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## Unanswerable Questions?

Back in 1957 a British archaeologist opined in an American magazine: “Nearly all the really important questions, the things we ponder in our profoundest moments, have no answer”. No doubt she was thinking of such questions as: Does God exist? Why are we here? and, What happens to us after death? But, in spite of widespread scepticism, there are answers to all these questions. For there is a God, and He has spoken to us clearly and with real authority. Yet today, almost 50 years on, there is an even greater unwillingness to accept the authority of Scripture, where God has given a revelation of Himself.

The fact is, as Paul makes plain in Romans 1, there is a real, though limited, revelation from God in the created universe around us, “for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (v 20). If it were possible for us to look about us without prejudice at the things that are made, we would feel obliged to accept the conclusion that no power less than God’s could have made them – that they did not come into existence apart from His eternal power. Yet every individual in this world *is* prejudiced and, in this generation, unbelieving prejudice very much operates in the direction of denying the creatorship of God and even His existence. But the evidence Paul speaks of still exists and, in the last part of the verse just quoted, he adds that, because of this evidence, “they are without excuse”.

In similar vein, Paul told the idolaters in Lystra of “the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein”. And they should have recognised His existence. Paul told them that God “left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). They should have realised that God’s kind provision in providence shows conclusively that God does indeed exist, and they should have realised this even if they had no further revelation, even if they never had the opportunity to listen to one of God’s messengers and never saw any part of the Scriptures.

If we accept the right answer to the first question, the answer to the second should follow very easily. The Shorter Catechism provides one answer to the question, Why are we here? when it declares that the First Commandment “requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify Him accordingly”. Among the scriptures quoted in support is Psalm 29:2: “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”. But how can we know what is glorifying to God and what kind of worship is acceptable to Him? We must go to the Bible. There we will find both the main principles – and, to some extent, the details which are to guide us in fulfilling the chief end for which we were created. One such main principle, which applies to the whole of our lives, is: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27).

And the third question: What happens after death? It is obvious what happens to the body, but no one can observe the soul as it leaves the body behind. To discover what may be known of the soul’s destiny, we must turn again to the Bible, where we are told that “the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc 12:7). It is God who made us; it is He to whom we must all give account at last; it is He accordingly who will, in perfect justice, send each of us to where we will spend eternity, to heaven or to hell. Will it be to the house of many mansions, the place of everlasting blessedness? Yes, the Bible tells us plainly, *if* we have become reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. But the answer to that last question is, No, if we reach death still in our sins, still under condemnation, still in rebellion against our Creator.

God has indeed spoken. He has told us all we need to know about religion. There is an answer in Scripture to every reasonable question, however profound. And all such answers are perfectly reliable, being given as part of an infallible revelation, which is, from beginning to end, inspired by the Holy Spirit. In particular, He has told us all we must know so that we may get safely through this life and safely out of it into a better world. Fundamentally we need faith in a crucified Saviour.

But will man listen? Sadly, as in most other generations, the vast majority of people today refuse to take such answers seriously. Even in countries like Britain, with a wonderful heritage of religious knowledge, and where the Bible is still so easily accessible, very few really believe its teachings. Perhaps never before in the history of the world has there been a generation which has felt so confident in trying to live without a god. Behind that confidence, of course, lies a faith in the theory of evolution, with its assurance that everything just happened to come into existence, without any supernatural guiding power

– apart altogether from a divine Creator. Today’s secular “prophets prophesy falsely”, and the “people love to have it so” (see Jer 5:31).

There was a time in the history of Judah when the Lord accused the people of following false gods. They were refusing to listen to the Lord’s words; they were content with merely-human answers to religious questions; in other words, they were walking “in the imagination of their heart”, an expression which includes the idea of stubbornness. It was in this context that the Lord called: “Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud” (Jer 13:15). And why do people not listen today when God speaks? One clear reason is pride. They are too proud to submit to the authority of God and to obey when He commands. Matthew Henry expands on these words of God through Jeremiah: “It is the great God that has spoken, whose authority is incontestable, whose power is irresistible; therefore bow to what He says, and be not proud, as you have been”. Equally our duty today is to put away our pride before this great God, to receive the truths that He has revealed, and to obey.

God has shown us clearly that this is a sinful world and that sin has infected every individual human being. Which points us to a further profound question: What must I do to be saved? This was what the Philippian jailer asked, and the answer he received from Paul and Silas is the very answer we need today. Human knowledge in most areas may have mushroomed over the past 2000 years, but, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, man must humble himself and accept the revelation given in Scripture as the one totally-dependable source of information on this vital matter. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” is the only accurate counsel that can be given to a sinner concerned about how to get safely to heaven. Yes, the answer may be expressed in other words; but unless it points in the same direction – that of faith in Jesus Christ – it is worse than worthless.

The late 1950s were a period of increasing prosperity when, in the words of Harold Macmillan, the then British Prime Minister, people had “never had it so good”, but Western society was on the verge of a tremendous departure from biblical standards in morals and religion. Certainly the rot had set in long before then, but what became known as the “swinging sixties” proved, in many ways, a marked turning point. Since then economic growth has gone on more or less continuously, but it has been accompanied by a continued decline in morality and religious observance – and by an increasing refusal to accept that there are sound answers to our profoundest questions.

What is the solution? On one level, it is a return to the Scriptures – to receive them as the inspired Word of God, and to listen and obey. But we must also be conscious of the need of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to apply that glorious revelation to the hearts of sinners everywhere.

## The Soul Sorrow of Jesus<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by *John Macnaughtan*

Matthew 26:38. *Then saith He unto them. My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me.*

There are many precious truths to be learned from the sufferings of the Redeemer. In the school of Calvary we are taught the worth of the undying soul. The sorrows of the Son of God, the amazement and agony to which He submitted, and the bloody sacrifice He offered up, loudly testify to the value of that spirit for whose salvation such a price was paid. Or we may learn the riches of a Saviour's love and grace, the vastness of His compassion and condescension, the inflexible character of the divine law, the completeness of the mercy provided for a fallen world; or the sincerity of Jehovah in declaring that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather commanding him to return from his ways and live. We do not purpose at present to set forth all that might be stated regarding the death of Emmanuel, nor will we attempt to gather up all the lessons strewn around His cross. We limit our attention to one part of the woes He bore – the sorrows of His soul. Approaching such a theme in a spirit of deep humility and prayerful dependence on the teaching of the Holy Ghost, we would observe:

1. **Jesus' *bodily sufferings***, however acute and protracted, **could not constitute a sufficient atonement** for sin nor meet the demands of a broken law. No doubt, in the history of redemption, there are frequent references to the bodily agonies of the Man of sorrows. God manifest in the flesh, wounded, smitten, pierced, dying, is so prominently set forth that we are apt to imagine that the pains of the cross, which issued in the extinction of life, constituted the main features of his substitution. And we are liable to conclude that a soul which has mastered the ideas connected with the laceration of His frame, the rending of His sacred body, the piercing of His hands and feet, really understands what the great Surety endured in the room and stead of the guilty.

Now, though the soul may well be filled – yea, overwhelmed – with amazement when it reads but one chapter about the bodily sufferings of Jesus, contrasting the peerless glory of the Lord with the humiliation to which He submitted, it must not believe that the endurance of these external inflictions constituted the whole, or even the principal part, of the propitiation made for sin. Iniquity was not so easily taken out of the way, nor was the Saviour's trouble so limited as this. The work to be done was the reconciliation of God

<sup>1</sup>Reprinted, with editing, from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2. Macnaughtan (1807-1884) was minister of the High Church in Paisley at the Disruption, and later moved to Belfast.

and man, on the footing of a magnified law and a glorified righteousness. To attain that end, an equivalent must be found at the very outset for the punishment man deserved. While this equivalent involved the pains of an agonised frame, it as clearly demanded the severer sorrows of an afflicted soul.

This may be made apparent by the following reasons: The body is but the instrument through which the soul acts. The spirit is the moving spring in all deeds of transgression and, consequently, when satisfaction is demanded for guilt, it must be yielded, not by the mere instrument of the crime, but by the living agent with whom the evil originated. Analyse any single trespass, and this principle will become clear. Take the first sin, which ruined a world and drew down the curse of the Lord on countless generations; a casual glance at it would perceive just an impious hand seizing the ripe but forbidden fruit – a covetous eye dwelling on its freshness – and man thereby exhibited as a degraded, ruined creature.

But surely there is something more in this deed of vice than the movement of the eye and the hand and the lip. There is the prior work of sin within the soul – the revolt of the heart from its allegiance to God – displayed in its communing with a spirit that denied His truth. There is the corruption of the moral nature, as exhibited by indulging the thought: We shall be as gods. And there is the resolute determination of the will to disobey, for creature gratification, the understood commandment of Jehovah. To all this, to pluck the fruit and eat, it was but the natural consequence.

So, when justice comes forth to avenge and when law, armed with all its terrors, seeks to vindicate its own insulted authority, those ends cannot be attained by smiting the eye with blindness, or crushing the arm that has touched the forbidden tree. No bodily suffering, whether voluntary or constrained, is an adequate compensation for the evil committed. The principal offender remains still unscathed and must not be permitted to escape. The soul must not elude the grasp of the great God it has mocked. The mind that has defied His sovereignty must not shelter from wrath beneath the writhing of an agonized body. No, in righteousness the sinner must be the sufferer; and as body and soul are in the transgression, the penalty of sin must include the pains and sufferings of both.

Here we cannot help noticing how solemn and alarming a statement this is to the unconverted. Have you ever thought on the penalty due to unforgiven sin? You see but little of it in time. You know nothing of the torment of an awakened conscience, of the agony of a spirit roused from the slumber of criminal indifference to the horrors of unmitigated despair, of the wretchedness of a soul cleft by the lightning of God's wrath and exposed eternally to His awful displeasure. You see a little of the fruit of sin in the poverty and

sicknesses and disappointment of earth. You taste a little of its consequences in the miseries and afflictions of the world, and you know you are exposed to the sadness of separation from time, to the gloom and the stillness of the grave. But are these the punishments of sin? Is this the full account of the law's demands? No, do not deceive yourselves. These sorrows, and that certain death, are but the evidences that the Judge has His eye and His hand on the rebellious, that there is no escape from His grasp. Speedily He will deal both with the agent and the instrument in sin, in righteousness meting out to each a punishment according to its power of endurance and the share it had in the offence against the dread majesty of Jehovah.

Again, the sufferings of Christ in His body could not be a sufficient atonement for sin, because they did not exhaust the condemnation pronounced by the law against transgression. It seems plain enough that, if the second Adam is admitted as a substitute in man's room, He must undergo the doom pronounced against the first Adam: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" – a sentence which implied exposure to an everlasting separation of soul and body from God, and adjudged man to the grave, through the death of the body. But it also included an immediate and certain penalty – the death of the soul. It taught that the Almighty would arrest the transgressor in the very act of his iniquity; in that hour the soul would be judicially excluded from God's favour. By consequence, this sentence cannot be removed till sin has been expiated in the sorrows of the soul itself.

It is very difficult, no doubt, to conceive of the death of an immortal spirit. And when the spirit displays an activity, zeal, enterprise and affection, though not for God's glory, we doubt the reality of its death. But what is death? Just a separation from the fountain of life. Now, the life of a soul flows from its union to the Infinite One, and the main exercises of that life consist in communion with Him; so it is quite possible that our immortal natures may be occupied with time and creature vanities, may be vigorous and lively in the pursuit of the objects that furnish a present delight – yet dead in trespasses and sins, devoid of all love to God, destitute of His image, loathsome as unburied corpses in His sight, under a sentence of condemnation that excludes from His favour and exposes to His wrath. And when the high penalties of the law come to be exacted – when the period of temporary reprieve is past – the soul must then recognise its distance from God, a distance never to be diminished. And the sense of this eternal separation, from the one source of blessedness and peace, will constitute a mighty element in the second death and embitter the wretchedness of a ruined state. O that sinners would think of this their latter end!

**2. The severity of the Mediator's sorrow,** when He made His soul an

offering for sin. He suffered much from the temptations by which He was assailed, for, says the apostle, “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”. Do not suppose that a pure nature cannot be harassed and grieved by solicitations to evil with which it has not the least inclination to comply; every mind that has been renewed by the Holy Spirit must understand how much the soul may be vexed by the presence of temptation, when it turns with horror from the idea of committing the crime to which Satan or the world allures.

Now Jesus, from the purity of His manhood and the power of His Godhead, was not exposed to those trials that spring from the defects and the innate corruptions of a fallen nature, and was free from those struggles of a law in the members, against the law of the mind, that often afflict believers; and although there was no possibility of His ever being seduced by external allurements to violate the holy commandments of His Father. Yet He felt keenly the assaults of temptation, and His very holiness rendered these trials all the more painful. That mind, unsullied by the stain of guilt, could not fail to recoil with horror from the very idea of personal transgression. Although, therefore, all temptation necessarily fell powerless at the feet of the Messiah, the very effrontery of sin and the loathsomeness of evil thus brought so close to the Son of God – the very necessity that was laid on Him to listen to the insidious wishes of the tempter – was in itself a source of grief to the Redeemer, and constituted a part of the mental agony to which He submitted when making Himself a propitiation for sin.

Yet this soul-trouble of Christ is a comfort to His people; it tested His purity, demonstrated His holiness, and provided sources of consolation for His afflicted and troubled followers. How graciously the words sound in the ears of a weak believer: “In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able also to succour them that are tempted”! And so the assaults of Satan and of sin were not altogether without effect. They did not overthrow the holiness of that spotless nature, but they dashed into the hidden reservoirs of its divine sympathies and caused their healing, refreshing waters to flow forth. And the clefts of sorrow they made in that blessed humanity are now just so many places of refuge to which a tempted believer may flee in his hour of trial for safety and for shelter.

Again, it is evident that the Lord suffered much from the ingratitude and malignity of man. Few wounds enter so deeply into a noble and generous spirit as those caused by ingratitude. The extent to which kindness has been shown adds to the cruelty of the infliction, and renders the shock the more crushing. What emphasis there is in the beautiful descriptions which the

prophets gave of this poignant grief of the Saviour! "All that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip." "Reproach hath broken My heart; I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none." "We hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not".

These predictions were amply verified in the history of the Lord. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. Notwithstanding His miracles of mercy, He was rejected by man. The cries: "Away with Him, away with Him," were mitigated by no expressions of pity. Betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, forsaken by all, He was given over to the unrelenting cruelties of the multitude, who had forgotten His acts of kindness, or only remembered them as a means for pointing their sarcasm: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save!" This constituted no trifling element in the woe of Jesus. The intense sensitivity of His spotless mind rendered this sorrow more acute and trying; while the endurance of it, as it formed part of that curse transferred to the great Surety, magnified the patience, love and grace of Him who for the sake of sinners made Himself thus poor, that they through His poverty might be rich.

Again, the soul sorrow of Christ was produced by the consciousness of all comforting communications being withheld from heaven, and by the feeling of being forsaken in the hour of His deepest distress. There were two parts in this trial, the one arising from the anticipation of the approaching evil and the other springing from its actual presence and pressure.

Sorrow in anticipation, where the mind is pervaded by an undoubted persuasion of its approach, has a tendency to paralyse the heart and fill it with an instinctive dread which is almost as painful as the trouble itself. This the innocent humanity of the Lord experienced with the precision of reality. He foresaw the cross, the shame, the curse, the grave, and His spotless nature would have shrunk from all contact with these tremendous evils had it not been upheld by the power of His almighty love. It was this anticipation that passed like a cloud over the serenity of His spirit when He said, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27). Faith seemed for a moment to be staggered; its language is that of sore perplexity: "What shall I say?" but instantly it recovered its stability, and meekly declared, "But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name."

The actual endurance of the affliction is described by the scenes at Gethsemane and the history of Calvary. These scenes reveal the Son of God weakened, troubled, excruciated by mental distress, as if some invisible hand were pressing to His lips a cup of indescribable bitterness, the very sight of



which filled Him with amazement and horror, and led to the agonizing prayer: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt". The language which the inspired writers use is very striking: "He began to be sorrowful", as if that Man of sorrows had never been in grief before. His soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death". And when the conscious withdrawal of all divine communication, and the full sense of being alone in the winepress of wrath, was most overwhelming, a burdened heart burst forth in the distressful cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Communion with God was the very life of His spirit, and the cry of desertion indicated that He felt the happiness of His soul ebbing away, and His whole nature tossed amid the billows of unmitigated wretchedness.

It is difficult to form a right idea of this portion of Emmanuel's grief; His desertion was so altogether different from that of a sinner eternally lost, and it is inappropriate to compare His despondency with the sadness that occasionally overtakes a weak believer. In the case of a damned spirit, God leaves it for ever; the removal of His mercy is real and eternal. But in the case of Jesus there was no separation between the Godhead and the humanity; the union of the natures remained in all its integrity in the depths of humiliation, and Christ crucified was just as truly God-man as Christ exalted to the right hand of power in the heavens, hailed with the acclaim of saint and angel, and adored by the whole universe of God as supreme in excellence and divine in glory. But there was a suspension of all the tokens of God's comforting presence; the Father seemed to retire from that sufferer while Christ in His manhood endured the great fight of affliction.

This was evidently a part of the curse due to sin. Transgression necessarily separated from God; the nature of iniquity, and the sentence of a righteous law pronounced against it, doomed the guilty to banishment from Jehovah's presence. Thus, just as truly as Adam felt his estrangement from God, when the Lord "drove out the man", so truly must every sinner, found out by his own iniquity, feel that he is separated from the fountain of all blessedness and the source of all comfort. Consequently, when the Mediator stood in the breach as man's surety, and became a ransom in his room, it behoved Him to endure this sense of desertion and the depressing feeling of distance from the Father.

And how immensely different is the sadness thus endured from what falls to the lot of a tried saint walking in darkness, mourning because it is not with him as in months past! He never knew the lofty and elevated fellowship with God that was the daily experience of Jesus of Nazareth; he never realized that pure and blissful communion that Jesus continually enjoyed; he never

entered into that inexpressible tenderness of love which arose from the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. And so his sense of loss is not for one moment to be weighed in the balance against that anguish which now pierced the heart of the Saviour of the world.

Nay, more, when we think of the Christian pilgrim in perplexity because of the absence of God's gracious presence, we picture a man whose feelings have been blunted by sin and are not yet completely renewed – a creature as yet without the capacity for uninterrupted enjoyment of God, a child of faith from whom, in condescension to his weakness, the Lord never altogether withdraws the light of His countenance, lest his spirit should fail before him. It may be with him comparatively a day of cloud and gloominess, but there is always the gleam of the twilight – dimness, but not absolute darkness, darkness that may be felt. But this is not the sorrow of Messiah. In Him you have a heart attuned to all the harmonies of heaven, characterised by all the delicacy of feeling which perfect piety induces, fitted for unbroken delight in Jehovah. You have that heart brought down from this cloudless enjoyment and enveloped in a darkness that was like that of hell itself – a darkness and desertion all the more terrible because it was to be endured in the midst of His other sorrows. O the love of Jesus, it passeth all understanding!

Finally, the sorrow of the Redeemer's soul rose to its height when He did actually endure the very wrath of God due to our sins. This is a great mystery, and we may not pry into it beyond what is written. It is plain enough that wrath is denounced against transgression, that it pursues the sinner, and that the vengeance and the curse of the law imply severe, positive and penal infliction from God's own hand. There is more in damnation than the loss of blessing and favour; there is more in hell than separation from heaven. Perdition is a state of actual suffering – suffering induced not by the presence of devils alone, not by the operation of man's unbridled passions upon himself, but proceeding directly from the power of the Judge. And before a soul could be saved, or the gladdening note of a completed redemption be sung throughout the universe, the indignation of an insulted heaven must burst on the head of the Daysman; the pains of hell must take hold of Him, and the full penalty be yielded to the violated statute, before God can be just in justifying the transgressor.

All this the Saviour suffered. The particulars of that hidden agony we cannot describe. It is enough for us to know that the hand of divine justice pressed heavily on His spotless soul; "that He was stricken; smitten of God, and afflicted"; that He did enter the winepress alone; that at His cross the prediction was fulfilled: "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd," to smite "the man that is My fellow"; that the sorrows of hell compassed Him about";

so that, in the language of the Psalmist, He might say, “Thou hast delivered My soul from the lowest hell”. All this indicated that, although there was not here the gnawing of the worm, or the unquenchable fire of remorse, or the blaspheming of a despairing spirit – because inconsistent with the essential purity and glory of His exalted nature – yet the very essence of the curse due to sin was borne and exhausted. Thus we may now gratefully understand how there can be no condemnation to them that are in Christ, the Lord being well pleased for His righteousness’ sake.

When we review this amazing subject, and note that we are redeemed not with silver or gold, but with the sorrow, with the blood, of the Lamb of God, can we fail to admire the vastness of the price, or to exalt the name of the Lord who so freely and so graciously laid it down? The price was sorrow unto death, the sorrow of the soul of Christ. If He had been a mere man, this would have been a costly gift, for a soul is worth a world – with all its grandeur and glory. But if it were worth ten thousand worlds, with heavens upon heavens beside, it were poverty itself when compared with the worth of the spirit of Jesus, that spirit which lodged in close fellowship with the Godhead, that soul which – though human in all its powers and faculties – was girded with the glorious attributes of the ever-blessed God. And yet it was made a sacrifice for sin! Surely herein is love – love divine, that ought to thrill each heart with gratitude and attune each tongue to praise. “O love the Lord, all ye His saints.” Behold what manner of love is this!

See what advice and warning this subject gives to unconverted sinners. It tells you that you must either reckon with justice yourselves, or meet its claims with the merit of Jesus. You may trifle for a little with sin, and play with it as with an imaginary evil. But in the end, when the time for repentance and for fleeing to the Saviour has passed away for ever, you must encounter the forgotten demands of the law. You must then learn, when too late, that the refusal of an all-sufficient Jesus is not the way to escape from the pressure of wrath; to lose an interest in the satisfaction of the Saviour is to subject yourselves to the woe and the curse written in the book of God. “Why will ye die?” Jesus is set forth as a propitiation, that you should believe in His name. Contemplate His work; trust in His merit; cast yourselves in helpless dependence at His feet. Let your prayer be, Lord, save us, or we perish. Then there may be heard in heaven, even now, halleluiahs from angel lips, because a sinner has repented and turned to God.

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If men were once made thoroughly sensible that the least sin is worse for them than the greatest affliction or suffering, their peace of conscience would be well secured.

Repentance is the tear which stands in the eye of faith as it is lifted up to behold Christ crucified.

*John Flavel*

## Separatism in the North of Scotland

### 3. John Grant (1752-1829)

*Rev D W B Somerset*

John Grant was born in the Strath of Kildonan in Sutherland in May 1752.<sup>1</sup> He lived at Duible, about a mile below the church of Kildonan on the north bank of the river. James Macdonald, the father of the Apostle of the North, was from the same township.<sup>2</sup> John was of above average height and of spare build, but athletic and with a powerful voice. By nature he was of a violent disposition; indeed Donald Sage described him as “not only hot and impetuous, but often ferocious”.<sup>3</sup> In his unconverted days he once attended a funeral at which “strong drink had been freely indulged in, with the result that the funeral party came to quarrel badly among themselves. ‘I let down’, said John, ‘the bier three times that day to engage in a fight. But that fight was made very bitter to me afterwards.’”<sup>4</sup>

The minister of Kildonan in his early childhood was Hugh Ross, an “honoured minister of Christ”, whose preaching was accompanied with “heavenly unction”. His ministry lasted only six years, however, and he died at an early age in 1761. His successor, John Ross, was also a good man, but weak in the pulpit. Donald Matheson, the Kildonan bard, said of his preaching that “like some persons at sheep-shearing, he must say it was wool they had, though the fleece was short”. John Ross died in 1775 at the age of 42, and Matheson said afterwards that “though he never saw one whose weakness in the pulpit he more pitied, yet he never saw a deathbed more enviable for divine consolations”.<sup>5</sup>

John Grant’s spiritual awakening occurred during John Ross’s time, but not through his instrumentality. He was at a prayer-meeting held by some of the godly men in the Strath, and part of Ps 56:13, “Walk before God in the light of the living”, was brought with terrible convicting power to his conscience. For the next seven years he was in spiritual anguish. In 1772 he

<sup>1</sup>The principal sources for his life are: Alexander Auld, *Ministers and Men in the Far North*, Free Presbyterian Publications 1956 reprint, pp 100-106; Donald Mackay, *Memories of Our Parish*, Dingwall, 1925, pp 144-56; John Macleod, *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, Edinburgh, 1965, pp 97-103; Donald Munro, *Records of Grace in Sutherland*, Edinburgh, 1953, pp 151-6.

<sup>2</sup>*Records of Grace*, p 174.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, second ed, Wick, 1899, p 137.

<sup>4</sup>*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 20, p 432.

<sup>5</sup>John Rose (ed), *Metrical Reliques*, Inverness, 1851, pp 246-7. John Ross’s granddaughter became a member of the Free Presbyterian congregation in Halkirk and died in 1900 at the age of 85, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 5, pp 186ff.

married, and it was perhaps three or four years after this that the peace of the gospel was imparted to him.<sup>6</sup> One night he was swept away trying to cross a river in spate, and it was when he found himself safe on the opposite bank that the light shone in his soul.<sup>7</sup>

Within a short while he was regarded as one of the foremost Christians in the Strath of Kildonan, and he was clearly a man of remarkable character. Donald Sage describes John Grant as “a truly pious man. No two things in one soul, however, could be placed in more direct, or even outrageous, contrast with each other than all that there was of grace and all that remained of corrupt nature, in the soul of John Grant. As a vital Christian he was, for the depth and extent of his knowledge, quite remarkable. His views were vivid, original, solid and scriptural, and the language in which he expressed them was calculated, by its terseness, accuracy and point, to do all justice in conveying them to the mind and comprehension of his fellow-Christians. He was also, although an illiterate man, yet unquestionably one of very considerable native talent.” He then goes on to speak of his eccentricity and of his explosions of temper.<sup>8</sup>

On one occasion, at least, John’s irritability got him into considerable trouble. He had been present in a church in Sutherland during a feeble sermon and had found the “devout swayings and sighings” of an elderly lady increasingly annoying. At last he could bear it no more and, reaching out his staff, he had given her a poke in the ribs. Her son, an army officer, was vastly indignant, and John found himself facing charges in the Sheriff Court in Dornoch. It happened, however, that the Sheriff was Hugh M’Culloch, an eminently godly man, who took in the situation at once. Addressing the lady, he said, “My good woman, you have all the sense you ever had. But this man has undergone a change so great that his natural wisdom is turned into folly.” “I did not know that,” the old lady replied, “or I would not have brought him here.” The case went no further.<sup>9</sup>

In 1776 William Keith was settled as minister of Kildonan, and within a few years John Grant had been ordained one of his elders. Donald Sage says that Keith was “a man of good ability and sincere piety” and that his ministry in Kildonan was “successful and prosperous”. His preaching was “eminently practical”, but his doctrine “did not enter very much into theological details”, although it was “sound, scriptural and edifying”. He was on good terms with

<sup>6</sup>He had been married to his wife for 45 years in June 1817, *Letters by the Eminently Pious*

*John Grant, Joseph M’Kay, and Alexander Gair* (np, nd) p.29, and he had been “married to Christ” for more than 50 years at the time of his death in 1829, *Ministers and Men*, p 106.

<sup>7</sup>*Records of Grace*, p 151.

<sup>8</sup>*Memorabilia Domestica*, pp 137-8.

<sup>9</sup>*By-Paths*, pp 101-2.

his parishioners, but he had the fault, according to Sage, of being excessively sociable. He left in 1786 to become minister of Golspie.<sup>10</sup>

The next minister was Alexander Sage who was inducted in 1787. John Grant was opposed to the settlement, seemingly because Sage was a poor speaker, and Donald Sage gives the impression that John Grant was a non-hearer throughout his father's ministry.<sup>11</sup> Donald Sage was not born, however, until 1790, and it seems likely that it was in 1793 that John Grant ceased attending ordinary public worship, while Sage was still an infant. The incident which occasioned this, according to Alexander Auld, was that John Grant "had urged the Session to put down the practice then prevalent of advertising on the Sabbath day in the churchyard the secular transactions of the ensuing week, and which weighed on his conscience. They declined to interfere, whereupon he resigned his office and withdrew from the congregation."<sup>12</sup> Presumably it was at this time that he started holding his own meetings on Sabbath.<sup>13</sup> About 1797 the event took place at the Kildonan communion which was the immediate cause of Separatism,<sup>14</sup> and thereafter it was a matter of principle with John Grant that people ought to separate from the "secular" ministers.

The population of Kildonan in John Grant's time was about 1500, but the notorious Clearance of 1813, together with subsequent "reorganisation", reduced it to a third of that number by the 1821 census. By 1831 the population was down to 257. John Grant himself left Kildonan in 1804, when he moved to Strathy, on the far north coast.<sup>15</sup> In his Gaelic Elegy on John Grant, Joseph Mackay refers to John Grant's being "wronged" and "expelled" by "Sutherland", and puts the blame for this on "a Presbytery without grace" who thronged him "like bulls of Bashan".<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Sutherland estate managers regarded Kildonan as overcrowded, and those who were seen as troublemakers did not have their leases renewed.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps one or two of the ministers had spoken to

<sup>10</sup>*Memorabilia Domestica*, p 53.

<sup>11</sup>*Memorabilia Domestica*, pp 48-9.

<sup>12</sup>*Ministers and Men*, p 102. In 1808 John Grant wrote of the "condemnation" he had received from "excellent persons" for the past 15 years, *Letters by . . . John Grant . . .*, p 19.

<sup>13</sup>*Memorabilia Domestica* p 49.

<sup>14</sup>See the first article in this series at footnote 8.

<sup>15</sup>He was in Strathy by November 1804, *Letters by . . . John Grant . . .*, p 13, and stayed for 15 years, *Memories of Our Parish* p 149, so he cannot have moved there earlier than 1804.

<sup>16</sup>We are quoting an English verse translation in which the Gaelic word *cleir* is translated Presbytery, *Memories of Our Parish*, pp 154-6. It has been suggested, however, that it should be translated *clergy*, which puts a rather different slant on events. The Gaelic text is in *Dain Spiordail, le Ughdairibh Eug-samhuil*, Forres, 1852, pp 18-21.

<sup>17</sup>R J Adam (ed), *Papers on Sutherland Estate Management 1802-1816*, Scottish Historical Society, Edinburgh, 1972, vol 1 pp xxviii-xxix.

the factor about John Grant, and in this way had secured his expulsion.<sup>18</sup>

Strathy was in the parish of Farr, and the minister when he arrived was James Dingwall (1743-1814), who was a Moderate. John Grant soon started holding his own meetings on Sabbath, and these were widely appreciated. Strathy is several miles from Farr and it would seem that there were no weekly meetings in Strathy until John Grant moved there. He was not as gifted a speaker as some of the other Men, but he was “intimately and spiritually acquainted with the Scriptures, and his views of the mind of the Lord, as therein revealed, were singularly original and striking.”<sup>19</sup>

Soon after John Grant moved to Strathy his health began to fail, and in March 1806 he wrote that he had not been more than a mile from his house for the last half-year. By April 1812 he was saying that he had not been out of the house for the previous three years, although he continued to hold meetings. His wife’s health also declined, and from April 1815 she was confined to her bed. She died on 23 July 1818, but John Grant believed that it was during these three years in bed that her conversion took place. In one letter at this time he refers to his “family”, from which it appears that they must have had a number of children.<sup>20</sup>

There is no direct mention in John Grant’s letters of the Kildonan Clearance of 1813 or the first Strathnaver Clearance of 1814, although many of the people were moved to Strathy.<sup>21</sup> In June 1818, however, he refers to the Clearances as follows: “Because of all our wickedness, the Lord, in His righteous judgement, allowed Lady Stafford to clear all the heritage, putting them in altogether to this town or village, because of their poverty. I believe they cannot stand two years in the miserable situation of their families; therefore I am very miserable on their account.”<sup>22</sup> In 1820 or 1821 John Grant himself was obliged to move for the second time, his croft in Strathy being required for a sheep-run.<sup>23</sup> Mrs Mackay, Hotel, as she was called, a godly widow, gave him a place in the hotel in Thurso for as long as he needed it.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Exactly what we are suggesting did happen to Alexander Gair in 1817, *Records of Grace* p 240.

<sup>19</sup>*Ministers and Men* p 101.

<sup>20</sup>*Letters by . . . John Grant . . .* pp 14,22,35,37; *Letters of John Sutherland, Badbea*, 18 April 1855. (These letters were printed in the *John O’Groat Journal* between February 18 and April 1 1927).

<sup>21</sup>*Sutherland Estate Management 1802-1816*, vol 2, p 181.

<sup>22</sup>*Letters by . . . John Grant . . .* p 33. Lady Stafford was the Countess of Sutherland in her own right. In 1833 her husband, the Marquis of Stafford, was created Duke of Sutherland.

<sup>23</sup>Alexander Auld gives the date as 1820, *Ministers and Men* p.105, but in a letter of December 1821 John Grant gives the distinct impression that he has only just moved to Thurso, *Letters by . . . John Grant . . .* p 39.

<sup>24</sup>An account of Mrs Mackay is given in *Ministers and Men*, pp 219-221.

About 1822 a small dwelling was found for him in Broubster, to the west of Loch Calder. This brought him within the bounds of the Achreny mission, where Finlay Cook<sup>25</sup> had been labouring since 1817. As a Separatist, John Grant was critical of Finlay Cook's attachment to the Church, but Finlay Cook said that he never passed his door because "I will get the rod from John, but then I will get honey with it".<sup>26</sup> It must have been at this late stage of John Grant's life that the Caithness Presbytery required Finlay Cook to administer a rebuke to him for a remark that he had made at a Question Meeting. Finlay Cook was unsparing in his rebuke and he feared afterwards that he might have given offence. "You were very hard on me the other day at the Presbytery," said John with a gruff voice when they met. "I was not a bit harder than you deserved," was the reply. "If you had been one bit less hard than you were," said John, "you would have fallen in my esteem."<sup>27</sup>

Sometime in the second half of 1828, John Grant moved once more, this time to Shebster a few miles north of Broubster, where Major William Innes of Sandside gave him a house. He was taken there in a cart belonging to one of his neighbours, Sandy Elder of Shurrery. Sandy had been savingly awakened sometime before during a meeting at which John Grant had spoken on Matthew 11:7, "A reed shaken with the wind".<sup>28</sup> John Grant's death took place on 16 May 1829, and he was buried in the old cemetery in Reay.<sup>29</sup>

A number of John Grant's letters survived; and extracts from 23 of these, along with letters from Joseph Mackay and Alexander Gair, were published in a small volume, from which we have already quoted several times.<sup>30</sup> Of

<sup>25</sup>Finlay Cook had been the missionary for Achreny and Strathhalladale since 1817, and in 1829 he became the minister of Ness.

<sup>26</sup>*Memories of Our Parish*, p 153.

<sup>27</sup>*By-Paths* p 102.

<sup>28</sup>*Records of Grace in Sutherland*, pp 154-5. Sandy was still alive in 1868. He supplied Alexander Auld with an anecdote of John Grant's deathbed (see *Ministers and Men*, p 106).

<sup>29</sup>The date, May 16, is that given in Joseph Mackay's Elogy, *Memories of Our Parish*, p 154. John Grant's tombstone gives the date as May 26, but this is regarded as an error.

<sup>30</sup>This was printed in Aberdeen, probably about 1860 but without date, place of publication, or editor's name. It consists of an eight-page preface, mainly concerning a theological argument in which Joseph Mackay was involved; 78 pages of letters; and a one-page appendix justifying its publication. The collection of letters was re-issued, in three separate pamphlets, at Kingussie in 1891 by Cameron Mackay, (1853-1937), who was born in Helmsdale, of Free Church parentage. He was a teacher for 20 years, but was dismissed while schoolmaster of Halkirk, Caithness. He defended himself in an anonymous publication, *The Dismissal of a Free Church Teacher*. In 1895 he became Reformed Presbyterian minister of Penpont in Dumfries-shire. In 1904 he published another work with the unusual title *Fifteen Bible Nuts Opened and Proved Sound*. In 1907 he left the Reformed Presbyterian Church following a doctrinal dispute. From 1913-1922 he was Church of Scotland minister of Stenscholl, Skye. In 1929 he published *Authentic Anecdotes of Three*



John Grant's 23 letters, one was from Duible dated 1795, 19 from Strathy written between November 1804 and July 1819, one from Thurso in December 1821, and two from Broubster in March 1825 and March 1828 respectively. All his letters were in English, but the English, particularly of the earlier letters, was not good. It was not his preferred language, though very probably it was the only one he could read or write.<sup>31</sup>

There was evidently something remarkable about John Grant. Alexander Auld placed him "at the head of the men of the far north", and Finlay Cook said that "Sandy Gair would split a hair with his keenness, but John Grant would rule a kingdom with his sense." John Sutherland, Badbea, said, "I know not of any in Scotland with his discernment and with views so clear in the Scripture and with such spiritual light. . . . A few minutes in his company would be better to the troubled soul than all the noise and learning of the greatest scholars in Great Britain."<sup>32</sup>

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## Eastern Europe Mission News

*Rev D A Ross*

Last October, Mr Maarten Schouten and Rev D A Ross drove a load of humanitarian aid to some congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Romania. The clothing taken was of good quality, some of it new. It was donated by friends in Scotland and Holland and sorted by our helpers in Inverness. Furniture and other useful items for those in need were also sent out.

However, the more important part of our load consisted of Bibles, religious literature and calendars. Some of the Bibles, in Hungarian and Romanian, were bought from the Trinitarian Bible Society, who kindly donated the others. The Society also gave a grant of 8000 Scripture text calendars in the Hungarian and Romanian languages. It is a privilege to be the means of taking the Word of God and sound literature to these distant parts, especially as Romania is under the Orthodox Church and the people generally are enmeshed in the worship of saints and other erroneous and superstitious practices.

*Great and Good Men of the North.* Presumably there was some connection between his republication of Separatist letters, his dismissal as a Free Church teacher, and his joining the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

<sup>31</sup>*Ministers and Men*, p 104. The New Testament did not appear in Gaelic until 1767. The Gaelic Old Testament came out in four parts between 1786 and 1801.

<sup>32</sup>*Ministers and Men* p 100; *By-Paths* p 102; *Letters of John Sutherland, Badbea*, 26 April 1856.

We were favoured with a good journey to and from Romania, although on our way back we were rather anxious about having to pass through heavy snow showers in parts of the Carpathian Mountains. Also the heater in the sleeping quarters of the vehicle failed to work, and then our gas cooker gave out. In temperatures below freezing point we had a more than chilly journey, but in the kindness of the Lord we arrived in Scotland safe and well.

Sfantu Gheorghe, the town to which we delivered our load of aid, is in the centre of east Romania, about 25 miles north of Brasov. We were well received by the pastor of the local congregation, one of a number of congregations in the area endeavouring to follow Reformed teaching. All the pastors wish to express their thankfulness to our Church in Scotland and to the Trinitarian Bible Society for the aid and especially for the Bibles and calendars. The calendars are distributed from house to house and, in cases where interest is shown over a period, a Bible is given later.

In distributing the Scriptures and aid to groups outwith our Church it is certainly not our intention to engage in some kind of ecumenical relationship, but to distribute the Word and good books, and to put them, if possible, into the hands of those who are striving to spread Reformed teaching. While we cannot agree with some of their practices, and at times meet with keen disappointment, it is good to know that they have a genuine wish to spread Calvinism. But our hope is that a door will ultimately open for us to plant a congregation of our own, from which we could, by the grace of God, disseminate the Reformed faith in its entirety.

On our return journey we visited a Hungarian Christian family by the name of Campan, whose home is in the town of Elk, close to the east border of Hungary. We first came in contact with Mr Romulus Campan through the internet, in his search for a sound Presbyterian Church. We spent one weekend in Elk, and had our main meals in his kind home. On Sabbath, when we had public worship in his home, I preached on Psalm 34:5 and he interpreted. We are indebted to Mr Campen, a teacher of English, for helping us to resolve certain difficulties in connection with our translation work there. We hope and pray that the door will remain open for us to continue bringing aid and Bibles to Romania and surrounding countries.

In the Ukraine our small congregation in Odessa continues to worship without interruption, and to distribute copies of the Scriptures and sound literature – Mr Igor Zadoroshney labouring tirelessly in this work. Our main concern at the moment is to erect a building for our work there. The plot of land is not large and this necessitates a building with a basement plus two floors, which is more costly. The basement will be for storage, especially of Bibles and literature, but also of humanitarian aid waiting for distribution.

The ground floor will have an area for public worship, an office for the work of distribution of literature and aid, and a garage for our small congregational bus. There will be a small car park in the compound but one of its uses will be secure parking for our truck when we visit Odessa with a load of aid. The top floor will consist of a modest flat for a pastor and his family, and a very small flat for visitors.

It has been in our plans for some time to purchase another truck for transporting aid, so the relevant Committees decided to purchase a truck to be used both for mission work in Eastern Europe and outreach work in this country. Since then a business family in Holland has kindly donated one of their trucks for our work, and they will release it in about a year, when they purchase their new fleet of vehicles. Although the truck is not a dual purpose one, it is ideal for Eastern Europe work. We are deeply indebted to this family for their gift and exceedingly thankful to the Most High for His gracious provision, and all the more so as we are in much need of funds for the proposed building in Odessa. While a considerable amount of money has come in to the Eastern Europe Fund, we have some considerable way to go before we reach the £108 000 cost of the building, £28 000 of which is tax. At the same time we do not wish this cost to hinder our publishing work; we are therefore proceeding to print the completed translation of Rev Donald Macfarlane's sermons.

Last year we had a surplus quantity of aid in store in Scotland, but the opportunity arose to send it in a large container to Zimbabwe. A quantity of knitted baby clothes, blankets and other items came from the Roundwood Trust, a group of Strict Baptists who do charitable work, and who for some years have sent baby clothes to Thembiso Children's Home in Bulawayo, Mbumba Hospital, and Sengera in Kenya. When every article had been loaded into the container there was still some space, but that was soon neatly filled by a further quantity of knitted children's clothes and medical aid kindly donated by a charity in Glasgow. The container arrived safely, and delivery to its final destination in Ingwenya went surprisingly smoothly. Miss Norma MacLean, and other members of staff in Ingwenya, have shown their great appreciation of the quantity and usefulness of the articles sent, especially those which are difficult to obtain in Zimbabwe.

Our aim in all this activity is what it has ever been: the growth and prosperity of the Church. While the ungodly pour scorn on attempts to spread "the word of the truth of the gospel", we know that only the gospel will bring true happiness to mankind. It is a great comfort to realise, according to the promises of God, that the gospel will yet be blessed to the salvation of many on their way to meet the Judge of all the earth. May we then have

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a deep sense of urgency in response to the Saviour's directive: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature", seeking that He would use every little effort of ours to extend His kingdom throughout the world.

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## Book Reviews<sup>1</sup>

***The Life of John Brown, with select writings***, edited by William Brown, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 202 pages, £6.95.

Originally published in 1856 as the *Memoir and Select Remains of the Reverend John Brown*, this book is composed of: (1) a short memoir of a Scottish shepherd who became a minister, an author of many useful books, and a professor of Systematic Theology; (2) some of his letters; (3) meditations and (4) his advice to his children.

John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787) had a most remarkable life. Orphaned at a young age, he experienced much of the providential care of the Lord. From his youth, though he had little opportunity for education, he had a great interest in learning. He taught himself Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Being called by grace, and later to the work of the ministry of the gospel, he gave himself wholeheartedly to it. He became a tutor of systematic theology, and expected his students also to give themselves wholeheartedly to the work of serving Christ. He was faithful to His divine Master as a ruling elder as well as a teaching elder.

He followed holiness, without which no man can see the Lord, and longed, as his advice to his children shows, that they would do the same. He advised them to "adhere constantly, cordially and honestly to the Covenanted principles of the Church of Scotland, and to that testimony which hath been lifted up for them. I fear a generation is rising up which will endeavour silently to let slip these matters, as if they were ashamed to hold them fast, or even to speak against them. May the Lord forbid that any of you should ever enter into this confederacy against Jesus Christ and His cause!"

He suffered many sore trials, some affecting his reputation. When, without formal tuition, he became proficient in biblical Hebrew and Greek, as well as in Latin, some detractors claimed that he had been taught by the devil. Even after his death he continued to be falsely accused; some editions of his *Self-Interpreting Bible* commentary were published with Doddridge's paraphrase of the New Testament instead of Brown's notes. C H Spurgeon obviously possessed one of these spurious editions and in his *Commenting and Commentaries*, he mistakenly accuses Brown of plagiarism.

<sup>1</sup>Both books reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

*The Life of John Brown* contains much that is interesting. From it we learn how extensive was his work as an author. As well as printed sermons, he has works on systematic theology, church history, typology, biblical reference works and biography, besides catechisms and miscellaneous pamphlets. Many will find the description of a communion season in Haddington in the eighteenth century very interesting, and there is a reference to “the Breach” in the Secession Church. A large part of the *Memoir* is taken up with Brown’s private devotional writings and the sayings of his last days, when through illness he was largely confined to his house.

Among his comments on preaching is this: “God in our nature, and doing all for us, and being all to us – free grace reigning through His imputed righteousness, God’s free grant of Christ and His salvation, and of Himself in Christ – and the believer’s appropriation founded on that grant, and the comfort and holiness of heart and life flowing from that, have been my most delightful themes”.

His remarks on personal religion are most interesting. Among them are the following. “I heard a sermon on Isaiah 53:4, ‘Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows’, which enlightened and melted my soul in a manner I had not formerly experienced; and I was made, a poor lost sinner, the chief of sinners, to essay [attempt] appropriating the Lord Jesus as having done all for me, and as wholly made over to me in the gospel, as the free gift of God and my all-sufficient Saviour – answerable to all my folly, ignorance, guilt, filthiness, wants, slavery and misery. This sermon had the most powerful pleasant influence on my soul of any that ever I heard.”

“Though I have not been left to commit gross crimes, yet He and I know the outrageous wickedness of my heart, such wickedness as would have provoked any but a God of infinite love to have cast me into hell; yet, lo, instead of casting me there, He takes me into His bosom and says to me, ‘I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving kindness have I drawn thee’; ‘I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely’.”

After 34 years as a minister he wrote: “Nothing will do for me but an uncommon stretch of the almighty grace”. At the same time he wrote of the resistance of the carnal mind to the will of God; it was unyielding until “the almighty influence of free grace put it out of my power to oppose it”. After 40 years he wrote: “I know not whether to be more amazed at His kindness, or my rebellious treachery and ingratitude. God has been doing all He can to save, smile on and favour me, and I have been acting to my uttermost in opposing and dishonouring Him.”

During his last illness he spoke much about the hope of glory: “If angels and men knew the raging of my heart, what would they think of redeeming

love, which hath pitched on me!” “O what a miracle to see me, the arrant rebel, sitting on the throne with Jesus! And I hope I shall be there. What cannot Jesus do!” “For a poor man, a dying man, a man that hath much to do, there is no friend like Christ.” “What kind strugglings! What kind smilings! What kind overlooking of my outrageous wickedness! He hath shown Himself to be God and not man in dealing with me.” “Anything I know about religion is this: that I have found weakness and wickedness about myself; grace, mercy and loving kindness about Jesus”. “O what Christ must be in Himself, when He sweetens heaven, sweetens Scriptures, sweetens ordinances, sweetens earth and even trials!”

On account of these and many similar sayings, I truly consider it a great mercy that this book was ever put into my hands. However, my delight is not unalloyed. I think many who love John Brown will, in places, disagree with William Brown, the editor, who was the youngest son of the subject of this book. Though he speaks very highly of his father, the differing characters of father and son are observable. For example, William was very scathing of the services preparatory to the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, esteeming them tiresome to ministers. But his father does not seem to have shared William’s weariness; he accounted the preaching of the gospel his greatest joy. William also found trying the predilection of his father’s age for confessional standards. His father, on the other hand had such a deep sense of the importance of the systematic arrangement of biblical truth – which is what our confessional standards are – that he wrote a systematic theology, which he called: *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

(Rev) Roderick MacLeod

***The Jerusalem Sinner Saved***, by John Bunyan, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 144 pages, £5.00.

In his preface to this little book subtitled, “Good News for the Vilest of Men”, Bunyan states that one reason which moved him to write the book was: “to invite and encourage the worst to come to Christ”. He goes on, “I have been vile myself but have obtained mercy; and I would have my companions in sin partake of mercy too”.

In what follows, he bases his arguments on the Lord’s commission to His disciples, that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached . . . beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). In chapter 1, “The Text Explained”, he proceeds to show what Jerusalem then was, and what it was to preach the gospel to those there. This leads to the observation that “Jesus Christ would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners”, which he proves to be the practice of both Christ in the Gospels and the Apostles in Acts.

Chapter 2, “Why Mercy is First Offered to the Biggest Sinners”, contains

eight reasons, including: “They have the greatest need”; “When they receive it, this brings most fame to Christ’s name”, and, “Others hearing of it will be the more encouraged to come to Christ”.

In chapter 3, “The Doctrine Applied”, Bunyan presents lessons we can learn from the fact that Christ would have mercy first offered to the biggest sinners. He makes 11 points here including: “This shows us how to judge rightly of Christ’s gracious intentions toward men”, and, “This gives arguments to use with unconcerned sinners to urge them to come to Christ”.

In the fourth and final chapter, “Conclusions and Answers to Objections”, Bunyan offers a caution on the ending of the day of grace. He concludes with answers to three fears a sinner might have: (1) that his day of grace is passed, (2) that he is not elect, and (3) that he has committed the unpardonable sin. He explains what this sin is and why it is said to be against the Spirit rather than against the Son of God. The book contains George Offer’s original preface (1854) to Bunyan’s *Works* and, at the end, a most helpful analysis of each of the four chapters.

Anyone tempted to believe that they have gone too far, or too long, in sin to be saved will find this book a great encouragement. For example, commenting on God’s grace being offered to Jerusalem sinners, Bunyan says, “What a pitch of grace is this! Christ is minded to amaze the world, and to show that He acts not like the children of men. This is that which He said of old: ‘I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath, and I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man’ (Hos 11:9, Geneva Bible). This is not the manner of men; men are shorter winded; men are soon moved to take vengeance, and to right [avenge] themselves in a way of wrath and indignation. But God is full of grace, full of patience, ready to forgive and one who delights in mercy. All this is seen in our text. The biggest sinners must first be offered mercy; they must, I say, have the cream of the gospel offered unto them” (pp 12,13). This book also contains powerful arguments for preachers to use, whether by way of encouraging those concerned about their souls, or by way of warning the unconcerned.

In a footnote to Offer’s preface we are told that “for the present edition some of the original language and grammar have been slightly modified to make the work more accessible to present-day readers”. Even with such modifications we find the language somewhat difficult in places.

*(Rev) W A Weale*

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Every command of Christ contains a secret promise: the promise of strength to fulfil it, and the promise of blessing when fulfilled.

It is their contrast that makes their mutual fitness: the outcast needing the Saviour, and the Saviour all-sufficient for the outcast.

*A Moody Stuart*







## Protestant View

### Reformed Churches Denying Their Creed

Speaking recently to leaders of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Pope said, “When Christian churches and communities are willing to admit that their members may have offended or misrepresented the teachings of others, they make important contributions to Christian unity”. He was referring, says the report, to pronouncements by the Presbyterian Church USA, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and others, that their sixteenth-century creedal statements about Roman Catholicism do not reflect their current understandings. For example, the 2004 synod of the Christian Reformed Church declared as inaccurate the statement of the Heidelberg Catechism that the Mass “is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry”.

Many Reformed churches and their ministers have long ago moved away from the their confessional statement that the Pope “is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God”. A minister of the Free Church of Scotland stated on its website in 1999 that 75% of ministers in his Church do not accept that the Pope is the Antichrist. The fact that the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches spoke to the Pope about “much to be done to move beyond our past condemnations of one another . . . and to come together at the table of our Lord” indicates that he and his fellow leaders are far from Reformed.

May we never lose sight of the scriptural statements of our creed that the Roman pontiff, as head of the papacy, is indeed the Antichrist, and that the mass is “most abominably injurious to Christ’s one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 29:2). “Hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Tim 1:13). NMR

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## Notes and Comments

### Sin Uncovered

It is alarming that one of those sodomite Members of Parliament, whose vile, indecent and wholly-unnatural immorality has been exposed by the press, should aver that many others at Westminster practise the same sin. Some of these Members already, we know, “declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not”. What is sobering and shocking is the thought that there may be many others there who cover their sin and remain anonymous. It would appear that

our legislators simply close ranks when one of them happens to fall and then it is “business as usual”. They react as if it were a matter of no consequence that one of their number has been exposed to the world as having engaged in practices which – even to mention them – cause revulsion in the minds of all right-thinking persons and especially such as have been enlightened by the Spirit of God to see the distinction that God has made between what is precious and what is vile, what is good and what is evil. We may well exclaim: How is the mother of parliaments fallen!

It would seem that political correctness now dictates that such men should be offered sympathy and even, in some circles, praise for having been so courageous as to make known what is called their “sexual orientation”. Even Sir Menzies Campbell expresses the view that such “orientation” ought not to debar men from occupying high offices – even that of Prime Minister, we presume! One of these fallen men, who betrayed his wife and children, described his depraved conduct as “an error of judgement”, while the other, who was regarded as an “Evangelical Christian”, expressed the view that in a few years’ time his lifestyle would be regarded as perfectly normal and would prove to be no impediment whatever in seeking political office. How mistaken you are, Mr Hughes! He continues in the race for the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party while his companion in sin falls out.

What these men seem to regret most of all is that their sin found them out. A national newspaper may have been the instrument, but we believe that it was God, ruling in His providence, who so ordered it, and it is a hopeful sign. There is, we believe, still in Britain a remnant of praying people to whom He inclines His ear. “For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” JM

### **“A Secular Country”**

Professor Steve Bruce of Aberdeen concludes that “Scotland is no longer a Christian country. It is a secular country which makes available to most Scots every conceivable form of religious belief and spiritual exercise; and the vast majority of us show no great interest, positive or negative, in any of them” (*The Scotsman*, 13 January 2006). Bill Jamieson, as an atheist, writes, in the same newspaper on the same day, on the decline of Christianity; he finds “profoundly shocking . . . the vacuum left by its decline, and one that has deeply shaken secular assumptions about the ability of the state or secular institutions to shape and encourage ‘virtuous’ behaviour”. He asks: “But looking around, what is it that we see? A secular paradise? Or a social abyss?”

His own answer is: “Not paradise, but a precipice over which we look

and now recoil from". Bemoaning "the utter mess in which mindless multiculturalism has landed us", he concludes that "seldom before can a generation have experienced such a destruction of the very world in which it was reared and sustained – from the outer cladding to the hidden supporting beams. With this destruction has come a feeling of helplessness, that we are defenceless against a scale of change that has wreaked incalculable havoc through to the core of our understanding of right and wrong, and on through the family, child-rearing, education and social behaviour". It is refreshing to come across such frankness in such a quarter, but obviously Mr Jamieson, being an atheist and ready to welcome Cardinal O'Brien's "re-Christianised Scotland", does not realise that the Christianity which gave Scotland its moral character is the Christianity of the Bible and of the Reformation, Christianity which is not simply a matter of belief, even if false (which he as an atheist must consider it to be), but which derives its power to influence character and conduct for good from its divine truthfulness.

Margaret Cook seems much more thorough-going in her atheism and antagonism to religion – especially, one suspects, the closer that religion is to the Bible. In her *Scotsman* column of 3 February 2006 she denies that morality in any way depends on religion and professes to believe that "morality is simply good communal living" and that "there is no gold standard for moral behaviour". Even she has to admit that modern morality "is almost too nebulous to define". Her fellow-columnist, Allan Massie, rehashes those stale critical views of the Bible (*The Scotsman*, 17 January 2006) which brought our Church into existence, by way of protest, when they were fresh in Scotland in the late nineteenth century. In doing so, he reveals, if only he knew it, the reason for the religious and moral decline which has characterised Scotland throughout the past century and especially in recent decades. When Church and society abandon an infallible Bible, religion and morality cannot but decline. Secularism and false religion can never take its place but will only deepen the religious, moral and social morass – as our beloved nation will find to its cost unless God grants repentance. "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hos 8:7). HMC

### **"The Day Changed and the Sabbath Preserved"**

Opponents of the New Testament Sabbath regularly bring out the old argument that the Sabbath was meant to be observed on the seventh day in honour of God's creation of the world, not on the first day in honour of Christ's resurrection. And they think that they have triumphed over those who believe that the Fourth Commandment applies to the Lord's Day.

It may be helpful to summarise an article, by Archibald A Hodge, with the

above title. In it he states three fundamental propositions regarding the Sabbath: (1.) The institution of the Sabbath rests on the physical, moral and religious nature of man as it exists under the conditions of life in this world. (2.) God instituted the Sabbath at the creation of man, setting apart the seventh day for that purpose, and imposed its observance as a universal and perpetual moral obligation upon the race. (3.) After the resurrection of Christ, instead of abrogating the old and introducing a new institution, God, through His inspired agents, perpetuated the Sabbath, reimposing it upon Christians with increased obligations and, by changing the day from the seventh to the first day of the week, enriched it with new and higher significance.

Following upon these assertions, Hodge states that the Sabbath was not a temporary Jewish institution; the Lord's Day is not a new Christian institution, different in nature and design, spirit and obligation, from the Sabbath of creation and of the Fourth Commandment; seventh-day observance was not so essential to its observance that it could not be changed by divine authority. The command to keep the Sabbath is as moral and immutable as commands not to steal, kill or commit adultery. It is essential to the institution that a common day be set apart to meet the spiritual, moral and social needs of men, for the worship of God and religious instruction, and to give rest from "the wear and tear of secular labour". While Christ rid the day of pharisaical impositions, He reaffirmed the fact that it was made for mankind as such and is suited to, and binding on, all. The specific day was not a moral aspect of the commandment and so could be altered by God at His will while maintaining the essential principle.

The replacement of the old preparatory dispensation by a new, permanent, universal one was a suitable time to introduce this change, retaining the essential institution while removing unessential types. The resurrection of Christ on the first day constitutes an adequate reason for the change, consummating as it does the objective process of redemption and conserving as it does the recognition of God as Creator. As Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28), Christ after His resurrection acknowledged the first day, not the seventh, by His revelation (John 20:19, Acts 2:1-4, Rev 1:10). The early Church habitually assembled on the first day of the week, and there is an unbroken chain of testimony from apostolic times until now. The change had the sanction of the apostles because it had the authority of the Lord. While there may have been a period of transition among Christian Jews, when both days were recognised, there is no doubt that the permanent institution of the Sabbath had its permanent New Testament embodiment in the Lord's Day and that the sanctity of the Sabbath adhered to it.

Having provided his evidences from Scripture and history, Hodge con-

cludes “that an institution having unchanged purposes and relations, enacted at creation, re-enacted with added sacredness on Sinai, and re-enacted with added associations and obligations by the apostles, must be the *same institution*, in spite of the mere change of day”.

John Bruce of Edinburgh (M‘Cheyne’s favourite preacher as a student), commenting on Isaiah 58:13,14, observes “that the appointment of one whole day in seven to be an holy Sabbath to the Lord was not more expressly required under the Jewish than under the patriarchal and Christian dispensations; that whatever, unless necessarily, hinders or interferes with the solemn dedication of the whole of it to the purposes of religion is as perfectly sinful now as it ever was”. He further notes “that, instead of authorising a somewhat more lax and less faithful observance of the religious duties prescribed, the Christian dispensation, by so changing the day as to place these duties in a far clearer and more attractive light, and to bring down out of heaven still more solemnising considerations to bear upon them, doth only the more increase our responsibility, if not our reverence, and thereby aggravate our guilt, if, either from any carelessness, or any carnal dislike to such spiritual duties, we keep not the Sabbath according to the tenor of this holy prophet’s requirement”.

HMC

### **Christmas, Paraphrases and the Free Church**

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* is Anglo-Catholic in its slant but accurate, on the whole, in its statements of fact. On the origin of Christmas, then, it can be expected to present as favourable a picture as the facts will allow. It says that the celebration of Christmas “does not appear to have become general till the later fourth century”, and the first mention of its observance on December 25 is in a calendar of 336 AD. The Western Church and most of the Eastern Church adopted the date of December 25, but the Church of Jerusalem adopted January 6, the date which is still observed in the Armenian Church. “The popular observance of the feast”, the *Dictionary* says, “has always been marked by the joy and merry-making formerly characteristic of the Roman Saturnalia and the other pagan festivals which it replaced”.

At the Reformation, the Church of Scotland set herself against the observance of Christmas, and severe laws were enacted against those who clung to the old superstitions. Christmas was reintroduced by James VI as one of the Five of Articles of Perth in 1618 – part of his attempt to impose Anglicanism on Scotland – but the Articles were repealed, and festival days “utterly abolished”, at the Glasgow Assembly of 1638. The present-day observance of Christmas in Scotland goes back to the efforts of the nineteenth-century “Scoto-Catholics”, who took up where James VI and Charles I had left off.

December 25, however, was not finally re-established as a general holiday in Scotland until 1973, and that was more through secular than religious influence. Since then secularisation has increased apace, and now political correctness is putting the finishing touches to the process by removing even the name “Christmas” and returning the festival to its native paganism.

This is well known, and it is surprising at this late stage to find two fresh proponents of Christmas, in the persons of Rev David Robertson of Free St Peter’s in Dundee (*A Christmas Tale*, Free Church website, January 2) and Principal Donald Macleod of the Free Church College (*West Highland Free Press*, January 13). Both writers readily acknowledge that they are deviating from the historic position of the Free Church, and both of them lament the continued prohibition of carols in their denomination. Mr Robertson’s congregation sings Paraphrases – on December 25 they sang the thirty-seventh, “While humble shepherds watched their flocks” – but Principal Macleod (who is in the same Presbytery as Mr Robertson) writes as if the Free Church were currently committed to exclusive psalmody.

Neither article advances any strong reasons in favour of Christmas, and Principal Macleod’s various arguments against exclusive psalmody have been answered many times, notably in Malcolm Watts’ recent booklet, *God’s Hymnbook for the Christian Church*. Principal Macleod has been advocating hymns for years, but he adopts a naive style, as though his thoughts were coming to him for the first time. He has some careless assertions, for instance that Jonathan Edwards sang only hymns, but the most peculiar is that “no one with only the Old Testament in their hand ever came to believe in the trinity or in the incarnation or in the vicarious death of the Son of God”. What about Simeon and Mary, Peter and John, Thomas and Paul?

Mr Robertson too seems to shoot himself in the foot, first maintaining that Christmas provides an “almost perfect” opportunity for proclaiming the gospel, and then highlighting the fact that not a few churches in Britain and America were closed that day, even though it was the Sabbath. Free St Peter’s, he claims, was the only church in Dundee to hold an evening service, and only 12 people attended that. Even some Free churches were closed that evening, according to Principal Macleod. The fruit of adopting a pagan festival into the Christian Church in Scotland has been Sabbath-breaking and paganism.

The Free Church is liberalising fast, and we fear that many who remain in that denomination will find that their own standards are changing almost as rapidly. What these two articles really demonstrate is the need for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Scotland. Then even the little children will be finding the divinity, incarnation and death of Christ in the Psalms. “The

Lord said unto My Lord, Sit thou at My right hand;” “I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people;” “Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death” (Pss 110:1; 89:19; 22:15). *DWBS*

## Church Information

### Synod Agenda and Committee Reports

Clerks of Presbyteries, conveners and clerks of committees, and all interested parties should note that all items of business intended to be placed on the Synod agenda must be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 4.

Conveners and clerks of all standing committees of Synod should note that all committee reports must also be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 4, for printing. These reports should contain information about the work of the committees during the year. Recommendations and proposals should be sent as separate items for the Synod agenda.

(Rev) *John MacLeod*, Clerk of Synod

### Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of the year’s two special collections for the Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during March.

*R A Campbell*, General Treasurer

## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*Bookroom Fund*: DCA, London, £40.

*College & Library Fund*: Anon, CAF, London, £50; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 119:37, £40.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund*: Anon, for work in Israel, £237.03; Anon, Western Isles, for work in Israel, £150; Anon, CAF, London, £100; Anon, CAF, London, for Sengera, £100; Anon, to help Ingwenya pupils wishing to attend school, £474.07.

*Congregational Treasurers* acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

**Assynt**: *Sustentation Fund*: Anon, £23.50.

**Bracadale**: *Congregational Funds*: Mrs LMK; £40 per Rev JRT.

**Breasclete**: *Congregational Funds*: Anon, £50.

**Gairloch**: *Congregational Funds*: Anon, £50 per Rev AEWM.

**Inverness**: *Bus Fund*: Anon, £40. *Congregational Funds*: Anon, £30, £35, £25; N Pearce, Cymru, £100. *Eastern Europe Fund*: Anon, £200.

**Portree**: *Bus Fund*: Anon, £10. *Congregational Funds*: AMN, “In loving memory”, £25. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund*: CN, for Mbuma Mission Hospital, £5 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund*: A Friend, £20 per SYM.

**Staffin**: *Door Collection*: CM, Staffin House, £50. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund*: Anon, for Zimbabwe Mission, £20.

**Stornoway**: *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund*: Anon, for Kenya Mission Poor Relief Fund, £20. *Sustentation Fund*: Anon, £90. *TBS*: Anon, £30. *Where Most Needed*: Anon, £100.

**Tomatin**: *Where Most Needed*: Anon, 1 Cor 15:58, £200.