

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Contents

John Newton's Pilot	63
David Cadwaladr:	
3. A Man of Prayer	66
The National Debt and Our Debt of Sin	68
Martha and Mary:	
6. More on What Honours Christ	71
For Junior Readers:	
How to Listen to God's Word	73
Why Read	
<i>Sketches from Church History?</i>	74
For Younger Readers:	
Thank God First	76
God Knows	78
Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2009:	
Prizes in John Tallach Secondary School	79
Looking Around Us	79
Choosing the World	80

Cover Picture: Three spotted eagle owl chicks.

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John Newton's Pilot

John Newton first went to sea at the age of just 11. His godly mother had died when he was only 6 and his father was a ship's captain. After that first voyage he kept on going to sea, and over the years he had many adventures and many difficulties, but his own foolishness lay behind most of the difficulties. It was no doubt in answer to his mother's prayers that God at last met with him and changed his heart, bringing him to believe on Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of sinners.

Newton became a captain, but later God called him to be a preacher of the gospel. He became a minister in the little town of Olney before moving to London. But perhaps the most useful work he ever did was to write letters, lots of them, containing much helpful advice which was based firmly on the Bible. Many of these letters were later printed in magazines and books and so they have been useful to many people, not just those to whom they were originally sent. During more than 30 years, Newton wrote a series of letters to a younger man, John Ryland, who also became a minister; these have recently been published in a book with the title, *Wise Counsel*.

Ryland would not have been surprised to find the ex-captain thinking in ways which reflected his seagoing experience. Several times Newton referred to the work of a pilot, the man at the helm of the ship, who steered her in the right direction. But in his mind was a series of pictures. The ship was himself or Ryland or anyone else sailing on the sea of time, and the sea may get very rough because of difficulties or troubles. All the more reason then for a skilful pilot, someone who can guide people safely through all the difficulties of life.

In 1785 Newton looked back on the time, 35 years earlier, when he married his wife Mary. He compared their setting out on married life to a sailor "who should put to sea without either pilot or compass". A successful voyage would look very unlikely if there was no one on board with the skill to steer the ship and if there was no compass to indicate the direction in which they should sail. So Newton confessed that, back in 1750, "we knew and thought but little of the Lord". God is the pilot we need to steer us safely through life,

with all its difficulties and temptations and hardships. And the Bible is the compass we need so that we would know the direction to take through life so that we may reach the harbour of heaven at last.

Before long, we might say, a perfect Pilot came on board. In Newton's language: "The Lord . . . thought of us . . . and hitherto He has helped us". God came to Newton and his wife; He showed them that they were sinners and that Jesus Christ is a glorious Saviour; He made them willing to believe in Christ. They became willing to submit to the Lord to guide them through the whole stretch of ocean – some of it rougher and some of it smoother – that lay before them in this life. They not only became willing to have the Lord as their pilot but also to take the Bible as their compass – to receive direction from God's Book and live holy lives. And God did take care of them as they sailed towards heaven.

Whatever stage of life we may be at, we need this Pilot. Without Him we will drift through life and in the end be dashed on the rocks of God's wrath and swept away into a lost eternity. We should be perfectly clear in our minds that, if we are left to ourselves, that is how our lives will end. Without Newton's pilot we cannot possibly find the harbour; we will miss the way into heaven. It is the Lord alone who can guide us safely through this world and bring us at last to the harbour where we can rest in perfect blessedness for ever.

In 1782 Ryland was experiencing some difficulties. Newton pictured him as sailing through stormy seas. But the ex-captain knew that the Lord could help, even in a time of trouble. He wrote to encourage his friend: "Cheer up. The skill of the pilot is best evidenced in a storm; so is the Lord's wisdom and faithfulness towards His children." He knew that God will never forsake those who trust in Him. He knew too that when times are difficult and God fulfills His promise to help His children, then it is most obvious that God has acted wisely and that He remains faithful.

But it is also at such times, Newton pointed out, that "the sincerity of their hearts towards Him" is most obvious. Times of trouble may make those who are not sincere give up their religion. But when God's true children keep following Him in such times of difficulty, it helps to show that they are sincere, that they really do trust in Him, that they are not hypocrites.

Do you sometimes get the feeling that everything happening around you is out of control? Yes, it may well be out of *your* control, but you can be sure that God is in control of everything, even when the storms of life are at their fiercest. Then, says Newton, "many a poor sailor is shipwrecked". He has no pilot; he has no compass. But Newton was sure that "the poor believer" will reach the port to which he is sailing. He went on: "It is good sailing

with an infallible Pilot at the helm, who has the wind and weather at His command". A human pilot may steer his ship skilfully through tremendous storms but he cannot possibly have any control over the weather. But because God is in control of everything, we will be perfectly safe if we trust Him. And He will guide us safely to the port of heaven at last, no matter how difficult some parts of the voyage may be.

In another letter, Newton was thinking of himself and other believers as passengers in a ship. Indeed the Church of God was in the ship too. It should be obvious that the Church often has to sail through difficult storms, sometimes through severe persecution. But will the ship sink? No, says Newton, "we need not fear sinking". Why? Because "the infallible Pilot will guide us safely through the storm". God can make no mistake; He knows everything; He is aware of every danger; and He can steer the ship safely past them all – even the dangers that are hidden from everyone else. This ship will never sink, no matter how severe the storm.

But are you in this ship? You might want to keep away from the ship where the Church of God is. You might see things in the Church that are not as *you think* they should be – perhaps things that in fact are not at all what they should be. But can you find a better ship? Can you find one that is guaranteed to take you safely into the port of heaven? Can you find any other ship that has a compass – at least one that works properly, that points in the right direction? No, you can be perfectly sure that if you drift away from the Bible and the Church, you will be shipwrecked at last on the rocks of God's wrath and sink into a lost eternity.

Newton had sailed for many years under the care of the infallible Pilot when he said this: "I am not what I ought to be – ah, how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be – I abhor what is evil, and I would cleave to what is good!" He was painfully conscious of sin, but he could see in himself something which showed him that he was indeed sailing towards heaven – he hated sin, especially his own sins.

We have thought of the Bible as a compass showing us the direction in which we should sail through life. But let us think of the Bible also as a telescope and let us picture Newton putting this telescope to his eye and looking into the future. As he did so, he said, "I am not what I hope to be – soon, soon shall I put off mortality [the part of him that would die], and with mortality [I shall put off] all sin and imperfection". And he summed up: "Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the Apostle, and acknowledge, 'By the grace of God I am what I am'." Yes, John Newton was on the way to heaven.

David Cadwaladr

3. A Man of Prayer

David Cadwaladr was brought up in a part of north-west Wales where no one preached the gospel. Yet, in spite of many difficulties, he eventually heard the good news about Christ and became "the Lord's possession for ever".

Soon after David Cadwaladr was converted, a desire arose in his heart to preach the gospel so that he might do good to others. But it looked as if this could never happen. When he was about 21, he became seriously ill and everyone except himself was sure he would die. This was what the doctor believed, and one old woman was in tears as she told David: "You are surely deceiving yourself. Truly, you are soon to die." But David continued convinced that he had a work to do for God, and so he would be spared to carry out that work. And he did not die; he was to live until he was 82.

One Sabbath, John Evans, a preacher from Bala who was to go to take services in Llangwm and Cerrigydrudion, was ill. He encouraged David Cadwaladr and a David Edwards to go in his place and hold prayer meetings. And if they felt they had something useful to say, he told them, they should also exhort the people. As they walked along they decided that David Cadwaladr should begin the meeting in Llangwm by reading and praying; then David Edwards should give an exhortation. As his friend was speaking to the people, David Cadwaladr felt disappointed with what he had to say. But when, in Cerrigydrudion, David Edwards began and he gave the exhortation, David Cadwaladr was even more disappointed with what he said himself. No doubt God was teaching him not to trust in his own powers of speech. Two years were to pass before, at the age of about 31, he again attempted to take a service, and this time God clearly helped him.

David Cadwaladr was well-known for how much of the Bible he knew by heart; he could always quote suitable verses and repeat them without making a mistake. When much younger, he heard a rumour that the country would be taken over by Roman Catholics and that they would not allow anyone to have a Bible but would burn them all. So David decided to prevent such terrible events being too much of a drawback for himself. He learned all of the New Testament by heart and most of the Old Testament. He clearly had an excellent memory, but he used it well. In his preaching, David Cadwaladr gave himself particularly to warning the unconverted about the awful eternity they would experience if they did not repent. It was the very words of Scripture he made use of in his warnings, and strong men would go pale in front of him.

Cadwaladr was remarkable for his prayers. One evening, at the end of a

church meeting in Bala, he lost all track of time as he wrestled with God in prayer; it was near midnight when he finished. Perhaps more remarkable still, no one present left during these three hours. In general, it is said that he prayed in public with unusual power, but that his secret prayers were even more remarkable. Sometimes he would spend the whole night on his knees, without realising that the time was passing so quickly, so much was he enjoying communion with God.

One evening he left his food to cool and went to feed his cattle. Then he thought he would go to pray for a few minutes. He had no idea that so much time had passed when he returned for this food, intending then to go to bed. He was surprised to find the house in darkness and the door locked. Then he looked towards the east and realised that the sun was about to rise. Obviously a man so much taken up with communion with God must have been unusually godly. No one should be surprised to learn that God made much use of him in turning sinners from their own ways.

As he went about preaching, Cadwaladr often had to walk huge distances, which might involve climbing to a considerable height to get from one valley to the next. One Sabbath he walked at least 35 miles and took four services. After many years of such effort he arrived at a house in Barmouth on a Saturday afternoon. The woman of the house asked him how he was. He told her that his health was very good, but “I felt something today, as I was climbing Aber-amphrech hill, that I have never felt before – lack of breath and a weakness inside me”.

“How old are you now, David Cadwaladr?” she asked

“I am 70 years old.”

“And how far have you walked today?”

“Only 28 miles.”

It shows the time and effort that good men in Wales and elsewhere were prepared to spend in making known to their fellow sinners the truths which God has revealed in the Scriptures. We should also bear in mind that many of those men had to endure considerable persecution, particularly in trying to take services in places where the gospel had not yet taken root to any great extent.

It was often difficult to find a home willing to give a night’s lodging to a preacher of the gospel. One day when Cadwaladr was on a long journey, night fell when he still had many miles to walk. He turned off the road to ask for shelter for the night in a house near Dolgellau. The owner did not give him much of a welcome; he asked: “Why did you not look for shelter earlier, before it got so late?” But he then turned to his wife and asked her: “Have we any room here?”

"No", she answered. But then she turned to their servant boy, Sionyn, and suggested that Cadwaladr might share a room with him.

"I don't mind", Sionyn replied.

Cadwaladr was then taken inside, and he sat on a bench beside the table. The woman offered him "a little milk and flummery", a food made with boiled meal. After Cadwaladr had eaten, the man of the house told Sionyn to go to bed. "This man is very tired", he added.

"I usually read a chapter of the Bible at home before going to bed", said Cadwaladr, "and then go on my knees to pray with the family. May I do that tonight?" Cadwaladr was given a Bible and he read and prayed as usual, pouring out his heart earnestly before God. As they listened, the family realised that this was no ordinary man; so they wanted to show him some honour. They sent the servant to his room on his own and gave Cadwaladr the best room in the house. And the next morning, the woman got up at four o'clock to prepare a meal for their visitor before he went on his way.

We do not know what the outcome of this visit was. But on other such occasions people received good for their souls when the Word of God was read and prayer was offered. How good if that Welsh family and their servant were brought to think seriously about their souls, to seek the Lord and to begin family worship for themselves!

The National Debt and Our Debt of Sin

Matthew Vogan

In 1775 the English writer and minister Augustus Toplady wrote a famous poem called "Rock of Ages". Toplady originally gave it the title: "A Living and Dying Prayer for the Holiest Believer in the World". It describes how Christ's finished work of atonement is the only way for sin to be pardoned. No matter how godly someone might be they must look helplessly to Christ for grace throughout the whole of their life. There is no place for any of our own works or merits. He wrote:

Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands:
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone!

The poem came at the end of an article in which Toplady compared the sins of the average person to the national debt. The Government of the United

Kingdom needs to borrow money in order to have enough to spend on the various areas under its control. The *national debt* is the amount it still owes to those from whom it has borrowed. In Toplady's time it was a massive sum of more than £130 million which was mounting all the time.

There is currently a lot of discussion about national debt in Western economies, particularly in countries like Greece, where they can no longer manage it. The national debt in the United Kingdom is a figure that seems to be spiralling out of control. It is expected to reach £928 billion by April 2010 and £1.1 trillion by 2011. It amounts to two thirds of the total amount of money we generate as a country. Everyone who pays taxes has a share in this debt in one sense, since the Government's income comes from the taxes. If the national debt was to be shared out to every man, woman, boy and girl, it would amount to £14 233 per person.

The debt also rises because the Government has to pay interest on all the money it has borrowed and this amounts to £42.9 billion a year. Every country seems to have a national debt, and for some the amount is far more than they can ever hope to produce. They can never pay it off. It reminds us of the rising debt of sin that we all have. It gets greater moment by moment and we can never hope to do anything to remove it by our own efforts.

Augustus Toplady's comparison of sin with the national debt was in response to John Wesley, who was promoting the teaching that a believer can attain to a state of sinless perfection in this life. Toplady showed what a vast sum of money was involved in the national debt by calculating how much it would weigh in coins and how many men would be required to carry all the coins and what distance they would extend to if they were all in one line. He also calculated how long it would take someone to count it all, which was 98 years, 316 days, 14 hours and 40 minutes! Toplady made these calculations in order to make a point about how difficult it is to reckon the number of sins that the average person may commit.

We sin when we do not do the good that we ought to do, as well as when we do what is evil. We sin in simply making use of God's gifts, including the air that we breathe, without glorifying Him. If we consider, at a very limited estimate, that the average person sins once per second, then at 10 years old, each of us is chargeable with 315 million sins. Toplady calculated that if an 80-year-old man sinned every second in his lifetime, he would be guilty of 2522 million sins. David could say, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me" (Psalm 40:12). Many people think casually that they can do something to atone for their sins, yet it is quite clear that it is absolutely impossible for anyone ever to "pay off" such an immense

debt of sin. Toplady speaks of how eternity itself will not clear the debt but only add to it, because the sinner will be a sinner still and so will still be sinning. "Hence the damned will never be able to satisfy the justice of the Almighty Creditor."

More than this, the righteous law of God requires absolutely-perfect obedience throughout our lives. The law makes no allowance for our lack of obedience to it. "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them" (Galatians 3:10). God would cease to be God if He accepted from us less than we owe. "Justice, holiness, and truth will and must have their own, even to the very uttermost farthing." No mere sinful man can give a ransom for another (Psalm 49:7-8). No angel can deliver us from so great a debt. What is there of sufficient value that can be put into the balances to outweigh the infinite debt of our sin?

Those who belong to Christ by faith may say with the Apostle: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law; being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). This will "infinitely over-balance" all of the sins of all of Christ's people. When we consider all of the sins of one individual, all of the sins of Christ's people cannot be calculated. Yet the debt was known to God and paid by Christ. When He died, the Lord Jesus Christ cried out: "It is finished" (John 19:30). In the original Greek those words are just one word. It was a very well-known word because, when a debt was fully paid, this word was written right across it.

The Lord Jesus Christ had paid an enormous debt for His people. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Colossians 2:14-15). Toplady was filled with wonder and worship when he considered this. "O Thou covenanting, Thou incarnate, Thou obeying, Thou bleeding, Thou dying, Thou risen, Thou ascended, Thou interceding Son of God! Not all the seraphs Thou hast created, not all the innumerable saints Thy love hath ransomed, will be able to comprehend, much less to display, along the endless line of eternity itself, the length, the breadth, the depth, the height of a sinner's obligations to Thee."

We have no hope in ourselves. We can only look to Christ and His finished work and perfect righteousness by faith. By divine grace, Augustus Toplady had realised this at 16 years of age while visiting Ireland. He wrote: "Strange that I, who had so long sat under the means of grace in England, should be brought right with God in an obscure part of Ireland, midst a handful of people met together in a barn, and by the ministry of one who could hardly spell his

own name". But just two years after he had published this essay and poem, he became ill and experienced his need of the truths he had written in "A Living and Dying Prayer". He was 38 years of age and spoke of his desire to be with Christ which is far better: "My heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory". "Sickness is no affliction, pain no curse, death itself no dissolution." "My prayers are now all converted into praise."

His poem had ended with these words of dependence upon the only sufficient redemption purchased by Christ:

Whilst I draw this fleeting breath
 When my eye-strings break in death
 When I soar through tracts unknown
 See Thee on Thy judgment-throne
 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee!

Martha and Mary

6. More on What Honours Christ

Rev H M Cartwright

Last month's article began to consider "our third encounter with Mary and Martha", Mary's anointing of Jesus with very precious ointment. Others criticised her but she was concerned to honour Christ, not to make an impression on them. This is the final section of a paper given at Youth Conference in 2009.

The Lord recognised the worldly spirit shown by the critics of Mary's action. They regarded as waste what was expended "merely" in demonstrating love and devotion to the Saviour. The worldly spirit will prize that which seems to have "practical" value but cannot appreciate that which is "only" honouring to Christ. It has to be doing something which can be measured in its practical effects rather than praying, worshipping, reading the Bible, listening to preaching, engaging in Christian fellowship. It is much happier among the externals than in heart religion. But, as Matthew Henry says, "when there is true love in the heart to Jesus Christ, nothing will be thought too good, nor good enough, to bestow upon Him".

Mary had the mind expressed by Paul, who said that it was "my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:20,21). And again: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for

whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

It is so easy to be taken up with the opinion of our fellow creatures and to forget that God knows our hearts and that very often "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Mary was taken up with Christ and with what would honour and please Him and she was ready to devote herself to that end, whatever other people would think of it. She seems to have been a much more retiring person than Martha. Perhaps it did give her a thought to do this before other people. Perhaps she considered that what she was doing for Him to whom she owed all things was so little that it did not even enter her mind to wonder what others would think of her.

In this she would be like Hector MacPhail (1716-1774), the minister of Resolis, whose ministry was blessed to the awakening and conversion of many souls, and whose name is for ever remembered in connection with the soldier Luke Heywood and the Highland Kitchen-maid and the dream he had of creeping in to heaven behind Manasseh. His biographer tells us that one night on his deathbed he was unusually restless. His friends asked him if he was in bodily pain or if a cloud was coming in between him and the Saviour in whom he trusted. Were his evidences of a saving interest in Christ darkened? The memorable answer he gave was that "he felt as much assured of being for ever with his Saviour as he was of lying on his bed". Then he added: "But I know not how I can look Him in the face, when I think how little I have done for Him".

It is only if we are taken up with Christ, sitting at His feet and learning of Him, and aiming primarily at honouring Him, that we will be enabled to do anything that will meet with His approval. Moody Stuart advises: "Begin with Mary, sitting at His feet, hearing His word, and drinking life into your soul . . . and you will end with Mary in the discharge of some noble work that will abide for ever".

We are living in a very bustling age in the religious world and yet very little seems to be accomplished. We can be full of activity and yet accomplish nothing of value. As a minister, one is conscious that one can even be occupied all day every day in religious and church matters and that they can become a substitute for a heart relationship with God in Christ.

Let us seek grace to concentrate on the religion of the heart – to be concerned to have Christ as our Saviour and to have communion with Him by His Spirit in the means He has ordained for that purpose – and to aim at pleasing Him whatever others may think or say. "I beseech you therefore,

brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1,2). The outcome of a Christ-centred and Christ-honouring life will not be fruitlessness and inactivity but "full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience" (*Shorter Catechism*, 87).

Let it be our concern to hear the Lord at last say, however undeserved we feel it to be, and although we have to attribute it all to free and sovereign grace: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21), remembering with Paul that, whatever praise or blame we may get from men, "he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Do not be ashamed of Christ or of giving Him the priority in your life, with all the implications of that for your life.

Well then, the poet John Newton put it well when he said:

"What think ye of Christ? is the test
to try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
unless you think rightly of Him".

But even when we, by grace, think well of Christ, we need to learn of Him to get our priorities right, so that when we follow Martha in giving ourselves to the practical work of the kingdom of God we do so with the spirit and sense of priority shown by Mary.

For Junior Readers

How to Listen to God's Word

I am sure you have noticed warning signs by the roadside when you are travelling. They have red triangles to catch the attention of drivers and to warn them about some danger they should beware of. The danger may be falling rocks, sheep on the road or a railway crossing. It is something to look out for and pay attention to.

The Bible contains many warnings about the dangers which surround us on our journey through life. It also gives us advice about the things we should pay attention to. Have you ever noticed the Saviour's warning: "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18)? *How* ye hear. In other words, it is not enough to listen to what is good and right; you must listen *in a right way* to benefit from what you hear.

How then do you hear properly – in a right way? *The Shorter Catechism*,

which is so helpful in lots of ways, can also teach you this. The answer to Question 90 tells us that, to benefit from God's Word read or preached, we should "attend thereunto with diligence, preparation and prayer". We are to give our full, prayerful attention to what we hear. Godly J C Ryle gives three rules for hearing the Word of God in a right way:

1. We must hear with faith, believing that every word of God is true.
2. We must hear with reverence – showing proper respect to God – remembering constantly that the Bible is God's book.
3. Above all we must hear with prayer. We must pray for God's blessing before we go to church, and we must pray again for God's blessing, when the sermon is over.

If we listen with faith, reverence and prayer, we will profit from what we hear.

Why is it so important for you to listen in a right way? The Bible gives an answer to that question too. In it God says, "Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live". *Your soul shall live* – what could be more important than the life of your never-dying soul? It is not only for your good now, but for your eternal benefit. God asks, "Who will hearken and hear for the time to come?" The time you have ahead of you in this life is only a moment in comparison to the never-ending eternity which is ahead of us all. Surely then it is of the greatest importance that you not only listen but that you "hear for the time to come".

Finally, will you not listen to Paul's warning: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1)? Not just listen, but give "more earnest heed" to God's Word – pay attention to it more earnestly! *J van Kralingen*

Why Read . . .

Sketches from Church History?

The subtitle of this book is, "An illustrated account of 20 centuries of Christ's power" – an ambitious effort for a 250-page paperback. Its author, S M Houghton, gallops through the history of the New Testament Church from its beginning at Christ's death and resurrection all the way up to the 1900s. The pace in the early chapters is very rapid, covering the first 700 years in a mere 30 pages, but devoting much more space to the key people and doctrines which came to the forefront at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation and afterwards.

In general terms, most people agree that it is a good thing to have some historical awareness – it is obvious that everything in the present day has come somehow from our past. Being familiar with how things have worked out over time in the Church is especially useful, so that we may have a proper perspective both on our faith (what we believe) and our practice (how we behave). So why is this particular book recommended?

For one thing, *Sketches from Church History* is worth reading because it has such a broad scope, not only in time but in geography. It covers events in Rome, North Africa, Britain, Germany, France, America, India, the New Hebrides – and more! You do not need to be an expert in Church history in order to pick up this book – rather, it is intended to give you a general overview. You can then follow up what you find out here by reading other more detailed books on whatever time or place, or person or doctrine, you found interesting.

But it is also a book which could be very inspiring to read. You will be struck by how fierce the persecutions have been. The earliest Christians were very cruelly treated. The Waldenses were also harshly persecuted in the Middle Ages. Again the Reformers had to struggle against tremendous opposition as they encouraged obedience to the Word of God. You will see too how bravely they continued to speak and act faithfully – how their lives were organised around a sense that God was worth obeying, even if the costs to themselves were huge. These costs might involve loss of status in society, or being put on trial in courts of law, or even being tortured and killed. It makes us wonder whether our religion is made of the same stuff – whether we are prepared to resist ridicule, harassment, and even worse sorts of persecution in the pursuit of loyalty to the Lord. It should also lead us to admire the way that the Lord strengthened these people to follow Him, even when the difficulties were often so astonishing.

There were of course other, more peaceful times when the Church's position in society was stronger. Then, as S M Houghton illustrates, Christians took the opportunity to be helpful to others round about them. Some carried out social reforms, for example – like William Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury in the 1800s. Others brought the gospel of Christ to people who had never heard it before – like John G Paton in the New Hebrides, Henry Martyn in India and Persia, and David Brainerd in North America. This is a book which provides you with countless examples of obedience to Christ, whether in doing for him or suffering for him.

Another reason for recommending this book is how well the writer understood the doctrines which were at stake at the various turning-points of the Church's history. One of the interesting things about Church history is how

doctrines come to be better understood over time, as different parts of scriptural truth are attacked or debated or clarified. In very brief outline, S M Houghton covers the heroic Athanasius, who defended the doctrine of how Christ can be both God and man in one person (around the year 325); John Wycliffe, who maintained the truth that the bread and wine are not literally changed into the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper (in the 1300s), and of course Martin Luther and the other Reformers, who rediscovered the central importance of justification by faith alone (in the 1500s). In the Scottish situation, the Covenanting period (the 1600s) and the Disruption of 1843 are also briefly covered. S M Houghton's biblical stance on all the doctrinal discussions means that this book can be read with confidence.

Finally, this book is worth reading because of the perspective it takes on providence. By offering us Church history as "an account of Christ's power", this book reminds us that things do not just happen in the world – in society, or in the Church. It was God who sent out the apostles to make disciples of heathen nations; it was God who allowed persecutors to harass Christians; it was God who equipped pastors and people to withstand persecution; it was God who gave theologians insight into the truths that the Scriptures teach; it was God who converted the sinners who listened as the truths of the Scriptures were proclaimed. Christ assured His Church at the outset, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," and this book provides us with material to understand how this can be true, in everything that the Church has ever experienced, both in the good times and the bad – a principle which applies right down to the present day. *CED*

This book is published by the Banner of Truth Trust and costs £10.00. Rebecca Frawley has written a *Student Workbook*, costing £8.50, to go with it. Both books are available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

For Younger Readers

Thank God First

Jonathan lived in a village near the city of Sheffield in England. It was harvest time and Jonathan was busy piling up the sheaves of barley to form a large stack. When he was standing on top of it, he slipped. He fell onto the ground and hurt both his ankles badly.

So Jonathan had to stay at home for some weeks until his ankles healed. He was not able to go out to work, so he could not earn any money. At last there was no food left in the house and no money to buy any more.

Jonathan's wife came upstairs to their bedroom, where he was lying in bed. She was crying. So he asked her what was wrong.

"The children are crying for something to eat and I have nothing to give them", she told him.

"Have you faith in God?" he asked her. And he reminded her of a promise to each of God's children. It is in the book of Isaiah in the Bible: "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure".

Jonathan then asked her to kneel down beside the bed and pray to God. He asked her to tell God about the children and their needs: "that they have no bread, that you have nothing to buy them any with. And I will also pray. Who can tell what God may do? He hears prayer."

They both prayed. They reminded God of His promises. And then they waited for Him to answer their prayers.

Soon afterwards someone came to the door with a loaf of bread. She belonged to a family who had a large factory in the village. At once Jonathan's wife ran upstairs to tell him the good news – that God answered their prayers.

What did they do then? Did they start at once to eat the bread? No, they remembered that it was really God who sent the bread. So they must first thank Him for being so good to them.

"Now," Jonathan said to his wife, "before anything else is done, kneel down at the bedside." He wanted to join with her in thanking God for hearing their prayers. And then the hungry parents and children ate their simple meal.

Later that day they had another answer to prayer. Someone else came to their door to bring them a piece of meat. I am sure Jonathan's wife thanked both visitors for being so kind to them. And Jonathan asked his wife to kneel down again and thank God for the piece of meat. They could both see that God was good to them.

Jonathan and his wife and children all needed food. But there is something we need even more than food like the bread and meat that these people brought to Jonathan and his family – food for the body. What we need most is that God would so change us that we would love Him and trust Him and obey Him. That is how Jonathan

and his wife lived – loving God and trusting Him and obeying Him. That is how we should live too.

Jesus once spoke about people wanting food and drink and clothes. But He said also: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Why not learn these words by heart and ask God to teach you what they mean?

Jesus was telling us to seek God Himself and other good things for our souls as more important than anything else. If we seek Him, He will give us all the other things we really need, like food and drink and clothes. Jonathan and his wife learned to seek God first, and He gave them what they needed when they were hungry.

God Knows

The details in the first paragraph are taken from the book, *Heroes*, by Iain H Murray.

Colcock Jones was a black minister in America about 150 years ago. As he was preaching one day, a woman felt her conscience troubling her. She complained that Jones had told the congregation what she was doing on the Saturday night. Probably he did not know anything she was doing that night; he could certainly tell her that *he* did not know everything about her. “But”, he added, “the Word of God did; and by the way you speak now, it fits you exactly; and so it proves itself to you to be the Word of God that knoweth all things and, instead of being vexed with the Word of God, you had better straighten your ways and be at peace with it.”

Good advice indeed! Many others have felt that a minister was preaching about them in particular and letting everybody else know the sins they were guilty of. It is far more likely that the minister was just describing the sort of sins that people *may* commit, and that *God* was directing the uncomfortable words to their mind and conscience. He knows everything about everyone – not just the wrong things they have done and the sinful words they have spoken, but the ungodly thoughts that have gone through their minds.

If the minister speaks about your sins, how should you react? First, you should not worry too much about the possibility that he knows you are guilty of these things; you should be far more concerned that God knows everything you have ever done and that the Bible condemns your sins. Second, you must seek salvation through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between us and God. You must turn from your sins and trust in Christ.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2009

Prizes in John Tallach Secondary School

Form 1: Phiwihlanhla Ndebele, Divine Matenda, Manasseh Tshuma, Malvin T Sibanda, Lee-Roy Sithole, Memory Kaiyo, Thembikile Sibanda, Pride Sibanda, Francois Moyo, Bukhwabethu Sithole.

Form 2: Nyradzo Muzira, Roy Randen, Princess Ndlovu, Sheron Mloyi, Mluleki Moyo, Audrey Mpofo, Hlengiwe Ncube, Sikhulile Ndlovu, Sicelo Shoko, Farai Mpondi.

Form 3: Rumbidzai Makaza, Nicola Sibanda, Mongiwa Ndlovu, Gugulethu Simanyiwa, Mayibongwe Sibanda, Sanelesiwe Dube, Sepiso Zulu, Roy Munyikwa, Thando Dube, Christpean Mlangeni.

Form 4: Casper Ncube, Zibusiso Dhlamini, Mbokeni Kulube, Charles Mzizi, Mbongeni Maphosa, Thamsanqa Ncube, Progress Mdlovu, Bhekisipho Mpofo, Atalia Ngwenya, Nobesuthu Ndlovu.

Looking Around Us

What Should Be Done with Criminals?

David Strang is the chief constable of Lothian and Borders police, based in Edinburgh. He is concerned that, after a spell in prison, criminals “go straight back to shoplifting or whatever they were involved in”. He is calling for more to be done to tackle the causes of crime and for less emphasis on punishment.

Yet punishment is a scriptural idea. God will punish sin, in eternity if not in this life – if people will not look to Jesus Christ, who endured punishment instead of sinners. And governments have a duty to punish those who break the laws of the country. We might wish all criminals to come out of prison reformed. That would be wonderful, but unlikely – especially when criminals are thrown into the company of those who are worse than themselves.

The main purpose of prison should be punishment, though every degree of reform is welcome. In many cases it is the only reasonable option; in other cases, different forms of punishment will be more appropriate.

No doubt the Chief Constable said much more than was reported in my newspaper. But what was clearly missing from the report – and one strongly suspects it was also absent from Mr Strang’s thinking – was the idea of sin, that all wrongdoing is against God, whoever else may also be affected. There was no suggestion that the real remedy for crime is God’s power to change the fallen human heart so that it wants to do what is good. What Britain and other countries desperately need today is the widespread preaching of the pure gospel, “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12).

There can have been few worse characters in history than Manasseh, King of Judah. Yet, when he was a prisoner in Babylon, God changed his heart. He then knew that the Lord is the true God; he understood that he was a sinner against God; he trusted in God as One who shows mercy to the most guilty of sinners. And, from then on, his life was completely different.

Many criminals will go back to shoplifting or whatever other crime they were guilty of. Manasseh did not return to his wickedness; he had been given a new heart. For the rest of his time in this world, he followed a completely different way of life. We can be very thankful for all the efforts some dedicated people make to try to influence lawbreakers to change their ways. But more is needed. And when a government and a nation ignore God and His power to change the hearts even of the worst of people, they should not be surprised if our prisons become fuller and fuller as the years go by.

Choosing the World

A poem written by R M M'Cheyne after a family friend had said that she was "determined to keep by the world".

She has chosen the world
And its paltry crowd;
She has chosen the world
And an endless shroud;
She has chosen the world,
With its misnamed pleasures;
She has chosen the world
Before heaven's own treasures.

She has launched her boat
On life's giddy sea,
And her all is afloat
For eternity.
But Bethlehem's star
Is not in her view;
And her aim is far
From the harbour true.

When the storm descends
From an angry sky,
Ah, where from the winds
Shall the vessel fly?
When stars are concealed,
And rudder gone,
And heaven is sealed
To the wandering one.

The whirlpool opens
For the gallant prize
And, with all her hopes,
To the deep she hies!
But who may tell
Of the place of woe,
Where the wicked dwell,
Where the worldlings go?

For the human heart
Can never conceive
What joys are the part
Of them who believe,
Nor can justly think
Of the cup of death
Which all must drink
Who despise the faith.

Away, then – O fly
From the joys of earth.
Its smile is a lie
There's a sting in her mirth.
Come, leave the dreams
Of this transient night,
And bask in the beams
Of an endless light.

Price 70p