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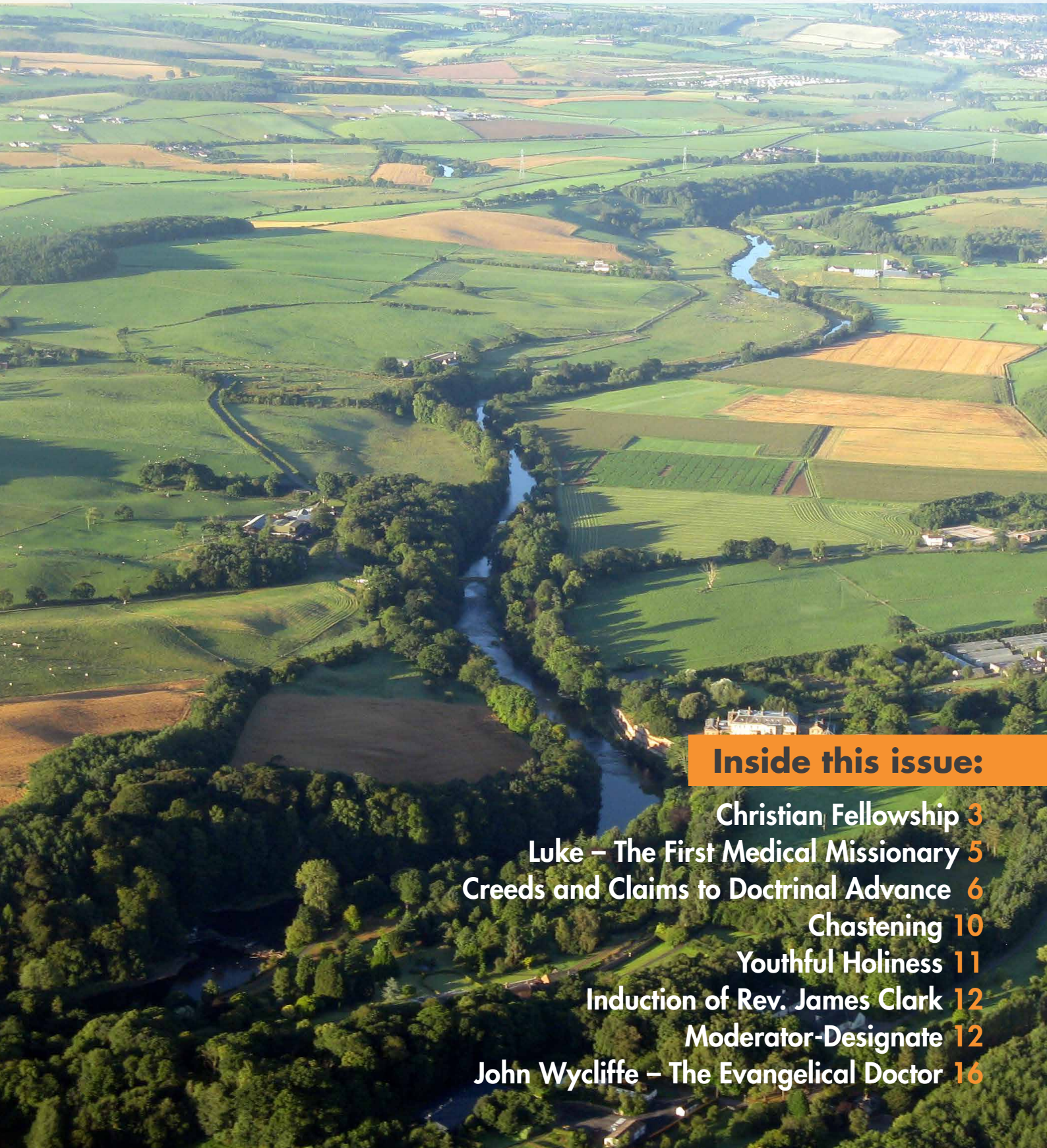

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The River Ayr in the historical district of Kyle, Ayrshire, where the Lollards were active. See page 16.

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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Christian fellowship is a subject that is often misunderstood, and something which may be more talked about than experienced. To understand its meaning we must first consider God Himself. A simple definition of fellowship is "friendly association, especially with people who share one's interests", and with reverence, this could be applied to the Trinity. The three divine persons, as one God and having one mind, will and purpose, indwell each other eternally. As Father, Son and Spirit they exist in a perfect fellowship of holiness and love, as "God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5).

To know this God as our God is a wonderful privilege. There is an infinite distance between God and man, as Creator and creature, and the Most High must stoop down and have dealings with us if we are to have any enjoyment of Him (Ps. 113:5,6). The Lord was pleased to do this with Adam, whom He had made in His image and likeness, entering into a covenant of life with him in the garden of Eden. While our first parents remained sinless they had fellowship with God; it was delightful and fulfilling, as nothing else could be. And as long as they had fellowship with God, they had a sweet fellowship with each other.

Alienation

When Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit He offended God and was alienated from Him. In His justice, the Lord inflicted the penalty of the covenant upon Adam (Gen. 2:17). The friendship was broken and the fellowship came to an end. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden. They had walked with the Lord but this could not continue, for "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) Because Adam represented us in what he did, his sin and fall were ours too, and so we come into the world dead in sin and separated from God.

If any of mankind were to have fellowship with God again it could only be through the removal of their guilt and restoration of life to their souls. This is altogether beyond man's ability, but not beyond the Lord's. The question that ought to occupy us is the one Bildad asked: "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4) Since the fall fellowship with God is only possible once we have been acquitted and accounted righteous before Him. The great encouragement we have from the Scriptures is that a merciful and gracious God has done all that is necessary to bring this about.

Reconciliation

As the offended party, God is bound to punish our sin. If we are ever to be reconciled to Him then His wrath against us must be placated, and for this, a mediator is required. In love to sinners, God sent His only begotten Son, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9). The Son of God came willingly as our Substitute, becoming man in His incarnation and obeying God perfectly. God did not spare Him but delivered Him up to Calvary and the cursed death of the cross. Bearing divine wrath, Christ paid for the sins of His people with His blood.

Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrifice to reconcile God and men. He is the reality of the Old Testament types associated with redemption, including the high priest, the animal sacrifices and the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant. By His life and death, He *expiated* sin, atoning for its guilt and cleansing from its pollution; He also *propitiated* God, satisfying His justice and turning away His wrath, to "make agreement for our sins", as Tyndale says. If the gospel has been blessed to us, and we are trusting in Christ as our propitiation, then we have fellowship through the Spirit with the Father and the Son, and with our fellow believers (1 John 1:3).

Union and Communion

This spiritual fellowship is based upon our union with Christ by saving faith; it is only out of this union that we can enjoy communion with God. There is a new relationship between God and the believer. In Jesus Christ His eternal Son, we are made His adopted sons. This gives us the confidence to draw near to the Almighty, praying to Him as our heavenly Father as the disciples were taught to do by Christ (Matt. 6:9). There is also this to encourage us, that believers are Christ's bride and as such the Lord desires fellowship with us. Can we say that, in His grace, "the king hath brought me into his chambers" (Song of Sol. 1:4), the inner chambers of intimate communion with Himself?

Our communion with God does not require great gifts or learning: *faith* is the 'must' for all fellowship

with the Lord. If we possess it then we may enjoy God's companionship, even though we may be far from His house and with no prospect of getting there, as the Psalmist was at times (Ps. 84:2). For David, one day spent in the courts of the Lord, enjoying His gracious presence, was more blessed than a thousand days of sinful, worldly company (v.10). This was a man who had access to every pleasure this world can afford, yet he happily refused them all in favour of the pleasures which are for evermore.

> *"They gaze upon a glorified Christ and are all like Him, pure even as He is pure."*

Church

The Spirit baptises God's elect into the spiritual body of Christ, the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23), yet we also have a place in the visible church on earth. The means of grace are there, and the fellowship we enjoy with God leads inevitably to fellowship with His people. To the Psalmist, the saints on earth were "the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (Ps. 16:3). Christians not only desire to be with Christ but with other Christians. It is in the nature of sheep to gather together: if you were ever to see a sheep which was always on its own, keeping its distance from the rest of the flock, you would wonder whether it was a sheep! So Christ's sheep belong in the fold of the church.

Scripture is the chief means of our communion with God and with one another. Every church and congregation has its problems; this is only to be expected, for every saint is a sinner in this life, having only the beginning of holiness. It is for this reason that Paul exhorts believers to put on "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Col. 3:12,13) In this spirit, the cause of Christ is maintained in the world and is a witness to it.

Brethren

A particular love belongs in the church. We love other Christians because God loves them, as He loves us, and because we see something of His image in them, as we trust we do in ourselves. As the sons of God, Christians are brethren, and Christ is our Elder Brother (Heb. 2:11). Jesus gave His disciples "a new commandment", which was an old one made 'new' by His example: they were to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34). This Christlike, sacrificial, brotherly love is "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14), binding believers together in the fellowship of the church and constraining them to seek one another's spiritual good. Do we check any attitudes in ourselves which are contrary to brotherly love?

The way to heaven is not easy for any of Zion's pilgrims, but fellowship with other believers is a great help, supporting, encouraging and challenging us. Fellowship exists among believers when the Word of God is involved. If Christians meet but talk about the things of the world, that is not fellowship; like the two on the road to Emmaus, we should be speaking about the things of the Lord (Luke 24:14). Sadly, even when we are among those of like precious faith and who mind the same rule as us, many things may come between, marring our communion: pride, worldliness and coldness of heart. These imperfections make us desire the day when we shall all see "eye to eye" (Isa. 52:8).

Blessing

Through Christian fellowship, we receive spiritual edification. We have heard of 'the communion of saints'. This is not the popish idea of praying to saints. Rather, as our *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches us, it is the truth that all who are united to Christ "have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory", and being united to one another they "have communion in each other's gifts and graces" (26:1). We benefit from the fellowship we have with faithful Christians of our day, through their words and deeds, but we also have fellowship with the worthies of the past through what they have left behind of their preaching, teaching and godly living.

When brethren are walking in the truth here below we find it to be a great blessing and a great joy. In eternity the Lord's people will dwell in the new Jerusalem, a city that is "compact together" and where the brethren "dwell together in unity" (Ps. 122:3; 133:1). This is a picture of the church assembled in heaven, a perfect society where the saints worship and enjoy fellowship without any difference of opinion or discord between them. They gaze upon a glorified Christ and are all like Him, pure even as He is pure. This is the fellowship we truly long for!

LUKE – THE FIRST MEDICAL MISSIONARY

REV. JAMES CLARK

We are not sure where Luke came from; possibly from Macedonia. This would fit the elegant character of his Greek language. We do know that he was a Gentile, called by God's grace and brought to the Apostle Paul in God's Providence.

The Apostle's Companion

From Acts 16 onwards you find Paul accompanied by his physician, Luke. Their companionship begins at verse 10, the beginning of the "we" passages in Acts. He was doubtless taught by Paul and now he could treat spiritual maladies in addition to physical ailments. The use of "we" in the Acts passages (Luke never names himself) shows the humility of the man. He does in his writings what many fail to do – he keeps that great idol 'self' out of it. We also see his courage in accompanying Paul. It was dangerous to be a friend of Paul in those days; his message brought great suffering upon him. Perhaps it is still dangerous to quote Paul, when you consider the effect of his teaching on Divine sovereignty in Romans chapter 9.

The Medical Missionary

Luke would be a comfort to Paul, for body and soul. He was his fellow pilgrim as they advanced through this world. There are many medical details in Luke's descriptions in the Gospel and in Acts (a book was written in the 19th century on 'The Medical Language of St. Luke'). His detailed observations of the 'patients' stand out, especially in the passages about the miracles. Luke was a historian also and gives unique details about Christ's birth. Some parables are only recorded in his Gospel; e.g. the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, The Pharisee and the Publican.

As a Doctor, Luke knew how far medicine could go and that sinners also need a soul-Healer, something beyond the reach of medical science. They say of mental wounds that 'time heals all wounds', but this is wrong. Only the blood of Christ heals all the wounds of the soul. The Gospel according to Luke emphasises the caring attitude of Christ towards the miserable and the outcasts, and perhaps sets forth His human nature more than the other three Gospels. Luke emphasises that Christ heals by means or without means, by touch or at a distance. The Holy Spirit conveys what is in Him to sinners (Luke 8:46). Sinners should apply to Him, for there is "balm in Gilead" (Jer. 8:22).

The Fellow Labourer

A "*fellow-labourer*" is how Paul describes Luke in Philemon (v.24). He was a co-worker with Paul and others, as one who belonged to God. There were some things Paul could not do which Luke as a Doctor could do, and vice versa. We all have a part to play in God's story of the Church, every member of the Body of Christ is placed where he/she is for the Master's use. Every Christian is 'gifted' in some way to bring glory to Christ.

One of Luke's labours was to write down the third Gospel and Acts. Luke not only wrote down Paul's speeches and the responses of those he taught, but put together under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit two large volumes in the New Testament canon of Scripture. In his humility, he hides himself in his writings; he never uses his own name. John does likewise, calling himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved". Paul calls Luke "*the beloved physician*" (Col. 4:14). He was trained and educated, not only at medical school but also by the Holy Spirit for his lifelong work. Paul loved him, but One greater loved him with a greater love.

A Friend to the End

In the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul mentions that Demas was with him (Col. 4:14). However, Demas deserted the cause and was not there with Paul as he neared death, but Luke was. "*Only Luke is with me*", he writes to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:11). What a great comfort this was to Paul when so many had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). Luke was a faithful friend to the end, he was no deserter. He was steadfast, to Paul and his doctrine. He was reliable, always there for him. He was also in danger of suffering death himself by identifying with Paul at this time of the emperor Nero's persecution of the church. Perhaps he accompanied Paul to the place of execution himself. It is good to die in the company of the Lord's people. Paul had now finished his course, Luke had a few more miles to run and then they would both be together again, under the care of the Great Physician.

No Christian dies alone; other friends may not be in time to be with us at the end, but the Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24) never leaves us, and receives our spirit (Acts 7:59) when it is our time to move on. We may lose feeling at the end but not Him, and faith will look for the Invisible. Faith dies with the promise in the heart that He will never lose us, He loves us too much and has paid so much, in blood, for that to happen. "They shall be mine", He says (Mal. 3:17), and faith responds, "I shall be Thine!" ■

CREEDS AND CLAIMS TO DOCTRINAL ADVANCE

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

That there is a body of truth set out in Scripture is obvious. Paul says to Timothy: "*Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*" (2 Tim. 1:13)

The Puritan minister Thomas Case (1598-1682) noted that the word 'form' in this verse signifies "a frame of words or things, methodically disposed; as printers set and compose their characters". He said that by 'words', we are to understand "doctrine, evangelical truth, the principles of Christian Religion", and that these words are called 'sound words', either from their "intrinsical nature" or "effect and operation". This truth is to be held fast.

The point Case was making is that Christianity has a body of truth which is systematically arranged, known, taught, confessed and adhered to unswervingly, being without alteration either through time or across the world: all must hold to the same truth. To this end catechisms have been devised. Not only does the word 'catechism' occur in Scripture, but the practice does too. The word *catechise* is variously translated as instruct, teach and inform (Acts 18:25; Gal. 6:6; Acts 21:21). You see it where Luke writes, "that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been *instructed*." (Luke 1:4) This indicates that catechising on the Christian faith had happened, and Luke was now writing out "those things which are most surely believed among us." (v.1)

Doctrinal Advance Explained

The American J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), a professor of New Testament, very helpfully explained the nature of doctrinal advance. He noted the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1647 in comparison with the ancient *Apostles' Creed*. It is not a case of adding new doctrines over time, but filling out what is understood and taught by the Church in relation to doctrines already existing. This is clear in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), where the Lord reminds the disciples that he has commanded them everything that is to be taught and believed.

We obviously cannot accept that the Church has advanced in the *number* of its doctrines, but there has certainly been *development* of those doctrines. The advance is in terms of greater *precision*, which is assisted by the refutation of errors. As Machen says, all definition proceeds by way of exclusion. How utterly shallow is the notion that the church ought to make its teaching positive only! Truth cannot be maintained in such a way, but only when it is differentiated from error.

Another thing to bear in mind is the *priority of truth*. That is Machen's point when he refers to the *Apostles' Creed* and the creeds of the Reformation. These creeds are not the expression of Christian experience but summary statements of what God has taught in his word. It is all there already, in the Scriptures. Christian experience derives from the truth taught in the Bible; to put things the other way round, and say that truth derives from our experience, is to reduce Christianity to Quakerism.

The modern notion of doctrinal advance is an advance toward obscurity, vagueness and minimalism. Indeed, the whole emphasis in modern thought, as seen in political agreements, is 'constructive ambiguity', where everyone can read into the agreement exactly what they want. Creeds and Confessions have precision in order to avoid doctrinal ambiguity.

Examples of Alleged Doctrinal Advance

We can learn from the following four historical examples of alleged doctrinal advance:

Subscription Controversy in Ireland (1720s)

The Subscription controversy of the 1720s is an example of what is at stake. Subscription to the Westminster Confession became a divisive issue within Irish Presbyterianism and the end result was the expulsion of the non-subscribers who formed a separate body known as the Presbytery of Antrim. The Irish debate had a very significant impact upon American Presbyterianism. The advocate of subscription in America was an Ulster Presbyterian named John Thomson, who witnessed at first hand the corrosive impact of anti-subscriptionism within Irish Presbyterianism. The sneering at 'man-made' creeds was effectively a cover for doctrinal deviancy and error. Determined not to tolerate such in America, Thomson campaigned for tighter subscription. The result was the Adopting Act of 1729, which was unanimously approved. The Act was an attempt to stem the drift towards doctrinal laxity favoured by New School Presbyterians, and was a decisive victory in halting the slide.

Revision of the Confession in USA (1788)

In the 1780s revision was again being debated in

America, culminating in the 1788 revision of the Westminster Confession, along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The American Presbyterian Church openly rejected the Confession's teaching on the Establishment principle, or the national recognition of religion, and the political situation in America no doubt contributed to this. The revision included the removal from the Confession of Old Testament proof texts used in defence of Establishment. A century later Charles Hodge, in volume 3 of his *Systematic Theology*, endorsed the changes by claiming that we do not argue from the Old Testament economy. The historic view however is that all laws, whether moral, ceremonial or judicial, remain in place unless they are revoked by God. Judicial laws which are merely political remain, although the laws which pertained to Israel as a nation do not bind Gentiles except in a general way. This point was ignored by Hodge. The Revision of 1788 was an 'advance', but only towards ambiguity. The claim that the Westminster Assembly was out of focus was a sugar-coating of what was really happening.

Declaratory Act in Free Church (1892)

In the late nineteenth century the Free Church likewise engaged in doctrinal ambiguity. The drift and direction are seen in the publication in 1888 of *The Obsoleteness of the Westminster Confession of Faith* by Robert Mackintosh, who began in the Free Church but became a Congregationalist. The clouding of the real position is evidenced by the repeated claim that the advocates of change were not *revising* the Confession but merely replacing the 'obnoxious' statements. Some tried to have it both ways. Robert Candlish (1806-73) stated in his 1864 Cunningham lecture, "I do not call for any revision of our creeds, confessions, and catechisms", yet in 1886 he noted that everyone who had the Westminster Confession had adapted it. Robert Rainy (1826-1906) in his 1873 Cunningham lecture saw no problem in revision, promoting it as a virtue. Thomas Murray (1821-96), during the 1889 General Assembly debate, levelled the charge of 'theological vandalism' against the Confession. The Declaratory Act of 1892 was the public attempt at enshrining theological and confessional ambiguity. Rev. John Keddie has amply surveyed the significance of all this in his book *Preserving a Reformed Heritage*.

Revision of the Confession in USA (1903)

Our last example is the 1903 revision of the Westminster Confession in the USA regarding the Holy Spirit. As J.V. Fesko, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, notes elsewhere, the real reason for revision stems from the liberal Presbyterian theologian Charles A. Briggs (1841-1913) and the theologian and church historian Philip Schaff (1819-93). Each had his own agenda. For Briggs it was 'modern progressive theology', whereas for Schaff it was the idea of evolutionary progress. Fesko states that Briggs uncoupled the work of the Spirit from Christ, which meant the gospel was left behind. Schaff was also an ardent promoter of ecumenism, believing that sixteenth and seventeenth century reformed theology had numerous defects which needed fixing. The two worked together to begin their radical revision of the Westminster Confession. Rather than clarifying anything, the outcome was doctrinal ambiguity.

Positions on Revision

Creeds are not infallible: the issue is the *manner* of revision. The issue of revision came up at the 1618 Synod of Dort. According to the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the Arminians at the Synod, viewing the confessions as products of human study, insisted that they could be amended at any time. The Calvinists argued that this position implied a disregard of the work of God and a denial of the Kingship of Christ over his church; the church's confession did not originate from man alone. In Kuyper's words, the Calvinists held that the Synod could only enter upon a revision of the confession "in order that the sovereign rights of the Word of God as exercising authority over the confession also might continue intact and inviolable." The Synod agreed with the Calvinists. ('Calvinism and Confessional Revision', P*resbyterian and Reformed Review* vol.2, no.7 (July 1891, pp.392-3)

What Now?

Returning to our text, our attention is drawn to the words "hold fast". First we are to have the truth, and then we are to retain it, not letting it go. This is reinforced in the next verse with the word "keep". A creed based purely upon the Scriptures does not stand in need of alteration – unless it is to be enriched by expanding it to make clear what the Scriptures teach. After more than 300 years, no one has brought any substantial claim that Reformed creeds, confessions and catechisms are defective. Some may claim that there are defects, but they want to obscure rather than clarify.

In a radio talk in the 1930s, Machen rightly stated: "The truth is, there can be no real progress unless there is something that is fixed. Archimedes said, 'Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world'." Well, Christian doctrine provides that place to stand. Unless there be such a place to stand, all progress is an illusion. The very idea of progress implies something fixed. There is no progress in a kaleidoscope.

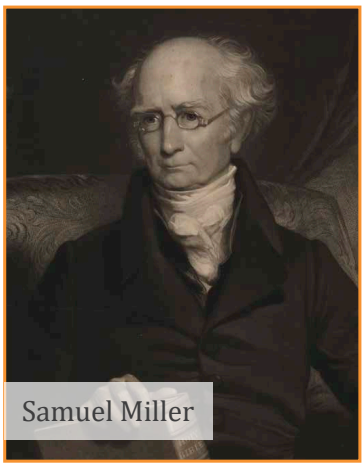
Let us hold fast! ■

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY AND BAPTISM

SAMUEL MILLER

(Samuel Miller [1769-1850] was Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton Seminary, New Jersey, from 1813-49. The following 'note', which has been lightly edited, is found in his work 'Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable', first published in 1835. It sheds helpful light on the Westminster's Assembly's view on the mode of baptism.)

"It has been sometimes ignorantly, and most erroneously asserted that the Westminster Assembly of divines, in putting to vote, whether baptism should be performed by *sprinkling* or *immersion*, carried it in favour of *sprinkling*, by a majority of *one only*. This is wholly incorrect. The facts were these. When the committee which had been charged with preparing a 'Directory for the worship of God', brought in their report, they had spoken of the mode of baptism thus: '*It is lawful and sufficient to sprinkle the child.*' To this Dr. Lightfoot, among others, objected; not because he doubted of the entire sufficiency of sprinkling; for he decidedly preferred sprinkling to immersion; but because he thought there was an impropriety in pronouncing that mode *lawful* only, when no one present had any doubts of its being so, and when almost all preferred it. Others seemed to think, that by saying nothing about *dipping*, that mode was meant to be *excluded*, as *not* a *lawful* mode. This they did not wish to pronounce. When, therefore, the clause, as originally reported, was put to vote, there were twenty-five votes in favour of it, and twenty-four against it. After this vote, a motion was made and carried, that it be *recommitted*. The next day, when the committee reported, and when some of the members still seemed unwilling to exclude all mention of *dipping*, Dr. Lightfoot remarked, that to say that *pouring* or *sprinkling* was *lawful*, would be 'all one as saying, that it was *lawful* to use *bread* and *wine* in the Lord's Supper.' He, therefore, moved that the clause in the 'Directory' respecting the mode of baptism, be expressed thus:


Samuel Miller

'Then the minister is to demand the name of the child, which being told him, he is to say (calling the child by his name) –

"*I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*"

As he pronounceth these words, he is to baptize the child with water, which, for the manner of doing it, is not only *lawful*, but *sufficient*, and *most expedient* to be, by *pouring*, or *sprinkling* of the water on the face of the child, without adding any other ceremony.' This was carried.

From this statement it is evident that the question which was carried in the Assembly, by a majority of *one*, was, *not* whether affusion or sprinkling was a *lawful* mode of baptism, but whether all mention of *dipping*, as *one* of the *lawful* modes, should be *omitted*. *This*, in an early stage of the discussion, was carried by a majority of one in the affirmative. But it would seem that the clause, as finally adopted, which certainly was far more decisive in favour of sprinkling or affusion, was passed 'with *great unanimity*'. At any rate, nothing can be more evident, than that the clause as it originally stood, being carried by one vote only, and afterwards, when recommitted, and so altered as to be *much stronger* in favour of sprinkling, and then adopted without difficulty, the common statement of this matter by our Baptist brethren is an entire misrepresentation."

Lawful but not Necessary

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (28.3) states that, "*Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.*" It provides the following proofs from Scripture, which are worth reading and weighing up: Heb. 9:10,19-22; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; Mark 7:4. From these references it is clear that dipping is lawful but not necessary: it is equally lawful to sprinkle or pour.

The subject of baptism is not immune to the penchant for point-scoring on the part of Christians. In the interests of historical accuracy, Samuel Miller has rendered a long-standing service to the Church. ■

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

REV. JAMES CLARK

"For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2)

Paul had personal experience of this delusion. He thought he was serving God in his earlier days but he was actually at enmity with God, despite his zealous religious activities! It was only when he met Christ that he could now serve God with a true knowledge.

A Religious Zeal without Knowledge is Dangerous

There is an anti-doctrine movement at work nowadays; many young people, in particular, are keen for activity but not study. Others, like Paul pre-conversion, are steeped in bad teaching about the Bible. Ceremonies and musical activities also become meaningless substitutes for intelligent worship. Others expend their energies on sociological or political causes and ignore the 'spiritually poor'. Others again, and not just the 'charismatics', place their subjective experiences and 'insights' above the authority of revealed Truth. Today's ecclesiastical culture highlights "the menace of mindless religion". True Christianity is not only acquiescing in God's way of salvation, but also in God's way of following Christ. Both are necessary if we are going to reach Heaven – otherwise we shall be detoured and end up in a place which is not Heaven.

The Mind must be Subordinated to Christ's Revealed Mind

If it is not, but goes its own way, the mind shows that it is still under the dominion of sin (2 Cor. 10:4,5; Ps. 32:9; Rom. 8:5-8). Some are too easily led by emotion, but the emotional part of man's nature was damaged by sin and is not an infallible guide to following the Lord. God communicates to us in words; they are written down so that we can read them. The problem is not with the eyesight but with the will; does the mind comply with what God says, or not? A choice must always be made. Peter gave the right response when he was pressurised to deviate; he asserted that we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). This seems acceptable to many, except when it means disobeying the church majority; for example, when it comes to obeying the Second Commandment concerning worship, the majority opt out (whether by Act of Assembly or otherwise). Definite, positive teaching, even when it is written for all to see, is not popular nowadays. They call this 'doctrine' – as if that was a bad word.

All we can say in response is that if you are not being led according to the Word, then it is not God that is leading you (Hos. 4:6). The remedy is clearly set out in Philippians 2:5.

True Knowledge is Necessary for True Holiness

If we are set free by Christ to follow him, and continue in His word (John 8:31,32), then we know we are in the path of holiness. But if we ignore His word, then our attempts at sanctification are Pharisaical and not based on "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26). To reject the Word of Christ for all aspects of the Christian life is to wander in ignorance, no matter how pious one feels. "That good, whatever it be, which the mind cannot discover, the will cannot choose, nor the affections cleave unto....in the Scripture, the deceit of the mind is commonly laid down as the principle of all sin whatever" (John Owen, *Works*, vol.2, pp.325-6). The battle for holiness begins in the mind, and only the Word can tell us whether we are in "the paths of righteousness" or not. Paul often writes in his Epistles, "Know ye not...I do not want you to be ignorant...". He was concerned that they all understood "what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:17) James, the half-brother of Christ, emphasised likewise that we have to be "doers of the word" (James 1:22-25), and not doers of something else, if we are to pursue sanctification.

Knowledge is given to us by God to be used. If used, it will bring us into spiritual worship, holiness, love and service. If we think we have zeal for God, let us measure that zeal by His word and not by our emotion or by the practice of the religious majority. Paul knew from experience that great zeal can delude us into thinking we have great knowledge. How we need to be kept by God! ■

CHASTENING

HORATIUS BONAR

(Bonar [1808-89] was a noted Free Church minister, serving in Kelso and Edinburgh, and a prolific author. This piece is taken from a chapter entitled 'The Recollections' from 'The Night of Weeping; or, Words for the Suffering Family of God', first published in 1845. It has been lightly edited.)

"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11)

We look on trial too much as we do upon a passing shower, which falls and then is gone. Whereas it is truly the smiting of the rock and the issuing forth of a new stream, whose waters are to keep us company through all our days of wandering. The benefits of chastisement should never be exhausted. They should be coming forth in freshness with every hour. Even when sitting calmly in the sunshine we may be drawing profit from the stormy past. This is consolation to the chastened soul; for how often in this way will a short sorrow be turned into lasting gladness. And it does seem as if what is thus obtained by us were a richer kind of blessing, a holier, deeper joy. Oh, let us remember past trials and carefully treasure them up as the choicest of our earthly possessions! The saint who has many of these to look back upon, has some reason to glory in his inheritance.

Influence

It is this that especially exercises that softening, mellowing influence which has been often observed in affliction. During the actual pressure of the sorrow there was less of this. Perhaps we were so stunned and stupefied as almost to be deprived of feeling. Or if we did feel, still there was so much of sharpness and bitterness about it that we were bruised rather than softened. There was such a struggle and such confusion of spirit that we sometimes wondered if we were profiting at all, and thought that the sorrow was too great to be productive of benefit.

But in retrospect all is different. "No chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11) The wound has ceased to bleed, and though it will remain a scar forever it is no longer open. It is then that the mellowing process goes on, and each remembrance of the past helps it forward. This is less perceptible than the others; we are not so directly conscious of it; but its silent influence upon our character, our temper, our will, our judgment, is wonderful.

Remembrance

The death-bed, the farewell, the funeral scene, the open tomb, the earth striking rudely on the coffin, the grave filled up, the turf rolled on by strange hands; these are like swords going through the very vitals. But they sadden more than they soften. The *remembrance* of these scenes, the frequent visit to the closed tomb, the calm after-inquiry into and meditation upon God's meaning in all this – it is these that so gently exercise a whole lifetime's influence upon the soul. They surround us with a softening atmosphere, and the light they shed down on us is the light of sunset, mellowed and shaded in its passage through the clouds of evening.

In another way also these recollections are precious. They teach us that God is *true*. The trials themselves taught us this; but their remembrance teaches us this yet more. And it is a lesson which even the saints need much to learn. Even they need to be taught how surely He is "the Amen, the faithful and true" (Rev. 3:14); and that in all that He has spoken to his church He has spoken *truly*. What refreshing confirmations of this do we gather up as we call to mind the past and see how the Lord hath led us. We can add our Amen every day to what Joshua declared to Israel on his death-bed. "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." (Josh. 23:14)

Blessing

Yes, "all things work together for [our] good" (Rom. 8:28) – the past as well as the present. And thus the stream of which we drink is a swelling one. Innumerable tributaries are flowing into it. This year it is "to the ancles", next year it will be "to the knees", and after that it will rise "to the loins" (Ezek. 47:3,4). And as it reaches the ocean, bearing us calmly on its bosom, it will be a great river "that [cannot] be passed over" (v.5). Yet oh, how little have the saints learned to prize these memorials of chastisement; these recollections of the wilderness, which are so rich in instruction, so fraught with blessing and with joy! ■

YOUTHFUL HOLINESS

REV. THOMAS BUCHANAN

"Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2)

We often hear from our parents and other older Christians that if they were young again they would do more: more reading of the Bible, more praying to God, and more in Christian service. They regret that their walk with God in their youth was not as it should have been. Their motive in sharing their experience is twofold: that you would not make the same mistakes as they did, and that you would strive for youthful holiness before God.

The command to be holy

While encouragement from older Christians is welcome, there is a greater obligation upon you to be holy: the command of God. When we are young we tend to consider some of God's commands to be applicable only to our parents, office-bearers or other older Christians in our church families. Yet the command in our text is for "all the congregation of the children of Israel". God's command to be holy applies in our youth.

What is it to be holy?

We can picture the word 'holy' as having two legs. One leg is walking away from something and the other is walking toward something. Are they walking in different directions? No, they are walking in harmony toward the same destination. Living a holy life means that with one leg we are separating ourselves from the things that corrupt us (sin, worldliness, disobedience) and with the other we are dedicating ourselves to live for God (faith, obedience). So 'youthful holiness' is not a list of 'do's and don'ts' but a life lived unto God. Reflection on Q. 35 of the *Shorter Catechism* will help you here.

Directions to get us started

The whole law, first and second table, directs you in holiness by showing you your duty to God and man. Leviticus 19 contains some directions very applicable to the years of youthful holiness:

Parents. "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father" (v.3). The call to be holy is supported by the Fifth Commandment. The home is a good place to begin to live in youthful holiness. We are called to a godly fear of our parents, which means we are to perform our obligations toward them. The Fifth Commandment reaches further than our natural parents, stretching to all superiors in age and gifts, whether in family, church or community. Let us live a holy life in honouring our parents.

Sabbath. "Ye shall...keep my sabbaths" (v.3). The call to be holy is also supported by the Fourth Commandment. Observing the Lord's Day is very important in living a life of youthful holiness. It is not a mere tradition but has been given to help us in the practice of holiness. We are to spend the day in God's worship, in His word, prayer and praise, both in public with our congregation and in private with our families. It is the day God has set apart in order that you may be set apart from the world and live unto Him.

Idols. "Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods" (v.4). The call to be holy is also supported by the First and Second Commandments. In living a life of youthful holiness we are not to turn to idols. An idol is not necessarily a figure or statue but can be a celebrity, musician, sports star, friend, mobile phone, social media account, etc. It is anything that turns your heart from God or your walk out of His way. Have you spent more time today with your mobile than you have in thinking about God? Holiness takes effort; you must strive to walk with God every day.

Why should I bother?

If the life of holiness is so difficult, you may be tempted to say, "I can't live like this, so why should I bother?" The reason given for us to be holy is not that we can be holy of ourselves but rather that our God is holy. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:15,16) If you are wondering when you were called to be holy, let me suggest a few things to help you. You are called to be holy by God's command, His covenant, your baptism, the gospel preached to you and ultimately by your faith in Jesus Christ.

Dear young people, the Bible is clear in the necessity for youthful holiness. It states that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), and so we can conclude that without Christ no man (including the young) can live a holy life in this world. If you desire to live in youthful holiness two things are needful for you: live a life of faith in Jesus Christ and pray for holiness. Begin with this petition: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10). ■

CHURCH NEWS

Rev. James & Mrs Christina Clark

Induction of Rev. James Clark *(Rev. David M. Blunt)*

On the evening of Friday 11th February, and in stormy weather, a congregation of approximately seventy gathered in South Harris Free Church (kindly loaned) in Leverburgh for the Induction of Rev. James Clark to the Harris congregation. Public worship was conducted by Rev. Raymond Kemp (Scalpay), Moderator *pro tem* of the Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides, who preached an appropriate sermon on 'The Lord Marrying the Land' from Isaiah 62:4-7: "*Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married....*" Mr Kemp pointed out that marriage is often used in Scripture as a figure to express the intimate relation between God and His people, which is a righteous, loving, merciful union and a communion of life. The Lord makes the marriage proposal through gospel ministers, and then graciously brings it about. Ministers are watchmen upon the walls of Zion, and they must be alert to enemy danger, instruct God's people and intercede for them.

Following the worship the Presbytery proceeded to the Induction. Rev. Harry Woods (Beauly) was associated with the Presbytery. Mr Kemp then addressed to Mr Clark the Questions appointed by Act of Assembly. Satisfactory answers having been given, and Mr Clark having signed the Formula in the presence of the congregation, Mr Kemp then engaged in prayer, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by authority of the Presbytery inducted Mr Clark to the charge of Harris. Mr Kemp and other members of Presbytery then gave Mr Clark the right hand of fellowship. Rev. David Blunt (North Uist & Grimsay) then addressed the newly-inducted minister from Christ's words in Luke 22:27, "*I am among you as he that serveth*", pointing Mr Clark to Christ as the Perfect Servant and model of humility, willingness and devotedness, and encouraging him to be among his flock and community and serve them. Rev. Kenneth Macdonald (retired) then addressed the congregation from the words in Hebrews 10:25, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*", urging them to be regular in their church attendance in difficult days and emphasising that time spent in listening to the preaching of God's word is never wasted.

After the Benediction had been pronounced, Rev. Harry Woods, Clerk to the Inverness Presbytery, spoke briefly of his appreciation of Mr Clark. The new Minister and his wife Christina then met the congregation as they left the building and a small reception followed at the nearby village hall. After greetings had been read presentations were made to the Clarks and to the Interim Moderator Rev. Raymond Kemp and his wife Heather. After Mr Kemp and Mr Clark had replied briefly the evening was concluded with worship.

The settlement ends a brief vacancy which began with the retirement of Rev. Iain Smith in October 2020. We pray that the Lord will bless both pastor and people in the preaching and hearing of the gospel. ■

Moderator-Designate

(Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, Assistant Clerk of Assembly)

A Lewis Minister with special responsibility for teaching systematic theology in the denominational Seminary has been announced as the new Moderator-Designate of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Rev. Greg MacDonald, who is minister of the Cross congregation, is due to take up his duties in May.

Mr MacDonald is a native of Stornoway where, along with his brother Mark, he completed his primary education. In his early teens family life was altered dramatically when his father, Rev. Kenneth Macdonald, took up an appointment on the Free Church South African Mission. Mr Macdonald, senior, would later become minister of Snizort, Isle of Skye and Scalpay, and is now retired, along with his wife Coleen, in the village of Garrabost, Point.

Returning from Africa Mr MacDonald would complete his secondary education at the Nicolson Institute. These were times of profound spiritual impact and in August 1993, at the age of 16, Mr MacDonald would profess faith in Christ as his Lord and Saviour. He then proceeded to Edinburgh University where he studied architecture graduating with an MA (Hons) in 1999. A period of work with the Edinburgh based

charity, Bethany Christian Trust, whose main work is amongst homeless people in the city served to deepen an awareness of the Lord leading him into the Christian ministry.

Having married Lorraine, also a native of Stornoway, Mr MacDonald commenced his theological training. At that stage the Free Church (Continuing) did not have its own Seminary, and theological training was provided at the Reformed Presbyterian College in Belfast. The MacDonalds look back fondly to their time in Ireland recalling the sincere welcome from the Irish Reformed Presbyterian Church, the excellent training and, in particular, the warm fellowship of the Loughbrickland RP congregation.

Rev. Greg MacDonald

On completion of his training Mr MacDonald was licensed to preach the Gospel and subsequently ordained and inducted to his Ness pastorate on 3rd September 2004. The Ness congregation had been cared for by Rev. John A Gillies for the greater part of the period following the events of 2000 and the harmony and spirituality of the people has proved to be a great blessing in the intervening years. As the years passed the family grew and the MacDonalds now have four children; three sons and one daughter.

Mr MacDonald has been blessed with opportunity of service both locally and further afield. He has been closely involved with the Providence Christian School in Stornoway serving on the Board of Governors for 14 years. He has also been involved in the local branches of both the Scottish Reformation Society and the Lord's Day Observance Society. He has returned to Africa serving as Trustee for Covenant College, Zambia and has also visited the denominational mission in Sri Lanka and engaged in mission work in Asia with Hudson Taylor Ministries. A more recent invitation to address the Presbytery Conference of the FC(C) in the USA was also greatly enjoyed. At the General Assembly in 2021 Mr MacDonald was appointed as Seminary Lecturer in Systematic Theology.

Speaking of the forthcoming General Assembly, Mr MacDonald expressed the hope that for the first time in three years the Assembly will be able to meet in person and that the business undertaken in Edinburgh would redound to the glory of God and the good of His cause in Scotland and beyond. ■

Southern Presbytery Colloquium

(Rev. Graeme Craig)

The annual Southern Presbytery Colloquium was once again able to take place 'in person' on Saturday 5th February at Knightswood Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow. The day proved beneficial for the men who gathered from a variety of denominations as fellowship was had in the things of the Gospel.

The opening paper was given by Rev. William Macleod, on *Aspects of the Second Coming of Christ*. The paper opened up a much-disputed subject in a profitable way. In particular Mr Macleod's discussion of the complexities of Matthew 24 was helpful. He noted that Jesus was answering two questions from the disciples, When would the temple be destroyed and What would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the world? Our Lord does not give a straightforward division in His answer between what for us is past or future. He indicated that some of the verses referred to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple in AD70, while others referred to the second coming of Christ, with there being an alternation of the two through the passage. He also showed that the end will be sudden and unexpected, "as a thief in the night". At the same time it will be no surprise to the saints in that they are longing and looking for Christ's return. Events to take place before the end as highlighted in Scripture were referenced, and signs of the end considered. This was a useful paper covering a range of Bible passages, and was stimulating and encouraging.

Thereafter, Rev. Andrew Allan spoke on *Applying God's Law Today*. After noting the way the word 'law' is used in Scripture, and indicating the usual distinction of the Old Testament Law into civil, ceremonial and moral, Mr Allan showed how the Moral law remains the believer's rule of life, even though he is justified and Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for him. In an interesting discussion of Romans 2:14-15 he indicated that all men by nature have the law written on their hearts, though they do not live up to it; otherwise those without the written law of God would not be guilty of sin, which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. After explaining the need to preach the law, without which the Gospel makes little sense, he concluded with a challenging application of the Ten Commandments.

The final session took the form of a brief paper followed by discussion on *Reaching our Neighbour in Modern Scotland*. Rev. David Fraser reminded the brethren that the Free Church was born in a time of revival and that mission work and outreach at home characterised the Church both before and after the Disruption of 1843. This challenge to be a people who

Rev. Graeme Craig leading worship at the Colloquium

were not insular, but were concerned for those who are perishing, was followed by some discussion as to how best to approach various types of people who might be encountered today, many of whom are either non-religious or caught up in false religion. The only regret was that there was limited time to pursue this theme.

The three sessions made for a worthwhile day and it was good to be able to meet and have fellowship with like-minded brethren over a period of time. The addresses can be found online on Partick Free Church (Continuing)'s Sermon Audio page.

Spring Conference 2022 *(Publications Committee)*

After a two-year absence due to Covid-19, the Spring Conference will take place this year in Inverness on Friday 15th April. It will run from 10.00am to 4.00pm (D.V.).

The subject of this year's Conference is 'Revival', and as usual there will be two sessions. At the morning session Rev. Maurice Roberts (retired) will speak on *The Principles and Necessity of Revival*, and at the afternoon session Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod (Snizort) will speak on *Twentieth Century Revivals in the Western Isles*. There will be a time for questions after each session.

It is intended that a Conference brochure and booking form will be distributed with the March issue of the *Witness* and also made available on the Church website. For more information please visit the website or contact the Clerk *pro tem* to the Publications Committee, Rev. David M. Blunt, at: publications@fccontinuing.org

School in Theology 2022 *(Rev. Andrew R. Allan)*

The organisers are pleased to announce that the programme for the 69th School in Theology has been finalised. The 2022 speakers and subjects include: Rev. John W. Keddie, '*The Life and Times of Moody Stuart*'; Rev. Tom Budgen, '*John 1:1*'; Rev. James I. Gracie, '*1st Chapter of Ezekiel*'; Rev. Henry J.T. Woods, '*Adoption*'; Rev. Craig Dennison, '*Themes in Jude*'; Rev. Davide Ratti, '*The Biblical Necessity and Responsibilities of Church Membership*'; and Rev. Thomas Buchanan, '*Scoffers in 2 Peter 3:3*'. Also in the programme are daily prayer meetings, devotionals, book reviews and evening worship sessions, along with a missionary spot on Tuesday morning when our Home Mission Worker Mr Donald J. Morrison will give an update on his work in Scotland and Moldova.

The School will take place from 5th to 8th September 2022 (D.V.) at the usual venue of Carronvale House, Larbert. The long-established School has a reputation of being a relaxed and informal gathering where men from different church backgrounds gather from all over the UK and beyond to enjoy a time of stimulation, encouragement and fellowship around the Word of God in a delightful and congenial location.

Brethren are encouraged to register on the School in Theology website if they have not already done so. By registering, the brethren will receive up to date information and will be able to book their place at the School online. Please go to www.schoolintheology.org.uk and follow the instructions. Alternatively a Booking Form may be downloaded from the site or obtained from the Secretary: Rev. Andrew R. Allan, 23 Kingfisher Drive, Glasgow, G13 4QA; tel: 0141 328 1707; email: secretary@schoolintheology.org.uk. Please return your completed form to the Secretary to book your place.

Ministers and Elders of the Free Church (Continuing) are encouraged to come. Essentially this is an excellent opportunity for in-service training. The date of the 2023 School has been set for the 4th to 7th September 2023 (D.V.).

Christians in Pakistan Gravely Imperilled

(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)

On Lord's Day 30 January, Rev. William Siraj (75) was driving home after leading worship at Shaheedan-e-All Saints' Church in Peshawar, north-west Pakistan, when two men on a motorbike ambushed his vehicle. Shot multiple times in the head, the much-loved pastor died instantly. While no group has claimed responsibility for the targeted assassination, an enlarged and emboldened Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, the Pakistani Taliban) and a determined Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) are both active in the area. The departure of Western counter-terrorism forces from Afghanistan has opened the space for terrorist groups to compete, recruit and operate. Of all the cities in Pakistan, none is more vulnerable than Peshawar. Peshawar's Christian clerics, churches and communities may be more at risk now than at any time in Pakistan's history. Please pray.

Quote

"There is nothing men do that advances them so much as this, to be a friend of God; yet I know, there is nothing in the world less esteemed than to be a friend of God."

Andrew Gray

COMMENT

TRUTH UNDER THREAT

Standing firm against intimidation

It is evident in the debate over so-called 'conversion therapy' that the public presentation of the gospel is at stake. An article by Mark Smith posted on *The Herald* website (6th February), entitled 'Abhorrent and Inhumane. So why has a ban on gay conversion therapy in Scotland still not happened?', focuses on Blair Anderson, a homosexual and activist for the End Conversion Therapy Scotland campaign. It states that Anderson was brought up in a Christian family who attempted to convert him to heterosexuality in his teenage years, "through prayer and pressure". Anderson is quoted saying: "It was all about the consequences, how they would be in heaven and I would literally be in Hell. They believed in Hell as a real place."

Here is an implicit attack upon belief in hell by an advocate for a ban on conversion therapy. It is the goal of some to remove historic, biblical Christianity, or rewrite it at the level of its belief and practice. The 'queer' lobby wants to make Scotland a cold house for Christians and the Church. It understands that the Bible declares sodomy to be sin and that those who practise it will go to hell. Therefore it would like public expression of belief in hell, and the underlying condemnation of sodomy, to be covered by any forthcoming ban.

What such deliberately overlook is that we are *all* sinners (Rom. 3:23). Only by God's grace do any of us receive forgiveness for our sins, through faith in Jesus Christ, and then begin to experience the transformation which enables us to live in obedience to God's will as set out in His moral law and exemplified by the Redeemer. We cannot under any circumstances yield the citadel of Christianity to nefarious, bullying groups of any kind, for to do so is to betray the Lord and sign our death warrant. Let us stand firm.

Meanwhile, Gonville & Caius, a college in the University of Cambridge, has voted to stop flying other flags, including the LGBT flag, believing that its own flag speaks for all its members. LGBT activists attacked the decision as pandering to intolerance! Inclusion can only be displayed by *their* flag! Also, the University of Bristol is being sued for discrimination by PhD student Raquel Sánchez, a feminist who has been harassed by 'trans' activist students for three years. She believes that only biological women can give birth. Diversity chiefs have pronounced her use of the term 'maternity' to be "problematic". We hope that Gonville & Caius and Sánchez stand firm too. ■

THE RESULTS OF ATHEISM

What unbelief does to society

It has become fashionable not to believe in God, although Scripture says that denying God's existence is foolish (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). This negative belief is still a belief, and like all beliefs it requires evidence to support it, yet we know that all the facts are against it. Atheism is also like other beliefs in that there are consequences which follow from it, for the individual and the nation. And the results of atheism are not good, as we are seeing today. It deprives us of three important things.

Atheism robs us of our *supreme authority*. If God is denied then there is no higher authority than man. The king used to be supreme, but now it is the people. The thought is that whatever the majority approves is acceptable (in reality it tends to be whatever those who are actually in power want). This may be fine in administrative matters, but not in matters of righteousness. The powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1), and they are surely accountable to God too. The apostles reminded the Jewish council who is supreme when they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Atheism robs us of a *stable morality*. Properly, morality consists of absolute rights and wrongs which apply to all men always. This is what we have in God's law, summed up in the Ten Commandments. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Rom. 7:12) As society becomes ungodly, this fixed standard is replaced by one which alters over time. A grievance is expressed, a right is claimed, change is demanded and eventually an act of parliament is passed. Abortion used to be treated as murder, but now it is provided by the National Health Service. Will the same soon be the case in Scotland with assisted suicide? When the law of God is set aside, nothing is sacred and nothing is safe.

Atheism robs us of any *hope for eternity*. The atheist expects oblivion at death. Such an end would mean that our lives are ultimately without any real meaning, yet do we not have the self-consciousness that the way in which we live our lives here is of great importance to us? We have this sense because we have a never-dying soul. We shall indeed meet our God one day (Amos 4:12). The gospel reveals how valuable man is in God's sight. In Christ crucified there is eternal life for perishing sinners. An unbelieving generation, without hope, urgently needs to hear these truths! ■

JOHN WYCLIFFE – THE EVANGELICAL DOCTOR

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

Most Christians have heard of his name, and may be familiar with the title he has been given – 'The Morning Star of the Reformation' – but beyond that he remains a mystery. Who was John Wycliffe?

Century of Upheaval

John Wycliffe was born around 1324 near Richmond in Yorkshire, in a most remarkable age. By 1300 almost everything that had been familiar for centuries had been turned upside down or reconstructed. The first half of the fourteenth century saw economic, social, political and religious change on a scale never before witnessed. Earthquakes, freezing temperatures and the Black Plague, along with the commencement of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), all combined to destabilise society. Benjamin Fischer says, "The English Church was not intellectually or spiritually prepared for such disaster. If anything, it had been left vulnerable by the ascendance of philosophical scepticism in the universities." (*Being a Pastor: Pastoral Treatises of John Wycliffe*, translated and edited by Benjamin L. Fischer, The Davenant Institute, 2021)

Revisionist ideas had become widespread to the extent that the knowability of God was doubted. Uncertainty and the unknowability of God in his nature and being became standard. The historian Gordon Leff wrote that God "became synonymous with uncertainty, no longer the measure of all things." ('The Fourteenth Century and the Decline of Scholasticism', *Past & Present*, No. 9 [April 1956], p.34) Incredibly, experience alone became the rule. The end result was an emphasis on Mary, the Mass and Mysticism. Scepticism resulted in the demise of Scripture reading. That is evidenced by what happened in Oxford and Cambridge where lectures on the Bible were reduced to a single term which could be completed during the summer holidays. In addition there was the demise of exegesis. Not a single commentary on Scripture was produced from Oxford from 1330 to 1370.

Evangelical Conscience

Into all this God raised up an intellectually brilliant and spiritually alert servant, John Wycliffe. Educated at Oxford, Wycliffe began by taking his BA at Merton College in 1356, becoming Master of Balliol College in 1361. Though he spent most of his time in Oxford, he held clerical posts at Fillingham, Lincolnshire, and Ludgershall, Buckinghamshire. He gained his doctorate in 1369, by which time he was renowned as both a theologian and a great thinker. He had previously been ordained in 1351, at twenty-four years of age, and over the next thirty years became the leading theologian of the century. From 1374 until his death he was rector of Lutterworth in Leicestershire. Wycliffe received his doctorate in divinity in 1372, but he was known popularly as *Doctor Evangelicus*, or Evangelical Doctor. From this time the word 'evangelical' entered the English language, being at first a derogatory term.

Some three hundred works are attributed to Wycliffe. Among the most important were: *On Divine Dominion*, which challenged the authority and legitimacy of the papacy; *On Civil Dominion*, which argued that the Roman Church could have no authority over the realm of England; and *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*, which stressed the supreme authority of the Bible. Wycliffe was condemned for heresy in 1381, which effectively ended his university career. He retired to Lutterworth, where, in addition to his preaching, he continued to write. Wycliffe was quite literally the evangelical conscience of the fourteenth century.

Followers in Scotland

The followers of Wycliffe were known as 'Lollards', and were not confined to England. His reforming spirit spread to Scotland, especially western districts, which led to his Scottish followers gaining the name 'The Lollards of Kyle', after Kyle in Ayrshire. Around 1407 an English priest named John Resby, a supporter of Wycliffe who had fled northward to escape persecution, was executed at Perth by burning for heresy – something which had never been seen in Scotland. The Lollards sought reform of the Roman Catholic Church. According to John Knox, in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, among the chief indictments made against the Lollards was that images, relics, and the Virgin are not proper objects of worship; that the bread and wine in the sacrament are not transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ; that no priest or pope can grant absolutions or indulgences; that masses cannot profit the dead; that miracles have ceased; and that priests may lawfully marry.

It is no accident that Knox in his *History* goes back to the Lollards, thus drawing a line from them to his own day. The historian Colin Kidd, in his book *Subverting Scotland's Past* published in 1993, draws attention to the providentialist view of history which, as with Knox, reaches back to the Lollards. The reason is the similar theology, which taught that the faithful need only the Scriptures for salvation; this was perhaps the greatest threat presented to Rome. Wycliffe strongly asserted the authority of Scripture over the Church. He wrote: "Even though there were a hundred popes and though every mendicant monk were a cardinal, they would be entitled to confidence only in so far as they accorded with the Bible."

> *"Too often we fail to grasp the sheer enormity of what Wycliffe achieved."*

Gabriel Toretta, a papist, in an article on John Knox and the cult of Mary in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (May 2014), states that "anti-Marian polemics entered Scottish Christianity through various sources, including the Lollards around Kyle" – thus confirming the similarity between Lollardy and the Reformation. More reassuring is the historian and Free Church minister William K. Tweedie (1803-63), who argued that 'lollardy' was the first name given to British Protestants, who were persecuted by papists who feared their growth.

Significant Legacy

What truths has Wycliffe left behind that demonstrates his significance?

First, the absolute free will of God to act as he pleases.

Second, the complete reliability of Scripture and the untrustworthiness of experience.

Third, the Bible is to be read in its primary literary senses. Wycliffe restored a realist reading of Scripture as opposed to a nominalist reading. Wycliffe was convinced that each and every part of Scripture was true and fitted together; thus Scripture was to be read in its totality.

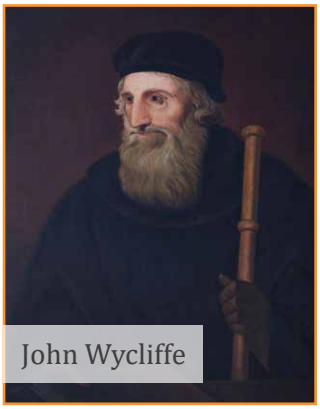
Fourth, that Christ is the interpretative key that unlocks the truth of Scripture. One must believe in order to understand. To that end, Wycliffe insisted that every Christian be a theologian.

Fifth, preachers must conform to the Apostolic model in order to be the mouthpiece of Christ. His work *On the Pastoral Office*, published in 1378, was central to this.

Sixth, Scripture has its own internal logic. The reader or preacher is not to come to it with his own system, but must first learn to read and understand Scripture for itself. We must conform ourselves to Scripture as opposed to conforming Scripture to ourselves. His point was simple: it takes a virtuous (i.e. gracious) person to understand Scripture.

Too often we fail to grasp the sheer enormity of what Wycliffe achieved. By his preaching he challenged a Pope, Cardinals and Bishops. By his academic lectures he took on the faculties of England and Europe. By his writings he disseminated Pauline-Augustinian theology that rattled and shook the Sophists and Cynics who had destroyed the interpretation of Scripture and faith in the trustworthiness of Scripture. Some of the biggest names in his day, such as John Kenningham, were unable to successfully refute or undermine his impeccable logic, grasp of Scripture and complete faith in God as the first principle of everything.

Ongoing Influence


John Wycliffe

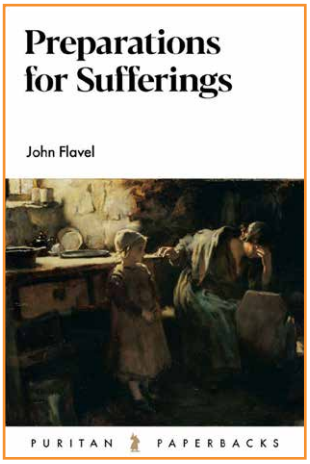
There was only one thing to do – silence him. Wycliffe was expelled from Oxford in 1381 to stop his popular influence amongst students. He died (following a stroke) on 31st December 1384, and was buried in Lutterworth churchyard. In 1415 the Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic, and in 1428 his remains were exhumed and burned, and then thrown into the local river. His influence was far from ended however – indeed it only increased after his death. Wycliffe's teachings had a great influence on Jan Hus (c.1372-1415), the Bohemian (Czech) reformer; Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, promoted his views in England, anticipating the sixteenth century English Reformation; and Wycliffe's Bible, which appeared from 1382 to 1395, was the first complete translation into English, and as such is at the head of the stream which led to the Authorised Version of 1611.

The churchman and historian Thomas Fuller (1608-61), in his *The Church History of Britain* published in 1655, said appropriately regarding Wycliffe: "They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighbouring brook running hard by. Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed the world over." ■

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Preparations for Sufferings
John Flavel, Banner of Truth Trust, pbk, 176pp, £5.50



John Flavel (1630-1691) based this exposition on Paul's words in Acts 21:13, where the apostle declared: "*for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*" It never ceases to amaze one how relevant are the writings and observation of divines like Flavel. In his Epistle to the Reader (pp.1-3), Flavel makes the following comments: "*the aged world, like aged persons, dotes and grows whimsical in its old age...the multitudes please themselves even when the sins of the time are so great.*" Contemporary indeed!

The book is divided into sixteen short chapters. After expounding the above text, Flavel then proceeds to demonstrate the purpose of God in the suffering of His people. He points out that it is usual with God to give some previous indication of suffering, for example, prior to the Flood and also regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Flavel reminds us that even Paul was given "many clear premonitions" of his sufferings.

There are numerous insights on the *whats* and the *whys* of Christian suffering in this precious book. Flavel's basic premise is that Christians in particular should be ready and prepared for suffering. He encourages us to have a mindset similar to Paul regarding this matter. The Apostle's approach is well-summed up in Philippians 1:23, "*to be with Christ which is far better*". And further on in the same chapter Paul states: "*unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake*" (v.29).

Further, it lessens the pain of suffering when we consider such matters in the light of the great eternity with its promised rewards. This is surely what Paul had in mind when he wrote: "*our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Cor 4:17). There is a very challenging chapter (10) on what the author calls "*the necessity of an heart mortified to all earthly and temporal enjoyments*" as a means to prepare oneself for this type of suffering. For twelve pages he takes us through a labyrinth of spiritual exercises in pursuit of biblical preparation for pre-glory suffering.

Flavel also gives a solemn challenge to those who hypocritically profess Christ. The inevitable occurs at the first sign of suffering for their supposed beliefs. Hence Flavel warns: "*never wonder if you see that profession which began in hypocrisy to end in apostasy.*" Nominal Christians are urged to consider their attitude towards the things of God. If one is not prepared to suffer for Christ's sake, there is something amiss in that person's mindset.

The final chapter is full of biblical encouragement for believers in their sufferings. Appealing to God's grace, covenant, electing love, union with Christ, His intercession in heaven, the indwelling of the Spirit, as well as divine promises, Flavel almost makes this type of suffering something to look forward to! Which of course it is, in God's superintendence over our glory-bound pilgrimage on earth. ■

Rev. Iain Smith

Christ the Mediator by John Morrison
Scottish Reformed Heritage Publications

This 88-page book by a retired minister of the Free Church (Continuing) and former lecturer in Systematic Theology in the Free Church Seminary was reviewed in our January issue. Further details are now available regarding ordering the title.

A single copy of *Christ the Mediator* costs £6.99 (post free). If 5-9 copies are purchased the cost per copy will be £6.00 (post free). When 10 or more copies are purchased the cost per copy will be £5.00 (post free). The book may be ordered from: Scottish Reformed Heritage Publications, 19 Newton Park, Kirkhill, IV5 7QB (tel: 01463 831896; e-mail: jwkeddie@yahoo.co.uk) or directly from Lulu (www.lulu.com), Amazon, or other Internet sites (ISBN: 978-1-6781-6276-4).

Other titles from Scottish Reformed Heritage Publications which have been reviewed in the magazine include:

James MacGregor – Preacher, Theologian and Defender of the Faith by John Keddie (November 2016 issue)

Preserving a Reformed Heritage by John Keddie (February 2018)

A Divided Church by John Keddie (July-August 2018)

The Church: Its Nature, Ordinances and Offices by John Keddie (June 2019)

Metrical Psalmody in the Free Church of Scotland by Maurice Grant & John Keddie (July-August 2019).

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.

March
13 Cross, Portree
20 Glasgow–Knightswood
27 Inverness–Greyfriars, Mebane, Scalpay Harris

April
3 Ayr, Bracadale, Duthil-Dores
10 North Uist & Grimsay, St Louis
17 Ballyclare & Doagh, Greenville
24 Aberdeen, Atlanta, Glasgow–Partick, Knock & Point, Lochalsh & Strath

May
1 Arran, Edinburgh–St Columba's
8 Glasgow–Shettleston, Kilmorack & Strathglass, Kilmuir & Stenscholl

(All dates subject to change due to COVID-19)

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2021 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES Jan 2022 £	Total to Jan 2022 £	Total to Jan 2021 £
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1,850	1,850	1,500
Duthil-Dores	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Inverness	0	2,000	2,000	2,000
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,450	1,450	1,450
Poolewe & Aultbea	700	960	960	960
Total Inverness Presbytery	700	7,760	7,760	7,410
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	0	0	0	0
Brora	573	700	700	700
Kiltearn	0	0	0	0
Tarbat	0	2,000	2,000	1,500
Total Northern Presbytery	573	2,700	2,700	2,200
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	0	475	475	442
Ayr	0	1,000	1,000	700
Ballyclare & Doagh	0	1,100	1,100	1,100
Dumfries	0	230	230	130
Edinburgh	0	1,600	1,600	1,600
Glasgow - Knightswood	0	2,000	2,000	2,500
Glasgow - Partick	0	1,600	1,600	1,600
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	800	800	1,500
Rothesay	0	0	0	0
Total Southern Presbytery	0	8,805	8,805	9,572
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	1,610	1,610	3,218
Harris - Leverburgh	0	1,400	1,400	1,600
Knock & Point	0	1,200	1,200	1,370
North Uist & Grimsay	480	1,050	1,050	1,050
Scalpay	0	2,200	2,200	2,100
Stornoway	0	7,968	7,968	3,000
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	480	15,428	15,428	12,338
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	500	500	500
Lochalsh & Strath	0	0	0	2,000
Portree	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Snizort	0	1,600	1,600	1,600
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	0	5,100	5,100	7,100
Smiths Falls	0	995	995	985
Total From Congregations	1,753	40,788	40,788	39,605
Other Donations	0	2,663	2,663	3,177
Legacy	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,753	43,451	43,451	42,722
Included in the above: Tax	0	0	10	0
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	1,753	43,451	43,451	42,722

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

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financialadministrator@fccontinuing.org

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

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

Attendees at the recent Southern Presbytery Colloquium (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

1 Timothy 4:16

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)