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SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Bible is forthright about our condition since the fall. It tells us, in the words of the Psalmist, that "every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Ps. 39:5). There is a futility about our lives in this world. The hopes people have are often dashed, bringing them disappointment. Even the rich and powerful may find that their schemes lack success. Most significant of all, for every individual, everything sooner or later comes to an end. Our lives close in death, which no one can avoid. David knew that he was a frail, sinful creature. Despite his great honour and achievements, his stay on this earth, as with us all, could only be a brief one. This is the reality of divine judgement upon man's sin.

The Scriptures also give us a faithful account of God's purpose with man. Their great theme is God's love for sinners and the salvation He has provided for us. This salvation is revealed in words that Jesus spoke to the Jews: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) Bodily life is valuable, but it is by no means the total of man's being. Christians do not cling to their earthly lives in the way that others tend to do. They have another sort of life – one of an imperishable kind – which means that they can look beyond the grave. They have been blessed with *spiritual life*.

Source

We are not saved from our sins because we are members of a Christian church or believe in a Christian creed. Our problem is that we are spiritually dead, and we need spiritual life restored to our souls. Only God can do this, through His Son Jesus Christ. At the time when our Lord began His public ministry, the Jews had to endure lectures from the scribes and Pharisees on the law of Moses and the tradition of the elders. Their teachers were without spiritual life, and the people were not going to get any help from them. How different was Christ! He had the Spirit without measure and preached the gospel of the kingdom. We may say that Christ *is* the gospel.

Jesus once preached a sermon in which He proclaimed Himself to be "the bread of life" (John 6:48). He was referring to His flesh, which He would give for the life of the world. This new life for mankind is spiritual and eternal and is enjoyed by faith in Christ and through union and communion with Him. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him...he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." (vv.56,57) Such teaching astonished Christ's hearers. Many of them were offended and ceased to walk with Him (vv.61,66), but some would not depart from Him. Among them was Simon Peter. "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou has the words of eternal life." (v.68)

Beginning

How does spiritual life come to us? It is important to be sitting under the gospel regularly, yet if all we hear are the words of a man then we are still dead in our sins, even though it is the truth we are hearing. It is only when we hear the voice of the Son of God that our souls live (John 5:25). We hear Him as the Friend of sinners and the Shepherd of lost sheep, and we answer His call. Believers with a Christian background may not get any *new* knowledge when they are converted: what they get is a *saving* knowledge of things they already know. Jonathan Edwards realised that the change that had happened to him was in his heart. He was like the blind man who had often heard of the beauty of a sunset, but only appreciated it when his sight was restored. Edwards now saw a glory in the truth of God's sovereign grace in Christ.

The power of Christ enabled Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, to leave his tomb (John 11:43,44). So the sinner is regenerated by a mighty work of God's grace, the Spirit applying the benefits of Christ's redemption and making him a new creature. By Christ's power also, Aeneas, who had been paralysed for eight years, was made whole, and left his bed (Acts 9:34). So the image of God is restored in the Christian, who more and more glorifies God. The Lord reproduces the beauty of His holiness in believers, and one day He will renew our bodies too, in the likeness of Christ's glorious body.

Evidence

When this new life is present in the soul it will show itself. To begin with it may be hidden but it soon becomes apparent. It is there in the desires and actions of those who have been born again. *Prayer* is a good indicator of spiritual life. It is the 'breathing' of our faith. We ought to pray with confidence: God is a Father to us, we appear before Him in the name of Christ, and the Spirit makes intercession for us. Matthew Henry said that we should speak to God "from the heart, heartily, for it is for our lives, and for the lives of our souls, that we are speaking to him." It is a wise saying that the prayer meeting is the most accurate measure of a congregation's life and health.

Another sign of spiritual life is a *hunger for God's word*. When we are born again we know what it means that "man doth not live by bread only" (Deut. 8:3). There is an appetite in our soul that cannot be satisfied with anything less than God. We love reading the Bible and hearing it preached. God speaks to us and blesses us with the riches of His grace in Christ. Can you say with Job, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12)? *Walking with God* is further evidence that the good work has begun in us. There is a willingness to be rid of all sin, and there is a grateful resolve to live in the light of His truth and be led in His righteous paths. Believers enjoy a holy fellowship with the Lord – a foretaste of heaven.

Growth

Living things grow, and so do Christians, some more quickly than others. Infants become adults, and God's children are also meant to go on to maturity. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 3:18) All the graces are there in the newborn soul, but no grace is so important to our soul as faith. Faith is first, along with repentance, and hope and love come from it. The more faith grows, the more the other graces grow, and the fruit of the Spirit is seen. As we seek to nourish our souls and exercise our faith, it encourages us to know that God is at work in His people, to make them spiritually fruitful.

The Lord taught this when He compared the church to a vine (John 15:1-8). Christ is the vine, the members of the church are the branches of the vine, and the Father is the "husbandman" who tends the vine. In His providence and grace, the Father cultivates the church. Some of the branches are fruitless, and He eventually cuts them out, because they are dead. He does not cut out the other branches, but carefully cuts them *back*. They are living, and not without fruit, but He will make them *more* fruitful yet to His glory. The secret of a productive vine is in this pruning. If the luxuriant, leafy growth is not pruned, it will turn to barren wood. The Lord sends trials and afflictions to lessen our love of this world, and to increase our love and likeness to Him.

Perfection

The new life God gives to His people is unconquerable. It survives all the efforts of the world, the flesh and the devil to destroy it. It is not overcome by death and continues through all eternity, where it is experienced in its fulness. The reason for this lies in what has been said already: our spiritual life has its source in *Christ*. In Jesus' words to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). God's covenant with His people means that He will never remove His Spirit from them altogether. He will uphold them and strengthen them until they enjoy the perfection of the state of glory. Does it not encourage you that the Lord *commands* this blessing, even life for evermore (Ps. 133:3)?

> ***"In His providence and grace, the Father cultivates the church."***

The life that is in our souls as believers ever directs us towards its blessed source. The result is the adoration of God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." (Ps. 103:1) Is God your chiefest joy here on earth? If so, then one day you will have your place around the throne in heaven, with the multitude whose praise never ceases. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." (Rev. 5:12) The worship of God, in spirit and in truth, is the best token of, and preparation for, the life to come.

The promised land was a type of heaven. When Paul says "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), he connects our place in glory and our obedience to God. This is an incentive to obey the Lord, but we must remember that the obedience which merits heaven for us is *Christ's*, not ours. Caleb's obedience typifies Christ's, which was perfect in every way. Because of Christ's obedience, His believing people enjoy salvation (1 John 3:5); because of that, let us follow the Lord *fully*.

"The meek shall eat, and shall be fill'd;
they also praise shall give
Unto the Lord that do him seek:
your heart shall ever live."
(Metrical Psalm 22:26) ■

HOW TO DEAL WITH FRUSTRATION

REV. JAMES CLARK

"It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel...Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house" (1 Kings 8:17-19)

David had a good plan – to build a house for God's worship and manifest God's glory to the world – but it was not David who would accomplish this. His son Solomon would do it. Sometimes our enthusiasm may be curbed by God's sovereignty and we experience a sense of frustration, which is deepened by our perplexity and our lack of understanding.

Frustration can be General or Particular

You may have decided on a certain course of action and gathered momentum in bringing it to pass. It may fill your thoughts, as was David's experience (Ps. 132:1-5), but then the door is firmly closed against you, and you cannot reopen it. You are perplexed; you were convinced it was a good thing to do, but...it cannot be done! The reasons for frustration are many. We may be limited or frustrated by our health, our circumstances (for example, opposition, lack of finance), unreliable human support, or even by the church. Sometimes compelling obligations (for example, primary care for others) may prevent us from carrying out our personal plans. In general, frustration occurs when something greatly desired (and lawful) is beyond our reach. In particular, it is when we feel a sense of failure within, that we have come short of glorifying God again (Rom. 3:23).

Examples in Scripture of this Experience of Frustration

Again and again, we see God's people experiencing deep frustration. *Moses* stands on the mountain from which he sees the promised land of Canaan. He has been thinking of it for forty years and he wants to cross over. He pleads to God for this, but to no avail; God tells him not to pray for this again. *Jeremiah* was called to the ministry and looked for repentance among the people, but God planned destruction in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 9). He became disillusioned and felt that his ministry was a failure; he could not accomplish his dreams, his deep desires for the welfare of the people. *Paul* wanted to spread the Gospel in Mysia and Bithynia (Acts 16), but God prevented him. Paul knew that these people, if they did not know the Gospel, would perish, but God forbade him to go there. Frustration requires submission to God. "Thy will be done" (Luke 11:2). Frustration becomes the testing ground of faith. Even our frustrations will "work together for good", if we continue to love God (Rom. 8:28).

God's Words to the Frustrated

"And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." (1 Kings 7:18) God saw the desire, the longing, the direction of David's heart. He was not commended for his good intentions (there is no merit in intentions), but he was acknowledged by God for his devotion. We must not let the dazzling world or the disappointing church strangle our enthusiasm to serve God wherever we can. Building a temple is not the only way to serve God; there are other ways. We must resist frustration turning us into cynicism or despair. "Thou didst well", says God. We continue to run, to fight, to pray and pursue the attainment of a Christlike character in us. If we sin, we say with another, "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18). If we fall, we say with Micah, "rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise" (Mic. 7:8). God sees the way we are facing when we fall, he sees the direction of our lives, that they are towards Him. Have we our faces towards Christ, or our backs? Are the ideals set by Christ still before us? We shall yet "be like him" (1 John 3:2).

David did not go away in a tantrum (like Jonah), he did not sit down and give up doing anything. No, he did what he could to help Solomon in God's cause. We can do much to help, advise and prepare those coming after us as they seek also to serve the Lord. Solomon could never have achieved his aim without David's preparation for it.

David's Response and Ours

David did more than acquiesce. He encouraged those who were tempted to rebel in their frustration. When God says "No", it is because He has something better (than you think) planned for you. "In His will is our peace" is an old saying. If you cannot pray, sing praise; and if you cannot sing praise, pray. Many believers have died in faith, not having received all their desires and all of God's promises in their experience (Heb. 11:13), but now they have! We struggle, but we struggle on. We have had our failures, but Christ's kingdom cannot fail; God is still "for us" (Rom. 8:31). "Hold out faith and patience". ■

THE FAILURE OF ATHEISM: WHY WE NEED NOT FEAR

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

"The fool has said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1)

There have been many such 'fools' over the centuries. Some have been high profile academics, others more ordinary. Some make headlines, others do not. So what, sadly, do these foolish people think?

Bertrand Russell

In his essay *Why I Am Not a Christian*, published in 1927, the influential British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), stated the following:

"*Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown, and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing – fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion has gone hand-in-hand. It is because fear is at the basis of those two things. In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the Christian religion, against the Churches, and against the opposition of all the old precepts. Science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.*"

It will soon be a century since Russell wrote those words. Now is an opportune time to analyse his 'prophecy'. Should we Christians tremble? Should we be alarmed?

1. *Is religion based on fear?*

It is undoubtedly true that *false* religions peddle fear in order to recruit and retain their membership. This is evident in Islam, and in cults like Mormonism, Scientology and the JWs. They are ruthless when it comes to those who leave. For Islam the penalty is often death; for cults it is social ostracism. The problem with Russell's fear is the absence of definition.

Consider this text: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." (Exod. 20:20) Essentially Moses says, "Do not fear...and yet do fear". This is not a contradiction. He is saying to Israel, "Reject the fear (or dread) you have of the Egyptians, and fear (or reverence) Jehovah."

2. *Is religion dangerous?*

Russell wrote: "*I am as firmly convinced that religions do harm as I am that they are untrue.*" Russell may have thought himself clever and original, but he was neither. In 1634, a Peter Studley published a pamphlet entitled *The Looking Glass of Schism*, which purported to tell the story of a 'Puritan' named Enoch ap Evan. In the course of a family dispute about whether to kneel at the communion, this 'Puritan' killed his mother and brother with an axe. Here was the ultimate proof that religion made one mad and bad. Studley's point was that Puritanism was dangerous, to the extent that it led to murder. Needless to say, Studley was virulently anti-Puritan in his sentiments. The case of Enoch ap Evan seemed to him to provide the concrete proof. Studley proceeded to claim that Evan believed himself to have been visited by the Holy Spirit, had visions of a dove and that the devil handed him an axe to kill his family.

Russell of course confused Biblical Christianity with distortions of it. Romanism did much harm to millions of people. However, he conveniently ignored the genocidal impact of atheistic philosophy. Communism, the ultimate 'religion' of atheism, has murdered millions, imprisoned millions and made life miserable for millions – all in the name of progress and enlightenment. By contrast, Christianity lays down love for God and our neighbour as the twin building blocks of life. Hardly a harmful teaching!

3. *Does religion hinder progress?*

For Russell, our existence is the product of chance. Astonishingly he failed to see the implications of his own position. If 'chance' produced all there is, then reason and logic are impossible, and so is scientific study. Reason and logic exist because order and design are built into the fabric of our world by God.

Russell also overlooks the fact that Christians are found in every walk of life doing both ordinary and extraordinary things. Not a single scrap of evidence has been produced to show that Christianity offers any hindrance to progress. Many of the greatest scientists and scientific minds were Christians.

What has and does hinder progress is the theory of evolution, with its false claims and massaging of the evidence. The Piltdown Man forgery, which originated in 1912, is only one of many hoaxes. Precisely because evolution is a lie, nothing and no one must be allowed to undermine the thesis with evidence. Only when it becomes a public scandal that falsification has occurred is there any change in the theory, but it is merely cosmetic. In his book *The Great Turning Point*, the creationist Terry Mortenson, who has a PhD in the history of geology, studies the 'scriptural geologists' of the 19th century, demonstrating their competence, honesty and fairness, in contrast to their atheistic opponents.

Atheism is not new!

It may be a surprise to some that atheism has a long history. It may be an even bigger surprise that Christians were called 'atheists' by the Romans because they rejected the 'gods' and believed only in one God, Jehovah. What then is the history of atheism?

Plato (428-347BC) believed in the 'gods', but his pupil Aristotle (384-322BC) rejected that for an 'impersonal first cause', whatever it was. Richard Dawkins is not original: he is merely a copyist with his own impersonal first cause – a big bang! Then came the Atomists, who reduced existence to a blank space filled with invisible atoms. That was the sum total of our universe. Nature is all there is, without meaning or purpose. The outcome is that all is meaningless: it just *is*.

The Sceptics, Cynics and Sophists of the 4th century BC treated everything and everyone with distrust. The Sceptics set about 'debunking' everything: all was arbitrary; there were no absolutes and no truth. The Cynics despised everything: they spat on tradition and custom, and hated the family and authority; they gloried in 'shamelessness', and nothing was deemed out of bounds. The Sophists literally cancelled truth: sounds familiar?

In today's academic circles, all this is called the "hermeneutic of distrust". Those who know nothing of ancient Greek philosophy fall victim to 'modern ideas', which are simply old adages repackaged. Knowing history enables us to withstand the onslaught of false teaching. This is very evident in the New Testament, where we are frequently pointed back to errors under the Old Testament in order to understand the present. There is nothing new, and thus nothing to fear. The only problem – and danger – is our ignorance.

The Church was fully alert to atheism, polytheism and superstition. Long before the Greeks and their philosophy, she sang: "That there is not a God, the fool doth in his heart conclude" (Metrical Psalm 14:1). Greek philosophy was simply *foolish*. The Church was equally aware of polytheism and superstition, singing: "For all the gods are idols dumb, which blinded nations fear" (96:5). The Church was neither fooled, surprised nor ignorant of the cultures around her.

Neither was the Church intimidated by idolatry of any kind, whether in the abstract or concrete form. The Church sang of this too: "Their idols silver are and gold, work of men's hands they be." (115:4) It was all the product of human make-believe, fancy and wishful thinking. In the same Psalm we later sing, "Like them their makers are, and all on them their trust that build." (v.8) The idols have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear. Those who worship them become *like* them – dumb, blind and deaf.

The Fight Back

The apostolic Church did not remain silent on all this. The locations of the various congregations to which Paul sent his epistles are significant. Each was surrounded by an antagonistic culture. The late American apologist Greg L. Bahnsen, in his book *Always Ready*, makes the important point that if the proponent of Christianity is going to "[cast] down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God", he must first "[bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5), making Christ pre-eminent in all things (Col. 1:18). Bahnsen accordingly made much use of the Epistle to Colossians as a means of equipping believers in their defence of the Christian faith, and refuting every alternative. He also majored on Paul's confrontation with the men of Athens at Mars Hill (Acts 17), where the apostle confronts, reasons and finally rejects the Athenian worldview.

Carl Trueman is a modern writer who knows the importance of the second century AD. In his latest book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway Books, 2020) he states:

"The most powerful witness to the gospel is the church herself, simply going about the business of worship...the culture is most dramatically engaged by the church presenting it with another culture, another form of community, rooted in her liturgical worship practices and manifested in the loving community that exists both in and beyond the worship service...The church protests the wider culture by offering a true vision of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God."

What now? Let us "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). ■

THE SHORTER CATECHISM: (1) MAN'S CHIEF END

REV. DAVID M. BLUNT

Q.1. *What is the chief end of man?*
A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

Do you ever think about the glory that belongs to God? There is nothing more important! Man imagines that he is the greatest thing in the universe, but the reality is that God is the centre of everything. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Rom. 11:36)

If we are to understand anything about our existence, we must begin by reflecting upon God and His glory. The glory of God refers to the honour of His Name and the excellency of His character. God is all-glorious in His being and in His works – in what He is and what He does.

Creation

The first thing we read in the Bible is, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) The creation in which we live and of which we are a part reveals God's glory. What do you see when you gaze at the sky in the daytime or at night? Of course you see the sun, the moon and the countless stars, but you should see something more than that. The Psalmist certainly did. When he looked up he exclaimed: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). His thought was, How great God must be, that He made all these wonderful things! How good and wise and powerful He is!

Providence

Christians often speak of 'providence'. By this they mean that God is intimately involved with His creation. He upholds it and directs every action that occurs within it. When we consider the history of the world – the events we read of in the Bible and what has happened since – we may find much of it difficult to fathom. We remember that the Lord says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). Yet we can be sure of this: God is glorified in all that comes to pass. This will be evident at the last day. Wicked men will not triumph ultimately: their sin will be punished. By divine grace the godly will be victorious, and their righteousness will be rewarded. The books shall be balanced.

Chief End

The eternal welfare of our soul, and our lasting happiness, are bound up with the truth of God's glory. Just as God's purpose is to glorify Himself in all that He does, so our great purpose in life is to glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31). That is why God created man, uniquely in His own image and likeness. The chief end or goal that belonged to Adam and Eve was not to promote their own name and enjoy themselves, but to honour and enjoy their Maker, even forever. God made our first parents upright and sinless, so they were able to do this.

The fall brought about a profound change in man. The effect of sin is to make us self-centred and self-seeking. We have forgotten our proper place before God. Though sin may attract us, it will always leave us disappointed. Its pleasures are only for a season (Heb. 11:25), and that season comes to a close at death. The more we sin, the less happy we are. Only in worshipping, serving and glorifying God does man find true enjoyment and contentment. But how is this possible for us as sinners?

Redemption

Nothing brings such glory to God as the redeeming work of His Son Jesus Christ, finished at Calvary. In this work God's mercy and grace are seen, as well as His power and justice. Christ died in the place of sinners, to provide salvation for them. After he was converted, Paul's prayer was, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). He rejoiced to preach "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:11). If we are trusting in the Saviour, and God is our chiefest joy, then we will be seeking to live in a way that is worthy of Him. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:20) ■

"There is no part of our life, and no action so minute, that it ought not to be directed to the glory of God."
(John Calvin)

CHANGELESS, PERMANENT THINGS DO ACTUALLY EXIST

REV. JAMES CLARK

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16)

We live in a world with no fixed beliefs or standards. In the society we live in, Truth and Morality have become simply a matter of opinion. Nothing is to be absolute...and now no-one is safe! There are no fixed standards of right and wrong and every man does that which is right in his own eyes (Judg. 17:6). This is a fearful freedom!

A World where God is not allowed to Rule

God and His standards have been blotted out of His own world. Even if society's floating, and often evil, standards are maintained by a majority (a so-called democracy), it soon becomes a tyranny, and repressive measures are enacted to silence opposition. The majority in the next generation may however change the standards yet again, and reverse who is to be prosecuted. Society thus becomes unreliable and those who hold firmly to the Word of God must therefore prepare for alienation and persecution. Why? Because we hold to absolutes, an unchanging standard of truth, of right and wrong, and of God's supremacy over all national governments. It is a mistake to limit Christ's dominion to the church. He is "Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Rev. 17:14).

The Church has been Affected too

This 'poison of subjectivism' has infiltrated the visible church also. The Bible is being 'reinterpreted' in order to change the standards of *doctrine, worship and practice*, with the consequent ostracism of those who are unwilling to change from the perfect, unchanging, teaching of God in the Bible in these three areas. It is one thing for the world to remove all traces of certainty in life, but it is tragic and fatal for the church to do so, and leave us to the mercy of next year's ecclesiastical decrees! The people of God have a history of being betrayed by dominant groups within denominations, just as civil society has been betrayed by 'democratic' majorities in government. We thus have majorities who deny God in the civil sphere and make him into their own image in the ecclesiastical. Each has lost their credibility, but not their accountability to God when life here ends.

The Tragedy of the World

There can be no acknowledgement of 'transgression' (crossing a fixed boundary) unless God's boundary is accepted, according to His Word. Without this acknowledgement there is no sense of guilt and therefore no need for forgiveness. If there is no concern for forgiveness there is no repentance, and without repentance there can be no forgiveness, no salvation. It is a descending spiral into self-destruction, and it all begins with having no fixed standards. The world sees this as liberation, freedom, but the world's slaves are blinded by sin and cannot see their own slavery (2 Cor. 4:3,4). The Jewish people are an example of religious blindness (John 8:33), blind to the way they have perverted the Word of God according to their legalistic prejudices. The Lord came to call *sinners* to repentance, not the (self-) righteous (Mark 2:17).

The Tragedy of the Church

It is not in God's nature to bless disobedience or deviation from His Word in doctrine, worship or practice. When you have false doctrine being propagated – for example, doctrines alleging that man can assist in his own salvation, or that a form of worship invented by ecclesiastical bodies is acceptable, or that a practice of sin is condoned and discipline is seen as outmoded – then you have the blind leading the blind... into the eternal ditch (Mark 7:13)! They say that they believe in Christ, but they have dethroned Him! Psalm 50:21 is relevant to today's church. If a revival in the church does come, it will bring forth shocking and deep repentance, and a return to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

The Way of Life

The Lord says, "Follow me" (Matt. 4:19), and, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21). There is a safe Path through this world into Heaven, but only one Path. It is the Path marked out by the Word of the Shepherd. His Voice comes to us, and His sheep will follow Him according to His Word. He did say, "few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14), but He also said, "Fear not, little flock" (Luke 12:32). The Shepherd is with them and all their needs He will supply. He will restore souls, feed them in the midst of their enemies and bring them Home (Ps. 23:6). What more could a sheep ask for? ■

APPROACHING JUDGEMENTS

JOHN OWEN

(Taken from a series of sermons preached in a private congregation in England in 1681, at a time of political and constitutional strife and growing indifference to religious principle. The substance of these discourses was published with the title 'An Humble Testimony unto the Goodness and Severity of God in His Dealing with Sinful Churches and Nations', and is found in Volume 8 of Owen's 'Works'. In his preface, Owen speaks of "sincere repentance" and "universal reformation" as "the only way for the saving of this nation from impending judgements and wasting desolations". This topical piece has been lightly edited.)

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5)

In the interpretation and application made of these severe accidents by our Saviour, in his divine wisdom, we may observe:

1) *Especial judgements in such a season, befalling in any, do not prove an especial guilt or provocation in them.*
This our Saviour expressly denies, and that with respect unto both the instances insisted on, and that distinctly (vv.2,4). I do not hence absolutely establish a general rule as unto all times and persons. For,
Firstly, The observation is here confined and limited unto such a season as that under consideration; namely, a time of provoking sins in the generality of the people, and approaching judgements. In such a season, no assignation of especial guilt ought to be made on especial calamitous sufferings.
Secondly, Some persons may be guilty of such daring, presumptuous sins, that if they are overtaken with especial judgements in this world, it is the height of impiety not to own the especial revenging hand of God in their destruction. Such was the death of Herod (Acts 11:22,23).

2) *Judgements on private men in such a season are warnings to the public.*
This is intimated by our Saviour in this place; namely, that God uses a sovereignty herein, by singling out whom he pleaseth, to make them examples unto others. This, saith he, was the sole reason, as far as you are concerned to judge or know, why God brought these sore destructions upon them; namely, that by these warnings he might call you to repentance. Yet, I judge, God doth not ordinarily exercise his sovereignty in this kind, unless it be when all have deserved to be destroyed: and then, as in the sedition and mutiny of military legions, they decimated them, or slew some for an example and terror unto others; so God calls out of a guilty multitude whom he pleaseth, to make previous instances of approaching judgements.

3) *Those who first fall under judgements are not always the worst that judgements shall befall; nor are the first judgements usually the most severe.*
So it is plain in these instances. And because we have instances of this nature amongst us, we should consider how to make a right judgement concerning them. And these three things we may safely determine:
1. That those who suffered were sinners also, though – they were not so only, or in an especial manner. [*These things were spoken on the burning of several persons to death in one of the late fires in London.*] This is necessary unto the vindication of the justice of God.
2. That he who hath made them warnings unto us, might have made us warnings unto them. Herein his sovereignty and mercy towards us who escape is manifest.
3. That we also have a hand in that guilt, forerunning such providences so far as there is any thing penal in them. For such private previous judgements are the effect of public provocations. ■

WHAT IS FAITH?

C.H. SPURGEON

(Taken from Spurgeon's book 'All of Grace' and lightly edited.)

What is faith? It is made up of three things – knowledge, belief, and trust.

Knowledge

Knowledge comes first. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14) I want to be informed of a fact before I can possibly believe it. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17); we must first hear, in order that we may know what is to be believed. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Ps. 9:10). A measure of knowledge is essential to faith; hence the importance of getting knowledge. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. 55:3). Such was the word of the ancient prophet, and it is the word of the gospel still

Search the Scriptures and learn what the Holy Spirit teaches concerning Christ and His salvation. Seek to know God: "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6) May the Holy Spirit give you the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord! Know the gospel: know what the good news is, how it talks of free forgiveness, and of change of heart, of adoption into the family of God, and of countless other blessings. Know especially Christ Jesus the Son of God, the Saviour of men, united to us by His human nature, and yet one with God; and thus able to act as Mediator between God and man, able to lay His hand upon both, and to be the connecting link between the sinner and the Judge of all the earth.

Endeavour to know more and more of Christ Jesus. Endeavour especially to know the doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ; for the point upon which saving faith mainly fixes itself is this – "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Know that Jesus was "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Drink deep of the doctrine of the substitutionary work of Christ; for therein lies the sweetest possible comfort to the guilty sons of men, since the Lord "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5:21) Faith begins with knowledge.

Belief

The mind goes on to *believe* that these things are true. The soul believes that God is, and that He hears the cries of sincere hearts; that the gospel is from God; that justification by faith is the grand truth which God has revealed in these last days by His Spirit more clearly than before. The heart believes that Jesus is verily and in truth our God and Saviour, the Redeemer of men, the Prophet, Priest and King of His people. All this is accepted as sure truth, not to be called in question.

I pray that you may at once come to this. Get firmly to believe that "the blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7); that His sacrifice is complete and fully accepted of God on man's behalf, so that he that believeth on Jesus is not condemned. Believe these truths as you believe any other statements; for the difference between common faith and saving faith lies mainly in the subjects upon which it is exercised. Believe the witness of God just as you believe the testimony of your own father or friend. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." (1 John 5:9).

Trust

So far you have made an advance toward faith; only one more ingredient is needed to complete it, which is *trust*. Commit yourself to the merciful God; rest your hope on the gracious gospel; trust your soul on the dying and living Saviour; wash away your sins in the atoning blood; accept His perfect righteousness, and all is well. Trust is the lifeblood of faith; there is no saving faith without it.

Lean with all your weight upon Christ. It would be a better illustration still if I said, fall at full length, and lie on the Rock of Ages. Cast yourself upon Jesus; rest in Him; commit yourself to Him. That done, you have exercised saving faith. Faith is not a blind thing, for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing, for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing, for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation.

That is one way of describing what faith is. ■

RETIRING MODERATOR'S SERMON

REV. GREG MACDONALD

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."
(1 Corinthians 1:23,24)

Last year I attempted to consider the *manner* of preaching, with an emphasis on its pastoral nature. This year I would like us to consider more the *matter* of preaching. In question form, last year we pondered, *How* should we preach? This year we ask, *What* should we preach?

To guide us in this, I would ask you to turn to the chapter read, 1 Corinthians 1. We shall focus on the words of verse 23 in particular.

The apostle here addresses the contentions that have riven the congregation in Corinth. This is the first area of concern that he raises in a letter not short on areas of concern. But, despite all the other areas, this was the one that has Paul's priority. After appealing for harmony, and deploring the various spurious bases on which they have built up their divisions (such as who baptised you, or which preacher you prefer), Paul turns to offer the positive basis of Christian harmony: *the preaching of Christ crucified*.

The preaching of the Cross causes division – without question. It divides the church from the world. But it *unites* believers. It is the rallying standard of the soldiers of Christ, it is the banner of her armies, and the motto of her battalions.

And so this evening I would like to consider with you the matter of preaching, in six brief points.

> *"The Gospel is not a performance. It is not art. It is not theatre or opera. It is simply to be preached."*

1. What is the form of our preaching?
In many ways, friends, I wish that we could afford to simply accept this point without comment. It ought to be so obvious. How do we preach? By preaching!

Preaching is the apostolic method for carrying the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ forward in this world. It is the heralding, with the full authority of heaven, this message. We are not asked to mime it, or act it, or draw it, or film it, or infantilise it, or change it. We are not to hide it, nor be ashamed of it. It is not to be made into a Lego stop motion animation as we have seen recently.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16) We are to preach this gospel with full confidence in the form that we use. That it is the form authorised by Scripture, mandated by God, exemplified by Christ and endorsed by all his apostles.

The Gospel is not a performance. It is not art. It is not theatre or opera. It is simply to be preached. That is, it is a message to be delivered by speaking the truth. The word used here for preaching means to be a herald. It is a formal word, used of heralds who

brought the messages of their superiors. It implies gravity and authority, the message itself is delivered in such a way as expects to be listened to, accepted, and acted upon.

This is the commission of the Saviour for all those who are ordained to carry this word: "For Christ sent me...to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17)

So at the risk of stating what ought to be obvious – the form of our preaching is to preach!

2. Who is the subject of our preaching?

We preach *Christ*. There is a 'what' in our preaching which we will come to next, but notice now that there is a 'who' in our preaching. Who is it that we declare, who is it that we reveal? It is Christ Jesus.

This is not to deny or demote the Trinity in any sense. But the focus of the Gospel message is upon the Son. We are not to be wiser than God. The Father proposed redemption. The Spirit applies it. But it was the Son who achieved or accomplished it.

And indeed the title here is selected with all the wisdom and care of the Spirit. He chooses a title that reminds us of the Trinity: the Christ; the Anointed One. The subject of our preaching is the One anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16). We know that the Christ is the Son of God. But again the focus of our message is on him in his office as Mediator, commissioned and anointed by God, equipped for the work of salvation.

Christ is the glorious subject of our message, and if he is not, then we are outwith this definition of preaching. Put Christ at the heart of your message, and it will greatly heal the contentions of believers, it will have Jews and Gentiles alike heartily offering their amens to the message, and finding commonality in their like precious faith that lays hold upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are focused away from the Saviour, divisions will surely come into the body. But keep him at the very centre of our preaching, where every eye may see him, and he will draw all men to himself.

Christ is the subject of our preaching.

> ***"This is our message. This is our focus and our subject. The same subject should prevail in all of our preaching. It must ever relate to the Cross."***

3. What is the message of our preaching?

But we preach *Christ crucified*. Or as it is put in verse 18: "the preaching of the cross...".

Notice the trio of synonyms employed by the apostle in this section: "preach the gospel" (v.17); "the preaching of the cross" (v.18); "we preach Christ crucified" (v.23). These three terms are clearly equivalent to one another. The Gospel is the Cross, the Cross on which Christ was crucified.

This is our message. This is our focus and our subject. The same subject should prevail in all of our preaching. It must ever relate to the Cross. And we know this. We were taught this in seminary and college. But the practice of it is at times sporadic, the reality of doing it more challenging.

What does this tell us, when the apostle here espouses us operating with one, single, constant theme? It tells us of the *majesty* of that theme. Christ crucified must therefore be a subject of infinite merit and depth and worth, if it is to sustain being drawn upon time after time, not only for your ministry but for all ministries, in all ages, until the end of the world!

> *"We have been given a message suited for all people in all ages. They may not want it, but they need it."*

Move away from this theme and you relegate the centrality of the Cross, but also you lower the value you place upon this subject. You judge that it cannot bear constant reference, that it cannot supply sufficient material for your ministry. That you need at times to deviate from it, to supplement it, to allow some relief from a relentless focus upon Christ crucified.

But no! The apostle here claims that all preaching must articulate the accomplishment of Calvary, and all preaching must expound what Christ achieved on Golgotha. Preaching that does not do this is not worthy of the name of preaching, for it is not worthy of the name of Christ. His Cross is the full expression of the will and character of God on earth. Every single portion of Scripture, that reveals God to man, is either the promise or the exposition of the Cross.

And so every single sermon preached should be a demonstration of that connection, or else we have failed to carry to our hearers the perfect integration of the Word, the harmony of the whole of Scripture, and the centrality of the Cross. It is the person and work of Christ. The substitutionary atonement of Golgotha, the just dying for the unjust, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.

The message of our preaching is Christ crucified.

4. Who is the target of our preaching?

This is an important question. We should know who our message is for. It is not irrelevant. When we preach Christ crucified, who is that for? Who do we wish to hear about it?

Paul gives us a plain guide to follow. He says the message is for Jews and Greeks. "Greeks" here is not intended to be limited to actual Greeks, but rather the Greek-speaking world of the Gentiles. Now notice that "the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom" (v.22), implying that both of them seem at first to be open to the Gospel and willing to hear the message. However, verse 23 tells us that the Gospel message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the one and foolishness to the other.

The seeming negative responses still tell us what we need to know as far as to whom the Gospel is targeted. The only way the Greeks can count the Gospel foolishness and the only way the Jews can stumble at it, is if the apostles are preaching it to them, and pressing its claims upon them, and urging them to accept the crucified Christ as their Saviour.

Yes, this message offended the Jews and seemed irrational to the Greeks, but that did not stop Paul or the other apostles from reaching out with the message at every opportunity to all ethnic groups in the world. So the message is for all peoples. No one is to be excluded. Nor is their reluctance or resistance to the message any ground for withholding it from them.

But the Gospel is not just for all peoples. It is also for all *kinds* of people. Following the same logic, Paul reels off the different sorts of people, the different characters of person, to whom he has heralded the Gospel. The message about Christ crucified is for the wise. It is for the mighty. It is for the noble, even though not many of them will respond. It is for the foolish and the weak, the base and the despised.

There is then no ethnicity to whom the Gospel is not given, nor is there any class or character of person within any nation to whom the Gospel is not directed. We can and indeed we must, biblically, see the message of Christ crucified as to every sinner on earth. What their reaction might be ought not to deter us. How likely they are to believe is not to impact us. How worthy they seem in our eyes is not to restrict us.

We are to go out into all the world. We are to sail the seven seas, traverse the globe and explore the furthest parts of the earth. We are to go to the king and to the pauper, to the weak and to the wise, to the rich and to the destitute. We have been given a message suited for all people in all ages. They may not want it, but they need it. They may not like it, but it is for their eternal good. They may resent it and persecute us, but nothing is to curtail us in fulfilling our mandate and being obedient to our commission.

One area perhaps for pondering. If there is any steer given here, any category or group of people on whom biblically we may focus more sharply, it is the poor and needy. It is those who are not wise after the flesh, those who are not counted in the ranks of nobility, the weak, despised and base souls in this world.

We are given encouragement for this greater focus, or at least we are given a greater hope of success amongst these very people. There is a solemn challenge for us. Think of those who are in the lower tiers of our own society. Think of those with addictions and mental health issues, families broken beyond belief and living with the effects of trauma and abuse. Think of those on the streets, and themselves caked in the mud of a filthy lifestyle. And yet God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, the weak things, the base things and the things that are despised. Even this is no excuse to ignore the wealthy and the powerful. We are not told that *none* of them are called, but that not many of them are.

> *"There is the offence of the Cross to this day, and we largely labour amongst Gentiles."*

We are not given any more constriction than that. No further limiting of who the Gospel is for is anywhere suggested in the Bible. It is then our holy task to reach to all people, and all kinds of people. To be as broad as east to west, and as deep as north to south.

The target of our preaching is to be all men without exception.

5. What is the effect of our preaching?

I have deliberately sought to make this a distinct point. Sometimes we are tempted to argue from the effect of our preaching backwards, trying to deduce who then should be the targets of our preaching. That is a dangerous mistake.

Paul makes it clear that he preaches Christ crucified to both Jews and Greeks. And yet what is the general response that he records under inspiration? To the Jews a stumbling block. To the Greeks foolishness. If then we were to argue back from the general effect of our preaching, we would eventually so narrow down our target audience as to leave us with virtually no one left apart from those who are already faithful believers!

I would also suggest that the categories here are not a hard and fast distinction. It is not that only Greeks felt the Gospel foolish, and only Jews found it offensive. We know that is not the case. There is the offence of the Cross to this day, and we largely labour amongst Gentiles. And the apostle himself has already characterised the preaching of the Cross as foolishness to them that perish (v.18), without imputing that reaction to any specific ethnic group. But it is helpful to us in giving us the two main broad reactions to the Gospel, so that we can better prepare for these responses.

The first effect of heralding the crucified Christ is to be offended. This is here attributed especially to the Jews. The reason that the Jews were offended was precisely because they had a background. They had the law and the oracles. They had the privileges. And yet the Gospel shows them that they have achieved nothing, and that they are just as guilty as those who know nothing. The Gospel treated them, not as worthy but as unworthy, not as advanced and special but as poor and needy.

In other words their offence is evidence of their spiritual pride. And that remains a common response to the Gospel when we approach those who already have some religion in their lives, some expectation that they are better than others. The text tells us that this is like a stumbling block. By knowing and even anticipating this response, we are better placed to help them overcome it. We are to trace the root of their offence, and seek to remove it out of the way – not the

offence of the Cross, of course, but the reasons why they are offended at it.

On the other hand, the Greeks had next to no background. There was almost no point of commonality between the clarity of a monotheistic message, and the need for atonement, and the confused babble of religious pick and mix, and atheistic philosophy. And so they react with disdain. What nonsense! What a silly message the Christian message is! It is foolish because it is so different from their upbringing, and from their starting points. This shows us that we have to go to the root of their confusion, and attack the foundations of their whole view of life. That is exactly what Paul did of course in addressing the Athenians in Acts 17. He targeted their whole understanding of creation and the purpose of life.

But then we have the second effect. "*But* unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (v.24) We are given here the effect of grace, the effect on the sinner of being himself effectually called by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word. To such a soul, the message of Christ crucified is not offensive, but powerful. Not foolish, but the very pinnacle of divine wisdom.

These twin marks of grace are beautiful things to observe in the sinner who embraces the Gospel. They see the Cross, not as weakness to be despised but as the incredible power of God, his awesome might in putting away all the sins of all his people. That is hardly weak! It is fabulous power! Nor is it foolishness. The wisdom of God to devise this plan, and to carry it out to such a peak of perfection, makes us to be in awe of God's mind and adore God's purposes.

Aim then in preaching the Gospel at these twin effects. That sinners might see in Christ crucified both the power and the wisdom of God! And finally:

6. What is the power of our preaching?

Those who believe will see the power of God in the Cross of Christ. But what power is there in us to preach? What power is it that causes sinners to submit to the Cross, and see there the power and wisdom of God? What is the assurance of the success of preaching? It is given a double support here.

First of all Paul talks about calling: "But unto them which are called..." (v.24). This is not the general call of the Gospel to all, but when that Gospel call is made effectual to the sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what is promised to us. This is is what we depend on. That the foolishness of preaching will be made effective to the sinner by the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit.

> ***"Those who believe will see the power of God in the Cross of Christ. But what power is there in us to preach?"***

This to the relief, assurance and duty of the preacher. It relieves us from the burden of feeling it is our responsibility to convert a sinner. It assures us that God will bless the preaching of his Word. And it gives to us the duty of pleading for the work of the Spirit to call sinners under our ministry, and wherever the Gospel goes forth.

But this is not all the power of our preaching. We are also assured that not only can the Spirit do this, but that he certainly *will* do this. He will certainly call all those who have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (vv.27,28).

We preach to all men everywhere. We seek to work through their defensive responses, their derision and their offendedness. And we trust that God will send his Spirit, and will bring to himself every single one whom he has chosen. None will be left. None will be lost. None will be forgotten.

What encouragement we have here, friends! What pillars of power for the preaching of Christ crucified! Paul can plant and Apollos can water, because God *will* give the increase. We have the twin supports of the effectual calling of the Spirit, and the Father's election, as we proclaim the redemption of the Son!

This message will not fail. It cannot fail. It will cover the earth. It will vanquish all other religions, and all other philosophies. It is fit for Jew and Gentile, for old and young, for rich and poor.

Let us not then lose confidence in our message, nor in our Saviour's work, nor in the power of our God to call sinners to himself. Amen. ■

MODERATOR'S ADDRESS

REV. GAVIN BEERS

GLORIOUS THINGS ARE SPOKEN OF THEE

"Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." (Psalm 87:3)

As we meet in General Assembly, we gather from various parts of the country and the world. We come with different experiences in our personal and church life, some of which are positive and others that are negative. As servants of the Lord in the twenty-first century we face perennial challenges that have been common to the Church in all ages as well as others that are unique to our own day.

If I have my finger on the pulse, though I presently live at a distance from most of you, many it seems are struggling with a prevailing sense of discouragement. Times are hard for the Church in Scotland and the moral demise of the nation has its own oppressive effects on the hearts of God's people. I would like to speak to that today and encourage you to set your eyes on the bigger picture in the hope that it will feed your faith and excite you to ongoing and increasing prayer and labour in the Lord's vineyard.

We turn to Psalm 87 which bears the title "*A Psalm for the sons of Korah.*" The notation tells us that it was explicitly written for public worship in the Temple. We are not told when it was written. Some scholars have attributed it to David, others locate it in the days of Hezekiah, and others argue it was written after the return from captivity. So the date is uncertain, but what is clear is that it speaks to all these historical eras as well as to the Church today. Indeed, it takes us beyond all these to our eternal hope. The theme of Psalm 87 and our address is *Zion*, the city of God, and specifically the *glorious things* God has said of her.

1. A Glorious City

The Psalm begins quite abruptly, almost with an outburst: "*His foundation is in the holy mountains.*" (v.1) Then *Zion* and her *gates* are introduced (v.2), after which she is given the title "*city of God*" (v.3). The verses refer to the city of Jerusalem and in particular the Palace and Temple complex at its heart. This was glorious, and there are a number of aspects of this glory that can be considered of the city historically.

First, her foundation was glorious. "*His foundation is in the holy mountains.*" It was God who founded His city in the mountains of Zion. They were not the highest hills in the region but they were *holy*, because God had set them apart for a purpose and according to His promise. In Deuteronomy 12:5,6&11, the Lord said He would establish a central place to which the tribes of Israel would gather at His sanctuary. In the days of David, when he had conquered the last stronghold of the Jebusites, Zion was established as the Royal and Priestly city, to be the centre of Israel's civil and religious life. It was from Mount Zion that Israel's Covenant kings would reign and the Temple would be built upon its neighbouring Mount Moriah. God set it apart and sanctified the sanctuary with His presence, as the place where He would dwell with His people. "T*he hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever.*" (Ps. 68:15,16) The city was "*Jehovah Shammah*", because the Lord was there (Ezek. 48:35).

The city's foundation was glorious because it was founded pre-eminently as a Gospel place. God would meet with sinful men in its Temple by sacrifice. In addition to His earlier promise, He had given two significant Gospel pictures at Mount Moriah. It was on this mountain that God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in the place of Isaac (Gen. 22). Later David

stayed the judgement of God upon Israel by purchasing the threshing floor of Araunah, and building an altar there to sacrifice to God so that His plague of judgement would be turned from Israel (2 Kings 24:18-25). So it was in this place and upon Gospel ground that God laid the foundation of His holy city.

> *"They left their tribal regions for the holy city where God was glorified most in the public gathering of His people."*

Second, her worship was glorious. In verse 2 we read, "*The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.*" The whole land was the land of promise and all the dwellings of Jacob were a delight to Him as His people worshipped in their families. However, this was the place appointed for the congregation of Israel to gather publicly. "*Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.*" (Ps. 122:3,4) Some people assembled there weekly, sometimes daily, but the tribes of Israel went up to Jerusalem to observe their three annual pilgrim feasts. They left their tribal regions for the holy city where God was glorified most in the public gathering of His people. Sacrifices were offered. Her singers and players on instruments were there and in her precincts the voice of God's praise was made glorious.

Third, her promises were glorious. God had promised to set the place apart for His dwelling, and so having founded Zion He would preserve and advance it in the presence of, and in spite of the hostility of, surrounding enemies. Israel's enemies would seek the city's destruction because they hated Israel's God, but because the Most High "*shall establish her*" (v.5), they would only be able to do what the God of Israel allowed. God's preservation of the city would even lead His enemies to wonder and fear: "*God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail.*" (Ps. 48:3-6)

When Israel's enemies attacked, they realised to their peril that the God of the city would stand for her defence. Go and inquire of the Assyrians, who learned that God was her refuge and strength. Ask them of the God who in one night slew one hundred and eighty five thousand of Sennacherib's host! But our Psalm also shows us that not only would Zion's enemies be destroyed: some of them would be converted. People from Rahab, which refers to Egypt, together with Babylon and Philistia would become as native-born inhabitants of the city of God (vv.4,5). We get to see this in part in the Old Testament as a stream of proselytes come to trust in the God of Israel – for instance, Uriah the Hittite and Ittai the Gittite.

Fourth, her springs were glorious. The Psalmist declares, "*all my springs are in thee.*" (v.7) The springs he speaks of refer to sources of satisfaction. The true Israelite realised the preciousness of what God had provided for him in Zion. The ministration God established there, though not as glorious as that which was to come, was still glorious. God fed His people on Christ through the ceremonial worship He had appointed. "*For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.*" (Ps. 132:13-15)

When the godly were cut off from the city, they longed for Zion, envying even the sparrows nesting in her altars (Ps. 84:1-4). In captivity they refused to forget her. "*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*" (Ps. 137:5,6)

These glorious things were all spoken of and experienced in the historical Zion, the city of God. But Psalm 87 of course takes us far beyond these historical blessings in Jerusalem. So we need to consider in the second place:

2. The Glorious Church

The Puritan Stephen Charnock notes that this Psalm speaks of a greater city, because the earthly city of God was ruined by Babylon. The city was rebuilt, but it was later destroyed by the Romans and remained under the hoof of the Mohammedans in his day. It is clear that the most glorious things spoken of Zion are fulfilled in the New Testament Church. The New Covenant believer is said to have come "*unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.*" (Heb. 12:22,23)

Israel's Redeemer, Jesus Christ, came to Zion and was rejected and crucified there, but the Father raised up His beloved Son and set His king on His holy hill in the spiritual Zion (Ps. 2:6). The earthly city was a type and shadow of this. God's spiritual Zion is a city with a better foundation, better promises, larger increase, perfect stability and greater joy. We will now consider some of the glorious things that God has spoken of her.

> *"God willed the Church to be, together with all things needed for her salvation and preservation to eternal glory."*

First, the Church's foundation is glorious. Jerusalem was founded on the hills of Zion according to the plan of God who desired to dwell there for a time. The foundation of the Church far exceeds this, as the Divine architect knew the strong foundation required for her to stand. He builds her on the holy mountain of His eternal covenant with His Son.

The Church therefore stands on the sure and immutable oath and promise of the God who cannot lie, so that what is said of the earth for a time is true of the Church forever: "*For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.*" (Isa. 54:10) God willed the Church to be, together with all things needed for her salvation and preservation to eternal glory. Nothing can change the word that He has spoken, nor will He ever break His Covenant.

The Church is built on the immovable rock of the incarnate Son Himself. God has laid in His Zion a tried, precious and sure cornerstone (Isa. 28:16). That stone is Christ, and "*other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (1 Cor. 3:11) The Saviour said of Himself, "*upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Matt. 16:18) So the whole integrity and security of the holy city rests here, and because of this she shall never be moved or destroyed.

Second, the Church's worship is glorious. God erected His Temple in Jerusalem and to that place the tribes went up. God loved all the worship offered to Him in the private dwellings of Jacob, but He loved this more. Whereas Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 12 foretold that one place would be established for Israel's worship, the prophets predicted a day when worship would be offered to God "*in every place*" (Mal. 1:11). Jerusalem and Gerizim do not matter anymore (John 4:21-24), but rather the Church of Christ in all the earth, gathering together publicly in the name of Christ.

It is there that the saints of God assemble. Our worship in private and family is glorifying to God, but He receives more glory when His church gathers together to praise and confess His name and worship Him according to the appointed pattern. This is the most glorious thing we do on earth and what brings Him most glory. When we gather, the God of the Church is present. As the Shekinah glory filled the Old Testament sanctuary, it was but a shadow of this greater glory. Jesus says, "*where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Matt. 18:20) The Father, Son and Spirit founded the Church to inhabit her praises, and so we are "*an habitation of God through the Spirit.*" (Eph. 2:22) The angels of God are present too, desiring to look into the things of our salvation. God glorified Himself, and they sang His praise, when He created the universe, but that creation was dumb and glorifies Him only passively. It is the Church that He has formed in the earth that alone glorifies Him actively and consciously and voluntarily. As sinners from among all nations are converted to worship God, the mystery that was hidden is revealed even to the angels who delight in it (Eph. 3:9,10).

Third, the Church's promises are glorious. Psalm 87:4-6 speaks of Zion and her children. Sinners from all nations will be born from her womb and nourished up within her gates. Each one of them who is born of the Spirit of God shall be counted in the Divine census: "*The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.*" (v.6) Gentiles will become Zion's native sons. There is Rahab, a reference to Egypt in a word that means fierceness and pride, together with Babylon and Philistia, who were violent and inveterate enemies of God's people and who waged war against them and led them into captivity. Now this and that former enemy would be found a child of Zion. But the promises introduced here are far more expansive than this.

A fulness of the Gentiles will come in. God says of her, "*the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*" (Isa. 60:3) Zion's gates will not be shut day or night, but strangers will flood through and use their wealth and labour to build her walls. In New Testament times, "*the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,*

and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isa. 2:2) Many glorious promises are made of this, too many to mention here. But consider the following:

"For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." (Isa. 49:19-23)

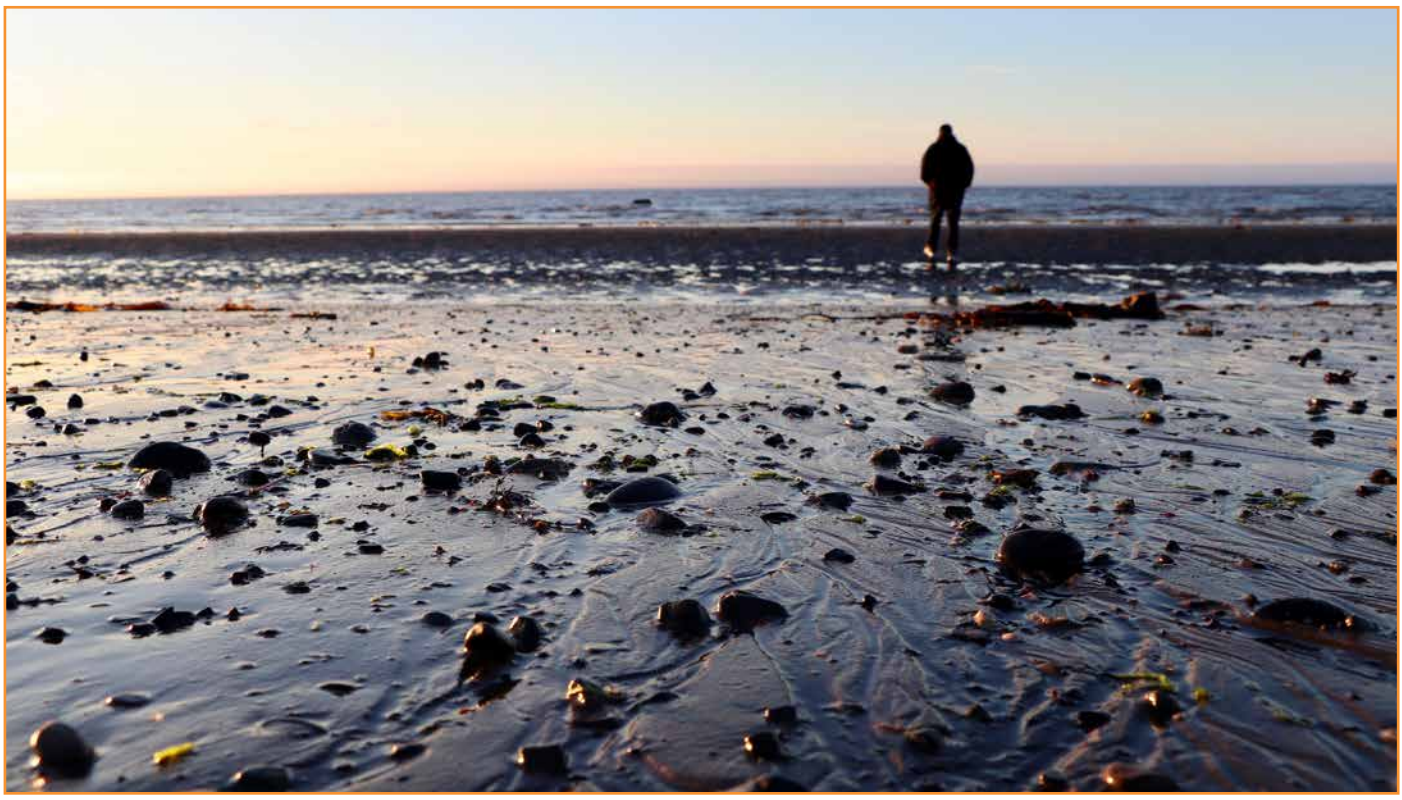
"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." (Ps. 22:27)

"His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." (Ps. 72:17)

"All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name." (Ps. 86:9)

> **"Do you see Zion's glory? People from all nations flooding through her spiritual gates..."**

Not only will a fulness of the Gentiles come in, but the Jews will turn to their Messiah. He came to their Zion and they crucified Him there. For this sinful rejection, their earthly city and temple were destroyed and Israel after the flesh was cut off. Yet their casting off was not total, nor was it final. We learn in Romans chapter 11 that Christ will graft them in again to their own olive tree, and that "*if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?*" (Rom. 11:12). Do you see Zion's glory? People from all nations flooding through her spiritual gates, the Jews called back into the Church, and upon this even more glorious gospel advance so that "*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*" (Hab. 2:14) Not as rivers are found in places



here and there upon the land. Go and stand upon the ocean shore and see how the waters cover the sea, and you will get the right perspective!

But the promises to Zion take us beyond this to the final and eternal glory of the Church. In the day of the Great Census, when God counts Zion's Sons, every one of them born in her in time will be brought through her gates into the heavenly city at last. Not one of them shall be missing. Whatever the glory is that is presented to us in the thousand years of Revelation chapter 20, it pales in comparison to the glory of the first verses of the next chapter. "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*" (Rev. 21:1-3)

What glory is this! The fame of Egypt, the strength of Babylon, the grandeur of the Roman Empire and all kingdoms and nations after it, are nothing in comparison to this holy city, the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the Church's stability is glorious. We do well to remember this, because to the natural eye the Church does not always seem to be stable in the world. Sometimes it looks like Zion is floating on a turbulent sea rather than established on the rock. But look at what God says in verse 5: "*and the highest himself shall establish her.*" No other institution in the history of the world has this promise written into its constitution. No particular church or denomination can claim it absolutely, but our hearts as God's servants go way beyond our own denomination and name. It is Christ's Church, of which we are a branch and are all members, that will endure forever.

Thank God that her stability and defence does not depend on the strength and wisdom of men or angels, but on the incontestable power of the Most High! For this reason, no weapon that is formed against her shall prosper (Isa. 54:17), and history has proven this to be true. The Church is still here! Egypt could not destroy her, Babylon failed, the Roman Empire tried to crush her and Islam took its sword to spill her blood. All the malice of the Roman harlot Church could not destroy her and all the atheist and secular isms of our day have conspired to silence and vanquish her – yet still she stands!

She will always have a place in the wilderness prepared for her by God, and the Dragon will never prevail against her (Rev. 12). Every persecution unleashed upon her will only aid her preservation and purification. A man might as well go and punch granite with his bare fist than set himself against the Church of Christ. There would be more chance of a leaf holding back the wind than the world prevailing against the Church. As Charnock explains, God will preserve her forever because His glory is bound up with her. Christ will not cease to be her Prophet to teach her; her Priest to intercede for her; her King to rule and defend her from all His and our enemies. Our King will always have His kingdom! When His cause is low, He has promised her glorious revivings. Though she may, for a time, like God's two witnesses lie in the street, He will bring life to her again (Rev. 11) and the kingdoms of this world will yet become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. Civil powers, false religions, wicked men, Satan, his beast and the Antichrist will try to kill her, but she will survive alone to attend all their funerals.

"The Church is still here! Egypt could not destroy her, Babylon failed, the Roman Empire tried to crush her and Islam took its sword to spill her blood."

Fifth, the Church's springs are glorious. We can say of the Church what Israel said of Zion, "*all my springs are in thee.*" (v.7) All my affections are bound up in the Church of Christ, so that I love her above my chief joy in this world. I love her springs because they are the means by which Christ brings this joy and satisfaction to me.

Our King has deposited rich supplies for the inhabitants of His Zion in the means of grace. Through the ministry of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments and prayer, He gives us Himself and all the benefits of His Covenant. As all fulness dwells in our Head, so the Church will always have food and water enough in the wilderness. Our Shepherd King prepares the table for us there, even in the presence of our enemies, and we eat the feast of fat things in His holy mountain (Isa. 25:6). His city can last out any siege, because she does not depend on the world but upon Him for her supplies. There is an abundance in Christ for all who shelter behind her walls. Springs of water, the finest of the wheat, wine well-refined on the

lees, honey and milk. all without money and without price. And it can never run out.

We give the last word at this point to Charles Spurgeon. "*Never let thy praises cease, O thou bride of Christ, thou fairest among women, thou in whom the Lord himself hath placed his delight, calling thee by that pearl of names, Hephzibah, 'for my delight is in her.' Since the Lord has chosen thee, and deigns to dwell in thee, O thou city of beauty, none can rival thee, thou art the eye of the world, the pearl, the queen of all the cities of the universe; the true 'eternal city,' the metropolitan, the mother of us all. The years to come shall unveil thy beauties to the astonished eyes of all peoples, and the day of thy splendour shall come to its sevenfold noon.*"

> **"The Church of Christ will never be defeated, so we must resist the temptation of acting as though she has been."**

3. Believing Glorious Things

I want to take you back now to the beginning. We said that the Church faces its own peculiar discouragements in our age. Listening to the conversation of Christians and seeing downcast ministers, we need to apply these truths believingly to our hearts that in turn we may direct our labour. So, consider in closing these four points of application.

First, you must lay hold of these glorious promises. Whatever you think of the present, the Church's future is glorious. This fact has motivated Christians in the past who laboured in dark days, and it is a hope that remains for us.

The Church of Christ will never be defeated, so we must resist the temptation of acting as though she has been. It is true that the security of the Church is not given absolutely to any given branch of her, but it is equally true that the promised triumph of the Gospel is to fuel your labour in the present. There is too much negativity in our ranks, brethren. Too much lamenting that it is not with us now as it was with our fathers, and while we might be justifiably and righteously sad for the state of things, we ought not to be paralysed by them.

There are few things in the history of the Church that have stirred Christians to work more than the "*glorious things*" that are spoken here. I remind you that the mouth of the Lord has spoken it, and therefore it is done. Those promised days exist as if they were already here, and a jealousy for God's glory should motivate you to pray and labour for their coming. We need to stop walking, praying and labouring by sight, and instead lay hold of these truths by faith. Can the witnesses rise again? Yes. Son of man, can these bones live? Yes. Will the Lord build up Zion and appear in His glory? Yes. Will the nations yet flock to Jerusalem and will God not restore the desolate places and make His Jerusalem a praise in the earth and make kings her nursing fathers? Yes, He will, and this has to be more than a promise or an eschatological theory, but rather a living and animating hope.

Second, get the right estimate of things in the present. The Church is at a low ebb in Scotland and counted as nothing in the eyes of the world. Indeed, they would mock and ridicule us as an irrelevance. But brothers, stop living and thinking of the Church today as if the estimate of the world is correct. We are to judge the Church by what God says of her, not what the world thinks. Zion was surrounded by her enemies and miniscule among the nations when the Church sang, "*Why leap ye, ye high hills, this is the Hill where God desires to dwell!' Glorious for situation the joy of the whole land!* The Church in Scotland that you lament as being so small is the most glorious thing about the nation. When we as the saints of God gather, though we may be few, God's eye is upon us. When you judge with the judgement of the world and evaluate glory by a head count, do you not forget that the king's daughter has an internal beauty – she is *"all glorious within*" (Ps. 45:13) – not seen by the natural eye?

Of course we long for better days, but let us not add to our sins by provoking the Lord in despising the day of small things in which we live. "Oh", we say, "our churches are small. Our congregations are old. We are getting smaller" – as if any churches in Britain are evidencing radical growth! With our eyes fixed firmly on our feet, we plod to the house of God with heavy hearts, all the while telling God that we do not understand what glorious things He has said of us. Does God not still love the gates of Zion? Then you should not approach them in the way you do. Are not all our springs to be found in her? Then come to God's house like David. "*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.*" (Ps. 63:1-3)

If in the days of Hezekiah they were singing Psalm 87 with the Assyrians at the gates, can you imagine the defiance of the congregation? Imagine them singing it. And listen to them singing Psalm 137, confessing their love for Zion in their synagogues in Babylon. The truth is that these Psalms have fuelled the hope of the Church of God for thousands of years, and as the saints sang and prayed them, God Himself heard and answered to bring us to the point of Gospel expansion that we have seen to the present day. But there is more, and so we continue to sing and pray these Psalms with the hope for their ever-increasing fulfilment.

Third, keep preaching the glorious Gospel. This is how God is most glorified in the world. One of the sad features of dark days is that the Church turns inward and stops preaching this message with passion, with the result that we see no conversions. To state the obvious, there can and will be no conversions if we will not go out boldly and declare this message. Whether men hear and believe or whether they do not, we desire to bring glory to our King and He is most glorified when the message of a crucified Christ is publicly declared and freely offered to sinners in the Church and the world.

Part of our complaint and discouragement is that we are surrounded by enemies and oppressors, but brothers, look at the Psalm! Who is born in Zion? Egyptians who enslaved the Church. Babylonians who destroyed the city. Philistines who were set for war. So get out among their spiritual heirs in the world today and start preaching the Gospel and pray that that "*this man and that man*" might be born of God in Zion.

Finally, keep living to the glory of Christ. The Church's foundations are in the holy mountains, and that is fitting because in another place it is said of God's house that holiness becomes it forever (Ps. 93:5). It is part of the glory of the Church that we reflect the glory of God in being clothed in holiness of life. A day like ours brings the real temptation to lower the standard, when our glory is to hold it fast. Our day is not a day for less holiness, but more. Glorious things will be said of us by the world, though they hate the very holiness we endeavour to walk in. And glorious things will be said of us by God, because He loves holiness.

In light of these glorious truths, it is time to unfurl the banner and to so live, worship and witness that it might be asked concerning us, "*Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*" (Song of Sol. 6:10) And the answer will be returned, it is Zion, the Church of the living God and the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom glorious things are spoken. ■

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023

LOYAL & DUTIFUL ADDRESS

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

The Loyal & Dutiful Address of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

May it please Your Majesty.

We, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met in General Assembly this 23rd day of May 2023, humbly desire to express to Your Majesty our continuing loyalty to Your Majesty's person and throne.

We note, with sorrow, the death of our late Queen Elizabeth, Your Majesty's dearly beloved mother. We have prayed, and continue to pray, for Your Majesty's family in their grief. We acknowledge with thankfulness to God her long life of self-sacrificing service to our country. We were also gratified to see the dignified manner in which Your Majesty led the nation in mourning for their Queen, noting again with thanksgiving how central the Word of God was in the events of that time. We pray that this would lead our nation to consider that God, through His Son Jesus Christ, is our only hope of comfort in life and death.

As Your Majesty's loyal subjects we have offered prayers to Almighty God on behalf of Your Majesty since Your Majesty's accession to the throne, and we assure Your Majesty that we will continue to do so following Your Majesty's coronation. The Lord Jesus Christ commands His people to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2), because they are ministers of God who are called to rule in His fear. Kings are called to "kiss the Son" (Psalm 2:12), in submitting all their rule to the Sovereign authority of Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. In particular they are to see that the true religion and Church of God are promoted and upheld in their realms. "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers" (Isaiah 49:23).

We are thankful to God that these truths remain embedded in the Act for securing of the Protestant religion and presbyterian church government in Scotland, acknowledged by You at Your accession and in the coronation oaths, and are symbolised in the golden orb Your Majesty received, with the words "Receive this Orb, set under the Cross, and remember always the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." We pray for Your Majesty and Queen Camilla, and in particular that Your Majesty will be enabled to pay the vows that Your Majesty has made before Almighty God to maintain the Laws of God, the true profession of the Gospel and the Protestant Reformed religion established by law in Scotland. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

Throughout the last year we have witnessed the continuing moral and spiritual decline of our United Kingdom. The Laws of God seem to be increasingly cast behind our back; as a nation we call evil good and good evil, and it is a time for godly leadership in Church and State. The Almighty spoke in His Providence through a pandemic that struck the nation with fear, but that fear has not proven to be the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. We cannot as a nation continue to live in flagrant disregard of the Law and Gospel of God and imagine that God does not see or know. Our greatest national need does not have to do with the economy or social justice, but repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, that God might return to us and favour us once again.

It is our conviction, according to God's Word, that so much of the restlessness and dissatisfaction of people in society is the result of our departure from God. In this sense, we are like the people of Judah whom God confronted through the prophet Jeremiah: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). A return to God and the authority and centrality of His Word in our personal, family and national life is desperately needed. We pray for Your Majesty's Government at Westminster, and devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, that the legislation they enact will be consistent with the moral norms of Scripture and not infringe our historic religious and civil liberties.

We recognise with sadness and prayerful concern the tragic situation in a number of countries that are experiencing ongoing wars and loss of life. The wages of sin is death, and war has been the fruit of it since Cain lifted up his hand against his brother Abel. We pray for Your Majesty's Government, that they may be able to exert political influence in a righteous way to encourage peace among the nations of the world. In all these upheavals may Your Majesty and our British nation have our eyes increasingly set upon the government of God, who has His work in shaking the nations of the earth, to the end that His kingdom, which can never be shaken, will arise and remain (Hebrews 12:26-29).

We consider it our great honour thus to communicate with Your Majesty each year at our General Assembly. We value the independent government of Church and State, while recognising their God-given duties and responsibilities to each other. We offer this Loyal and Dutiful Address as a ministration of the Word and a counsel of true comfort from Christ, the only King and Head of the Church. May the blessing of God rest upon Your Majesties, the Duke of Rothesay, and all members of the Royal Family.

So pray Your Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in General Assembly convened. ■

GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

The 2023 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) took place in a new location and venue – Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow, which was filled to capacity for the opening of the Assembly. God's kindness was seen in many ways, not least the favourable weather and travelling mercies granted to Commissioners, Delegates and members of the public. The Lord's help was apparent in the various matters that were taken up and a good spirit was evident throughout.

This report covers the main items of business conducted at the General Assembly. Generally the business stems from the reports of various Standing and Special Committees of Assembly. To give a flavour of these reports, quotes are given from the introductory sections. (The full reports are found at the following link: https://www.freechurchcontinuing.org/reports-to-general-assembly)

Monday 22nd May – 1st Sederunt

The First Sederunt or sitting of the Assembly – generally the briefest – took place on the Monday evening.

Retiring Moderator's Sermon

Following the singing of Psalm 8, the retiring Moderator, Rev. Greg MacDonald (Cross), gave an exposition of 1 Corinthians 1:23. Six points were set out from the passage: *the form* – preaching; *the subject* – Christ; *the message* – Christ crucified; *the target* – them that perish; *the effect* – Jew and Greek respond negatively; *the power* – an effectual call. The sermon was followed by the singing of Psalm 65:1-5, after which the outgoing Moderator constituted the Assembly and the Commissioners were ready to begin business. (The sermon is included in this issue and an audio recording may be found on the denominational website.)

Election of Moderator

The Principal Clerk thanked the Moderator for his sermon and the new Moderator was then duly elected. The name of Rev. Gavin Beers (Mebane) was moved by Rev. Robert McCurley (Greenville), seconded by Mr James Wanliss (Elder, Greenville) and approved. The new Moderator thanked the outgoing Moderator for the duties he had performed in the role.

Following the adoption of the Standing Orders, the usual committees were appointed to facilitate the smooth running of the Assembly. In addition, Iain MacIver was named as Assembly Officer and Colin Crichton (Elder, Stornoway) as precentor. Thanks were given for the work of Mr Maurice Grant who was unable to attend the Assembly due to ill health.

The new Moderator and the retiring Moderator

Assembly Arrangements & Nominations

The Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee was presented by the Convener, Calum Macleod (Elder, Knock & Point). The Report begins:

"It is no wonder that the God who ordered all the planets in their perfect orbit should seek order in His Church (Gen. 1:14-19, 1 Cor. 14:33 and Heb. 8:5). We ought therefore to be thankful as a Church that the fathers who have gone before us, in following the Lord's principle, have set up the administrative structure that we enjoy today. Within that structure, the principal role of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee is to enable the efficient running of the General Assembly and its statutory Standing and Special Committees."

The Assembly agreed to consolidate the Inverness Presbytery and Northern Presbytery to form a reconstituted Northern Presbytery with its seat in Inverness, with the most senior minister, Rev. Harry Woods, as Moderator at the first meeting to be held on 13th June.

There was discussion about the most appropriate location for the Assembly. Some desired a return to Edinburgh as the capital city, and therefore the logical place for the principal court of a national Church to convene. Others were in favour of continuing to use the facilities of our own church building in Partick. The Assembly agreed that in 2024 the Assembly would

again meet in Glasgow, and then decide upon the future location. The Committee was instructed to investigate the practicality of the Assembly meeting in Edinburgh in 2025.

Moderator's Reception

The first Sederunt concluded and commissioners retired for the Moderator's reception. Tributes and anecdotes were shared regarding Rev. Beers and his time in the Isle of Skye and Ayr. Mr Beers was inducted to Mebane, in North Carolina, in 2018, the congregation being known locally as Cornerstone Presbyterian Church. A striking account was given concerning the ministry and life of the Cornerstone congregation: it is such personal notes that give insight and delight to God's people.

Tuesday 23rd May – 2nd Sederunt

Moderator's Address

The Second Sederunt on Tuesday began with worship and the new Moderator's sermon based upon Psalm 87. Rev. Beers spoke on A Glorious City and The Glorious Church, concluding with the appropriate application of Believing Glorious Things. Public words of appreciation were given for the exposition of the Psalm. The singings were from Psalm 2 and 132. (The address is included in this issue and an audio recording may be found on the denominational website.)

Loyal & Dutiful Address

An excellent Loyal & Dutiful Address to the King was read and approved. The Address is prepared in advance by the Moderator-Designate, with assistance from a committee appointed by the Assembly. The Address was more comprehensive than has been usual in recent years, in setting out expectations and Biblical requirements. (The address will be skilfully scripted by Miss Joan MacDonald (Inverness) before being sent to His Majesty.)

Ecumenical Relations

The Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee was presented by the Convener, Rev. Kenneth Macdonald (rtd). The Report says:

"The dilemma we face is, to what extent should we engage with other denominations which are different from ourselves in practice, if not in theology? It can be easy for us to be too dismissive of others who differ from ourselves in practice, and forget that the Church of Christ is, as the Westminster Confession states, 'invisible', but 'consists of the whole number of the elect...' The Confession goes on to remind us that the 'visible church' is also 'not confined to one nation' but 'consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children...' (25:1-2)."

Rev. Kenneth Macdonald

Mr Macdonald spoke to the main items in the Report. These include: the Affinity Theological Conference; the 2022 meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Windhoek, Namibia; the conference of the European Conference of Reformed Churches near Amersfoort, Netherlands, in June; the FC(C)'s relations and interactions with different denominations in Scotland, the Netherlands and the USA.

(Order of the Day)

Delegates from various denominations and organisations were then introduced to the Moderator and invited by him to address the Assembly. The first was Rev. Iain Wright of the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (located chiefly in the USA). Mr Wright spoke concerning Ukraine and the assistance his denomination has given to those in need in that country. A training programme for deacons had also been established. One particular need was for a medical doctor for Uganda. Given the expansive needs, the OPC was desirous of joint endeavours in order to assist with as many of them as possible.

Mr Jonathan Arnold

Jonathan Arnold, General Secretary of the *Trinitarian Bible Society*, reported on the ongoing work of the TBS, beginning with a public affirmation of its commitment to the teaching of Westminster Confession of Faith 1:8 on the inspiration and providential preservation of Scripture. Over one million Scripture items had been given away in the past year.

Rev. Kenneth Stewart from the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* was next. He referred to the Ecumenical Relations Report and the discussions that had been held between himself and those from the FC(C).

The *Heritage Reformed Churches* (USA & Canada) were represented by Rev. Ian Macleod, ironically a fellow Scot. He spoke of the ongoing discussions between the HRC and the *Free Reformed Churches of North America*, which are also located in the USA & Canada, with a view to a possible union.

Ecumenical Relations (continued)

The Ecumenical Relations Report was then taken up again, in relation to the informal talks between the FC(C) and the RPCoS. The following deliverance was accepted by the General Assembly:

"The General Assembly note with regret that despite the closeness of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland to the Church in doctrine, government and worship, there does not appear the likelihood of a closer relationship being established at present, and accept the Committee's recommendation that whilst the informal discussions between the representatives of the two Churches cease, informal contacts be maintained on a personal level as a means of fostering better understanding and mutual fellowship between the denominations."

Speakers to the Report included Rev. James MacInnes (Lochalsh & Strath), who drew attention to items in the denominational magazine, the *Free Church Witness*, regarding what was happening within and without the denomination. Rev. James Gracie (Edinburgh) drew attention to the Right of Continued Protest and questioned whether the RPCoS held to such a principle.

Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod

Finance & Sustentation

The Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee was presented by the Convener, Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod (Snizort). In their Report the Committee say:

"The maintenance of the ministry of the Word of God continues to be the main burden of the work of this Committee, for… *faith 'cometh' by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). As in the past, we have sought to remember the needs of both the smaller and larger Congregations of the Church, and this is reflected in the Report.

It behoves us once again to acknowledge the Lord's goodness towards us and the continuing liberality of our people. May the King and Head of the Church be pleased to use us and our resources for the glory of His name and the advance of His Kingdom."

Mr Macleod noted that there was cause for thankfulness in terms of finances and statistics. The projected deficit had become a surplus, though stipends remain at the same level. It was agreed to increase the fees for supply preaching.

General Trustees

The Report of the General Trustees was presented by the Chairman, Andrew Naylor (Elder, Harris). It reflected not only a quiet year but also one of progress, with the transfer of manse title deeds to local trustees either completed (Edinburgh) or advanced (Partick, Duthil-Dores, Bracadale & Duirinish). The most urgent matter for the General Trustees was the creation of a Risk Register.

Petitions

The Assembly accepted Petitions from the USA Presbytery to raise the Auburn-Opelika (Alabama) and Hunt County (Greenville, Texas) preaching stations to sanctioned charges, with the right to call a minister. The Presbytery now comprises six congregations, with a preaching station in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

Overture

The Assembly accepted an Overture from the Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides requesting the Assembly to appoint a Day of Humiliation and Prayer, and appointed the date of Saturday 3rd June (or the nearest suitable date).

Tuesday 23rd May – 3rd Sederunt

Welfare of Youth & Education

The Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee was presented by the Convener, Rev. Timothy McGlynn (Aberdeen). The Report states:

"The past year has been one in which the work of the Church has, along with the whole of society, enjoyed the return of an increased measure of normality. While it is expected that some Congregations will take time to recover from the effects of several 'lockdowns', things are improving. There is also the continued challenge of seeking to retain the young people associated with the Congregations during the later stages of school, and in the years

Rev. Timothy McGlynn

following as they move into university and the workplace."

The Committee recorded their thanks to their Clerk, Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, for her invaluable work on behalf of the Committee. The updated Sabbath School Workbooks are now printed and available for congregations. Regarding the Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize for memorisation of Scripture, over the last year there had been fourteen entrants over the three grades.

(Order of the Day)

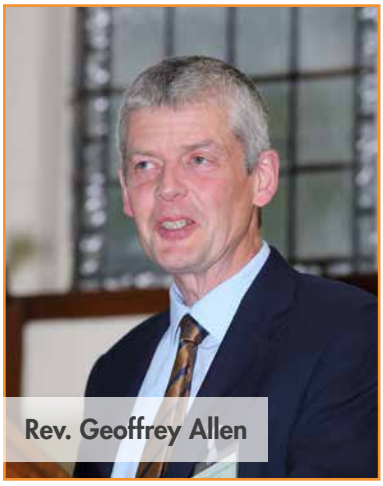
Prizes were then given to a number of our young people for their success in the Sabbath School and Bible Class examinations or their diligence in completing puzzles in the *Explorer* magazine. This is a delightful opportunity to encourage our young people in spiritual things, and also a welcome interlude in the normal proceedings! The following were introduced to the Moderator who presented them with their awards: Marybeth MacDonald (Stornoway); Thomas Keddie (Duthil-Dores); and Kenny MacKinnon (Partick).

Welfare of Youth & Education (continued)

The 2022 Youth Camps were held at Kilmallie, near Fort William. A total of thirty-one young people attended, consisting of seventeen senior and fourteen junior campers, who came from Scotland, Spain and Mexico. Two of the leaders were from France and Spain. The topic for the Senior Camp was 'Not Ashamed – Living the Christian Life', while the Junior Camp looked at 'God's Grand Design'. The 2023 camps will be led by Rev. Greg MacDonald and Rev. Thomas Buchanan.

(Order of the Day)

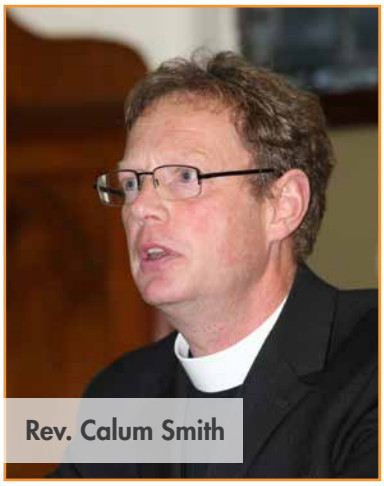
A further group of delegates was presented to address the Assembly, beginning with Rev. Geoffrey Allen of the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland*. He reminded us that this year saw the 212th Synod of his Church. The main issues being faced were the drop in Church attendance among young people and a fall in Church membership. The denomination currently has two students for the ministry, who are both in their second year of training.


Rev. Geoffrey Allen

Rev. Alistair Sutton of *Reformation Scotland* spoke on the varied work of the organisation. In Aberdeen for example there is a 'theology and coffee project' amongst students, as well as networking opportunities.

Rev. John Nelson of the *Australian Free Church* made his way to our General Assembly once again, expressing his affinity with us and his delight in addressing our Assembly. He updated us on the talks with the *Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia*, a denomination with which the FC(C) has mutual eligibility and from which the AFC separated some years ago.

Psalmody


Rev. Calum Smith

Rev. Calum Smith (Bracadale & Duirinish) presented the Report as Acting Convener of the Committee. The Report begins:

"The Book of Psalms is part of the Word of God, given by inspiration of God, and has been given to us, not only for reading, but principally for use in our public worship. Thus in many places, such as Psalm 95:1, we are exhorted to lift our hearts in song, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation*. As songs given to us by the Lord to sing, they have been provided for our edification and comfort, but above all to enable us to glorify Him in praise."

Mr Smith emphasised how imperative it is that our denomination continues to use the 1650 edition of the Scottish Psalter. Nothing comes nearer in English to expressing the mind of the Holy Spirit in metrical form than this time-honoured version. Appreciation was expressed to Rev. & Mrs William Scott for their tireless work in promoting Psalmody.

Wednesday 24th May – 4th Sederunt

Devotional Exercises

The Fourth Sederunt began as usual with Devotional exercises, consisting of psalms, readings and prayers. It is a reminder to the Commissioners that we are first and foremost a spiritual body. Three words were laid before us from Haggai 1:1-2:9, namely *consider, build* and *promise*.

Public Questions, Religion & Morals

The PQRM Committee's Report was presented by the

Convener, Rev. David Blunt (North Uist & Grimsay). The Report states:

"The present times are difficult for believers, for 'the wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted' (Ps. 12:8). It is a blessing that we still have the Word of God read and preached among us, to guide us in these perilous times of spiritual and moral confusion. We are thankful for the promises God has made to His people, which encourage us in standing firm on the side of Christ, as we must endeavour to do."

The Report contained a treatment of 'Male and Female' from Genesis 1:26-28, followed by consideration of nine separate issues: child discipline, gender recognition, transgenderism, conversion therapy, abortion, assisted suicide, the Saint Margaret Declaration, the Lord's Day and funerals. Mr Blunt referred to a hostile culture that seeks to batter down Christianity and bring the Church into submission. The real issue is sin, and we must continue to employ the biblical terminology concerning sin. The truth that the Church belongs to Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance.

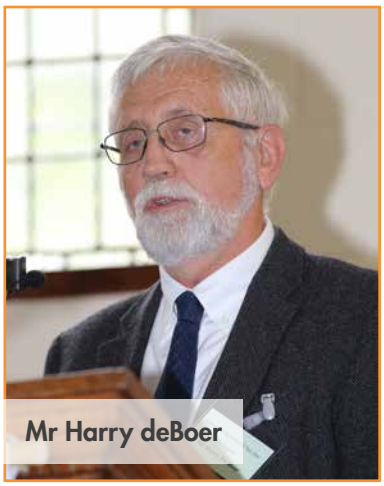
John Gillies (Elder, Partick) drew attention to valuable literature on cremation and asked if this could be made more widely available, as cremation was becoming more acceptable. Rev. Maurice Roberts (rtd) expressed how important the PQRM Committee was in light of the serious situation facing the country. Rev. David Fraser (rtd) urged the need to continue to protest Sabbath desecration.

(Order of the Day)

A further group of delegates was then introduced to the Moderator, led off by Falko Drijfhout from the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales*. With twenty-four congregations (which includes six church plants), mainly in England but also branching out into Sweden and Germany, there have been both difficulties and encouragements. Altogether the EPCEW have approximately 1,000 baptised members and 740 communicant members gathered into one Presbytery, with consideration being given to this becoming two. They currently have five divinity students.

Allan McCulloch of the *Scottish Reformation Society* reminded us that, in addition to publishing the quarterly *Bulwark* magazine and an annual *Historical Journal*, the Society continues to hold online conferences. Covenanter memorials continue to receive the Society's attention, especially since a number of them are either being vandalised or becoming neglected. One such is that at the Grassmarket in Edinburgh, where the local council have removed the crowd barrier surrounding it.

Harry deBoer brought greetings from the *Canadian & American Reformed Churches*, which date their origin to a separation which occurred in 1944 among the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, known as 'The Liberation'. The CARC is a federation of some seventy-two local churches, with thirty divinity students and five professors, and also some thirty parent-run schools.

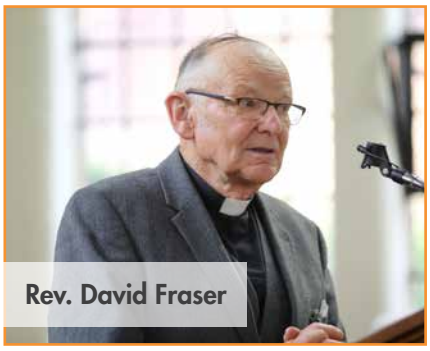

Mr Harry deBoer

Connor Keuning brought greetings on behalf of the *Free Reformed Churches of North America*. This federation owes its existence to Dutch immigration, particularly after the Second World War. It has nineteen churches and two church plants. The name 'Free Reformed' was adopted in 1974.

Finally, Rev. Roy Mohon of the *Presbyterian Reformed Church* (chiefly USA) movingly reminded us of the reason for our fraternal relations. Both our denominations are confessional, both expound the Bible and both are committed to the theology of the Bible as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

Training of the Ministry & Admissions

The Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee was given by the Convener, Rev. David Fraser (rtd). In their Report the Committee state:


Rev. David Fraser

"The workload of the Committee rises or falls according to the number of individuals seeking recognition as Candidates for the Ministry, making Application for Admission, or studying under the oversight of the Committee, and this has been low for several years. The 'law of supply and demand' does not seem to be operating, because vacancies are increasing but recruitment remains low on the home front, while students are coming forward overseas where charges are all filled! Seven charges are languishing without pastors and this begs the question, 'What has gone wrong?'"

There are five men training for the ministry: Mr Alan Blaney (Ballyclare & Doagh); Mr Kevin MacDonald (Scalpay); Mr Paul Pontacq (France); Mr Joel Suarez (Spain); and Mr Tyler Ray (USA). Mr Logan Shelton (USA) has completed his training. There is also Mr Fabien Garat from France, who is presently a private student.

(Order of the Day)

The General Assembly then received further Delegates. First was Rev. Jonathan Baxter of the *Associated Presbyterian Churches*. Mr Baxter drew attention to difficulties that have been faced recently, with the closure of several congregations resulting in five remaining congregations. Three of these (Dundee, Inverness and Stornoway), have ministers, and two (Kinlochbervie and Oban) are vacant. The APC have a shared concern with the FC(C) over a shortage of students and ministers and the viability of some of their congregations.

Rev. Jonathan Baxter

Joel Upton gave an update on the work of *Affinity*, especially regarding social issues, where they seek to promote and defend the Biblical viewpoint. Affinity was formerly known as the *British Evangelical Council*. It aims to build Christian unity through gospel partnerships. It publishes the *In Touch* bulletin and a journal entitled *Foundations*. Rev. Timothy McGlynn (Aberdeen) represents the FC(C) on Affinity.

Overture

The Southern Presbytery overtured that the Assembly ordain that ministers and probationers from other denominations making successful application for admission to the FC(C) should ordinarily be required to complete a course in Church History & Principles at the Free Church Seminary before they can receive a call. The Assembly decided that the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee would examine how best this may be implemented and return to the Assembly in 2024 with matured proposals.

Application for Admission

The Assembly accepted an application from Rev. Craig Scott for admission as a minister. Mr Scott was ordained in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. It is expected that he will minister in the newly-sanctioned charge of Hunt County in Texas.

Wednesday 24th May – 5th Sederunt

Home & Foreign Missions

The Home & Foreign Missions Committee's Report was presented by Rev. James MacInnes (Lochalsh & Strath). The Report says:

Rev. James MacInnes

"The Gospel is advancing, it always will. The Committee have a responsibility for mission work at home in our own nation, and abroad, to the ends of the earth. *The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein*. (Psalm 24:1)

While it is not possible for our small denomination to focus our limited resources upon all nations equally, the Lord has undoubtedly opened tremendous doors of opportunity for our involvement."

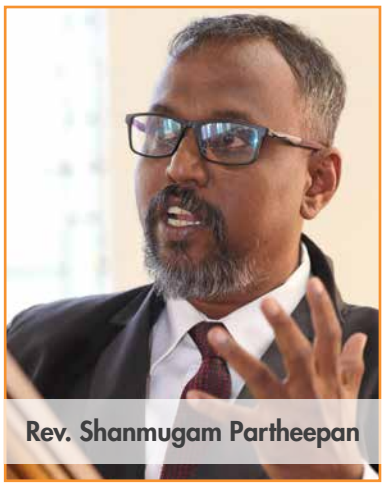
The chief items in the Report were Home Mission, European Mission, International Mission, and North America. Thanks were expressed for the tireless labours of Mr Donald John Morrison, our Home Mission Worker, in gospel outreach in Scotland. Discussion took place about how best to provide practical financial support for the mission in Sri Lanka, and the Assembly encouraged the Missions and Finance committees to work together on this.

(Order of the Day)

Four missionary Delegates were invited to address the Assembly. It was a delight to hear Rev. Hugues Pierre (Pau) report on the steady progress being made in his congregation in the south-west of France. Overlooking the Pyrenees and just thirty miles from the border with Spain, the Pau congregation is part of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. Four things particularly pleased him: it was heartwarming being in Scotland with his entire family and to meet so many; they now have a congregation of twenty souls and there are three services per week; the ordination of two elders; a possible new work in the south-west of France.

Rev. Partheepan (Sri Lanka) gave us an encouraging account of the work in the land of his birth. It is just over ten years since our Church sent him there as a missionary. There are now two congregations with ninety-eight souls in total. There have been twenty-six

baptisms, four deaths and two weddings. There have been seven discipline cases, all resulting in positive outcomes without a single person leaving. A college (Melville Theological Institute) has been established to help give instruction and training for pastors. Partheepan thrilled us with how his defence of the doctrine of the Trinity against error has resulted in him being viewed with suspicion, yet his stand for this truth continues. A fascinating aspect has been the discovery of a Tamil Psalter that was published in 1755!


Rev. Shanmugam Partheepan

Rev. Jorge Ruiz (Rubí) reported on the work in Spain, that included disappointments and encouragements. We rejoice in the solid progress being made. Please remember the two students in our own college from Europe – Fabien Garat and Joel Suarez.

Richard Gibson, of the *International Mission to Jewish People*, then addressed the Assembly. Jewish mission has been a matter of interest to the Free Church since the Disruption. IMJP was formerly known as *Christian Witness to Israel*, and changed its name recently in order to emphasise its global perspective as opposed to being focused on one country.

Thursday 25th May – 6th Sederunt

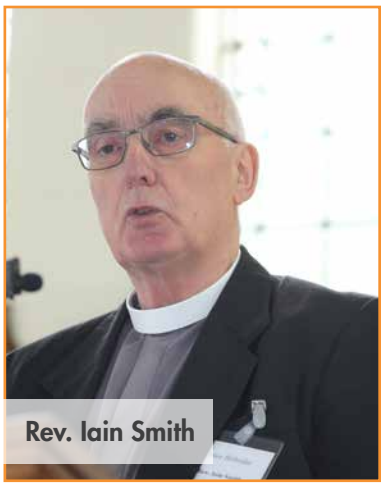
Publications

The Report of the Publications Committee was presented by the Convener, Rev. Harry Woods (rtd). Their Report says:

"We are encouraged to see that some of our men have produced materials through the self-publication channels available today, and we would encourage others to try their hand at this. There is a vast, untapped reservoir of materials from Scottish ministers and others that has not been republished in modern times, and it would be good to have some of these back in circulation."

In April the Committee accepted the resignation of Rev. Thomas Budgen as Editor of *The Explorer*. They brought to the Assembly a nomination of Rev. James MacInnes (Lochalsh & Strath) as the new Editor for a four-year term, and this was approved by the Assembly. Speakers made various comments and suggestions regarding our Church magazines.

Legal Advice & Property


Rev. Iain Smith

The Committee's Report was presented by Rev. Iain Smith (rtd), Convener. The Report states:

"The Committee are thankful to the Lord that this ecclesiastical year has been fairly quiet in comparison to recent years. A number of different matters have been set before the Committee but none of them has been of a contentious nature. The lion's share of the work has focused on the review of the Church Safeguarding Policy and the Committee wish to express their thanks to the brethren appointed to the Sub-committee for the time and effort they have taken to produce a draft Policy.

The Committee are mindful of the times in which the Church finds herself. With increasing frequency, State legislation is encroaching upon the spiritual independence and liberty of the Church regarding the oversight and discipline of her Courts. This, coupled with the increasingly intolerant nature of society, which is often targeted against the Christian Church or individuals through litigation, means it has become necessary for us to investigate and understand our specific needs as a church from an Insurance perspective."

In connection with the revision of the Church's Safeguarding Policy, emphasis was laid upon the importance of all office-bearers being familiar with the Policy and abiding by its terms.

Concluding Items

As proceedings moved to a close, the Assembly heard reports from committees it had appointed during the First Sederunt, namely: a Committee to visit Synod, Presbytery & Committee Records; a Committee to prepare a Minute on Deceased Ministers & Elders; a Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly. Other matters – Protestations, the Appointment of the Commission of Assembly, Thanks and the Appointment of the next General Assembly – were not unexpectedly completed in an efficient manner. The 2023 Assembly closed at 11.30am with Psalm 122 and the Benediction.

The next General Assembly is appointed to meet, God willing, in Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow, on Monday 20th May, 2024. ■

[Images in the Assembly Report are courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan]

CHURCH NEWS

William MacKenzie

Obituary – William MacKenzie, Arnisdale

(Rev. James MacInnes)

William MacKenzie reached the end of his earthly pilgrimage on 25th November 2022, only a few days following his 92nd birthday. The gospel had shaped the west coast community to which Willie belonged, but his attendance at worship during the early part of his life was one of habit and not motivated by a love for the Saviour. But there were those, including his wife Christine who prayed for him. A reluctant hearer at evangelistic services conducted in the local school, Willie, who was getting ready to walk out, was struck with the significance of the gospel and his own need of salvation. Now listening avidly, he called upon the Lord for mercy. A changed man, he was dismissed by companions the next day with the words, "you'll soon forget about all that." A life of faithful service to the Lord proved the reality of Willie's retort, "Ah, but He'll not forget about me."

Twelve months later, meeting the evangelist upon the road, Willie stopped to thank the man and relate something of his experience that night, never anticipating the evangelist's insistence that they both there and then fall to their knees to give thanks to the Lord for his goodness. But so they did, and throughout his life Willie continued to bear public testimony to the grace and mercy of God.

The late-in-life transformation of an outdoor hill-man to that of a conscientious carer, making dinners and washing clothes, during the final years of Christine's illness surprised many and spoke eloquently of the deep bond of love that they shared. Asked the secret of a happy marriage, they celebrated more than 60 years together, both replied, "the Lord has been good to me." Christine's passing, 18 months before his own was bravely borne, his sorrow sweetened by the realisation of what she was then enjoying in the presence of her Lord. A comment, typical of his great gospel hope, came in response to admiration for the tremendous, rugged beauty of his native Arnisdale, "I was just thinking how much better heaven will be."

During his active life Willie wore many hats: a deer-stalker upon the hill, and that of a postman for his day job, delivering the mail by boat along the unpredictable waters of Loch Hourn. He wore a soldier's cap during military service with the Royal Artillery and the Seaforth Highlanders, and that of a special constable when later working with the local police. For many years he was active in the mountain rescue team, and a member of the auxiliary fire brigade. As a Christian he was highly respected in the local district, opening the Community Council meetings with prayer until his retiral well into his eighties. As an elder in a congregation distant from many others he was called upon to preach regularly which he considered a trial and a privilege.

A man of energy and humour, many were his adventures, once even, and almost certainly unique for a Free Church (Continuing) elder, he, unwittingly, drank 'holy water' – the priest having recently visited his Roman Catholic friend's home and left behind a jug upon the sideboard.

Age and infirmity can bring many challenges, but one of his greatest trials was missing public worship. It was therefore a great joy for both Willie and the local congregation, when in an unexpected and remarkable way it was possible for him to sit at the Lord's Table only a few days before he had to leave Arnisdale for a nursing home in Inverness. Caring for Christine, which he was so thankful to be able to do, had taken a toll upon his own health. The weariness he felt was accentuated in this new environment and his longing for home heightened. The nursing care was necessary, and he undoubtedly benefited from it until that longed for day came, when his various hats were finally all cast aside, to be replaced with something far better. "*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" (2 Tim. 4:8)

Willie delighted in the company of many friends, and particularly in that of his children and grandchildren. In prayer he always made mention of the young people of the community, pleading for days of renewed gospel blessing. We commit Billy, Shona, David, Alan, and Roddy, together with their own families into the care of the God of all comfort, with the prayer that they would come to enjoy the riches of God's great grace in the gospel.

Seminary Closing *(Rev. Graeme Craig, Principal)*

On Friday 9th June, friends of the Free Church Seminary gathered with the Lecturers and UK-based Students in Westhill Church, Inverness, at a service to mark the closing of the Seminary at the

end of another academic year. After a report from Rev. Graeme Craig, Principal, reviewing with thankfulness the completion of a more normal Seminary year than previous ones, Rev. Trevor Kirkland, Lecturer in Church History & Principles, addressed the gathering on the theme *No History, No Gospel*. In his address, Mr Kirkland pointed out that the Psalms were given by God, not just as a devotional aid, but to teach us history. Thus, in at least nine of the Psalms, there is a focus on God's dealings with his people in history, with doctrinal and practical applications drawn out. Quoting J. Gresham Machen, he noted that history and doctrine belong together and that without the history there is no Christianity. (The first part of the address is included in this issue.)

After the lecture the work of the Seminary was commended to the Lord in prayer and a time of informal fellowship enjoyed. This was an encouraging meeting for both Lecturers and Students. God willing, the 2023-2024 Session of the Seminary will open on Tuesday 12th September at 7.30pm in Westhill Church, with a service and lecture from Rev. Greg MacDonald, Lecturer in Systematic Theology. The work of the Seminary, and all the students, both home and overseas, are commended to the prayers of the Church. ■

Outreach Work in Valencia *(Rev. James MacInnes)*

A recent development within the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon has been the establishing of an outreach work in Valencia, a large city approximately four hours drive down the coast from Barcelona. Under the supervision of the Rubí Kirk Session, services are conducted locally. As part of a recent family holiday, Rev. Greg MacDonald was able to visit the work and has provided this brief report:

"This young congregation made us all most welcome, with the preacher (Christian Lou Ramos) even going to the effort of translating his sermon into English at various intervals throughout the address. With singing from a Geneva-style Spanish metrical psalter (translated by Rev. Jorge Ruiz), the whole service was familiar in its style and reverence. At one point a nearby eruption of fireworks caused the visitors some surprise, but otherwise did nothing to interrupt the worship. Warm fellowship followed the service, and we exchanged contact details and offered a reciprocal invitation to Scotland at any time. The Lord is building his church and we rejoice that he permits us to behold his workmanship. Four young couples form the core of the congregation, and each is expecting their first child over the coming months. Please pray for the work in Valencia." ■

North Korea: "All for Jesus, even in death" *(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)*

At 5am on Lord's Day 30th April, five Christians gathered at a farmhouse in Tongam village for a secret time of prayer and worship, as was their custom. This time, however, police were there to arrest them. The believers' 'crime' is that they were worshipping and serving God in a country where the Kim dynasty alone is to be worshipped and obeyed. A local resident told Radio Free Asia: "At the site of the worship service, the police retrieved dozens of Bible booklets and arrested all in attendance." According to a second resident, the believers have refused to renounce their faith. "A staff member of the judicial agency told us that the [believers] refused to tell where they got their Bibles and said, 'All for Jesus, even in death'." Please pray. ■

Quote

"Let the Bible be the every-day book. In it God speaks to your soul; by it He will sanctify your nature, direct your steps, and give you joy and peace. Let not the works of man occupy the place of the book of God; but search the Scriptures daily, and exercise faith therein." ■

James Smith

The congregation in Valencia

HOME MISSION WORK IN PARTICK

REV. ANDREW ALLAN

As a congregation we recently had Mr Donald John Morrison, our denomination's Home Mission Worker, with us for a week, to help in some extensive outreach in and around the Partick area.

Efforts

We went around many homes and flats in the Partick, Thornwood, Hyndland and Whiteinch areas, knocking on doors and handing out Good News magazines and gospel tracts. Some of these places we have not visited before. Generally we were politely received, and most people to whom we spoke accepted the literature.

On three afternoons we embarked on open-air preaching and gospel tract distribution at Byres Road, Partick Station and Buchanan Street in the city centre.

All-in-all, we distributed around 1,600 magazines and many more tracts, and had promising conversations with various individuals whom we hoped would accept the invitation to attend our Lord's Day services.

Reflections

Now that the week is over, it is good to reflect and learn, and see if we could have done anything differently.

First, we are grateful for the labours and zeal of Mr Morrison. He has been with the congregation on a number of occasions previously and has not lost his indefatigable love for the work. Also, we are grateful for those in the congregation who were able to accompany and help Mr Morrison and for those who prayed for the work. And we bless the Lord for pleasantly warm and dry weather which made our task that much easier.

Second, we are glad to have done what we did, because we believe it is right to try to reach out with the gospel to those who are perishing. And, to humble us, we must leave the results with God, for we can only sow the seed.

Third, on a human level we were somewhat disappointed, because only one new person appeared following the outreach and she was in no sense connected with our efforts.

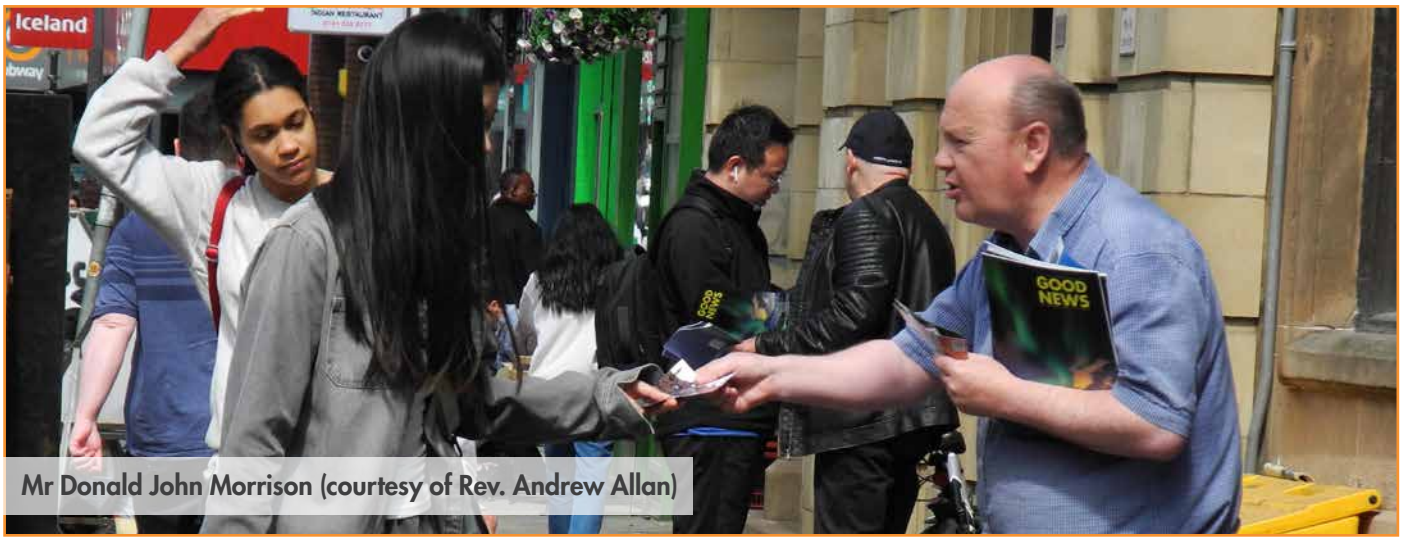
Fourth, we are encouraged, because we know that the moral and spiritual state of Glasgow and the UK is not what it should be, and yet it may be that through the efforts of the congregation and others, it is not as bad as it could be.

Hopes

Perhaps, because of what we are engaged in, it could be said of us, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). We might not be seeing people coming to the house of God and under the means of grace, but we might be used of God as a preservative in a corrupt society. Or, on the other hand, we might be fulfilling the role of intercessors, preventing or delaying more of God's judgements from falling upon our godless society.

And we know and believe that God's Word shall not return unto Him void (Isa. 55:11), and that we might yet see a harvest of souls won for the Saviour.

Whatever happens, by the grace of God we intend to undertake the same in June 2024 (D.V.). ■



Mr Donald John Morrison (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

COMMENT

THE MINDSET BEHIND ABORTION

Bill to create 'buffer zones' lodged

A bill which aims to end protests outside abortion clinics in Scotland, by creating 150-metre 'buffer zones' around such facilities, was finally lodged at the Scottish Parliament on 15th June. The Supreme Court opened up the way for the bill in December, when it ruled that setting up such zones in Northern Ireland does not "disproportionately interfere" with the rights of protesters. A first vote on the 'Abortion Services Safe Access Zones (Scotland) Bill' is expected in October.

The proposal for this bill, which has the support of the Scottish Government and MSPs from every party represented at Holyrood, came from Gillian Mackay, a Green MSP. Remarks she made to the BBC on the day her bill was lodged indicate, not only the claimed justification for it, but also the attitudes of the pro-abortion lobby in general. Anti-abortion campaigners (and that should be all of us) need to take note of this mindset and expose it.

Mackay referred to abortion services as "healthcare". Given that abortion involves the deliberate killing of a child, and often has a long-term, negative impact upon the woman's mental and emotional health, to describe it as 'healthcare' is perverse. She then associated the bill with existing pieces of legislation which govern "reproductive rights". This term ignores the fact that God has given neither the mother nor the father the 'right' to end the life of their unborn child, whether the child has been conceived within marriage (where all sexual relations properly belong) or outside of it, by fornication. Mackay finally spoke of protesters harassing people who are going "to express their bodily autonomy". The desire to live independently of God's control is at the root of every sin, including the sin of abortion. It was there in our first parents when they gave heed to Satan's temptation to be "as gods", and ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:5,6), with its calamitous consequences.

The point of protesting against abortion in the vicinity of abortion clinics is to show to women, before it is too late, that there is an alternative to the horror, evil and tragedy that is abortion. It is to offer both help and hope. Jenni Minto, the Women's Health Minister, has acknowledged that there is "enormous strength of feeling around this issue". The strength of feeling on the part of those whose opposition to abortion is based upon the Word of God will not be diminished by any restrictions placed upon their right – and duty – to protest. The truth remains the truth, and one day it will prevail again in our land. ■

ENDING CONVERSION PRACTICES

Will preaching the gospel be prevented?

It is possible that proposals to ban so-called 'conversion therapy', which are supported by the Scottish Government, will be introduced at Holyrood before the end of the year. We have a fair idea of the form the intended ban is likely to take. The report of the Scottish Government's 'Expert Advisory Group on Ending Conversion Practices', published last October, recommends that the definition of conversion practices "must be wide enough to encompass any treatment, practice or effort that aims to change, suppress, and/or eliminate a person's sexual orientation, expression of sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression."

If such a comprehensive definition is ultimately approved by Parliament, then whatever it is intended to cover, there is a danger that the work of the Church will be caught by it. Preaching the gospel, whether in the congregation or a public space, involves issuing the call to conversion that Peter gave to the people who gathered in Solomon's porch: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Like every other sin, the sin of homosexuality needs to be repented of, and blotted out. Without this we remain in our sins and will be shut out of heaven.

Bans on 'conversion therapy' are demanded by homosexual lobby groups, and activists already target Christian bodies. Core Issues Trust (CIT) is registered as a charity in Northern Ireland. According to its website, CIT supports those "leaving LGBT identities, behaviours, attractions and life choices", and campaigns for "the freedom to access pastoral care, counselling and therapeutic choice". In 2020, an 'LGBT' activist used Twitter to encourage people to put pressure on Barclays Bank, an employer 'approved' by the homosexual organisation Stonewall, to close CIT's account. The bank capitulated, but Dr Mike Davidson of CIT, who received hundreds of unwanted calls and unpleasant messages, took legal action for unlawful discrimination. In June, before the case was heard, Barclays made a settlement offer of £21,500 with legal costs to follow. Davidson accepted this, but his bank accounts were not reinstated and Barclays has not apologised or admitted liability.

This worrying incident shows how 'conversion therapy' bans are likely to be exploited by homosexuals and their allies to bully anyone who is critical of their lifestyle, and to stop churches from proclaiming the liberating power of Christ to people who are enslaved by it. May the Lord confound the enemies of His church and gospel, and turn them back! ■

NO HISTORY, NO GOSPEL (1)

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

(The first part of the address given at the closing of the 2022-2023 session of the Free Church Seminary. It has been lightly edited.)

In his essay History and Faith, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), Professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary, wrote: "*The centre and core of all the Bible is history. Everything else that the Bible contains is fitted into an historical framework and leads up to an historical climax...The modern Church is impatient of history. History, we are told, is a dead thing. Let us forget the Amalekites, and fight the enemies at our doors.*"

But is that a Biblical position? We shall look at Psalm 78 to work out what the Biblical position is. Our title reinforces the importance of the subject. Some Christians treat Church history with the same attitude as Henry Ford, who famously said that "all history is bunk". Others take a Jane Austen approach, whereby history is treated as a romantic novel. Neither position is Biblical. The proper position is set out in Psalm 78, the focus of this study.

1. The Placement of History in the Psalms

We all sing the Psalms, but how many notice the history that is recorded in them? How many merely sing the Psalms devotionally? While that is not wrong in itself, it overlooks all the history which the Holy Spirit has recorded. There are nine Psalms that specifically deal with history, although history is of course scattered throughout the Psalms. These nine Psalms are: 78, 89, 105-7, 114, 135-137. The size of those Psalms is important as well. Psalm 78 has 72 verses; 89 has 52 verses; 105-107 have at least 43 verses each.

It is therefore a serious mistake to sing only the first five or six verses of every Psalm, as it suggests that the other verses are irrelevant. The church is to sing *all* of every Psalm. The Holy Spirit has given to the Church this history to sing, so it behoves us to sing it, and not just those little portions which we happen to like or think we understand better. It is even worse to think that the other verses have nothing to do with us. As one writer has said: "the psalms are the faithful voice of the people of God in response to his saving history".

2. The Significance of History in the Psalms

To see the significance, you must study the structure of Psalm 78 as created by the Holy Spirit for us. It recounts the following events: Israel in Egypt (vv.12-16); Israel in the wilderness (vv.17-31); Israel in the wilderness (40-42); Israel in Egypt (vv.43-53); Israel in Canaan (vv.54-72). The pattern then is: Egypt, Wilderness, Wilderness, Egypt, Canaan. But what does it all amount to? The key to the interpretation is in verses 1-11. Verse 2 refers to a "parable" and "dark sayings of old". Here then is history put in the form of a parable, to reveal a very significant pattern in the history of God's working.

The parable is about two things. The first part sets out God's sovereignty (v.4); He is the Lord, with his mighty strength and wonderful works. The second part covers Israel's rebellion (v.8). The Psalm is intended to teach these things to God's people (vv.1-3), that they may then teach the following generations (vv.4-8). So the Psalm teaches those who are alive and subsequent generations this same history.

We have the importance of Israel's history (vv.1-8) and Israel's insurrection (vv.9-11). What did the insurrection consist of? There was cowardice (v.9), indifference and disobedience (v.10), and ignorance (v.11). There is a section in the middle of the Psalm which explains this spiritual instability in detail (vv.32-39), but at its centre was the fact that the heart of the people was not right with God, neither were they stedfast in his covenant (v.8).

Many ask, What is wrong with the church today? The real question is, What was wrong with the church *then*? Others ask, What is wrong with Christians today? when the real question is, What was wrong with the Lord's people *then*? This history tells you that there are some things which just do not change. What was wrong then? Cowardice, indifference, disobedience and ignorance. Is that not what we face today? It is all set out in this history, along with what produced this instability.

In Scripture we are exhorted, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable" (1 Cor. 15:58), which is what we have in Psalm 78. God has given us this history, and the significance of it, for the generation in which we live. We do not need to go to pundits or prognosticators,

nor take surveys, neither scratch our heads: we go to the Bible and ask, What is wrong with us now? And the answer is, What was wrong then? We are not any different from Israel: we are not right with God, neither are we steadfast in his covenant.

What we see in this Psalm is a weaving together of history and doctrine. The two go together. As Machen stated, without these two elements, there is no Christianity! Why do we teach our divinity students history and doctrine? So that they can see for themselves, side by side, the history and doctrine that shape Christianity, making it what it is, and highlighting the centre, glory, aspirations and problems of the faith.

3. The Necessity of History in the Psalms

Our theme – no history, no gospel – needs to be examined. What happens if you decide this history doesn't matter? If all this history which happened so long ago is now irrelevant? What are the consequences? Can we keep Christianity and jettison the history? Can we retain all the great doctrines of the Christian faith while getting rid of the history? The truth is we lose the following:

(i) *Our view of God.*

First, we lose the *supernaturalness* of God (v.12). "*Marvellous things did he*". Where? When? How? "*in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.*" Why do we believe in a supernatural God? Because it is here in the history. God has done these things. "*They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. How he wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan; and had turned their rivers into blood*" (vv.42-44). Remove the history and you lose this.

Second, we lose the *righteousness* of God (vv.17-18). "*And they sinned...provoked...tempted God*". The terms indicate God's righteousness, which was provoked by their sins. How do you know God is righteous? Because the history records it.

Third, we lose the *wrath* of God (v.31). "*The wrath of God came upon them, and slew...and smote...Israel.*" And you know that by this history, which tells you He is a God of wrath. As long as you have this history, you cannot abolish God's wrath. Many have tried and have failed, because every time the Church sings Psalm 78, we are confronted with divine wrath.

Fourth, we lose the *compassion* of God (v.38). "*But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not*". God did not treat his people as their sins deserved! This history tells you of his compassion. Lose the history, and you lose the doctrine.

(ii) *Our sense of the fickleness of human nature.*

We are surprisingly fickle. It was God's people who said, "*Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*" (v.19) What had they just seen? His supernatural power! But, here is a new situation: can God deal with this? Thus, "*they believed not in God and trusted not in his salvation*" (v.22). How fickle! Sometimes we are practising atheists, and barely supernaturalists. We read that "*they sinned still and believed not for his wondrous works*" (v.32). It was all before them, but they sinned in unbelief. Where was their faith in God? It was pious flattery and lies (v.36). They had all the cliches, and said their 'amens', but were entirely fickle.

Psalm 78 is a mirror for us. The Puritans referred to 'feathery Christians', devoid of history and doctrine, who changed their creed every week. Give up this history and you surrender all this doctrine. Machen said that a gospel independent of history is a contradiction in terms. You cannot kept the gospel without the history. It is the difference between God as an abstract idea, and a Saviour who has acted to redeem a people for himself in this wretched world.

This explains why, when liberals give up the history recorded in the Bible, they give up the gospel also, and create an alternative gospel – the social gospel, climate change gospel, identity gospel, and so on. Once you surrender the history you must have a substitute gospel, because you cannot retain the true gospel.

What about the New Testament? We find that the Gospels have a common refrain when recording a significant event. They say that it was a fulfilment of "that which was spoken by the prophet", or similar words. The Old Testament people of God, and the events and providences that occurred among them, were designed to show God and His work through the Lord Jesus Christ.

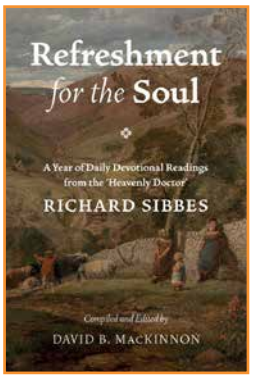
Consider Matthew 2:17,18, where Herod's killing of the children at Bethlehem leads to the fulfilling of Jeremiah's prophecy of Rachel weeping for her children (Jer. 31:15). This historical detail may be dismissed as irrelevant, but what is lost when this is done? Either Rachel existed or she didn't, she wept or she didn't. If Rachel is rejected as myth, you remove the entire context in which her weeping is recorded. That in turn questions the veracity of the gospel, the truthfulness of God and the Holy Spirit. How can the Church say, "God says", or, "the Bible says", if Rachel did not actually exist and weep?

Consider the text, "Christ Jesus came into the world" (1 Tim. 1:15). Either Christ came or he did not. What did his coming mean? He came "to save sinners". The doctrine explains the history. But if the history did not exist, then the doctrine is irrelevant. Without the history, what it is to be a sinner becomes meaningless. ■

BOOK REVIEWS

(Books for review should be sent to: Rev. David M. Blunt, 17 Knockline, Isle of North Uist HS6 5DT)

Refreshment for the Soul
A Year of Daily Devotional Readings from the 'Heavenly Doctor' Richard Sibbes Compiled and Edited by David B. MacKinnon. The Banner of Truth Trust, hbk, 401pp, £17.99.



Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was and is one of the most popular of the Puritan writers. The Banner of Truth Trust, as well as reprinting the full seven-volume set of his works, has published several individual books by him, such as *The Bruised Reed* and *Glorious Freedom*. David B. MacKinnon, who recently retired after forty years of ministry, has compiled this volume of 366 carefully-chosen, page-long, extracts from Sibbes' writings. In this way there is a short reading for each day of the year.

MacKinnon provides a suitable verse from the Bible (ESV) to head each page. The occasional antiquated word has been updated and sentences and paragraphs have been shortened to make it easier to read. For those not used to reading the Puritans this will provide an excellent introduction to this goldmine. As Spurgeon said, "Sibbes never wastes the student's time, he scatters pearls and diamonds with both hands."

A few extracts will give a flavour of the work:

"Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world."

"It is a singular comfort that Christ ascended as a public person, on our behalf, in our nature, for our good. When we think of Christ in heaven, think of ourselves in heaven also."

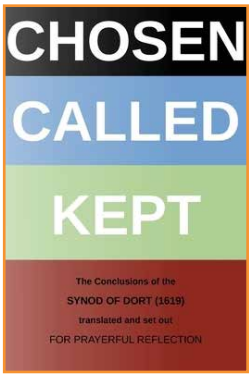
"We have enemies to fight against that never sleep. Satan our enemy never sleeps, 'but goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour' (1 Pet. 5:8). We sleep but Satan sleeps not, nor those that are his instruments. The disciples slept but Judas slept not."

"At the end of each day, go over all that was done that day. As God did when he created the world, at the end of each day he viewed all that he had done. Let us not allow our bodies to rest until our consciences are peaceful in our salvation." ■

Rev. William Macleod

Chosen – Called – Kept: The Conclusions of the Synod of Dort translated and set out for prayerful reflection and study
Chris Griffiths, Pearl Publications, pbk, 94pp, £6.99

The publicity indicates that this is the first publication in the UK for 150 years of the conclusions of the famous Synod held in Holland in 1618-19. 'Conclusions' is the term used by the author instead of the original 'Canons'. Mr Griffiths is a former pastor, and expresses his gratitude to Afrikaans Christians to whom he once ministered and through whom he came to treasure and delight in "this wonderful statement of God's saving grace."



While Presbyterians belong to a different branch of the Reformation from that which developed in the Netherlands, we have much in common with it and can wholeheartedly agree with the author's assessment of the Canons. Drawn up in order to resolve the controversy in the Dutch churches caused by Arminianism, the Canons are the original 'five points of Calvinism'. The book begins with a brief account of the Synod, and includes a quotation from George Smeaton, who said of the Canons: "it may be questioned whether anything more valuable as an ecclesiastical testimony for the doctrines of sovereign, special, efficacious grace was ever prepared on this important theme since the days of the Apostles."

The fifty-nine articles making up the five 'heads' ('parts' in this volume) of the Canons – Unconditional Election (Part 1), Particular Redemption (Part 2), Total Depravity and Irresistible Grace (Parts 3 & 4), The Perseverance of the Elect (Part 5) – have been arranged into fifty-two portions, with the suggestion that they be read on a weekly basis. Each article contains a sub-heading summarising the article, the original text of the article in a new translation and layout designed to make the meaning clearer, and a suggested Scripture passage for reading. The text does not include the 'rejection of errors' found in each head of the Canons. A Glossary of Latin terms, recommended Further Reading and Endnotes complete the content.

This is a useful aid for those who are new to the Canons and one which we hope will fulfil the author's aim of encouraging "regular and prayerful reflection" on the great truths they contain. ■

Rev. David M. Blunt

COMMUNION DATES

Communions are held on the following Sabbaths. Visitors should contact local ministers for times of the main services and the preparatory and thanksgiving services. Contact details may be found on the Church website.

July
2 Snizort
9 St Louis
23 Atlanta

August
6 Harris
20 Duirinish
27 Stornoway

September
3 Portree
10 Duthil-Dores, North Uist & Grimsay
17 Glasgow–Knightswood, Kilmuir & Stenscholl, Scalpay Harris
24 Inverness–Greyfriars, Lochalsh & Strath, Mebane

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2023 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES May 2023 £	Total to May 2023 £	Total to May 2022 £
Free Northern Presbytery				
Aberdeen	0	1,950	9,750	9,750
Assynt & Scourie	50	0	4,823	1,292
Brora	5,020	600	8,327	8,222
Duthil-Dores	0	1,567	11,000	10,996
Inverness	0	2,000	15,802	15,164
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,450	10,855	11,471
Kiltearn	0	0	0	3,208
Poolewe & Aultbea	6,338	975	4,875	4,850
Tarbat	0	1,000	5,976	9,583
Total Free Northern Presbytery	11,408	9,542	71,408	74,535
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	0	280	4,220	4,378
Ayr	0	1,000	6,460	5,598
Ballyclare & Doagh	0	1,100	7,802	8,375
Dumfries	0	240	1,130	1,175
Edinburgh	0	2,450	12,569	10,867
Glasgow - Knightswood	0	1,600	12,124	12,878
Glasgow - Partick	0	2,105	16,000	12,000
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	800	5,774	8,513
Rothesay	0	6,000	6,000	500
Total Southern Presbytery	0	15,575	72,079	64,282
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	2,100	10,500	7,955
Harris - Leverburgh	0	1,600	11,104	10,524
Knock & Point	0	2,000	10,604	8,937
North Uist & Grimsay	2,755	1,050	7,742	7,646
Scalpay	205	2,300	14,148	13,375
Stornoway	0	7,190	44,180	45,397
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	2,960	16,240	98,277	93,834
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	0	1,500	10,159	8,851
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	20	500	3,072	2,900
Lochalsh & Strath	280	1,500	11,973	14,242
Portree	245	1,500	11,676	12,030
Snizort	629	1,600	15,181	13,003
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	1,174	6,600	52,060	51,026
Smiths Falls	0	0	995	995
Total From Congregations	15,541	47,957	294,819	284,672
Other Donations	0	3,955	13,636	21,140
Legacy	0	0	10,000	0
TOTAL	15,541	51,912	318,455	305,813
Included in the above: Tax	1,194	0	73,175	75,567
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	14,348	51,912	245,280	230,246

Gifts and Donations - Donations and gifts for the Church should be sent to the Financial Administrator:

Mrs Muriel Smith
Free Church (Continuing) Manse, Loch Mor,
Struan, Isle of Skye IV56 8FB
financialadministrator@fccontinuing.org

Cheques / postal orders should be made payable to "Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)".

General Treasurer
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The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is a recognised Scottish Charity (SC 030976).

General Assembly 2023 inside Partick Free Church (Continuing) (all Assembly photos courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

Zephaniah 3:17

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)