. If you worship, while yet you refuse to give yourself to the Lord, your very worship is mockery. All is sin and danger and death till you return to the Lord – till you repent. O most blessed day when at length the sinner feels that out of Christ there is no resting-place for the sole of his foot where he dare rest for a moment, when he utterly despairs of salvation or of hope from himself, and when utterly despairing of all other help, he casts himself into the outstretched arms of divine mercy and, looking unto Jesus, says at length, “Save *Thou* me, and I shall be saved. Heal *Thou* me, and I shall be healed. Turn *Thou* me, and I shall be turned.” That prayer shall enter into the ear of the hearer of prayer.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>“As long as I am told that I must come to God, and that I can come, I am left to suppose that some good thing, or some power of good remains in me; I arrogate to myself that which belongs to Jehovah; the creature is exalted, and God is robbed of His glory. If, on the other hand, I am told that I cannot come to God, but not also told that I *must* come, I am left to rest contented at a distance from God; I am not responsible for my rebellion, and God Jehovah is not my God. But if we preach that sinners cannot come, and yet must come, then is the honour of God vindicated, and the sinner is shut up. Man must be so shut up that he must come to Christ, and yet know that he cannot. He must be told to come to Christ, or he will look to another, when there is no other to whom he may come. He must be told that he cannot come, or he will look to himself. This is the gospel vice, to shut up men to faith. Some grasp at one limb of the vice and some at the other, leaving the sinner open. But when a man is shut up so that he must and cannot, he is shut up to faith. God is



# The Eternal Sonship of Christ<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Further Testimony from Scripture

*Rev J R Tallach*

(4.) *The witness of the Apostles.* John writes: “God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him . . . sent His Son, to be the propitiation for our sins. . . . The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:9,10,14). It was not, as some contend, that God made Him a Son by sending Him into the world. As these examples clearly show, He was the Son before He was sent, and as God’s eternal Son He was sent to give life to His people, to be a propitiation for their sins and to be their Saviour. The Father sent, and the Son was sent. The Son was therefore God’s Son from everlasting.

Again, Paul speaks of the Son as “the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3). We read that “Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). It is an essential part of fatherhood that a likeness be conveyed to the son. In the same way it is of the essence of sonship that a likeness to the father be reflected in the son. The Messiah exemplified this condition of sonship by being the fullness (see John 1:16) and outshining of His Father’s glory and by bearing the true likeness of His Father just as the wax takes on the exact impress of the seal. In verse 14 of this chapter He is spoken of as the “only begotten of the Father”. He had many brethren, but this begetting was natural as there was a communication of essence, while theirs was adoptive and there was a communication of qualities. Isaac was called Abraham’s only begotten son as coming from Sarah in lawful wedlock and being made sole heir. Christ was God’s own Son and calls God His Father (John 5:17). “I ascend to My Father and to your Father” (John 20:17).

The expectation of the Old Testament saints was plainly based on the promises given concerning Christ, which were fulfilled in the coming of the eternal Son. In Micah 5:2 we find the promise of the Son in eternity as already discussed. Again in Isaiah 9:6 we read, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”. These saints were prophesying of the birth of declared to be Jehovah, and the sinner is made willing to be saved by Him, in His own way, as sovereign in His grace.” From John Duncan’s speech in the Free Church General Assembly, on 21 May 1844.

<sup>1</sup>The first article, printed last month, gave the testimony of the Father, of the Son Himself, and of the Holy Spirit on the subject.

a child whose person would bear all the hallmarks of divinity – He would be the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He would, as the eternal Son, carry the work of salvation on His shoulders and bring it to a glorious conclusion.

As this was what the saints expected, Simeon spoke for the whole Old Testament Church when he took the child Jesus in his arms and prayed, “Now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation” (Luke 2:38). Simeon was not alone. Anna, Zacharias, Elisabeth, Nathanael and other godly men and women were also among those “that looked for redemption in Jerusalem”. They found this redemption in the Son of man, who was also the eternal Son of God.

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch may be viewed in the same light. The passage before him was Isaiah 53, where the prophecy was a promise of one who died “for our transgressions”, and “was bruised for our iniquities”. Philip opened up that prophecy by preaching to him Jesus, and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. When pressed as to the depth and genuineness of his conviction, the eunuch declared, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”. His profession of faith was accepted and he was baptized (Acts 9:20). No further questions were required.

(5.) *The witness of the holy angels.* Luke recounts the visit of the angel to Mary, when he told her: “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” (1:35). By making the words “therefore also” refer to the phrase “the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee”, the heresy arose, as early as the second century, that the Lord became a Son at the time of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. But this would not only make Jesus a temporary Son, but make the Spirit the Father in the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> Again the agency of the Holy Spirit was confined to the formation of the humanity of the Lord in this incident.

But none of the Lord’s titles refer exclusively to His humanity. The title *Son of man* comes closest to this, but it is used to refer to Jesus in heaven having power to forgive sins, ascending up where He was before, and coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. It evidently refers to the Lord’s complex person and includes His eternal Godhead. Furthermore Jesus’ miraculous birth must have been known to very few, as He was “supposed to be the son of Joseph” (Luke 3:23). This therefore could not form the basis for His being known as the Son of God.

We notice that the first part of Luke 1:35, which reads, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee”, is in reply to Mary’s enquiry as to how this conception

<sup>2</sup>R Treffry, *The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ*, London, 1865, p 122.

could take place, “seeing I know not a man”. It has no direct reference to the last part of the verse, where the Son of God is mentioned.

Treffry suggests that the next section, “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee”, refers not to the work of the Holy Ghost but to the Divine Word, the second Person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is said to “come upon”, indicating a temporary residence, while the Highest is said to “overshadow”, indicating a more permanent presence. The term “overshadow” recalls the presence of the Most High over the mercy seat in the holy of holies in the Old Testament. Thus the eternal Word, immediately upon the formation by the Holy Spirit of the conceptus in the womb of Mary took it up into Himself. He thus took our nature, in its very germ, and was made of a woman. It therefore follows that the “holy thing” which was so formed, united as it was to the eternal Word, “shall be called the Son of God”.<sup>3</sup>

The “holy thing” which was to be formed of Mary is neuter – neither male nor female. Since the Son (masculine) is mentioned by the angel both before and after, the presence of a neuter word is striking. It may be a reference to the hypostatical union, the union of the divinity of the second Person with the humanity of the conceptus. It reminds us of Paul’s words in Romans 1:4, which refers to the divine nature of Christ as the “spirit of holiness”.

Some still contend, as noted above, that it was because of His incarnation, and only at His incarnation, that Jesus received the name “Son of God”. But the incarnation of Christ was an act of infinite condescension, of self-emptying, and it would seem strange for this to be the reason why a term of such honour and distinction was conferred on the Saviour. On the other hand, it is entirely in agreement with holy Writ and the mind of the Spirit that the true dignity of our Lord’s person is made to shine through at times of particular lowliness in the life of the Lord. For example, when He was but newly born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, the shepherds came to honour Him as the Prince of Peace and, while He was yet dependent on His mother, the wise men come to worship Him as a divine king. So here, in the abasement of His incarnation, we are reminded of His glory as the eternal Son.

(6.) *The witness of the fallen angels.* The devil began his temptation of the Lord in the wilderness with the words: “If thou be the Son of God”. These words are understood to imply that he knew that Jesus was the Son of God. It is as though he was saying, “Since Thou art the Son of God”. It is certainly evident that lesser devils knew Him as such, and it would seem strange if Satan knew less than his followers. The anguished cries of the devils cast out by the Lord are further proof to the same effect: “What have

<sup>3</sup>Treffry, p 127.

we to do with Thee?” Wherefore dost Thou interfere with us? “Art Thou come to torment us before our time”, to anticipate the torment that awaits us? All their cries are full of powerless rage and oppressive fear. Absolute authority rested with Jesus alone, so that spectators “were amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (Mark 1:27). The testimony of the angels was that Jesus was the true and eternal Son of God.

## Separatism in the North of Scotland

### 4. Joseph Mackay (1780-1848)

*Rev D W B Somerset*

Joseph Mackay was born at Dyke at the upper end of Strathhalladale on 12 August 1780.<sup>1</sup> His father Angus was a “worthy catechist” and Joseph was the second son.<sup>2</sup> He grew up a strong and handsome young man, six foot four inches tall,<sup>3</sup> and in about 1796 he joined the Reay Fencibles, a regiment which had been raised by Lord Reay in 1794 because of the unrest in Ireland. The regiment numbered about 700 men, mainly from Sutherland, and it had been stationed in Belfast since November 1795. Joseph Mackay was promoted to the rank of sergeant in September 1800.

For their first two and a half years in Ireland, the Reays were engaged in peace-keeping duties such as “apprehend[ing] suspected rebels, breaking up seditious meetings, or assisting in the search for hidden arms,”<sup>4</sup> but on 24 May 1798 the Irish Rebellion broke out, in which a considerable number of Protestants were brutally murdered. The Reays had been ordered to Cavan at the beginning of May, and on 22 May they were commanded to march to Dublin. While they were on their way, the Rebellion began and a large party of rebels encamped on Tara Hill about 20 miles from Dublin. They numbered about 4000 and had spent the previous two days plundering the countryside. The Reays were accompanied by two troops of Yeomanry, but numerically they were no match for the rebels. Nevertheless it was decided that they

<sup>1</sup>A single ruined house is all that remains at Dyke now. The principal sources for Joseph Mackay’s life are: Alexander Auld, *Ministers and Men in the Far North*, Free Presbyterian Publications 1956 ed, pp 135-8; John Macleod, *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, Edinburgh, 1965, pp 103-110; Donald Mackay, *Memories of Our Parish Dingwall*, 1925, pp 91-115.

<sup>2</sup>*Ministers and Men*, p 135; Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, Wick, 1899, p 208.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Maclean, *Duthil: Past and Present*, Inverness, 1910, p 39.

<sup>4</sup>I H Mackay Scobie, *An Old Highland Fencible Corps*, Edinburgh, 1914, p 133.

should attack, and on the evening of the May 26 they advanced up Tara Hill. After fierce fighting, the rebels were scattered, leaving 350 dead behind them and most of their weapons. The Reays and the Yeomanry between them had 11 men killed and 30 wounded. The engagement was critical for destroying the morale of the rebels throughout Ireland.

The Reays had a reputation for good conduct and discipline, and there was a high degree of religion in the regiment. Several of the men came under spiritual conviction while they were in Ireland, and at least two of them returned to the far north with Bibles which they had purchased in Ireland.<sup>5</sup> One of them had saved three months' pay in order to do so. For a few months in 1795 the Reays had been stationed at Fort George near Inverness, and the more religious of the men hired a building and arranged for services to be conducted by some of the neighbouring ministers. One of these was Ronald Bayne, later of Kiltarlity, who was minister of a chapel in Elgin from 1788 to 1800. His preaching at that time was blessed to Alexander Sinclair (c1778-1852), who became paymaster's clerk in the regiment, and was subsequently eminent among the Men of Thurso.<sup>6</sup>

Another of the Men of the far north who was converted while in the regiment was John Mackintosh, Crask, who later worked alongside Peter Stuart as a catechist. The ministry of a Methodist preacher in Ireland was blessed to him, but it is said that "while he freely acknowledged his obligations to this minister, his views of divine truth, when matured, became decidedly Calvinistic". He said that it was "by secret prayer in his father's sheep cot that he got clear of the Irish divinity".<sup>7</sup> Another of the converts was William Gordon (1770-1820) from the parish of Creich. He was converted while the Reays were stationed in Longford in 1799, and he started composing religious poems in Gaelic. These were well received in the regiment and were published at Galway in 1802. He later became the teacher of a Gaelic school in Creich.<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Mackay himself came under conviction of sin while he was on his way to join the Reays. At Beaully, where he was billeted for the night in a crofter's house, he overheard the remark of an old woman who was watching

<sup>5</sup>Scobie, p 101, p 204n.

<sup>6</sup>Scobie, pp 70-71; Ian R MacDonald, *Aberdeen and the Highland Church (1785-1900)*, Edinburgh, 2000, p 8; *Ministers and Men*, p 141.

<sup>7</sup>*Ministers and Men*, pp 133-4; *By-Paths* pp 125-9. Other Men of the far north who served with the Reays were Hugh Campbell (1744-c1826) (*Ministers and Men*, pp 138-40), William Mackay (MacRob) of Strathy (*Ministers and Men*, p 146), and Robert Mackay of Truderscaig, see Scobie p 102n.

<sup>8</sup>Scobie p 328. For a short biographical account, see John Reid, *Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica*, Glasgow, 1832, pp 164-5.

him as he stood by the fire warming himself: "What a pity that Satan should get such a brave-looking man". Joseph was greatly struck by the words, and his life was noticeably different from then on.<sup>9</sup> When the Reays were disbanded in October 1802, he returned home a changed man. He was soon accepted among the Men of the north, and by the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 he was already recognised as one of their leaders.<sup>10</sup>

On 10 December 1806 he married Marjory Gordon, who had been born in 1785. Their first child, Elizabeth, was born in May 1808 but died in August of that year. A further 11 children were born, the youngest in 1831, and 10 of them survived infancy.<sup>11</sup> Marjory's father Adam was tacksman of Griamachary between Strathhalladale and Kildonan.<sup>12</sup> He was a godly man, and it is said that the liberality of the Gordon family "to the household of faith and others was proverbial".<sup>13</sup> According to Donald Sage, he and his wife exercised "the most unbounded hospitality".<sup>14</sup> As a tacksman, Adam Gordon was expected to assist the forces of law and order, and he must have found himself awkwardly placed during the riots sparked by the Kildonan Clearance of 1813. He is mentioned twice in letters of the notorious Patrick Sellar, the legal agent for the Sutherland Estate at that time.<sup>15</sup> His eldest son John became a major in the army and was acquainted with the Duke of Kent (1767-1820), the fourth son of George III and the father of Queen Victoria. Through the influence of the Duke of Kent, John obtained commissions in the army for his three brothers, and in 1814 he also obtained a commission for Joseph Mackay.

The regiment which Joseph Mackay joined was the First (or Royal Scots) Regiment of Foot, and he was commissioned as an Ensign in the Third Battalion on 6 October 1814. His main, if not his only, active service was during the Waterloo campaign of June 1815. On 16 June the battalion "distinguished itself in a particular manner" in the engagement at Quatre Bras: "Being removed from the centre of the Fifth Division, it charged and routed a column of the enemy. It was then formed in a square to receive the cavalry, and though repeated attacks were made, not the slightest impression was pro-

<sup>9</sup>*Memories of Our Parish*, p 94.

<sup>10</sup>*Ministers and Men*, p 135.

<sup>11</sup>Full details of his family, taken from his Family Bible, are given in *Memories of Our Parish*, p 115.

<sup>12</sup>A tacksman leased a large area of land from the proprietor which he then rented out to sub-tenants.

<sup>13</sup>*Ministers and Men* p 135. On p 136 there is an anecdote involving Sandy Gair staying with the Gordons.

<sup>14</sup>*Memorabilia Domestica*, p 208.

<sup>15</sup>R J Adam, ed, *Papers on Sutherland Estate Management 1802-1816*, Edinburgh, 1972, vol 2, pp 178,181.

duced.” The casualties were heavy, however, with 218 killed and wounded out of about 700 men. A further 144 men were killed or wounded at Waterloo on Sabbath 18 June, and Joseph Mackay was among the wounded.<sup>16</sup>

The third Sabbath of June was the Thurso communion, which thus coincided with the Battle of Waterloo. James Macdonald, the father of the Apostle of the North, was attending the communion, but after the close of the service, instead of going to his house, he suddenly left everybody and spent the evening and part of the night in prayer among the rocks near Pennyland. He said the next day that he had felt a strong inclination to pray for the British troops that night. Meanwhile Joseph Mackay, lying wounded, had a strong sense on his soul that James Macdonald was praying for the British troops. Joseph resolved at that time that, if he were spared, he would divide the compensation that he would receive as a wounded officer among the Lord’s people at home.<sup>17</sup> He was placed on half pay on 1 August 1816, and the entire battalion was “reduced” in 1817. About this time he must have returned to Reay to carry his vow into effect.

“After his return home,” it is related, “he paid a visit to the noted John Grant. On his way to John’s house, Joseph was reflecting on the painful and dangerous experiences he had passed through, and the gracious care the Lord had exercised over him, and it occurred to him that, if he were asked to engage in any religious exercise when he met John, he would require to have something specially good to offer. After Joseph arrived at the house, John ordered food to be set down, and then requested Joseph to ask a blessing, which he did at some length. No sooner did he conclude than John, whose discernment of any formality was exceptionally acute, and his criticisms often severe, remarked, ‘O well, yourself and the devil formed an excellent prayer on the way this morning’.”<sup>18</sup>

It was probably about this time that Joseph Mackay began to assist Peter Stuart as catechist in the parishes of Daviot, Duthil and Moy near Inverness. The connection might well have been formed through John Mackintosh, Crask, (mentioned above) who was catechist in Stratherrick, and who together with Peter Stuart was investigated by the Inverness Presbytery in 1817 for his Separatism. It does not appear that Joseph Mackay was ever resident in Inverness-shire – perhaps he simply went down for part of the summer each year. In 1829 he became catechist of Reay in succession to the godly William

<sup>16</sup>Charles Dalton, *The Waterloo Roll Call*, London, 1904, pp 117,119; Digby Smith, *The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book*, London, 1998, pp 538,543.

<sup>17</sup>Donald Munro, *Records of Grace in Sutherland*, Edinburgh, 1953, pp 176-7; *Ministers and Men*, p 135.

<sup>18</sup>*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 25, p 204.

Calder.<sup>19</sup> Finlay Cook had been the missionary for Achreny and Strathhalladale since 1817, and in 1829 he became the minister of Ness. Joseph Mackay, John Mac Connel from Tongue, and Janet Macleod from Sandside in Reay went across to Ness for his first communion, Janet staying with the Cooks for six months. This visit shows how close was Joseph Mackay's friendship with Finlay Cook at that stage, which is noteworthy in view of their later rift.

Joseph Mackay's earliest surviving letter dates from July 1828, when four of his children had measles, one of them for 17 days.<sup>20</sup> In September 1834, Joseph's daughter Margaret died at the age of 22, and one of his Gaelic elegies is written in her memory. Another child, Thomas Gordon, died in November 1839 aged 16. Sandy Gair, who had lost a son and a son-in-law by drowning in 1822, comforted him with the thought "that David's smarting rod was heavier than yours or mine; for your relations and mine were such as gave us much comfort in their lives, and we had many grounds of hope in their death; but his were taken away in their sin".<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Mackay was still catechist in Reay in the summer of 1836, and in a document of 19 May 1836 he signs himself as elder and catechist for the parish.<sup>22</sup> Archie Cook became minister of the North Church in Inverness in 1837, however, and for a short while Joseph Mackay acted as his catechist.<sup>23</sup> By 1840 Joseph was back in Reay,<sup>24</sup> and John Mackay, later Free Church minister of Lybster, who was also from Strathhalladale, refers in his manuscript Diary to a visit from Joseph Mackay during a long illness he had at that time. In his entry for 1 January 1856 he writes: "I have again an occasion to lift up an Ebenezer, for hitherto hath the Lord helped me, having had fifteen years added to my days since my illness in 1840/1. I well remember hearing at that time Ensign Joseph Mackay read that chapter (Isaiah 38) and my endeavour to act faith in the promise."

We have spoken of Joseph Mackay's views on the Disruption in the first article in this series, but to what extent he was consistent in his opposition to the Free Church is difficult to say. On the one hand he referred to the Free Church as the "Free Secession", and compared the Free and Established Churches to "Ephraim against Manasseh, and Manasseh against Ephraim, and both are against Christ".<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, he took communion in the Free

<sup>19</sup>*By-Paths*, p 104.

<sup>20</sup>*Letters by the Eminently Pious John Grant, Joseph M'Kay, and Alexander Gair*, p 66.

<sup>21</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph M'Kay . . .*, pp 86-7.

<sup>22</sup>Kenneth Phin, *Fanaticism in the North*, Edinburgh, 1852. p 42.

<sup>23</sup>*By-Paths*, p 106.

<sup>24</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph Mackay . . .*, pp 44-5.

<sup>25</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph Mackay . . .*, pp 49.



North Church in Inverness after the Disruption and, when George Mackay, who was also from Strathhalladale, became minister there in 1845, Joseph Mackay offered to become his catechist. The offer was refused, however.<sup>26</sup> The following year Joseph Mackay had an exceedingly bitter dispute with the Cook brothers over their doctrine of Traducianism,<sup>27</sup> with the result that in November or December of that year he was excommunicated in the parish of Reay by Finlay Cook. In spite of this he continued to act as catechist, with the general support of the people.<sup>28</sup>

Joseph Mackay lived in Reay at least until 22 March 1848, but shortly afterwards he was evicted and had to move to Achnacly in Broubster, near where John Grant had stayed after his eviction from Strathy.<sup>29</sup> His life, however, was nearly at an end. In his final published letter, of 18 June 1848, he refers to his intention of visiting Strathspey once again, but for various reasons he did not arrive there until about August 22.<sup>30</sup> He immediately began catechizing but within a short while he took ill and had to go to the Raigbeg Schoolhouse in Strathearn, where his friend James MacDougall was teacher. On Sabbath 27th he received a visit at there from Archie Cook, and the two were at last reconciled.<sup>31</sup> Within a few hours Joseph Mackay had passed into glory.

Preparations were made for his funeral in the far north, but to the disappointment of the people there he had arranged to be buried in Inverness, next to Peter Stuart. His grave is in the Chapel Yard Burying-Ground. Over it is a table-stone with the following inscription:

“Erected to the memory of Ensign Joseph Mackay of Reay, late of the Royals, who had been for many years catechist in the Parishes of Moy, Dalarossie, and Duthel, and died upon the 27th August 1848 at the schoolhouse at Raigbeg in the 68th year of his age. He was a loving husband and an affectionate father. Few could vie with him in his wonderful talents, spiritual experience, and brotherly love, with the other graces which adorn the Christian life. In private he exhibited the effects of the doctrines he inculcated in public

<sup>26</sup>*By-Paths*, p 106.

<sup>27</sup>*Traducianism* is the belief that the human soul is, like the body, derived from the parents. *Creationism*, which is the more common Reformed view, is the belief that each human soul is individually created by God.

<sup>28</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph Mackay . . .*, pp 63-68.

<sup>29</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph Mackay . . .*, p 65; *Memories of Our Parish*, pp 108-9.

<sup>30</sup>*Letters by . . . Joseph Mackay . . .*, p 30.

<sup>31</sup>*By-Paths*, p 104; *Memories of Our Parish*, pp 112-3; William MacQueen, “Joseph Mackay”, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 106, pp 88-90; Cameron Mackay, ed, *Letters and Sayings of Joseph Mackay, Reay, 1828-1848*, Kingussie, 1891. According to one account, Finlay Cook was also present.

by a close walk with God and by a kind, affable, and humble deportment towards all, loving his very enemies. No insinuation or persuasion could induce him to forsake the good old principles of the Church of Scotland, though greatly persecuted for his steady adherence. He was a faithful witness unto death, and upon such He has promised to bestow life.”

Twenty-eight of his letters are included in *Letters by the Eminently Pious John Grant, Joseph M'Kay, and Alexander Gair*, from which we have quoted a number of times, and one other, dated 8 September 1842, is given in the first edition of *Ministers and Men in the Far North*. Seven of his Gaelic elegies have also been preserved. They first appeared in the 1852 Forres Collection of Hymns and were republished in 1899 along with poems of Donald Matheson, Kildonan, and Donald Cattanach.<sup>32</sup> Partly at the instance of Rev Donald Beaton, they were translated into English verse by John W Macleod, Glasgow, the translations appearing in *Memories of Our Parish*. Joseph Mackay's memory lived on, however, mainly in his sayings and in the anecdotes told of him. Even 50 years after his death, it was said, “many stories are told of his piety and benevolence, and the few old people left in the Reay country still talk with the greatest reverence of Ensign Joseph”.<sup>33</sup>

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## Holiness<sup>1</sup>

*Henry Law*

Leviticus 11: 44. *Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.*

**H**oliness! There is sweet music in the very name. It tells of sin subdued, of boisterous passions lulled, of fiery lusts becalmed, of miry paths made clean. It sets before us a pure walk, where peace and joy go hand in hand, and scatter heaven-born fragrance around. Reader, this grace for a few moments claims your view. God's voice commends it to your love. May His might graft it in your heart!

Holiness! To cause this lovely plant to thrive, its roots to deepen, and its branches to bear fruit, is one grand purpose of the scheme of grace. Fly back in spirit to the day when sovereign love made its all-wise decrees, and life's fair book received the blessed names. We find election choosing souls in Christ. What is the final purpose? It is that they should be holy and without blame before God in love (Eph 1:4). A holy stone is laid, that

<sup>32</sup>*Dain Spiordail, le Ughdairibh Eug-samhuil*, Forres, 1852; Donald Matheson, Joseph Mackay, Donald Cattanach, *Laoidhean Spioradail*, Glasgow, 1899.

<sup>33</sup>Adam Gunn and John Mackay, *Sutherland and the Reay Country*, Glasgow, 1897, p 234.

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from Law's *The Gospel in Leviticus*.

thence a holy fabric may arise. The will to save wills holiness in the saved.

Predestination next draws the full chart of the believer's course. The path is holiness. "An highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called the way of holiness" (Is 35:8). The holy pilgrims must not walk in mire. They all show features of a heavenly birth. "Whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). The God-like travellers must tread a godly road.

When the due time is come, Jesus appears with full redemption in His hands. Doubtless the first note of the gospel trumpet is rescue by His death from sin's tremendous woe – payment by His blood of sin's immeasurable debt, His endurance on the cross of the law's curse, satisfaction through His sacrifice of all God's claims. Wondrous achievement! Noble triumph! Worthy display of everlasting love and power!

But is this all? Are there not other waters in this well? Are there not other summits on this rock? Yes. Christ is redemption's overflowing cup. Christ is the uttermost of man's vast need. Hence He frees from the rule and sway of evil, as surely as from its endless pains. Holiness is the Redeemer's essence, and the end of redemption. Hark, the Word loudly cries, "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14). "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4). He sows the seeds of blood, that holiness may bloom. He spares no price, that He may buy a holy treasure.

In the fair day of grace, the tender Shepherd seeks each straying sheep. Long they may wander in earth's desert waste – exposed to cruel foes and famished by the weeds of nature's soil. But He knows them well, and they must know Him. So the sweet notes of His alluring call at last fall softly on their ears. They hear; they yield; they follow; they obey. The call is holy (2 Tim 1:9, 1 Thess 4:7). Sin henceforth is eschewed – abhorred – and a pure flock feeds in pure meadows. Thus the whole gospel plan bears, as its mitre, "Holiness to the Lord". Its every step is turned towards holiness. Its every part subserves a holy end.

Perhaps you now may say, Show me some picture of this beautiful grace. A ready text points upwards. The Lord's own voice proclaims, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). Our God is holiness, and holiness is likeness to our God. "The new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). The new-born nature is similitude to God.

Let not man's cavils shade the brightness of this truth. Take no inferior standard. True holiness is divine. It loves what God loves. It shuns what God shuns. Holiness is God in the heart, the life, the lips, the ways, the walk. It is a stream in which each drop is heavenly and heavenward. It is a sun in

which each ray is from God's throne. God can propose no model but Himself. A lower thought would acquiesce in evil. Therefore the mandate is, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Holiness falls short when it falls short of God.

But perhaps you say, Such glorious lustre is too bright for sight. The heavenly sunshine dims the dazzled eye. But still draw near. God's holiness in human form has visited and trod our earth. Jesus takes flesh and tabernacles here. His walk in our soiled paths is clean, as on a celestial pavement. Mark every act. Hear every word. They have one feature, Holiness. No trial spared Him. Hell's every snare was laid. No circumstance, which ever won or drove to sin, failed to put forth its craftiest wiles. But all was vain. Each wave rebounded from the holy Rock. In childhood, in youth's bloom, in riper age – to earthly parents and to heavenly Father, to treacherous friends and open foes, alone, abroad, in work, in rest, in ease, in agony, in life, in death – He showed one glorious front; He stood one glorious column: Holiness. There has been perfect holiness on earth. Your eye can scan, your mind can grasp, this pattern. Such is the holiness of God.

But some may add, This righteousness was wrought out for the Church. Christ kept each edict of the law for them. He places this obedience in their hands as a key to heaven, as a right to life, as title-deeds to bliss – as a beautiful robe to shine in heaven's light. This is made over as the portion of His saints. Can they need more?

True, this righteousness is the wedding dress in which He decks His bride. It is her spotless beauty and her coronet of gems. But it is more. The life of Jesus draws the clear portraiture of Zion's citizens. Heaven's courts and atmosphere and inmates are all holy. None but the holy can there walk and breathe and taste delight. Heaven is no heaven to old natures. To such, the sounding harps sound only discord. To such, the one employ is only misery. There is no pulse in common.

Man must have holiness. Not to buy heaven; that is Christ's work only. Not to fill merit's cup; that is Christ's gift. But to gain fitness to associate, to win capacity for bliss. Without Christ's righteousness, the gate cannot be passed. Without internal holiness the entrance is no gain. No holiness, no heaven.

Mark next the soil in which this flower has roots and the seed from which it springs. Man's pride must here lie low. It never thrives in nature's field. Neither can hand of nature plant it. When sin came in, each gracious fibre died. The curse fell blighting on earth, but most so on the human heart. The thorns and briers of the outward world are dismal emblems of the wilderness within. God's likeness was effaced at once, and hideous enmity established its one rule. How then can holiness revive? Until the waste

becomes a garden, the plant cannot be set; until heaven gives the seed, it can nowhere be found. God must prepare the soil. God must infuse the seed. The work is wholly God's.

But this is all arranged in the sure covenant of grace. The Holy Spirit lends His aid. By His almightiness, He forms anew the texture of the soul. He takes away the barren rock. He brings down scions from the garden of the Lord. He graciously inserts them. And thus true holiness again lifts up its fruitful and its fragrant head.

Be not deceived. Trust not to powers which are powers none. You must gain help from God, or you can never be a holy man. The wish and the ability are both divine. Can darkness melt itself to light? Can rocky channel flow in liquid streams? Can poison's stem produce the luscious grape? Or hatred love? Can the dry bones reanimate themselves? These changes cannot be. Neither can dead souls burst their tombs, and clothe themselves in self-made life. The mighty agent is above; and till He works, no work is done.

Next mark the renovating means. The wondrous engine is the gospel-truth. The Spirit wins by charming notes. He opens ears to hear new melody. He gives the eye to see new scenes. He reveals Christ – the beauty of all beauty. He shows the cleansing blood – the sympathising heart, the perfect refuge, the all-sufficient aid. These sights transform. A new affection subjugates the man. Jesus and purer hopes now occupy the mind. Darkness is past. The true light shines.

The grace of faith springs up. This is the chain which binds the soul to Christ, and makes the Saviour and the sinner one. A channel is now formed by which Christ's fulness plenteously flows down. The barren branch becomes a portion of the fruitful stem. Christ's vital juices permeate the whole. The limbs receive close union with the head, and one life reigns throughout the total frame.

Would you be holy? There is only one way. All other roads lead down to deeper mire. Christ must come in. All is dark death except where Jesus lives. All is pure life and loveliness where Jesus reigns. Draw near and nearer to the gospel page. There gaze on Christ till the soul's features melt into His likeness. The gospel heard and read and loved are the bright wings on which the Spirit flies. The Spirit's presence brings the Saviour near. The Saviour welcomed is all holiness begun. The Saviour cherished is all holiness advancing. The Saviour never absent is holiness complete. Holiness complete is heaven's full blaze.

Believer, this subject has a warning voice. You mourn shortcomings. You find the hated monster sin still striving for the rule. Evil is present when you would do good. Help is laid up for you in Christ. Seek clearer interest in

Him. Faith sows the seeds. Assurance brings in golden sheaves. They who most deeply feel that they have died in Christ, and paid in Him sin's penalties, ascend to the highest heights of godly life. He is most holy who has most of Christ within and joys most fully in the finished work. It is defective faith which clogs the feet and causes many a fall.

We here discern why gospel truth is so assailed with hate. It is the lever which moves men's minds from sin. It is the sweet attractive to the heaven-pure path. Hence the sin-loving world turns angrily away. Evil is more congenial to the taste. Evil is sweet. Corruption rejects Christ. But evil's sweets are a deceptive cup. The draught is poison. The drops prove only gall.

Delay not. Cast it from you. Peace only blooms beside the gospel road. There is no happiness but on the gospel mount. True blessedness is holy oneness with the holy Saviour. When He is near, what sorrow can distress? His smile dispels all gloom. His words of comfort make each burden light. Seek holiness and happiness in Christ. They are conjoined by God, and thus conjoined for ever.

But if you madly turn to the false taper of this world's show, too late will this truth bar heaven's gate against you. O heed it now, before "too late" arrive. "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

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## The Unprofitable Servant<sup>1</sup>

*Matthew Poole*

*Matthew 25:24-27. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

We must remember that we are in a parable, which (as with other similitudes) cannot be expected in all things to agree with what it is intended to illustrate. This part of the parable doth chiefly instruct us in these two things:

1. That it is the genius of wicked men to lay the blame of their sins upon others, oftentimes upon God Himself. The unprofitable servant here pretends that the dread of his lord, as a severe man, was what kept him from labouring and making a profitable use of the talent with which his master had intrusted

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from Poole's *Commentary*, vol 3.

him. Thus many think that man shall hereafter have something by which to excuse himself, before God, for his not repenting, if there be an election of grace, or anything of special and distinguishing grace, and if man hath not a perfect power in his own will. They believe that, in such a case, God, by condemning men for unbelief and impenitency, is reaping where He did not sow and gathering where He did not straw.

2. Men in their excuses will, instead of excusing, only accuse and condemn themselves. The lord of the unprofitable servant tells him that the fault lay in his own sloth and wickedness, and that his dread of his lord's severity was but a mere frivolous pretence and unreasonable excuse; for if he *had* dreaded any such thing, he would have done what he could, he would have put out his money to the exchangers, and then he should have received his own with increase. And shall not God as justly, another day, thus reply to those who think to excuse their lewd and wicked lives, their impenitency and unbelief – that because they are not elected, they do not have a power of themselves to repent and believe, nor to receive His efficacious grace?

“O you wicked and slothful wretches, did you suspect or fear you were not elected? Why then did you not give all diligence to make your calling and election sure? Do you plead the want of power in your own wills to repent and believe, and that I did not give you a special, effectual grace? But had you not a power to keep from the taverns and alehouses, to keep from lying and cursing and swearing and from open profanation of My Sabbaths? Had you not a power to read, to hear, to pray? If you had to your utmost used the talents I gave you and I had been lacking in my further necessary influences of grace, you might indeed have said something; but when you made no use of the talents you had, why should I trust you with more? Faith comes by reading, hearing, praying; you had a power to do these things; these talents you had. Why did you not read, hear, pray, that you might believe? If you took Me to be so severe a master, why did you not do what was in your power to do, that you might find Me otherwise? If you had done what lay in your power to do, in the use of those talents which I gave you for that end, you might then have blamed Me if I had not given you more; but you never tried My kindness in such a case. So then you are not ruined by any severity of Mine, but by your own sloth, neglect and wickedness.”

Thus much this parable teacheth us: that God in the recompences at the last day of judgement will be found just, and sinners will all be found liars, and their damnation will be of themselves.

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What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless and wandering when we come to hear or pray, but because there have been such long intermissions in our communion with God, by reason whereof our heart is out of a praying frame? *John Flavel*

## Our Gospel Work in Africa and Israel

*Rev Neil M Ross*

**I**srael: Rev John Goldby continues to hold church services in Jerusalem every Sabbath (Lord's Day). Numbers are very small but visitors from various parts of the world are welcomed from time to time. Recently they had visitors from Finland and a minister and his wife from Scotland.

"In Israel," says Mr Goldby, "there are many opportunities for discussing Biblical subjects with individuals, both Jewish and Christian. Recently, a young Orthodox Jewish man asserted that the translation of the Hebrew word *alma* in Isaiah 7:14 by *virgin* was incorrect. While it is true that *bethula* is a more common Hebrew word for *virgin*, *alma* here is properly translated by the word *virgin*. The New Testament leaves us in no doubt that this is the correct translation, and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 250 BC) also supports it. When it was mentioned to him that *alma* is the word used for the virgin Rebekah in Genesis 24:43, he maintained that Jewish Talmudic tradition (the Oral Law) has it that Rebekah was at this time only three years of age! However, Genesis 24 makes it quite clear that Rebekah was then a young woman, not a child."

It is important, Mr Goldby adds, that dialogue between Christians and Jews goes on. This is not easy because historically Jews have suffered much at the hands of some so-called Christians, especially from the Church of Rome, and a great deal of suspicion and prejudice remains in Jewish minds.

Mr Goldby and his family hope to return to Scotland on furlough in summer. Meanwhile, they continue to study the Hebrew language, which helps them to relate to the Jewish state and people. He appreciates the prayers of those who remember our work in Israel, and desires that others would join them in seeking the blessing which only God can command. One great encouragement to pray for such a blessing is the cluster of promises God has given with regard to His ancient people: for example, "I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezek 34:26). He is faithful who has promised.

**Kenya:** Certain tensions at Sengera Mission sadly came to a head at the end of last year when some of the European staff informed the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee that they had decided they could no longer work on the Mission and were to give up their posts. These were the administrator, Mr Hugh Mackenzie, and the three nursing sisters, Truus Ringelberg, Celia Renes and Gilia van Wijngaarden.



When the Committee consequently met on January 3, it first of all placed on record its sadness at the sudden death of Sister Peta van de Ridder on November 29, its great gratitude for all her years of service to the Church's mission work in both Zimbabwe and Kenya, and its sympathy with her sorrowing family in their great loss. The Committee then redeployed Mr Mackenzie and the three nurses to our Zimbabwe Mission. The Committee had in any case requested Mr Mackenzie last year to go to Zimbabwe in mid-January 2006 to review the administrative work of the Mission there before returning to Scotland in July at the end of his tour of duty.

Rev Keith Watkins continues as Mission Superintendent. He reported to the Committee on the possibility of Omorembe Clinic continuing to operate. When he met with the Committee at its next meeting in Inverness in February, it was decided that the work of the clinic should continue at a reduced level, under Kenyan staff, until such time as other staff are appointed. The Committee is inviting applications for an administrator and nurses, and prayerfully desires that some suitably-qualified candidates will be led to apply. So the work goes on, albeit on a lesser scale, Mr Watkins carrying on his preaching and teaching work in the congregation and dealing with his many duties as Superintendent.

A useful meeting was recently held in Holland between our loyal helpers, Mbuma Zending, and our Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee (which was represented by its Convener, Rev John MacLeod, and Mr Roderick Campbell, the General Treasurer). It is the Committee's prayer that the door which has been opened for our Church in Sengera will be kept open, and especially that many Kisii people there will be led by the Spirit of God to receive the truth in love, fully believing what Christ declared, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

**Zimbabwe:** The regular preaching of the word and instruction of the people is steadily kept up by our settled ministers, Revs P Mzamo, Z Mazwabo, S Khumalo and M Myloi, assisted by their helpers, including Rev A B MacLean. As was decided some months ago, Mr MacLean went to Sengera Mission for four weeks. He returned to Zimbabwe on March 3 and continues preaching to our congregations there.

On the management side, an overdue and fundamental review is being carried out by Mr Hugh MacKenzie throughout the Mission in the spheres of finance, infrastructure and transport; he is to report his findings to the Committee for its consideration. It is little understood how widespread our Zimbabwe Mission is, and how great are the logistical problems and expense in maintaining an efficient relationship between our main work of preaching

the gospel and such “handmaids to the gospel” as our schools, hospital, clinics, translation unit, children’s home, Christian bookshop and the building and transport sections.

Dr Anneke Snoek is well settled at Mbumba Hospital and has a constant stream of patients. She is looking forward not only to the re-commissioning of the operating theatre but also to the opening of the new Opportunistic Infections (OI) Clinic, which deals with HIV-positive and AIDS patients. Sister Petra Beukers has been joined by Sisters Renes and Wijngaarden from Kenya, one helping in the pharmacy and with hospital administration, and the other with counselling AIDS patients and processing X-rays.

With regard to other nursing staff, Sister Willie Geurtsen from Mbumba is doing a midwifery course at Mpilo Hospital, Bulawayo, while Nurse Erica van Breda (who came to Zimbabwe from Scotland in January) is undergoing nursing-orientation and language-study courses in the city. Sister Truus Ringelberg, since arriving in Zimbabwe from Kenya, has been happily helping in Thembeiso Children’s Home (where she worked when she first went to Africa 30 years ago).

Mr Jacob van Praag, from our Sydney congregation, is presently in Zimbabwe supervising building construction and maintenance work, especially at Mbumba Mission, where good progress is being made with building the new OI clinic, re-roofing two primary classrooms, building a new three-unit accommodation block for staff, and renovating some of the nurses’ dormitories. He has installed a new electric power generator, renewed electrical circuits, and is replacing unreliable gas refrigerators with electric ones. He reports too that the building of the new science laboratory and teachers’ house at Ingwenya is progressing nicely. Last, but not least, he is also called upon as an elder of the Church to give help in conducting church services.

The John Tallach Secondary School at Ingwenya has again had good results for the Cambridge O-Level examinations. The pupils have achieved a pass rate of 86%, which puts the school among the very top secondary schools in Matabeleland for O-Level results. This is most encouraging for the staff, especially the Acting Headmaster, Mr B Ncube, and Deputy Head, Miss Norma MacLean (who is enjoying a well-earned furlough in Scotland until the end of April).

We were sorry to hear of the death of former secondary pupil, Sly Jaricha, who had cancer (some of our readers contributed to the cost of his treatment). He enjoyed fair health for some time afterwards, but his condition deteriorated again, and sadly, on February 11, he passed away.

In conclusion, as we think of those who have gone to Zimbabwe and Kenya to help in the work of the gospel, and of those who support them, we

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are reminded of Priscilla and Aquila whom Paul described as “my helpers in Christ Jesus”. As a Church we are much indebted to those who, under the Most High, are helpers together with us as we strive to play a small part in fulfilling the great commission of the Divine Head of the Church: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”.

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## Book Review

***Masters of the English Reformation***, by Sir Marcus Loane, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 320 pages, £15.50, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This book was originally published in 1954 for the Church Society to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdoms of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley and others, who “laid down their lives in loyalty to the truth of God’s Word”. The Banner of Truth has now reprinted it on the four-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary (2005) of “their faithfulness unto death”.

The book covers the period 1505 to 1555, critical years in the history of the Reformation in England and it is clear that the author has a great affinity to those of whom he writes. He is of the opinion that “the 40 years from 1516 to 1556, during which these men found and followed Jesus Christ, were the years in which the English Reformation was cradled and nurtured for the glory of God”. This is not a statement that one can easily argue against.

The author examines the beginning and progress of the Reformation in England by giving relatively short but intense accounts of the lives of five of the most important figures of this period. These are: Thomas Bilney, William Tyndale, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer. The changes in their lives, as they studied Erasmus’ New Testament and the writings of Martin Luther, are clearly followed through their own writings; Loane makes excellent use of these primary sources.

The piety of these men, their close and constant study of the Word of God and their determination to order their lives and worship by it, are an example to us all. The way they bore up against persecution, cruelty, imprisonment and, finally, burning is an inspiration to all who love the truth. They indeed showed their faith by their works. This is no empty eulogy; their frailties, fears and failures are all allowed to speak, alongside their final triumph through God’s grace. We are encouraged to learn that they were men like ourselves, used by the Lord for the purpose of glorifying His own name in the revival of His Cause in England.

The book is well researched. The author adds a large bibliography and his

sources are given at the end of each chapter. It is a scholarly work but has a racy style, which makes the book very readable to young and old; indeed at some points it is hard to lay it down. It deserves a wide readership, for it deals with issues which are relevant to our own day. The conflict in England at the Reformation was between the authority of the Word of God and the authority of the Pope. And it was their certainty of the truth of Scripture that made these men faithful unto death.

One minor difficulty is that the author mentions, without explanation, names with which many readers are not likely to be familiar. Also we are forcibly reminded throughout that Sir Marcus is an Anglican and he writes from that perspective. We commend this book to readers of this *Magazine* and to others.

*(Rev) D J MacDonald*

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## Notes and Comments

### The Root of All Evil

The Bible tells us that it is “the love of money” (rather than the possession of it) which is “the root of all evil”. How plainly has this been demonstrated recently! We refer to press reports of the questionable financial dealings of a British international lawyer, who happens to be the husband of a Cabinet minister; and the totally-unconnected theft of no less than £53 million from a Securitas depot in Kent. The lawyer appears to have been already a man of means before he accepted the gift of £350 000, which Italian prosecutors allege was a “bribe” from Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister of Italy. By doing so, he brought his wife under intense pressure.

One commentator has pointed out that it is only those who have the “wherewithal” in the first place that are able to go on and invest in “hedge” funds, where the risk of loss is minimised. To most of us the movement of vast sums of money, sometimes across national borders in order to generate more money, is simply bewildering. Cardinal Marcinkus who has recently been summoned to the eternal world to render his account to his Maker, was, for years, notoriously competent in handling Vatican finances to this end, and also, it would seem, expert in money laundering.

After the Cabinet Secretary had investigated Tessa Jowell’s conduct, he found her not guilty of breaching the ministerial code and the Prime Minister has cleared her of wrongdoing. But many MPs apparently remain sceptical; they are uneasy about what the affair has exposed and her involvement, even indirectly, in what is described as “the world of secretive payments through complex networks of offshore companies”.

“Men do not despise a thief,” Scripture declares, “if he steal to satisfy his soul, when he is hungry.” That does not, of course, mean that his theft is condoned, but rather that “his extreme temptation renders him an object of pity rather than scorn – men do not despise him”. The argument that he was “hungry” or starving cannot surely be advanced by our international lawyer in justification of his conduct in accepting unearned money from whatever source, compromising his wife in the process, and, so we are to believe, without her knowledge.

Nor can those guilty of stealing from the Securitas depot plead destitution in defending themselves against charges of law-breaking. Press reports indicate that at least one of the principal men charged in relation to the Kent robbery was a successful businessman whose high standard of living was well known – such as would make it totally implausible for anyone to argue that he was constrained to engage in criminal activities on account of need. The motivation must, quite simply, have been the love of money.

How wise was Agur the son of Jakeh, who prayed, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain”. *JM*

### **Persecution of Christians**

For the fourth year running, North Korea is at the top of the World Watch List of 50 countries which are worst for the persecution of Christians. The 2006 list, published by Open Doors, USA, (OD) has Saudi Arabia in second place. More than 70 expatriate Christians were arrested in 2005 during worship in private homes in “Saudi Arabia’s largest crackdown on Christians in a decade”. In Iran (third on the list), a new wave of persecution of Christians followed the election of a hard-line president in June 2005. Not only have many Christians been harassed but many have been arrested and beaten. One house church pastor was killed last November.

In Pakistan (sixteenth on the OD list), says Christian Broadcasting Network, Christians are a tiny minority in a Muslim nation and are often the target of attacks. Eighteen-year-old Mohan Shazad was warned that, if he did not stop selling Christian tracts, he would suffer for it. He was attacked so brutally that he had to have an arm amputated. He later said that he would continue selling Christian literature.

In India (twenty-sixth on the OD list), a spokesman for The Gospel for Asia (GFA) says that Hindu extremists have launched dozens of attacks against Christians since January because of Christian outreach to India’s 300 million Dalits, often referred to as “untouchables”. The GFA spokesman said

that Hindu nationalists want India to be a “pure Hindu” nation. He added “If laying down our lives for the sake of the gospel is called for, that is nothing strange or new, and we will go forward”.

Let us ever remember in prayer those believers who are persecuted as they follow Christ and seek to make Him known to others. “Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith” (2 Thess 3:2). *NMR*

### **Politicians’ Ideas of God**

Very surprisingly, Prime Minister Tony Blair has publicly referred to God. In a recent interview he said he believes God will be the ultimate judge of his decision to go to war with Iraq. But he refused to be drawn further when asked, “So will you pray to God when you make a decision like that?”

God will indeed be the ultimate judge of his decision – and of all his other decisions and actions, political and personal. However, he seems to have no right idea of how to prepare for that final judgement. Referring to the death of John Profumo, who notoriously had to resign from government in the 1960s as a result of his scandalous conduct, Mr Blair said: “He . . . underwent a journey of redemption and gave support and help to many, many people”. This idea of the wrongdoer earning redemption from God was put more explicitly by Profumo’s friend Lord Deedes, who claimed, “He atoned for his mistakes and I think will, on death, receive his reward for that”. Referring to Profumo’s work for the poor of east London, Lord Deedes added, “If that isn’t considered to be sufficient atonement for the mistake he made, then there is no such thing as forgiveness”.

Another politician who believes in self-redemption is MP George Galloway. In a recent interview he said he fears he will be punished by God on the Day of Judgement because he has “sinned repeatedly” and admitted that his biggest sin has been infidelity. “My only hope is that my life as a whole and the totality of my time here will help make up for some of that. But that, of course, is in God’s hands.” He also expressed the hope that his anti-war campaigning will help to balance the scales.

Judgement is indeed in God’s hands. To those who come before Him on the last day citing nothing more than their own good deeds as the reason why they should enter heaven, He will say, “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity”. May our politicians acknowledge that no one will enter heaven but those whose hope is based, not on what they have done, but on what Christ has done – that He died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice, to redeem sinners from eternal punishment. *NMR*

### **“The Weapons of Our Warfare”**

Christians offended by such attacks upon their faith as the blasphemous and vulgar *Jerry Springer: The Opera* – which is so dishonouring to the great God and their Saviour Jesus Christ – have responded with peaceful protests. Even sections of the secular press have acknowledged the contrast between the reaction of Christians to those things which deeply grieve them and the violence, and calls to violence, with which some offended Muslims responded to cartoons which they regarded as insulting to Mohammed, or with which Sikhs reacted to a play which they regarded as offensive to their religion. When professing Christians use carnal weapons to promote their beliefs or suppress those who revile them, they are acting inconsistently with their religion. The advocates of Islam, however, cannot readily prove that violence is inconsistent with its tenets. Certainly the fear of such violence is already subtly influencing attitudes in Church and State.

The Bible teaches people to think and to reason, and to endeavour to persuade others, by presenting truth to the mind. It does encourage strong resistance to evil and a readiness to contend earnestly for the faith. The Christian is entitled and obliged to use legal and morally-justifiable means to seek to advance truth and restrain falsehood. The Christian citizen in a constitutionally-Christian land has the civil right and Christian duty to use his citizenship to seek to bring legitimate pressure to bear upon those in positions of authority to exercise their functions in a way which will allow us to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim 2:2). But, “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor 10:3,4). Christians are followers of Him “who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet 2:23).

A columnist in *The Scotsman* (7 February 2006) displays the common lack of understanding of the radical distinction between those who are rather inaccurately dismissed as “fundamentalist Evangelicals” and those described as extremist adherents of other religions. He suggests that those who attack evolution, promote the idea of intelligent design or, even more alarmingly to him, advocate creationism, and believe that the word of God written in the Bible should be our moral code, bring us “to the same point of departure as the mobs now ransacking embassies”.

Unless our nation wakens up to its danger, it may soon discover, even in an earthly and social and temporal way, the consequences of turning its back on the religion of the One who said: “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt 11:29,30). HMC

## Protestant View

### The Unveiling of Rome's Scandal

"Clearly, the end of the scandal is not in sight." So said a pro-Roman Catholic newspaper in the USA, when reporting the defrocking of priest Bernard Bissonnette, who had abused children. The Boston Archdiocese alone has announced an agreement whereby 88 people who were molested by Roman Catholic priests will each receive an average of about £43 500.

"Just [last] Wednesday," the report added, "the Roman Catholic Church in Dublin, Ireland, announced that 102 of its priests are suspected of abusing at least 350 children since 1940." According to a statement on the website of the Archdiocese of Dublin, these figures were revealed by "an independently-conducted review which examined the personnel files of over 2800 priests". The statement adds, "To date 105 civil actions have been brought against 32 priests of the diocese or priests who held appointments. 65 of these have been brought to a conclusion and 40 are on-going. Settlement of claims has amounted to €5.8 million" [about £4 million].

Although the impurity of many Roman priests is being steadily uncovered (truly, the end of the scandal is not in sight), multitudes worldwide are still deluded by Rome and blind to its pollution. May their eyes be opened to see its uncleanness and to heed the call of God, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor 6:17). NMR

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## Church Information

### *Four Little Words*

This book for young people was originally published as *Pages from the Past*. Originally edited by Rev Alexander McPherson, it is now available in a new edition from Free Presbyterian Publications. All the articles in the book were taken from past issues of *The Young People's Magazine*, but for this reprint some more pieces from Mr McPherson's pen have been added. This 96-page book appears in a much more durable binding than before, having now been produced as a hardback. It costs £6.95 and may be obtained from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom and elsewhere. We hope that it will prove useful to a new generation of young people.

### General Building Fund

By appointment of Synod, this year's special collection on behalf of the General Building Fund is due to be taken in congregations during April.

*R A Campbell*, General Treasurer