

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

Vol 112

February 2007

No 2

Christ Still Reigns

The Saviour had been crucified. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had laid Him in the grave. The chief priests and Pharisees recalled that Jesus had foretold His rising from the dead on the third day. They went their unbelieving way to Pilate, claiming to be afraid that the disciples would “come by night and steal Him away”, and requesting “that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day”. Pilate told them: “Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can”.

But no guard, however strong, could prevent Christ’s resurrection. Indeed there was no power in earth or in hell which could do so. Christ’s rising again had been decreed from all eternity; it was part of the divine purpose to bring about the salvation of sinners. The devil is strong, and his followers in this world may be allowed to go far in opposing God’s purposes, but they cannot ultimately prevail, for “the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever” (Ps 33:11). In particular, it was absolutely impossible for the chief priests and Pharisees to succeed in their attempt to keep Christ’s body in the grave. The guards could not even keep calm when confronted by an angel; we are told that “there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men” (Matt 28:2-4). They had no power to resist when a mere creature appeared, albeit a glorious and perfect creature, which indicates how pointless the attempt was to keep in the sepulchre the body of Him who is the Son of God.

Christ had Himself foretold His resurrection; He had said to His disciples: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again” (Matt 20:18,19). Here was *the* Prophet; as God, He knew everything; even as man, He could not be in error. If *He* made known that He would rise again from the dead on the third day after His death, it was true. He had come from God, and He was God; no one

– chief priest, or Pharisee, or member of the watch, or even the most ordinary person in Jerusalem – had any right to refuse His testimony.

And Christ's resurrection was according to Old Testament prophecy. God the Father had appointed Him to be the great sacrifice for the sins of the world. But His death was not to be the end of His saving activity; He was to rise again: "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, *He shall prolong His days*" (Is 53:10). This, in common with all other inspired prophecies, was sure.

Yet the chief priests and Pharisees were blind to the significance of all the prophecies pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah and His work; when He came to His own, they did not receive Him. They refused to recognise Him when, for instance, He pointed to Jonah as a type of Himself: "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:40). The accumulated weight of Old Testament testimony was being brought to bear on them Sabbath after Sabbath in their synagogues, but they refused to recognise the fulfilment of the prophecies and of the types in Jesus of Nazareth. Yet their unbelief could not hinder that fulfilment.

Further, there must be an answer to the petitions in Christ's intercessory prayer. He was the great Intercessor, who could in truth claim to the Father: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do". And on that basis He prayed, "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:4,5). And the first step in that glorification was His being raised from the dead.

At the moment when He breathed out His spirit into the hand of the Father, the work of atonement was complete. Yet He must lie in the grave until the third day. But, as Peter told the multitudes on the day of Pentecost, "It was not possible that He should be holden of" death" (Acts 2:24). He proved this from the fact that the words of Psalm 16 refer to Christ: "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). Death could not hold Him who had come into the world to save sinners. In His life and sufferings He had magnified the law and made it honourable; so "the Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake" (Is 42:21). It was accordingly certain that God would raise His Son from the grave. No scheme of men or devils could stand in the way. Rather, the effects of the Angel's presence on the men who formed the guard at the sepulchre would show that God had supreme power there. And God's absolute power is equally effective in every other situation.

Christ is now exalted at the right hand of God, the place of infinite power.

He sits there as King, with authority over all creatures, and nothing can hinder Him in carrying out the divine purposes, no more than the guard at the tomb could hinder His resurrection. He had a right to say, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18). And how is that power exercised today? Particularly through the Word of God, as applied by the Holy Spirit. As Prophet, Christ reveals “to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (*The Shorter Catechism*, answer 24), and He does so by divine authority and unlimited power.

In exercising that power, He uses instruments – in the first instance the disciples – whom He sent out with the words: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:19,20). Their successors also have the same authority and the same encouragement – from Him who sits at the right hand of the Father. Their preaching may seem a very feeble instrument when measured against the strength of human unbelief and the fearful power of the devil, who does all he can think of to oppose the effects of the gospel. Especially in such an age as this, when the most influential streams of human thought are unbelieving, how can we expect the preaching of the gospel to have great effects? To look for great effects from ministers’ preaching today seems altogether foolish.

Yet Paul, inspired by the Spirit, makes the comment: “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). It was because Peter on the Day of Pentecost preached as an ambassador of King Jesus that multitudes who heard him “were pricked in their heart, and said . . . Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Evidently the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work in the 3000 souls who were added to the Church on that day. We can also see here a fulfilment of the prophetic words: “Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also” (Ps 68:18). Christ, exalted on high, was bestowing the gift of salvation on each of these sinners, rebels though they were. And so it is today; in spite of all the resistance to gospel preaching, sinners are born again – because the authority of the mediatorial King cannot be resisted when He has a purpose to save.

Many voices are raised in opposition to the Church today, but none of her enemies can succeed in destroying her; the power of her King is stronger than all these voices put together. The promise to the Church still holds true: “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn” (Is 54:17). The power of the One who rose from the grave on the third day must triumph over all the attempts of men and devils to destroy His Kingdom on earth. “He ruleth by His power for ever . . . let not the rebellious exalt themselves” (Ps 66:7).

The Trinity and Christ's Redemption¹

A Sermon by *William Nixon*

Matthew 28:19. *The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

Mankind did not like to retain God in their knowledge and have been given over to a reprobate mind, to the service of abominable idols, and the practice of vile affections. Multitudes with a Christian name live in unrighteousness because they do not know God. On the other hand, grace and peace are multiplied to such as know God; they are called to a life of virtue here and to a life of everlasting glory hereafter. But it is only when God gives anyone a heart to know Him that they become His people and He becomes their God. And when the earth is filled with this knowledge of the Lord, it will be full of righteousness and peace and of adoring praise.

The duty laid on all who are entering on the work of their life on earth is to know the God of their fathers, and to serve Him with a perfect heart and a willing mind. The duty laid on His children and servants is to increase in the knowledge of God, so that they may be increasingly fruitful. No one indeed can find out God to perfection. Parts of His ways are made known in His works of creation and providence and they may be apprehended; but only a little portion is heard of Him. He does great things which we cannot comprehend. His greatness is unsearchable. Yet the life of our souls now, and our entrance into eternal life at last, depend on really knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines in the hearts of all who have fellowship with Him on earth and are preparing for His presence in heaven – to give them the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

1. The *oneness of God* is plainly revealed to us. “There is none other God but one.” “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” “The Lord, He is God: there is none else.” “Besides Me there is no God; I know not any.” He is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.” “Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth.” There is thus only one Being in the universe who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. He alone has existed eternally in and of Himself. There is no God before Him, with Him, or after Him. There is no being to be likened to Him or compared with Him.

The oneness of God is also proclaimed in the works of creation and providence. The harmony among them all is evidence that they proceed from

¹The original title of this sermon was: “The Doctrine of the Trinity – its Practical Bearing on Redemption by Christ”. It has been abridged from his volume, *All and in All: the Relations of Christ as God: Creator and Redeemer*. Nixon (1803-1900) was minister in Montrose.

one great Creator and are governed by Him as their only supreme Ruler. The unity of design which they display proves them to have been all planned by the same infinite Mind, to be preserved and disposed of by one God. The distance between Him and the highest of His creatures is too great to pass over, and before Him they continually prostrate themselves in adoration of His unsearchable greatness, awful majesty and holiness, and offer up their praises for His goodness, which endures for ever.

2. The Scriptures as plainly reveal that this one living and true *God exists in Three Persons*: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Thus:

(1.) *The Father* is God. "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things." "There is but one God, the Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" "One is your Father, who is in heaven." He is the "holy Father", "the righteous Father", "the Father of mercies", "the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning".

(2.) *The Son* is God. [1] The names of God are given to Him: "The Word was God", "God blessed for ever"; "He is the true God", "the great God", "the mighty God", "Jehovah" on His "throne, high and lifted up".

[2] The perfections belonging to God alone are ascribed to the Son. He is "the first and the last", that is, the Eternal One, "whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting". He is omnipotent: "Alpha and Omega . . . the Almighty", to whom "all power is given . . . in heaven and in earth". He is omniscient: He tries "the reins and the heart". He is omnipresent: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them"; "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world". And He is immutable: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever".

[3] The works of God are all performed by the Son. He is the Creator: "All things were made by Him". He is the Preserver: "By Him all things consist". He is the Governor: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever".

[4] The worship belonging to God only is due, and given, to the Son. The Father "hath committed all judgement unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as . . . the Father". When God "bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith, Let all the angels of God worship Him". "Every creature which is in heaven, and in the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

(3.) *The Holy Ghost* is God. To lie to Him is to lie to God. When the Holy Ghost spoke by David, it was God who spoke by him. The Holy Spirit is the omnipresent Spirit, from whom we cannot flee; the omniscient Spirit, who

“searcheth all things”; “the Spirit of grace”; “the Comforter, the Spirit of truth”; “the Spirit of glory”; “the good Spirit”; “the Spirit of power”; the Spirit who “moved on the face of the waters”. He “garnished the heavens”; He “revealed the truth to holy prophets and apostles”; He gave power to work miracles; He inspired the sacred writers; He strives with men; He testifies of Christ; He quickens the spiritually dead; He guides into all truth; He helps the infirmities of true suppliants; He makes intercession within them, with groanings that cannot be uttered; He dwells in them as His temples; He makes them fruitful in all gracious affections. Such as resist and quench Him provoke Him till He ceases to strive with them. Such as cherish Him are guided by Him to the land of uprightness. The Holy Spirit, of whom all this is true, is equally a divine person with the Father and the Son.

(4.) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *distinct persons* of the Godhead. They are not one divine person under different names or manifestations; they are distinguished from each other by their respective personal properties within the Godhead. Thus it is the property of the Father to beget the Son; it is the property of the Son to be begotten of the Father; and it is the property of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the Son as well as of the Father, eternally to proceed from both. In relation to the created universe, they are also distinguished from each other by their characteristic actings; for it is characteristic of the Father that He sent the Son to save sinners; it is characteristic of the Son that He came into the world, took our nature and worked out man’s redemption; and it is characteristic of the Spirit that, being sent by Christ, He applies redemption to the soul.

(5.) While distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *one God*. They are one in nature and in essence. They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. They are not three Gods, but the one living and true God. The Father is the one God, the beginning and the end, and the Lord of all things; the Son is the one God, the beginning and the end, and the Lord of all things; and the Holy Spirit is the one God, the beginning and the end, and the Lord of all things. To us there is but this one God, one God in three persons, three persons in one God – the triune Jehovah.

This is the God of the Bible, the God of all true Christians. The following are a few of the proofs and illustrations of this truth furnished by Scripture. In the Book of Isaiah the words occur, “Come ye near unto Me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent Me.” “Seek out of the book of the Lord and read . . . for My mouth it hath commanded, and His Spirit it hath gathered them.” There is the threefold form of blessing of the ancient Church: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His

face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace". There is the thrice-repeated ascription to God of the holiness displayed in redemption: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory". All admit that the Father is addressed. But so is the Son, for John expressly says that the glory the prophet then saw was Christ's. The Holy Spirit was also concerned in this adoration, for in Acts 28 it is said of the words spoken in relation to the vision: "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias . . .".

Still more plainly do the New Testament Scriptures direct our faith to the three-one God. [1] There is the form of Christian baptism: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". [2] There is the record of Christ's own baptism, when the Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted upon Him: "Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". [3] There is the form of prayer used by the Apostle to conclude his Epistle: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all, Amen". [4] There are the words of Jesus: "The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He [the Spirit] shall testify of Me." [5] There is the prayer for the Thessalonians: "The Lord [the Spirit] direct our hearts into the love of God [the Father], and into the patient waiting for Christ". [6] There are the words of the Apostle to the Ephesians: "For through Him [Christ] we have access by one Spirit unto the Father". [7] And there is the prayer of John for the Churches: "Grace be unto you, from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come; and from the seven spirits [the Holy Spirit, in the fulness of His perfections and grace] and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness".

3. This doctrine of the Trinity being revealed in Scripture, we can discern its *suitableness to the absolute perfection and blessedness of God*. He is the source of all the excellence and happiness of His creatures, and whatever is good in His intelligent creatures reflects a corresponding infinite goodness in Himself. If intelligent creatures had to live in a state of absolute solitude, most of their virtues would not exist and their happiness would be utterly marred. It is in fellowship with others that the piety and virtue of any intelligent creature is called forth, and his blessedness secured. So the great God, who made man in His own image, has ever existed in a plurality of persons, who have ever enjoyed perfect and blessed communion with each other in the unity of the divine nature and essence as the three-one God.

Contemplate the Father eternally saying to the second Person of the Trinity: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee". Contemplate the Son as eternally "in the bosom of the Father". Contemplate the Father and the

Son eternally delighting in the perfections of which the Father is the fountain. Realise in any measure this combined oneness and distinctness of the Father and the Son, and a view of Deity is obtained infinitely more worthy of the all-perfect God than can be in the minds of those who consider He is as strictly one in personality as in Godhead. But it adds to the glorious character of the Deity to know there is a third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, the co-equal and co-eternal partaker of the same uncreated perfections. There is thus a joint contemplation and enjoyment of the divine perfections of each Person in the Godhead. In other words, the Son and the Holy Spirit jointly contemplate and enjoy the perfections of the Father; the Father and the Holy Spirit jointly contemplate and enjoy those of the Son; and the Father and the Son jointly contemplate and enjoy those of the Holy Spirit.

This revelation of the relations and communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost within the Godhead presents to us the Deity as all light and life and love and blessedness and glory. God is all light: light which is in the Father as its source, and in the Son as “the brightness of the Father’s glory”, and in both perfectly and infinitely co-existent. God is all life: life which is in the Father as its fountain-head, and in the Son in virtue of His eternal generation from the Father, and in the Holy Spirit in virtue of His eternal procession from the Father and the Son, and in each in the same uncreated and everlasting fulness. God is all love: love which finds in each of the three Persons of the Godhead infinite occasion for its exercise from everlasting to everlasting. God is all blessedness: a blessedness of which the perfections of each of the Persons of the Godhead, and their mutual relations and fellowship within the divine nature are the ever-existing boundless source.

God is all glory too, as the glory of the Father rests on the Son, and is reflected back upon the Father, while the same glory is the glory of the Holy Spirit, who is one with the Father and with the Son in the infinite perfections and everlasting counsels of the Godhead, and exhibits these perfections and executes these counsels and secures from the universe the glory due to God. 4. This doctrine of the three-one God is *eminently practical*.

(1.) This is proved by the fact that it is revealed only in connection with the plan of redemption. God the Father is revealed as having possessed Christ, under the name of Wisdom, before His works of old, for the redemption of sinners, as having chosen them in Him before the foundation of the world, as having eternally willed that Christ should in due time make His soul an offering for sin and thus see a seed and accomplish the Father’s pleasure in the salvation of those for whom He died – and on these accounts delighting in Him for ever, and giving all things into His hands.

God the Son is revealed as one brought up with the Father, as in constant

communion with Him about the plans of divine sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness and grace, especially the plan of redeeming love; as thus rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth and having His delights with the sons of men; as saying, “Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart”. Not less distinctly is God the Holy Ghost seen fitting the human nature of Christ – when taken into union with His divine – for the work He was to finish, and applying this work to the souls of men for their eternal salvation.

The whole character and efficacy of redemption are thus bound up with the doctrine of the three-one God, and with the parts which are severally performed by the persons of the Godhead: the Father planning it, the Son executing it, and the Holy Spirit carrying it into effect. Thus no doctrine in the whole Word of God is of greater practical importance. With such a provision, there cannot possibly be a failure on the part of the Triune Jehovah, until the keystone of the whole building is brought forth with shoutings of, “Grace, grace, unto it”. On the other hand, if God were what Unitarians represent Him, the claims of divine justice could not be reconciled with the salvation of sinners. Either evil must be permitted to dwell with God, or those who commit it must be consigned to hopeless misery.

(2.) The practical importance of this doctrine is seen in the fact that the first public profession of Christianity, which separates a man from the world and introduces him into the Church of Christ, is a profession of faith in the three-one God of salvation, in the rite of baptism. The water in baptism symbolises the sin-cleansing virtue of Jesus’ blood and the heart-purifying power of the Holy Spirit. And the reception of the ordinance involves a solemn engagement to glorify God with soul and body, which are His. This solemnly significant act is performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and that fact is full of meaning of the most practical nature.

Baptism is thus administered as an ordinance: [1] appointed by the three-one God to represent participation in the redemption of the gospel; [2] in observing which the blessing of the three-one God is supplicated for those who receive it; [3] in which those baptized avow their faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as the one living and true God; [4] in which those baptized renounce the devil, the world and the flesh, and yield themselves up, soul, body and spirit to God to do His will, and to seek their happiness in His favour; [5] in which they dedicate themselves to the three-one God: to God the Father, the Father of the Eternal Son, the Father of all creatures, whom He made and keeps in being; the reconciled Father of all who are in Christ by faith; to God the Son, the Eternal Son, who in our nature lived and died on earth, and now pleads and reigns in heaven for the salvation of all

who were given to Him in covenant by the Father; and to God the Holy Ghost, as entering, inhabiting and working in all the saved, applying redemption to their souls, enlightening, purifying and gladdening them, and so preparing them for, and leading them to, the land of uprightness.

(3.) The practical nature of the doctrine of the Trinity is seen in the blessing prayed for by the Apostle, and prayed for ever since by all Christian assemblies, and which every rightly-exercised Christian feels that he needs to be continually supplicating at the throne of grace, and always realising, as the well-being of his soul: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen.”

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” includes all He can become to His people, and do for them, as their Redeemer. When He manifests Himself as exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give to His people repentance and forgiveness of sins, when He makes them walk in the light, when He becomes to them the foundation on which they are enabled to build their hopes, when they find Him delivering them from their enemies and making them more than conquerors, His grace is made sufficient for them. Now this fellowship with Christ, this communication of all the help which His followers require, would be simply impossible – it would even be idolatry and blasphemy to expect it from Christ – if He were not a divine person.

The next part of this prayer is, “The love of God be with you”. This love of God is the love the Father exercised eternally in choosing sinners to salvation, laying help for them on His own Son as one mighty to save. In the fulness of time He sent Him into the world, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons. In the exercise of this love He spared not even His own Son, but gave Him up to die for their offences, and then raised Him for their justification. In and by the Redeemer, the love of the Father to believers secures their pardon, acceptance and holiness, grants them a place in His own family, animates them with the spirit of adoption, and invests them with all the privileges, dignities and blessedness of the children of God for ever.

Then the prayer is added, “The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you”. After the Lord Jesus finished His work on earth, the Holy Spirit was sent according to His promise, and became the Sanctifier and Comforter of the redeemed in all ages. He teaches them all things. He glorifies Christ by showing, to such as believe, the things that are His. He sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts. He prompts all their holy desires and heavenly longings. He fills them with peace and joy in believing and makes them to abound in hope. They are warned not to resist, grieve or quench Him, but rather to cherish His presence and motions, to preserve their bodies as His temples,

to live and walk in Him, and to bear His fruits: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. All this proves that, as they hear this petition, they are to consider the divinity of the Holy Ghost and the divine nature of His gracious dealings with their souls.

Conclusion. (1.) These considerations show that a true understanding and a believing reception of the parts performed in salvation by the three Persons in the Godhead are essential to all true godliness. And when the kingdom of Christ is established on this earth, as the reward for His love to His people – washing them from their sins in His blood, and making them kings and priests unto God and His Father – it will be through the blessings supplicated from the three-one God: “Grace and peace from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth”. The Triune Jehovah will be adored in the praise for ever offered by the redeemed in heaven: “Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

(2.) Do not fancy you can safely shelter from your duty to the three-one God by the *mystery* of His being. Mystery! What is not full of mystery? The bread you eat is full of mysteries; yet you eat it and live by it. The water you drink is full of mysteries; yet you refresh yourself by it. The air you breathe is full of mysteries; but you use it as a means of life. The earth on which you tread is full of mysteries, but you do not the less pry into its secrets because myriads of them may be impenetrable. The future is full of mystery, but are you on that account to shut eternity, heaven and hell from your thoughts? Your present life is full of mystery, but are you therefore to spend it in utter forgetfulness of the warning that it will profit a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?

All things are full of mystery, but it is madness to neglect what you can know because so much is beyond your knowledge. Enough is revealed of the mysteries of the divine nature and workings to awe, instruct, enlighten, renew and bless for ever the simplest souls that receive the truth. If you are to live before Him, and to live for ever with Him, you must now know Him as He is revealed to all who believe in the redemption of the gospel. In that case, God the Father is your reconciled and gracious God and Father in Christ Jesus; God the Son, as incarnate, is your God and Redeemer; and God the Holy Ghost is your indwelling Sanctifier. “Know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.”

The Doctrine of Forgiveness (5)¹

Rev Neil M Ross

The Christian forgiveness we are called to exercise to those who have done us personal wrong, says John Flavel, “is not a stoical insensibility to wrongs and injuries”. Nor is it to hide our displeasure in order to avoid inconvenience. “This is carnal policy,” says Flavel, “not Christian meekness.” Nor is it the patience, forbearance or generosity of spirit which some unconverted people may display. This grace of Christian forgiveness is not, he says, “by natural acquisition, but supernatural infusion”. Lastly, says Flavel, “Christian forgiveness is not an injurious giving up of our rights and properties to the lust of everyone that hath a mind to invade them. No! These we may lawfully defend and preserve, and are bound to do so; though if we cannot defend them legally, we must not avenge our wrongs unchristianly.”²

What kind of forgiveness must we then show? We cannot, of course, forgive the wrongdoer in the sense of removing the guilt which he has contracted before God by his offence – that belongs to God alone. Nor can we as individuals forgive him in the sense of removing any censure or discipline placed on him by a court, ecclesiastical or otherwise; that belongs to the court. In his sermon outline on *Forgiveness of Offences*, Charles Hodge says, “The word forgiveness [in the context of forgiving the offences of one another] is used in a wider or a stricter sense. In the wider sense, it includes negatively, not having a spirit of revenge, and positively, exercising a spirit of kindness and love, and manifesting that spirit by all appropriate outward acts.”³

The first step in exercising Christian forgiveness is, however keenly one feels the wrong done, to refuse to harbour bitter, spiteful, hostile feelings towards the offender. “The indispensable duty of all who would be forgiven of God, is to forgive their debtors,” says Alexander Paterson. “And this we may be said to do when, notwithstanding all that they have done to us, we discover [that is, display] no spirit of revenge; when we entertain no hatred or malice against them; when we strive against the very thoughts of revenge, which belongeth to God alone; when we forbear to hurt our enemies in any way, although we have it in our power to do so in various ways.”⁴

Paterson goes further, saying that we forgive those who wrong us “when

¹This is the final part of a paper given at the 2005 Theological Conference of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Part 4 dealt with “Forgiving one another”; this subject is continued here.

²*The Works of John Flavel*, London, 1968 reprint, vol 1, pp 378ff.

³*Princeton Sermons*, London, 1958 reprint, p 275.

⁴*Paterson on the Shorter Catechism*, Edinburgh, 1846, p 371.

we love them, and wish well to them, and are ready to do them good at all times, as if nothing has been done by them; when we do not rejoice, but grieve at their calamities; and when we pray for them and desire reconciliation with them and relieve their wants when it is in our power to do so. All this is certainly included in the command of our Saviour, ‘But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’ (Matt 5:44).”⁵ Charles Hodge likewise says: “We should cherish towards those who offend us the feelings of kindness, regarding them with that benevolence which forbids our wishing them any harm. We should treat them in our outward conduct with kindness, returning good for evil, and acting towards them as though they had not injured us.”⁶

This does not mean that the offended party is not to approach the offender about his wrongdoing, as we noted already. If an erring brother does not voluntarily acknowledge his offence, apologise and ask forgiveness, it is the duty of the wronged party to meet with him personally and seek reconciliation, as directed by Christ: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matt 18:15).

Albert Barnes has a helpful comment on the phrase, “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone”. He says, “In the original it is, ‘Go and reprove him’. Seek an explanation of his conduct; and if he has done wrong, administer a friendly and brotherly reproof. This is required to be done alone: first, that he may have an opportunity of explaining it. . . . Secondly, that he may have opportunity of acknowledging his offence, or making reparation, if he has done wrong. Many would be glad of such an opportunity, and it is our duty to furnish it by calling on them; and thirdly, that we may admonish them of their error, if they have done an injury to the cause of religion. This should not be blazoned abroad. It can do no good. It does injury. It is what the enemies of religion wish. Christ is often wounded in the house of His friends; and religion, as well as an injured brother, often suffers by spreading such faults before the world.”⁷

On the phrase, “Thou hast gained thy brother”, Barnes adds: “To ‘gain’ means, sometimes, to *preserve*, or to *save* (1 Cor 9:19). Here it means, thou hast preserved him, or restored him, to be a consistent Christian. Perhaps it

⁵Paterson on the Shorter Catechism, p 371.

⁶Princeton Sermons, p 275.

⁷New Testament Notes, Online Bible. It should be noted that, while Barnes often shows a remarkable gift for discerning the meaning of a Scripture passage – as in the quotations given here – he is not a safe guide to some important doctrines.

may include the idea also, thou hast reconciled him – thou hast gained him as a Christian brother.”

To forgive one another is of such importance that Christ says with regard to it: “Take heed to yourselves” (Luke 17:3), and adds: “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him”. Matthew Poole’s wise comment is: “This doctrine of the forgiveness of our offending brother is pressed upon us . . . [with] the gravest arguments imaginable (Matt 6:15, 18:35, Mark 11:26, Luke 6:37, Eph 4:32); from whence we may justly conclude it a duty of very high concernment for us, both to understand and to live in the practice of it. It signifies the laying aside of all thoughts or desire of revenge in our own cause. The precept is not exclusive of our duty to see the glory of God avenged upon murderers, etc; nor yet to seek a just satisfaction, in a legal way, for wrongs done to us relating to our limbs or estate, so far as the person is able to do it; much less doth it require us to make such a one as hath so injured us our intimate and bosom friend. That which it requireth is the laying aside all *malice*, or desire of *revenge*, upon our neighbour in a case wherein our own name or honour is concerned.”⁸

As to the manner of forgiving the offender upon his repentance, it must be sincere, full and free – similar to the way in which God forgives sinners. This is taught by such passages as Ephesians 4:32: “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *even as God* for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”; and Colossians 3:13: “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: *even as Christ* forgave you, so also do ye”. Matthew Henry comments on Ephesians 4:32: “Those who are forgiven of God should be of a forgiving spirit, and should forgive even as God forgives, sincerely and heartily, readily and cheerfully, universally and for ever, upon the sinner’s sincere repentance”. George Swinnock puts it this way: “In forgiveness there is an outward profession of this inward remission, and this must be done when the party acknowledgeth his fault. If the offender say, ‘I repent’, the offended must say, ‘I remit’. Surely, did men but consider the infinite wrongs they do, and affronts which they offer to the glorious God every day and yet how they expect to be pardoned,” [they would be more ready to pardon others].⁹

When believers, by grace, show genuine Christian forgiveness, it no doubt tends to encourage them to seek forgiveness from God for their own sins; as the Larger Catechism teaches, they are emboldened to ask for, and encouraged to expect, forgiveness when they have this testimony in themselves, that they from the heart forgive others their offences (cf answer 194).

⁸*Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Edinburgh, 1974 reprint, vol 3, p 252.

⁹*The Works of George Swinnock*, Edinburgh, 1992 reprint, vol 1, p 119-20.

James Fisher, in his *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, makes the pertinent comment: “No one can reasonably imagine himself to be the object of divine forgiveness who is deliberately and habitually unforgiving towards his fellow men”.

The question arises, If someone forgives those who have wronged him, in the sense of not having ill-will against them, must he now enter into free and open friendship with them? John Flavel is quite definite in his answer to such a question. “No, if we have experienced them to be treacherous and false and see no change, we are not bound to trust them; if they be, and remain, wicked and profane, we must not associate with them; ‘I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked’ (Ps 26:4,5)”.¹⁰

As we have noted, the duty of showing Christian forgiveness to others is not easy – indeed, impossible, apart from grace. It is to the God of grace we must look in order that we may, from our hearts, forgive others. As Alexander Paterson says, “It is evident that, all things being considered, this is one of the most difficult practical lessons to be learned in Christianity; human nature recoils at the injunction. But there is no alternative: divine authority is laid upon us; and in divine strength we can do all things.”¹¹

In conclusion, we reiterate that Christians are to forgive others because they themselves have been forgiven by God, against whom they have sinned. Forgiveness of sin is an incomparable blessing bestowed by an incomparable God. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,” said the Psalmist in Psalm 32. The word ‘blessed’ is a very emphatic interjection, as if to say, “O the abounding blessedness of such a man;” or as John Trapp puts it, “O then the heaped-up happiness of a justified person, disburdened of his transgressions!”¹² “Of all mercies,” says Thomas Brooks, “pardoning mercy is the most sweetening mercy.”

This doctrine of the complete and present pardon of sin by God is of the very essence of true Christianity, whereas it is absent from all other religions, including Romanism and Islam. Deplorably, it is absent from much modern preaching in the visible Church. The basic reason for that omission is another omission – of the solemn truths about sin and its condign punishment. Such defective preaching necessarily omits, or seldom contains, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin by God. It was far otherwise with the apostles. Their clarion call was, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Only in that context could they, and did they, proclaim

¹⁰*The Works of John Flavel*, London, 1968 reprint, vol. 6, p 312.

¹¹*Paterson on the Shorter Catechism*, p 371.

¹²*Trapp’s Commentary on The Old Testament*, Psalm 32, Online Bible.

forgiveness: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38).

May such preaching, by the grace of God, not only continue among us always, but also be heard to the ends of the earth, so that multitudes would praise God, as the prophet Micah did: “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy” (Mic 7:18).

Mackintosh Mackay¹

John Kennedy

Dr Mackay was born in the parish of Eddrachillis, Sutherland. His father rented the farm of Duartbeg and was a captain in the Reay Fencibles. He was an amiable man, and a pious Christian of superior intelligence and a consistent life. His mother was the eldest daughter of Rev Alexander Falconer, minister of Eddrachillis. She was an admirable woman, of a loving, cheerful disposition, a delightful companion, a wise and sincere friend, a devoted wife and mother, and an intelligent and devout Christian. Their son Mackintosh was born in November 1793.

After receiving an elementary education at home, his studies were then conducted in the parish school of Tongue and afterwards in an academy at Ullapool, conducted by a Mr Pollock, who was competent so to ground him in Greek and Latin and Mathematics as to enable him to follow a course of instruction in the University of St Andrews. Few young men from the far North ever entered college better able to take a prominent place than Mackintosh Mackay, with his unusual talent, his opportunities of preparation, his devotion to study, his capacity for enormous labour, and his conscientiousness in any work which was given him. He was not too young when he entered college in 1815.

In 1820 he entered the theological hall at Glasgow. It was there chiefly his theological studies were conducted, but he attended “partial sessions” both in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. During the recess between his college sessions, he was employed as a teacher successively at Bowmore, Laggan and Portree. He was licensed to preach in 1827, and in the following year was ordained and inducted as parish minister of Laggan. While there he completed his work as editor of the Highland Society’s *Gaelic Dictionary*. This great work

¹Taken, with slight editing, from *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*; tributes from a presbytery and synod have been omitted.

required very extensive and detailed acquaintance with Celtic literature. The materials which passed into his hands from those of Ewen Maclachlan were not scanty but were as yet unarranged when death removed him. The Dictionary taxed to the utmost the time and strength of a man who never shrunk from toil and it was completed in a way which left little to be desired. In consideration of the great learning demonstrated in this work he received, soon after its completion, the degree of Doctor of Laws.

Dr Mackay's conversion took place before the period of his college life. He did not leave his home in the far North without the fear of God in his heart. He knew the gospel before he was licensed to preach it. His ministry at Laggan was not fruitless. The Lord was with him from the outset, and the gospel which he preached was with power. But amid his literary labours, and in the society of those with whom he came in contact in gathering materials for his dictionary, his zeal began to wane, and his soul withered under a spiritual blight. But his backsliding was healed, and the love and joy of earlier days came back again before his brief ministry at Laggan was closed.

He himself thus described to the writer the means of his recovery. On a communion Sabbath, while he was seated at the Lord's table, the minister who was addressing the communicants spoke of the guilt and danger, and of the course and causes, of backsliding. Beginning with a soul's first movement from the mercy seat, he described with such minuteness the whole course of his declension that he felt as if every eye in the congregation must have been fixed on him, so thoroughly did he find himself exposed before them. Venturing to look up, he saw every eye fastened, not on him, but on the speaker, who, after describing his very case, passed on to speak of the remedy and to commend to the guilty backslider the merits of atoning blood, the riches of forgiving mercy and the power of renewing grace. The Word came to his heart with power and, before he rose from that table, he cast himself at the feet of Jesus in the hope of mercy and, with brokenness of heart and without reserve, surrendered himself anew to the Lord.

In 1831 he was translated to Dunoon. The charge of Logierait was offered to him at the same time, but he chose the more arduous post. In the restored fervour of his first love, he devoted himself to the duties required of him as minister of Dunoon. The territory embraced in his charge was wide, for the parishes of Dunoon and Kilmun had been united to form it. Even he could not, without an assistant, overtake the necessary pastoral work. At Kilmun there was a church in which the minister of Dunoon must occasionally preach, and beyond Kilmun lay the district of Ardentinny, while on the other side of Dunoon was the district of Toward. During his ministry, summer visitors began to resort to all these places. And to provide the stated supply

of preaching at each station, Dr Mackay laboured till churches were built at both Toward and Ardentinny, a new parish church erected at Dunoon, and the church at Kilmun repaired. In course of time he secured the aid of three assistants. He successfully accomplished the great labour of collecting funds for these objects.

After 1843, the same kind of work had to be repeated in connection with the Free Church. During the year from 1 May 1835 he travelled 1577 miles, within the bounds of his own charge, visiting and catechising his people and holding meetings for prayer and exhortation. The record of that year shows no exceptional amount of work; it furnishes but a sample of the regular course of his labour during the earlier period of his ministry at Dunoon. In course of time he was called to preach in other places with increasing frequency, till in 1843 his fragmentary diary shows that in five months he preached 77 times and in 25 places beyond his own charge; and during 1845, 169 times and in 47 places.

Amidst the bustle of Disruption times his labour was excessive. He travelled over almost all the Highlands and Islands preaching the gospel, explaining the causes of the Disruption, and organising congregations in connection with the Free Church. Most uncomplaining was he during all that arduous toil. The ready response of the Highlanders to the call to separate from Erastianism, while carrying with them in their hearts the principle of national religion, was to him ample reward for all his wearying and wasting labour. To him, a Christian Highlander, this was solace most refreshing. The cause of Christ was prized, and the Highlanders were not dishonoured, and he was therefore glad. His joy bore him through toils which would have seemed impossible to a less resolute man.

Most befitting was his appointment as Convener of the Free Church Assembly's Committee on the Highlands. No man loved the Highlanders with a deeper love, and no Christian was more anxious for their spiritual welfare. Labour for their good he counted no toil. He did not shrink when he looked forward to it, and he did not care to speak of it when it was past. The amount of correspondence, conference and toilsome travelling which he undertook, in furtherance of his schemes for the benefit of the Highlands, is almost incredible.

There are men who will not work unless they can climb to some housetop to proclaim what they are doing, and to tell what they have done. But Dr Mackay's heart was set on doing work and reaping fruit; he could not endure fuss. To other eyes his schemes sometimes seemed Utopian; and in prosecuting them he was regarded as intolerant by those who stood aloof and objected when they should have sympathised and aided. His aim was single, and he

was willing to “be spent” in labouring to attain his object. It was to him no recommendation of a scheme that it could be easily carried out. He would fain fill his consciousness with labour when his heart was set upon an object, and the prospect of toil was to him rather a stimulus than a bugbear. “Our friend Mackay,” Mr Monteith of Ascog once said, “has a horror of short cuts.”

In 1849 he was appointed Moderator of the General Assembly. His appearance and manner suited the position, and his addresses were such as to delight his friends. The most powerful speech he ever delivered was one which he addressed to that Assembly. Stepping down from the chair, he took up his position, as Convener of the Highland Committee, beside the clerk’s table. With rare power, and sometimes with thrilling eloquence, he pled for a more generous consideration of the needs of the Highlands. The fervour of a Scot, the fire of a Highlander and the zeal of a Christian combined their forces in the power that bore him onward in the course of his eloquent pleading. There were many in the house who, till then, did not know what Dr Mackay could do, and many then discovered for the first time how much was covered by his unobtrusive demeanour.

It seemed a strange way of showing his interest in the Highlands to forsake for a season his native land and transfer his labours, as a minister, to Australia. It looked like an abandoning of schemes which he alone had started and which only he seemed fitted to promote. But his going to Australia was the crowning proof of his deep love for his countrymen. He was ever prone to be sanguine. Unlikelihoods only roused him to exertion. He thought all Highlanders who were amassing wealth in Australia would be ready to contribute to the support of the gospel in their native land. He expected to gather them into communities in the land of their adoption and to enlist their sympathies in behalf of the cause which he himself had so much at heart. He did not adequately take into account the power which “the love of money” has over men – how it can close their hearts and hands and purses against the claims of the gospel.

But his leading conscious aim was to secure a supply of the means of grace to the Highlanders, whom oppression had driven, and whom gold had drawn, from their native land. He accordingly brought the case of the Highlanders in Australia before the Colonial Committee and the General Assembly in 1852, suggesting the propriety of sending out a deputation to labour among them, and expressing his willingness to go if required. The Colonial Committee, on the recommendation of the Assembly, accepted the offer of his service, and appointed him a deputy to Australia. He at once resigned his charge at Dunoon and started for the colony.

In April 1854 he was inducted as minister of the Gaelic congregation in

Melbourne, where he laboured for two years. He was in his sixty-first year when he landed in the colony; but during the first 12 months of his ministry there, he preached 146 times and travelled 3081 miles, searching out and addressing the scattered Highlanders, besides ministering to the people of his charge in the great colonial city. In 1856 he removed to Sydney and became minister of St George's Church in that city. Leaving with his congregation at Melbourne an effective organisation and a handsome church, he undertook to provide both for his new charge at Sydney. In 1858 he came to Scotland to collect funds for his new church, and as a deputy to the General Assembly of the Free Church. Returning in 1859, he resumed his work at Sydney and, with his wonted zeal and diligence, continued to labour there till his final return to his native land in 1862.

Not long after, he was settled in Tarbert, Harris, as minister of the Free Church congregation in that remote locality, and laboured on till failing strength compelled him to resign his charge. During the last year of his life he resided at Portobello, his interest in all that bore on the Redeemer's cause still unabated. But feeling that he had outlived the generation that knew him, he looked regretfully on the departed brightness of other days, and anxiously towards the darkening prospect in the future.

His last illness was sudden. It seized him on his journey homeward from a meeting of the Synod of Glenelg, of which he was still a member. His bodily strength was shattered, and his mental vigour greatly weakened by the attack; but amidst the delirium of fever, and during intervals of wakefulness and pain, one object alone was in his view. He fixed his eye on Jesus and sang of His beauty. He looked to "the land that is afar off" and pined to be in it, till his Saviour came for him and his ransomed spirit was borne to the rest for which he longed. He died on 17 May 1873.

His success as a preacher won for him his grave in that beautiful spot in which they bury their dead at Duddingston. A sister died not long before himself. Feeble and downcast, and at a loss to find a grave in which to bury his dead, he went forth in search of one. As he walked sadly along the road, he met a gentleman who accosted him and, learning the object of his quest, at once kindly offered him a burying place. There, after the interment of his sister's remains, a grave would be reserved for himself. The reason he assigned for his kindness was his recollection of a sermon which he heard the doctor preach about 35 years before in the church of Duddingston and which the preacher himself had quite forgotten. The text was remembered, and the leading ideas of the sermon, and the casual meeting renewed the impression made by the sermon when it came from the preacher's lips. On referring to his notes, Dr Mackay found that on the very day so marked in the memory

of the other, and from the very text he mentioned, he had preached just such a sermon as had been described.

Dr Mackay's personal appearance was remarkable. Tall, with a handsome face and figure and a dignified bearing, no one could look on him without feeling that he was no ordinary man. He was extremely reserved. He never opened up his heart but to a friend, and was far from ready to open even his mouth to any other. No one was allowed to know him fully whom he could not fully trust. A reticence made him sometimes seem austere, but no man could be more genial and entertaining when there was an attraction to draw him out. He shone in conversation only when in earnest or at ease.

His mental resources were great, but he did not care to shew his wares in his window. Always careful to have his own mind rightly informed about every subject on which he spoke, he lacked the power to present it vividly and pithily to others. In an address, he went over again all the ground he traversed in his thinking. Instead of the results, he gave the process of his study. This always made his sermons and his speeches lengthy. His train of thought was always in exact logical sequence, and he was always ready, without effort, to clothe his thinking with correct expression; but a redundancy of words concealed his power. Only when he spoke under the impulse of strong feeling could his hearers feel the force of his thinking. His words seemed fewer then because they were more rapidly uttered, and the thought seemed then to bear a fairer proportion to the speech.

His preaching was always edifying. As a systematic divine, he was accomplished and exact; but his preaching was not distinctively dogmatic. He was quite as anxious to indicate the fruits of the truth, as applied, as to unfold the treasures of the truth as revealed. Careful to distinguish a life of godliness from all counterfeits, he was wont to deal closely and searchingly with the consciences of his hearers. He followed the bearing of truth down to the everyday life of men as surely as he traced up its wonders to the counsels of Jehovah. And yet he was not a specially practical preacher. All the necessary elements were found in his teaching, and none of them in preponderance. To an intelligent and earnest hearer he was always interesting, and not infrequently he arrested the attention of all classes of his hearers by the earnestness of his manner and the eloquence of his words. But, best of all, he was a praying preacher. With a self-abasing sense of his own unfitness for the service of the gospel, he leant his weakness on Him whom he preached; and the power of God, in answer to his cry of faith, wrought revivingly in the hearts of the living, and raised not a few of the dead "into newness of life".

The better God is known, the more He is trusted.

Matthew Henry

Who Have Obtained Mercy?¹

Robert Traill

There is a great difference between the state of sin and misery that mercy finds men in, when it first visits them, and the state that it brings them into. The difference is so great that we are apt to think the change may be easily known (see Eph 2:1-18). Yet so many things obstruct them that have obtained mercy from confessing it – and obstruct them that have not obtained it from acknowledging their lack of it (of which I shall not now speak) – that searching is needful. And for your help in that work, I offer these few plain marks.

1. To place a high value on special saving mercy above common mercy is a good sign of one that has obtained saving mercy. There is a special mercy of God, and there is a common mercy. Special mercy is saving; it comes from the heart and love of God (Eph 2:4) and is treasured up for, and laid out only upon, His chosen. It is the favour He bears to His people (Ps 106:4). Common mercies are thrown about with a large and indifferent hand: “He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45). Now these two sorts of mercies are as far different as heaven and earth. The excellency of the one is far beyond that of the other, though we are unworthy of either. “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant,” said a great saint (Gen 32:10), and so should all say. But few perceive this great difference, and many give the preference to common outward mercy. Who but a Christian counts it a greater mercy to have the conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus than to have a large and prosperous estate in the world – and that the light of God’s countenance, and an hour spent in His courts (when the King’s presence is in them), is better than all the enjoyments of this world?

Moses was a man that obtained singular mercy from the Lord. It appeared in this: he esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb 11:28). He had excellent balances and true weights. He put in the one scale Egypt’s honours, treasures and pleasures (and how weighty are such things in the worldling’s balances!) and in the other “the reproach of Christ” and “affliction with the people of God”. His judgement on this weighing is that this reproach, because of Christ’s concern in it – and this affliction, because it is of and with God’s people – is better than all other things.

¹An extract, slightly edited, from one of Traill’s “Sermons Concerning the Throne of Grace”, in his *Works*, vol 1. Traill (1642-1716) was a Scot who suffered for his faith in Covenanting times but exercised his ministry in England.

The true test of men's spirits is justly taken from their settled inward apprehension of the worth and value of spiritual saving mercy as above all outward mercy. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" (Ps 4:6,7). Most men are for any good, they know not well what, and they will take it from any hand that can give it. But David knew what good he would have and who could show it: "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us". Why is he so earnest for this blessing? "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." Carnal men seek gladness and make it, and take it to themselves as well as they can; but gladness of God's putting in their heart, they know not. David does not here compare – though he does reveal it – the holiness of his heart, with the earthliness of that of others. He does not compare the tenderness of his manner of life with theirs; but he compares the joy God gave him by the light of His countenance, not with the joy he had, but with what the ungodly have in their sensual satisfactions.

Try yourselves by this. Where is your esteem lodged? What sort of things do you relish? Common outward mercies carry away the hearts of the most part of men, and this shows that few men have obtained special mercy.

2. He that has obtained special mercy has a love to it and to the Giver of it, and to the way God gives it and in which he receives it. He that is a lover of God's mercy in Christ has obtained it. A natural man may have a liking to God's mercy in general, but he sees no glory, no goodness, no beauty, in mercy as from God through Jesus Christ – mercy shown on account of a full satisfaction made to justice in and by His blood, mercy given freely to glorious ends and purposes. But every one who has obtained it admires every thing in it. It is rich mercy, says he; it flows from a blessed fountain, free love; it runs in a blessed channel, the redemption of Jesus; it comes to me in a well-ordered covenant; and was shown me for His praise in my salvation from sin and misery.

3. The one who has obtained mercy is a daily beggar for more mercy. Whenever God's special mercy is tasted, hunger and thirst after more is raised. No sooner did Paul obtain mercy but, behold, he prays (Acts 9:11). There is more of mercy yet to be had. Mercy quickens the soul's desires and enlarges them. The greatest receivers are the greatest beggars: "Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet 2:2,3). This mark is plain and will never fail. They that drive not a trade of prayer for special mercy have not yet obtained it.

4. The one who has obtained mercy from the Lord shows mercy to others; he is a merciful man to others (Matt 5:7). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness . . . forbearing one

another, and forgiving one another . . . even as Christ forgave you” (Col 3: 12,13), and, “Forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). How unbecoming is it that such should have bowels of brass on whom God’s bowels of mercy have been poured out? This is a mark that will never fail, but in a high fit of temptation. All that have obtained God’s mercy will be disposed to show mercy. Forgiving one another is an easy thing; it costs nothing but to think a kind thought. Yet how hard is this to many, through the power of corruption?

There are some acts of mercy, as bounty and charity, that poor Christians have no ability for. But the principal act of mercy is in every Christian’s power, and that is mercy to men’s souls. We cannot give them that mercy we have obtained; but we can, and should, wish the like to them. Never did a man obtain mercy from the Lord for himself but he wished that others should partake of it also. As soon as the woman of Samaria (of whose conversion we have the largest account of any convert in the Bible, in John 4) obtained mercy, she forgot what she came to the well for; she had got somewhat better than the water of Jacob’s well; she met with Jacob’s God and got Jacob’s blessing. She went to the city and turned a sort of a preacher to them: “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (v 29). She obtained mercy and would have all the city come and get mercy also. And a great many came and obtained mercy. Christ caught that woman by His grace and made her as a bait to catch many more.

No believer can deny his sense of such a frame as this. There are some persons thou dost love, and shouldst love; thou prayest for them. What dost thou mainly ask for wife, children, brothers, sisters and all or any thou lovest heartily? Is it not: O that they might share in God’s saving mercy? If thou dost ask it for others as the greatest mercy, thou thyself hast obtained mercy. Paul obtained mercy. He dearly loved his countrymen the Jews, and on good grounds (Rom 9:1-5). What does he pray for them? “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom 10:1). All right prayer should be the heart’s desire. Salvation is the best thing we can pray for ourselves or for those we love. And no man can heartily pray for the salvation of others who has not got it himself.

Whosoever desires to persevere and increase in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, to live and die in hope that maketh not ashamed, must be diligent in secret prayer; must constantly read God’s Word, begging Him to explain it and give faith in it; and must walk with those who walk conscientiously before God – who are always aspiring to what they have not attained – in whose manners, spirit and discourse there is what reaches the heart and tends to humble, quicken and comfort the soul.

Henry Venn

Zimbabwe Mission News

Rev Neil M Ross

A very long pastorate – of almost 50 years – came to an end after the Zimbabwe Presbytery last September accepted with much regret the resignation of Rev Petros Mzamo. Having been minister of the Mbuma Congregation and Superintendent of the mission station there since 1957 (apart from a period during the guerilla wars), he felt the time had come in the providence of the Most High to resign his charge. During that time he also had the responsibility of caring for several outstations, and for the Zenka Mission during its pastoral vacancies. Although at times he was weary *in* the work, he was not, as he said in one of his annual reports to the Synod, “weary *of* it”. Having obtained help of God he continued working until he was 88. We pray that there may yet be further fruit from his many labours and we wish him a pleasant retirement in his home in Bulawayo.

Mr Hugh Mackenzie, formerly administrator of the Sengera Mission in Kenya, was appointed Mission Co-ordinator in Zimbabwe from the middle of November. He has already carried out a review of the work of several Mission departments. He is now to assist heads of departments to prepare their development plans and budgetary requirements for 2007, recruit a consultant to train the office staff in financial reporting, and assist in preparing a feasibility study and report on whether or not to upgrade the John Tallach Secondary School to cater for Fifth and Sixth year pupils. He is also required to help the new Transport and Building Projects Manager in formulating a protocol for managing his responsibilities. In addition he must prepare a brief and plans for modernising the Head Office, and assist the Mbuma Administrator (when one is appointed) to establish robust administrative procedures at the Mission Hospital there. Lastly, he is to draw up proposals for converting accommodation in the Thembisio Home from its present dormitories to the households arrangement now being used in homes in Zimbabwe.

The Mission is employing Mr Philani Mzamo on a provisional basis in the post of Transport and Building Projects Manager. Mr Mzamo (a nephew of Rev P Mzamo) has been Superintendent of Mapiso Township in Bulawayo for more than 10 years, and is an elder in Ingwenya Kirk Session with responsibilities for Cameron outstation. If the trial period of a few months works out to the mutual satisfaction of Mr Mzamo and the Mission, he will, God willing, be confirmed in the post.

Mbuma Mission Hospital is working at full stretch. Dr Snoek and her nursing staff have been under extra pressure since government medical provision in the Nkayi area fell well below what is required. They have also

been busy setting up the Opportunistic Infections clinic – for treating various infections to which HIV and Aids sufferers are especially susceptible because of their weakened immune system – and bringing it to the stage where it is fully operational. The European members of staff assisting Dr Snoek are Sister-in-Charge Willie Geurtsen and Sisters Petra Beukers, Celia Renes, Gilia Wijngaarden, and Erica van Breda. Of these, Sister Beukers is still on sick leave in Holland, and (at the time of writing) Sister Wijngaarden is expected to return from her sick leave on January 18, while Sister Erica van Breda had a short break at the end of December. Sister Renes awaits a work permit so that she may do the same kind of Aids home counselling as she did in Kenya, but meanwhile she is giving assistance with administration. One particularly pressing need at Mbuma is for a hospital administration clerk in order that Dr Snoek and the nursing sisters may be relieved of many time-consuming administrative tasks.

In November, John Tallach Secondary School staff at Ingwenya were glad to welcome back the assistant head, Miss Norma MacLean, from compassionate leave in Scotland because of her mother's illness. Mr B Ncube, the Headmaster, deferred his leave in order to allow her to go home. Mr James Macleod, who stood in for Miss MacLean while she was in Scotland, came home for a break but was to return in mid-January for another two months. Miss Eleanor Wylie, having recently completed her teaching contract, is back in her native Ulster. We are pleased to hear that a lady teacher – who belongs to the Church and is an ex-pupil of the School – has been recruited to teach Religious Education, but there is still much need of Free Presbyterian teachers coming forward to serve the school, especially in teaching Religious Education, if only for a year.

Mission departments are looking forward to the arrival of a large container full of used hospital furniture, medical equipment, bedding and uniforms, household goods and office items, which have been very kindly gifted by Raigmore Hospital and other parties. The shipment was organised, packed and dispatched by Rev D A Ross, Mr A MacRae, Mr E Ross and several others who generously assisted them. They were thankful that this provision was made in the kindness of the Most High, and were well satisfied when, at the end of December, they saw the container leave on its way south.

Rev Alastair MacLean is still in the difficult situation of not having received a work permit from the Zimbabwean government and therefore is not in a position to accept a call from any congregation there. Apparently, the documentation for his work permit application went astray in some government office, and therefore he had to apply anew. In the meantime, he is kept very busy preaching at the various stations on Sabbath and weekday.

Book Reviews¹

They Were Pilgrims, by Marcus L Loane, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 272 pages, £15.00.

This book was first published in 1970, and the Banner of Truth printed this edition in 2006. The book gives a brief but enlightening survey of four young men who gave themselves to the service of Christ, mostly in missionary work. They are David Brainerd, who laboured among the North American Indians; Henry Martyn, in Persia, Armenia and several parts of India; Robert Murray M'Cheyne, though much more briefly, among the Jews of Palestine and Central Europe; and Ion Keith-Falconer, mostly in Arabia. They never met, but all were motivated by a common desire for selfless missionary endeavour; their short lives were given to preaching Christ crucified. But perhaps the life of the last mentioned reflects somewhat the downturn in Christianity in his generation.

The author draws much on relevant journals, diaries and letters, all of which speak of their spiritual experiences and conflicts but, above all, of their burning desire to draw sinners to Christ. It becomes obvious, as we read, that they lived in a much more spiritual age than is our lot, yet we can set our Amen to some of the doubts and fears they experienced and battled with. It is interesting to note that, though none of them enjoyed robust physical health, they were tireless in their efforts – “they loved not their lives unto death”. Their lives covered the period from 1718 to 1887 – from when David Brainerd was born to when Ion Keith-Falconer died.

This is an eminently readable book which leaves us with a yearning for one of “the days of the Son of Man” in our own midst as a nation – and indeed throughout the world. We commend it to our readers.

(Rev) D J MacDonald

The Divine Challenge, on Matter, Mind, Math and Meaning, by John Byl, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 331 pages, £8.95.

The challenge of the title refers, on the one hand, to Satan’s temptation in Eden and man’s attempts “to dethrone the biblical God and to replace Him with gods of his own making”. On the other, it refers, for instance, to the Lord’s questions to Job: “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” The book is written to oppose modern man’s view “that his rational wisdom has made foolish the biblical wisdom”, for, “armed with scientific knowledge and technological power, modern man is ready to seize God’s throne”.

Dr Byl is a professor of mathematics in British Columbia. He has previous-

¹Both volumes reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

ly written *God and Cosmos*, which was positively reviewed in this Magazine. In *The Divine Challenge* he engages again with the evolutionary worldview and shows its unreasonableness. Particularly he demonstrates that mathematics is inconsistent with materialism (the idea that nothing exists except matter – and so claims that, for instance, man has no soul and there is no God). Thus, in a world created by God, new areas of mathematics are not *invented*; they are discovered. And it should not surprise us how much of mathematics has an application in science – the body of knowledge which systematises the laws which the Most High has built into His creation.

This book will not interest everyone, but it should be emphasised that it does not need specialised knowledge to understand it. As Professor Byl indicates, it “is addressed to the intelligent non-expert. Although the discussions will range over various issues in science, math, philosophy and theology, no prior knowledge of these disciplines is assumed. The aim is to convey the basic thrust of the arguments in non-technical language, as simply as possible.” In this he has succeeded admirably.

God is indeed on the throne, and all the evidence, when rightly viewed, points in that direction. Why then, “if God alone can satisfy man’s deepest needs . . . does man not turn to God?” The answer lies, as the author points out, in man’s “fallen nature, which is marked by self-delusion and pride”. And therefore “the only hope for man is to repent of his unbelief and to embrace the salvation offered in Jesus Christ”, which “requires him to swallow his pride”. With God’s blessing, such books as this may be used to bring many to swallow their pride and submit to God, the Creator of all things.

Protestant View

The Papacy’s Persecuting Power

A recent report states: “The Pope explained the history of persecution amongst believers during a general audience in Paul VI Hall [at the Vatican], which he dedicated to . . . St Stephen. ‘The first-ever martyr of the Christian church,’ he said, ‘teaches us that followers of Christianity will always face persecution . . . persecution will never be lacking in the history of the church’.”

Very true. But in the history of the Church of Christ, the Papacy itself has been the fiercest persecutor of biblical Christianity. Says Baptist writer David Cloud: “It has been estimated by careful and reputed historians of the [Roman] Catholic Inquisition that 50 million people were slaughtered for the crime of ‘heresy’ by Roman persecutors between AD 606 and the middle of the nineteenth century.” Cloud then cites reputable historians who show, for example,

that there were two million Waldensian martyrs during the first half of the thirteenth century in France, and that from 1540 to 1570 “it is proved by national authentic testimony, that nearly one million of Protestants were publicly put to death in various countries in Europe”.

In the St Bartholomew Massacre of 1572, at least 70 000 French Protestants were killed (there is reason to believe that the figure was nearer 100 000). Pope Gregory XIII praised this horrific event as “holy” and struck a special medallion to commemorate it. History records numerous other such examples. They all confirm the Bible’s testimony that the Church of Rome is indeed “the woman drunken with the blood of the saints” (Rev 17:6). But Scripture also shows that Christ will preserve His Church to the end of time and will bring the Papacy’s intoxicating power to an end. Then the mighty cry will be heard: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” (Rev 18:2). *NMR*

Notes and Comments

“Institutional Sectarianism”, “Homophobia” and “Religious Hatred”

Judging by media representations, these are fundamental problems of modern Scottish society and their eradication would make our nation an idyllic place in which to live. The Scottish Roman Catholic Cardinal demands that the Scottish Executive face up to the problems of “institutional sectarianism”. The commendable decision of the vast majority of Church of Scotland Presbyteries to veto the blessing of same-sex civil partnerships by Church of Scotland ministers, and the attempt of a university Christian Union to promote Biblical teaching on human relationships, are greeted with accusations of “homophobia”. Anything verging on criticism of the Islam, or any other non-Christian religion, is condemned as “religious hatred”.

The Cardinal has now concluded that most instances of sectarianism do not involve football, parades and marches (areas in which he thinks progress has been made) and that we should “begin to look at the wider social causes of sectarian animosity”. He claims that “poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and young people with nothing to do, are all contributing to the problem”. Supporters are quoted as asking why Roman Catholics are almost twice as likely to “end up in jail” and why they do not “get a fair crack of the whip” in the justice system, health, education and the boardroom? Of course the Cardinal believes that what he regards as unworthy discrimination is found at the highest levels of society in the exclusion of Roman Catholics from the throne.

No consideration is given to other possible causes for so many nominal Roman Catholics allegedly being in relatively poor circumstances. No enquiry is proposed as to why “derogatory conduct towards Catholics” made up 64%

of 532 “religiously aggravated crimes” in 18 months in 2004/2005, “with Protestants being victimised in 31%” – when less than 16% of the population is registered as Roman Catholic. The disproportionate place given to Roman Catholic spokesmen on moral and religious matters, the favoured status of Roman Catholic schools, the benefit to Roman Catholicism from immigration from Europe and such-like bonuses are not mentioned.

Attempts are made to silence assertions of the biblical position on euphemistically-named “gay” relationships by attributing such assertions to homophobia. *Phobia* is generally taken to mean *hatred* rather than *fear* and, in either sense, wrong motivation is attributed to those who combine aversion to that way of life with a desire for the well-being of those who practise it. The Scottish Parliament recently passed, by a large majority, an Act allowing the adoption of children by those in same-sex civil partnerships and refusing to give exemption to “faith-based adoption agencies”. Opposition was led by Roseanna Cunningham MSP, who had favoured civil partnerships but was of the view that “a traditional family is the best place to bring up children”. She obviously did not recognise that to concede the principle that such relationships are legitimate only opened the way to demands for further “rights”. It seems that few in authority recognise that, as Murdo Fraser MSP put it and as many citizens probably believe, “people who express these views are not homophobes or extremists or religious nutters, as some would suggest. They have genuine concerns and their concerns should not be dismissed.”

When people even question the peace-loving credentials of a religion whose followers parade with banners declaring, “Exterminate those who slander Islam”, they are accused of religious hatred and are themselves equated with the “extremist fundamentalists” who are blamed for these demonstrations. Politicians, religious leaders, and even our Queen, feel it necessary to concentrate on what they regard as the common features of the “great faiths”. It cannot be accepted that anyone who subjects the dogma and practice of another religion to reasonable and courteous scrutiny, from the standpoint that absolute truth belongs to the Christianity of the Bible, acts from anything other than obscurantism, bigotry or religious hatred.

There is little doubt that the current strategy of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2: 2), is that encapsulated in one of the world’s own proverbs: “give a dog a bad name”. Browbeat the critics into submission, or keep people from listening to their arguments, by writing them off as motivated by one of these cardinal sins of the day. Do not let people think for a moment that perhaps there are infallible standards of belief and morality and that perhaps these critics love their God and their fellow sinners so much that they are constrained to try to communicate the truth to others for their good and for God’s glory. Truly,

the more that people glory in their human reason, the more unreasonable they become. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom 1:22,28). We need to hear the alarm bells ringing. Rationalism and pluralism have ruinous tendencies. As the Bible puts it: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov 14:34). *HMC*

Sexual Orientation Regulations

The Sexual Orientation Regulations are intended to cover the provision of goods, facilities and services, and education. They apply to schools, businesses, and voluntary organisations including churches, and they have already become law in Northern Ireland (although, following a challenge by the Christian Institute, the High Court has granted a judicial review, to be heard in March). They are expected to become law in the rest of the UK in April and they recently passed the House of Lord by 199 votes to 66. The declared purpose of the Regulations is to make it illegal to harass or discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation. They are of broad application, and in some cases the burden of proof is reversed so that those accused of harassment under the Regulations are required to prove their innocence or else pay a substantial fine.

The Word of God strongly condemns homosexual conduct, treating it alongside adultery, incest, and bestiality (Lev 20:10-16). Under the Old Testament economy it was punishable by death (v 13), and it is clear that it ought to continue illegal in the New Testament dispensation. Like adultery, it is "an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges" (Job 31:11). In Britain homosexuality was criminal until 1967, but since then the law has been turned around in its favour, and the new Regulations take a further step in this direction. The long-term purpose of the homosexual movement, guided by Satan, is to silence any condemnation of homosexuality. The new Regulations, if confirmed, will certainly prove a powerful instrument of intimidation in the hands of homosexuals.

Christians are to be grieved at such laws, but they are not to despair. Christ has all power and it is He that is permitting these judgements to come upon Britain. Our nation has sown the wind in rejecting Protestantism and the Bible, and we are now reaping the whirlwind (Hos 8:7). We pray that these Regulations will not become law, or will not continue as law. But in any event the triumph of evil will be short. "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for He seeth that his day is coming. . . . Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it" (Ps 37:12-13,34). *DWBS*

Church Information

Committee Meetings

Synod committees will meet, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church as follows on Tuesday, March 20:

- 9.30 - 11.00 Training of the Ministry Committee
- 11.00 - 12.00 Magazines Committee
- 12.00 - 1.00 Sabbath Observance Committee
- 2.00 - 5.00 Finance Committee
- 2.00 - 3.00 Outreach Committee
- 3.00 - 4.00 Religion and Morals Committee
- 6.00 - 7.30 Publications and Bookroom Committee
- 7.30 - 8.30 Welfare of Youth Committee
- 8.30 - 9.30 Dominions and Overseas Committee

(Rev) *John MacLeod*, Clerk of Synod

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, February 6, at 11 am.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, February 14, at 6 pm.

Northern: At Dingwall, on Tuesday, February 20, at 2 pm.

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Wednesday, February 28, at 4.30 pm.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, March 13, at 11 am.

Removed by Death

We have, sadly, again to record the death of two elders: Mr Robert MacLeod of Kinlochbervie on November 28 and Mr Gerrit Schuit of Chesley on December 11. It is expected that fuller obituaries will appear later, DV. How much the Church, and the world, need other faithful witnesses to be raised up!

Bookroom Fund

By Synod appointment, the special collection for the Bookroom Fund, is due to be taken in congregations during February. *R A Campbell*, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: A Friend, Huntly, £50; Anon, "In loving memory", £2000; A Friend, Newcastle, 1 Pet 5:7, £40.

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, Inverness, for Odessa Church, £100.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, England, "for your missions in Africa", £295; Mrs A B, for Themviso Children's Home, £100; Anon, for Jewish work, £40 per Rev JLG; Anon, for Israel Mission, £1000.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Assynt: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £71 per RAC.

North Harris: *Congregational Funds:* The estate of the late Mr John MacInnes, £300 per JFM.

Staffin: *Door Collection:* CM, Staffin House, £50. *Sustentation Fund:* CM, Staffin House, £50.