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COVER IMAGE:
The east end of Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh. Robert Rollock was the first minister of the parish and is buried in the graveyard. See page 16.

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THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

Our nation is experiencing lean times spiritually. Materially we are wealthier than former generations – although the Covid pandemic and conflict in Ukraine have reminded us of the uncertainty of such riches – but we are not prospering spiritually in the way our forefathers did. There is little desire for the things of God, which are regarded with disdain, and even hated. The Bible is no longer acknowledged as having authority over our beliefs and behaviour.

This unbelieving and scornful attitude is seen in countless individuals and groups in society. It is also evident in our governments, and alarmingly in sections of the church. Believers who have seen better days are bound to weep over this tragic situation. If we think that because of our wonderful Christian heritage our nation could never become as dark as less-favoured nations, then we need to think again. The danger is a real one.

Lesson

Scripture teaches, and history demonstrates, that the greatest spiritual privileges are no guarantee against declension and what may follow. God chose Israel to be a special people unto Himself, covenanting with them and giving them the means of salvation, yet time and again they departed from the Lord. When their promised Messiah finally came they did not receive Him (John 1:11), refusing Him as their King because they could not approve the terms of His reign. The solemn consequence is seen in the words Christ then addressed to them: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38)

The Jews took offence at Christ early in His public ministry, when He visited Nazareth, the town of His upbringing, and worshipped in the synagogue. Reading from Isaiah, He proclaimed Himself to be the Saviour foretold by the prophet (Luke 4:16-21). Knowing that the congregation there tended to pride, He preached the doctrine of election, pointing out how in the days of Elijah and Elisha God passed by many in Israel, and showed mercy instead to the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman the Syrian, both Gentiles. In their anger at this, the people forced Christ out of the city, leading Him to the top of a hill from which they hoped to cast Him down and kill Him (vv.23-30).

Death

The offence was also there in Capernaum when Christ proclaimed Himself to be the Bread of Life. He would give His flesh for the life of the world but stressed that we cannot have eternal life except we eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:53,54,56). To many of His followers, this was "an hard saying", for they did not have saving faith in Him. The Lord reminded these waverers that salvation is by sovereign, irresistible grace, that "no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." This was too much for them, and they turned back. But Simon Peter would *not* go away. When he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (vv.65-69), he spoke for all true disciples.

The Jewish leaders ultimately had Jesus crucified. This was ordained by God. In His eternal purpose, the church was to be founded upon the suffering and dying of her mighty King and Redeemer. The Jews had always struggled with the modest way the Saviour entered the world at Bethlehem, and the humble circumstances of His life, but what stumbled them was His bloody death at Golgotha. "The Son of God, dying on a cross, accursed of God? It is impossible, and proves that Jesus was a false prophet." This stumbling block must not be removed by changing the gospel: that Christ was "made a curse for us" *is* the gospel (Gal. 3:13)! Instead it is removed by changing the *sinner*, which only God can do. Paul knew nothing among the Corinthians but "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified", and the Lord blessed His preaching (1 Cor. 2:2-4).

Scandal

The offence of Calvary takes different forms, depending on who is taking offence. Among them are those who see no need of a crucified Saviour, because they do not think they have done anything worthy of the name 'sin'. Some go so far as to deny the very idea of sin, insisting that man is essentially good. It must be said that the treatment Christ received from the Jewish church and nation, He being the one person in history who was perfectly good, is a fact that does not sit easily with any notion of man's worthiness. Total depravity is not a mere theory with no actual examples. The evidence of it is there in every one of us! According to Paul,

mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, are all under sin; there is not one of them that is righteous, seeks after God or does good (Rom. 3:9-12).

As long as we remain in our sins, we do not want the cross to change us in the way that we need to be changed. We prefer to change the cross. This has been done with the literal cross. It has become a religious symbol, an ornament and a piece of jewellery. Having no warrant from God, this symbol is capable only of attracting the physical eye and can do nothing for the soul. More significantly, the doctrine of the cross has been changed. Instead of the biblical doctrine of substitutionary atonement, by which believers in Christ have "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14), Christ's sufferings are said to have a moral power only, encouraging us to do good in the face of evil. There is no help for us poor sinners there!

> *"To the wise of this world, the cross is weakness and foolishness."*

Works

The doctrine of the cross comes under continual attack from within the evangelical church. In one way or another, it is taught, and often quite subtly, that if we are to be saved then we must add something to Christ's work on the cross. There are certain conditions we must fulfil ourselves – faith, repentance, obedience, endurance, and so on – otherwise the cross cannot save us.

The churches of Galatia were bewitched by teaching of this type. It insisted that Christians needed to be circumcised, just as was required of the Jews under the old covenant. Paul stood firm, giving the Galatians this warning: "if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing...every man that is circumcised...is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:2-4) He also told them this: "if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased." (v.11)

Because Paul would not preach circumcision as a requirement for salvation, he was persecuted by the Jews and Judaisers. He preached against works, against the damnable 'plus' which says that salvation is dependent on something in the sinner or something done by the sinner. Here is the truth: if Christ crucified is not *all* to us, then He will be *nothing* to us. This is the offence. Come to the cross we must, but the only thing we may bring with us is the sin from which we need to be saved.

Pride

Faith and repentance are not our work, but God's gracious gifts to us (Eph. 2:8; Acts 5:31). The gospel calls us to receive and rest upon Christ alone for righteousness, but we are like the man with the withered hand, powerless. Yet Jesus said to the man, "Stretch forth thine hand", and the moment the words were spoken, "he stretched it forth" (Matt. 12:13). We have a promise from Christ to encourage us: "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7). We should pray to the Lord that He would give us the hand of faith, to lay hold of Himself and His salvation. Our obedience and endurance as believers are also from God, for all our good works are the fruit of that good work He has begun in us, and "will perform until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

We can see why the doctrine of the cross is so offensive to so many; it gives no place to man and leaves no room for his sinful pride. We find Paul saying, even praying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14) The truth of the cross will one day find out those whose 'Christianity' was in reality of a very different sort to that found in the Bible.

Love

To the wise of this world, the cross is weakness and foolishness. They see a forlorn figure, forsaken by all, even by God. But the Lord's people see a beauty in this because they see it in the light of the Scriptures, which say that in His desolation Christ "bare the sin of many" (Isa. 53:12). Believers love Calvary, for they love the One who in love to them died so willingly there. They love it for the abundant grace it brings into their lives, the pardon and peace they enjoy and the sanctifying power it has in their lives.

Christians love the cross because God has made them new creatures in Christ. With their renewed minds they understand that salvation is of the Lord alone, and with their renewed affections they adore the One who accomplished it. Christ said, "blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. 11:6). Make sure that this promise belongs to you. It surely does, if in your heart you are already singing the eternal song of the redeemed, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:12). ■

THE CROOK IN THE LOT

REV. JAMES CLARK

"Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?"
(Ecclesiastes 7:13)

"A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment [behaviour] under them, and that view is to be obtained only by faith and not by sense. For it is the light of the Word alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and, consequently, designs becoming [aims in accordance with] the Divine perfections." (Thomas Boston, *The Crook in the Lot*).

Providence is no Sure Guide

Boston's book is one of the best on this subject, namely when Providence seems to contradict Promise. We say *seems* to, for it cannot really be the case. God has a plan for each of His people's lives, and it is holy, just and good, like Himself. Boston highlights the need for the Christian to respond well to perplexing and distressing afflictions – something we do not do by nature. Our need is to understand, but often even this comfort is beyond us. If our heart can be (Divinely) held up, we can continue under the affliction. Otherwise we collapse inwardly, and move along the pilgrim's path with trudging steps. But, like Joseph, even when we do not understand, we have to pray that our faith and patience will hold out until the storm has passed. No human power can still the storm, and it may be a while before the heart faintly hears the words, "Peace, be still." (Mark 4:39) Under this weight of sorrow we also need to show the world our trust, like Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I [continue to] trust in him" (Job 13:15)!

Submission in Faith, not Fear

Some people bang their heads against a door which God has closed (Rev. 3:7). If God closes a door, only He can open it again. It may not be His purpose to do so; He may open another door instead (Acts 16:6-10). We must pray to submit to Him in faith, not sullenness. It is not possible for God to give His people what is second best: all things work together for their (ultimate) good (Rom. 8:28). "Not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42) is the perfect pattern of submission. In Gethsemane these words were uttered by a perfect human nature under great strain. We know something of it. There was in Christ, internally, much 'unknown suffering'. Our own suffering is also unique to ourselves. Others see only the surface, not the waves and currents below. Faith shall continue to speak well of Him when challenged, even if it takes all our strength to get the words out, like Job: "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

Consider the Work, Consider the Remedy also

Faith must be tried and exercised in order to grow; the alternative is shallowness and toddler-responses when we do not get our way. We are to 'consider' this work of God. We can either turn it around in our mind in circles of panic, or we can consider it as HIS work, and therefore it is neither aimless nor punitive. Something has happened to disturb our smooth, onward course; there is a shudder inside as we come to a halt, and try to take in what is happening. Alas, we only have the mental capacity to see the present and not the future, the small part of the picture and not the finished painting. Others cannot get inside our pain to understand it, nor have they the omniscience or omnipotence to diagnose it or stop it. We can now either come to a complete stop and lie down in despair, or trust in God and 'make best speed to port', like the crippled merchant ship in World War 2 which could not keep up with the convoy.

Trusting in Christ

We can become too absorbed in contemplating the effects of distress on ourselves, rather than reflecting on what God is teaching us through the experience. It takes strong prayer to get out of self, and an occupation with our own feelings. The Puritans talked about "how we can improve this" – not just *how* we can get out of this, but *what* we can get out of this. And remember, our responses affect not only our own spiritual life but also those around us – our 'dependents' in God's family. The Person of Christ comes to us with many Names; one or more aspects of His character are suitable for us to apply to ourselves in our present experience. He is a Physician, to bind up wounds, He is a Carer to maintain us in life, He is a High Priest who can be touched as He contemplates our infirmities and ignorance (Heb. 4:15; 5:2).

Every morning we wake with a choice: Shall we trust Christ today? That may sound simple, yet such trust cannot be implemented without faith. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us", says Faith. "Pray on", says Hope. "Endure all things", says Love (1 Sam. 7:12; Luke 18:1; 1 Cor. 13:7). This is something to be remembered. ■

PROVIDENCE – A NEGLECTED TRUTH

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

John Dane, an ordinary seventeenth century Puritan from Ipswich, wrote 'A Declaration of Remarkable Providences in the Course of my Life'. In it he records how on one occasion he and his family were in great need. His wife told him she had nothing for the children, and urged him to take his gun and see if he could get something. As he went, his one pig, which was highly prized, followed him into the marshes. The providence of God seemed to tell him that he should not go out that day. He returned with his pig, and, "*when I cam within les then forty Rod of my house, a cumpany of great gray gese cam ouer me, and I shot and brout doun a galant gose in the uery nick of time.*" Thus God by his providence fed John Dane and his family.

Defining Providence

What is providence? The Dutch-American theologian Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) wrote: "Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end." (*Systematic Theology*, p.166). From this definition we learn that providence has three elements: preservation, concurrence and government.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* describes God's works of providence as "his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." (Q.11) Nothing is excluded or overlooked in this definition of providence. In short, "all things work together", the bad as well as the good (Rom. 8:28). It is not just that God works *in* all things; he works *the things themselves*, which shows us the unlimited, boundless, supernatural power of our Triune God. It explains why the Saviour could say of the sparrows, "one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." (Matt. 10:29)

The late American evangelist John G. Reisinger, in his booklet *The Sovereignty of God in Providence* published by Chapel Library, has a helpful six-point outline on the subject:

1. God has a definite plan and purpose for the world. Job 23:13; Eph. 1:8-12.

2. God is always in control of all things and is constantly at work in accomplishing His plan. Hab. 1:1-11; Isa. 10:5,6.

3. God controls and uses everyone, even the devil, in working out His plan. Isa. 10:7-11; Ps. 76:10.

4. God punishes the people that He uses to accomplish His purposes when they act out of wrong motives. Isa. 10:12-16; Acts 2:23,24; Matt. 27:15-26.

5. All things are from God, but the devil is the agent of all evil. 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1.

6. Although all sickness and affliction are part of God's purposes and under His sovereign control, it does not follow that all sickness and affliction are necessarily chastisement for sin. Job 1:1; 1:6-2:10; 13:15.

A Means to Understand Things

Nothing separates believing and unbelieving scholars like the subject of providence. According to the English historian Edward Gibbon (1737-94), history is little more than the register of crimes, follies and misfortunes. By contrast, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) was an unashamed 'providentialist'. To the unbelieving, this understanding is both primitive and embarrassing, but to Edwards it was essential to his theology.

Edwards demonstrates his providentialism most prominently in his well-known work *The History of Redemption*, which has been described as "a Christian universal chronicle". Unlike the Church father Augustine in his *City of God*, or the New England Puritan Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia Christi Americana (The Glorious Works of Christ in America)*, Edwards sought to do nothing less than explain the entire history of humanity according to God's Grand Plan. At the centre of human history is the work of redemption; without that, nothing makes sense.

Edwards kept personal theological notebooks, known as the 'Miscellanies'. In one of them he says: "God is continually causing revolutions. Providence makes a continual progress, and continually is bringing forth things new in the state of the world, and very different from what ever were before; he removes one that he may establish another. And perfection will not be obtained till the last revolution, when God's design will be fully reached." (*Miscellany* 547)

Edwards also argues that "whatever end it was that [God] gave the world a being, it must be supposed that the continuance of the being of the world...is that which as much concerns the obtaining of God's end, as the first giving of it a being". (*Miscellany* 525) In other words, the way to understand and make sense of our world, both collectively and individually, is by means of providence. God weaves all things together to bring about his eternal plan.

God's Hardest Worker

In the booklet already quoted from, John Reisinger recalls how astonished he was when he first heard the statement, "The devil is the hardest working servant that God has!" Although everything Satan does is out of hatred to God, God uses it to fulfil his own plan. You see it in the Acts: the persecution of the church resulted in its expansion (8:1-4). You see it in Daniel: the persecution of the three Hebrews resulted in the acknowledging of Jehovah by the king of Babylon (Dan. 2:47). The central event in all human history is the cross of Christ, by which Satan's activities were spectacularly defeated.

God makes the wrath of man to praise him (Ps. 76:10), such that everything contributes to the realisation of his eternal plan. When evils occur, many mistakingly claim that "the devil did it", as if God had no control of the situation. The Puritan way of describing the relationship goes like this: while God has no hand in the *sin* of an action, without God there can be no action.

> *"Sadly, providentialism has come under attack in recent years."*

The Glory of God

God's glory, particularly in the redemption of his people, is the grand purpose in history, and providence is the means to bring it to pass. As Edwards puts it, "God's providential disposals of the material part of the world are all subordinate to his providence towards the spiritual and intelligent part of it." (*Miscellany* 702). The events of history are not a jumbled series of events but part of great God's great design. To know that design is to know what is happening; to deny it is to enter upon a fruitless search for alternative explanations. These are readily available: evolution, marxism, feminism, postmodernism, and so on. All these theories share the same weaknesses: they are inherently contradictory, frequently refuted, quickly become outdated and are eventually superseded.

Sadly, providentialism has come under attack in recent years. One American Baptist theologian has argued that God controls very little of this world. He bases his view on his own experience, especially the death of his wife, and Scripture passages such as the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) Apparently, this petition means that God is not in charge on earth, otherwise what is the point of the petition? We might respond by saying that if God is not in charge, then there is little point in us praying! Jonathan Edwards believed that this petition will be answered in the highest degree when God brings about the future glorious state of things promised in Scripture. "Thy people also shall be all righteous" (Isa. 60:21).

Providentialism is a glorious truth in which the Church and Christians have always rejoiced. Let no one rob you of it. In our current situation, many secular writers and analysts believe there is a revolution occurring in Britain and America; that being so, let us not retreat into unbelief or despair, but, like Edwards, consider God's grand plan, which is to glorify himself and bring his people into the kingdom of heaven.

Nothing More Practical

Joel R. Beeke has written: "Nothing is more practical than the doctrine of providence". Why is that? Beeke says: "We live in a dangerous world. Disease, disaster, and war sweep many people into eternity every day. Evil men oppress and abuse the godly and the innocent. Unseen to our eyes, Satan and his host go about like roaring lions seeking to devour people and drag them to damnation (1 Pet. 5:8). The deceptions and passions of sin rage in our hearts, so that we are never safe from ourselves. Realism demands that we live wisely and prudently in such a perilous place." ('God's Providence Applied in Our Lives', *Tabletalk*, February 2021) The American theologian B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) said, "A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly troubles." But how can we know serenity and calmness in the midst of war, famine, persecution, social chaos and a thousand other things that fill the daily news?

The short answer is given by Isaiah. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (Isa. 26:3) The longer answer is given by John Calvin. "Innumerable are the evils that beset human life; innumerable, too, the deaths that threaten it. We need not go beyond ourselves: since our body is the receptacle of a thousand diseases – in fact holds within itself and fosters the causes of diseases – a man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were, with death." (*Institutes*, 1:17:10)

What now? Let Calvin explain. "Yet, when that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care. For as he justly dreads fortune, so he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it." (*Institutes*, 1:17:11) ■

ETERNITY IN THE HEART

REV. JAMES CLARK

"He hath set the [eternal] world in their heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Calvin taught, with others, that we are born with a 'sense of Deity', that we had formerly a knowledge of God and we sense the loss of it. There is a sense in which time is less real than eternity, because, unlike the latter, the former is going to stop! This implanted desire is the clue to understanding the universal human unhappiness(es); the feeling that we live in a gilded cage or in a land of shadows.

Sin has a Blinding Influence on our Souls

It is sin that puts *this* world in the heart, so that it suppresses thoughts of the next world. God calls this world "evil", and says that we are not to love it (Gal. 1:4; 1 John 2:15). Adam could not be eternally happy here; creation was always the first stage to something else. We were not made to stay in this world and therefore we cannot rest here: 'Temporary' is written over everything here. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." (Augustine). That Rest is not here, but where Christ is now, in the place He has gone to prepare for us (Heb. 4:9; 13:14; John 14:2).

Objections to our Longing for Eternity

1. Some say this longing is *wishful thinking*, that "the wish is father to the thought". But what if we are longing for this place because it is there? You have a hunger for food because the food is there; you have a hunger for righteousness because it is there. What if we have this longing for Heaven because it is there, and that is why we are drawn to it, like the earth drawn to the sun? Like the earth, we cannot escape the attraction. The thought keeps coming back throughout life, and this is what makes the atheist's death uneasy.

2. Some say it is part of *childhood thinking* (by which they thus agree that it is an innate idea) and that education will bring the child out of it into adult thinking. But what if the world and its education (a world which lies under the influence of Satan, 1 John 5:19) is actively opposed to this kind of thinking and wants to keep our thoughts focussed on this world only? It is an organisation dedicated to suppressing the yearning for a world beyond this one, a programme of disinformation worthy of Screwtape himself! The world's strategy is to 'scientifify' or ridicule the idea of eternity out of existence, as if adulthood means that you don't believe certain things – things proscribed by the world's teaching, of course.

3. Some say that this idea is *only taught by the church and the Bible*, and that if these were not around, then neither would this idea be around. But many false religions have this idea in them also; what makes them false is that they all teach that this yearning can only be realised by works, and not by faith alone. Moreover, some grow up without Bible or church and still retain this idea. If they do read the Word, it will explain to them why they have this longing. Augustine was saying that there is a place in the soul which only God can fill; the world tries hard to fill it with something else, but it cannot give the satisfaction or joy that comes by knowing God.

A Problem in Seeking Communion with God

While eternity is in the heart, sin is there also, and this produces a tension. We sense the Divine, but we also feel an alienation, a separation from Him. When sin entered the world a glory departed from the earth and also the knowledge of it, but some echo of Paradise remains in the human heart. For the seeker with heightened (spiritual) awareness, there is not only conviction of Heaven but also of sin, and thus of a 'great gulf ' between God and us – His holiness on one side and our sinfulness on the other. There is thus a sense of anxiety in seeking Christ, that our eyes have been opened too late. But Christ reveals Himself as the bridge over that gulf, the mediating "path of life" (Ps. 16:11). Our sin halts our steps, but His grace draws us on, and we move towards Him, happily not by works but by faith. Faith looks forward; this is called *hope* in Scripture.

The Immortality of the Soul

This longing for the eternal and the perfect is an evidence for the immortality of the soul; other creatures may be happy that they live only in time, but we are not. We are not satisfied with the things of time, we are looking for things that will last longer! It is good (but often uncomfortable) when Providence stirs us up to keep looking for that city which has foundations (Heb. 11:10). There are times when we feel this longing more than at other times, yet it is always there. It is

something just out of reach, but set down in the Bible as a hope and a desire which God alone can fulfil.

"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.... For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened....Now he that hath wrought [formed] us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." (2 Cor. 5:2,4,5) ■

AFTER THE LORD'S SUPPER

GEORGE SWINNOCK

(Swinnock [1627-73] was born in Kent. Ordained in 1650 he served in Hertfordshire and then Buckinghamshire, until deprived of his living in the Great Ejection of 1662. Thereafter he was chaplain to the Hampden family and finally pastor of a congregation in his home town of Maidstone. This piece, taken from his 'Works' and lightly edited, is the final part of an item entitled 'What a Christian ought to do after a sacrament', in which Swinnock counsels believers regarding concerns they may have after partaking of the Lord's supper.)

I shall only answer a doubt or two from a troubled conscience, and conclude this ordinance.

Lack of Joy

Objection. 1. But possibly thou wilt say, (O penitent soul!) I have been at the sacrament and found little joy, what shall I do?

Answer. Though thou didst not find any ravishing comfort at the table, yet it may be thou mightest receive more grace from Christ. When thou didst not spring upward in joy, thou mightest root thyself more downward in humility. Here is no loss: heaven is the proper place for comfort, earth for grace. I expect my reward in another world. If I can but do my work well here, I shall be satisfied. A serious Christian may well be contented with solid peace without ecstasies. Therefore be not discouraged.

Absence of Peace

Objection. 2. But I find no peace, no calmness of spirit. I fear my heart was so dead and dull, that I did neither act grace in the ordinance, nor receive grace through the ordinance, for I saw never a smile in God's face all the while.

Answer. Didst thou not go in thine own strength? If so, no wonder that thou art disheartened. Jacob told his wives, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before" (Gen. 31:5), but what was the matter? This Jacob, say Laban's sons, "hath taken away all that was our father's" (v.1); "he hath got his riches". The glory of God, as I may say, is his wealth, his treasure, "the riches of his glory" (Rom. 9:23). Now if thou didst rob God of any part of his treasure, by thy self-confidence, it is no marvel that thy Father's countenance was not so pleasant towards thee as at other times.

Reflection

In brief, I would wish thee to reflect both upon thy preparation for, and carriage at the ordinance, and if thou findest thyself faulty, confess and bewail it; hereby thou mayest yet attain the efficacy of the ordinance. When medicine is taken down and doth not work, physicians often give their patients something to quicken it, and it proves exceeding instrumental for the diseased person's good; a sincere lamentation of thy negligence before, or carelessness at the table, supposing that thy heart be right with God, will much help forward the operation of the sacrament.

Patience

If thou findest that thou wast faithful in the discharge of thy duty, then by no means despond, but wait. Food doth not nourish as soon as it is taken into the body, there must be time allowed for digestion. The strongest meats are longest in digesting, but they give the most and the best nourishment. Faith and prayer will at last, like skilful midwives, deliver the promises safely of those blessings which did stick for a time in the birth. It is good that thy soul should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God (Lam. 3:26). There is light sown for thee, O thou child of light, who walkest in darkness; and be confident it will spring up. ■

LOT'S CHOICE

REV. RICHARD ROSS

In Genesis 13 we read of the parting of the ways between Abraham and his nephew Lot. It would seem that because they had increased in wealth, there was strife between the herdsmen of their cattle (v.7). There was a desire for peace, as we learn from Abraham's words to Lot: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." (v.8) A separation of their herds was decided upon as the best course of action.

Choice

Abraham gave Lot the choice as to where he wanted to go: "Is not the whole land before thee?...if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." (v.9) Lot, being tempted by the riches to be gained, dwelt in cities of the plain, pitching his tent in the direction of Sodom (v.12).

What a fearful choice to make! Because pitching towards soon became passing into, which further became a participating in, the sinful wickedness of Sodom. "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." (v.13)

Warning

The Lord in his gracious providence gave Lot a warning to flee from Sodom. The events of chapter 14, his captivity, and eventual release through Abraham's intervention, should have wakened him up. Sadly no, his heart was now firmly fixed on the wealth that lay in Sodom. The story of Lot continues into chapter 19. Disaster loomed, but by the gracious mercy of God, and through the supplication of Abraham, Lot's life was spared.

However, he lost everything that he had gone to Sodom to gain, and the sad remnant of his family that was rescued by the angels was a mere shadow of the Lot that went in.

Lessons

This sad biblical story is a warning to young folk. But have you learned these vital lessons?

1. Lot's choice was based on what he could *see*. He thought little of the spiritual benefit of being with Abraham. With Abraham he had enjoyed the blessing of the company of the godly, and also temporal increase. Abraham had the Covenant promise of God, family worship and instruction.

2. All that was thrown away by the *choice* he made. What about you? Are you desperate to dive into the world? It may be further education or work that is your reason, but think of what you are leaving behind. The company of a godly family for the company of Sodom! What a sinful and wicked choice to make.

3. Lot's choice was based on what *he* wanted. He knew what he was doing; even his narrow escape in Genesis 14 could not persuade him to change his mind. What about you? Is the gracious Lord dealing with you in providence so that you will change your ways?

4. Lot *imagined* that the choice was his. He wickedly failed to ask of the Lord, or even his godly uncle Abraham. He may have spared himself the sorrow of the Lord's chastisement, and the devastating effects on his own family, of which we learn in Genesis 19, including the loss of his wife, who looked back when the family fled Sodom (v.26). Alas, he was determined to have his own will and way.

5. Are you following the way of Lot? Then repent! Seek the Lord seriously; you have every encouragement from His word. "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7).

Remember

Lot stands in Scripture as a fearful warning. The Lord Jesus says that we are to "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Remember, and consider God's will for your life, not just what pleases you.

CHURCH NEWS

Jubilees of Rev. William B. Scott & Rev. Donald N. MacLeod *(Rev. Graeme Craig)*

A spirit of happy fellowship and thankfulness pervaded proceedings as the Southern Presbytery met in Partick on 25th June to mark the ministerial jubilees of Rev. William B. Scott and Rev. Donald N. MacLeod. In addition, they oversaw the signing of the Formula by Rev. Stuart Farmes as he was admitted a minister of the Church.

Rev. William Macleod, Moderator of Presbytery, preached from 1 Corinthians 3:6. Like Mr Scott and Mr MacLeod, here were two men from different backgrounds, Paul and Apollos, but they were only ministers by whom the Corinthians had believed. Ministers and people must continually remember this. Indeed, all are to have a servant spirit. There were two men, but there is one great God. He gives the increase and that is what matters. We must depend on him. All the glory belongs to him. In an age of spiritual apathy he can open hearts. God reigns and his plans will be fulfilled to build his Church and fill the earth with his glory. Although the ministry may seem a hard work today, it has always been hard work, for God alone gives the increase. No labour is in vain and all done for him is worthwhile. Thanks were offered to God for the ministries of these faithful servants.

After Mr Farmes had signed the Formula and been welcomed into the Church as a Minister, Mr Scott encouraged him from the reality of God's sovereignty. When the hand of providence appears heavy we must remember that the God who overrules all things is not only almighty and just, but gracious and loving. Referring to Philemon verses 11-12, he spoke of our duty to make Mr Farmes truly welcome. As the Romans were to receive Phebe, so we should receive Mr Farmes' wife, Elizabeth.

Following worship the Congregation retired to the hall where, after tea, presentations were made. Rev. Graeme Craig spoke of how Mr Scott reminded him of Barnabas. Whilst Mr MacLeod was a son of the Manse, Mr Scott was the son of a miner, but he had come to be a son of consolation, as well as a wonderful example to younger men. Like Barnabas, he was a zealous missionary – in Moyobamba (Peru), Eastern Europe, Spain and France; he was a Christ-centred preacher and a big-hearted encourager of the brethren and he was principled. He loved praising the Saviour and encouraging others to do the same with heart and lips. Thanks were also offered for Mrs Scott who, behind the scenes, had contributed so much to her husband's ministry.

In responding, Mr Scott spoke of how swimming across a river in spate or having a Kalashnikov prodded into him did not frighten him, but the thought of being ordained to the holy ministry terrified him. However, he still loved to commend Christ. He paid tribute to two ministers who had greatly helped him over the years – Rev. Donald N. MacLeod, who was regrettably absent due to sickness, and Rev. Ian McKenzie, whom many were delighted to see present that day. He encouraged all to keep on speaking about and commending Jesus.

L-R: Mr Calum MacLeod, Mrs Isobel Scott & Rev. William Scott (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

In the absence of Mr MacLeod, Rev. James Gracie addressed Mr MacLeod's eldest son, Calum. He spoke of family links with Mr MacLeod spanning the years. He was a humble, Christian gentleman, held in high esteem by all in the churches. His servant spirit was evident in that, upon retirement, he took on the care of the Arran congregation, who love him dearly and are grateful for his presence and ministry among them.

In reply, Calum acknowledged the kind thoughts expressed and reflected that his father had been rather diffident about the whole presentation business. He would have enjoyed being among the brethren, but would not have known what all the fuss was about! As we were reminded earlier, Christ is the one who matters.

Proceedings were brought to a conclusion by the singing of Psalm 133. We thank God for the faithful ministry of his servants and pray that they may yet be spared and be a blessing to many.

Opening of Seminary *(Rev. Graeme Craig, Principal)*

Over the last few years our Seminary in Inverness has been active in providing training for men from the USA, France and Spain. Recently the Lord has graciously provided some UK-based students. Mr Kevin N. MacDonald (Scalpay) is beginning a four year course as a student for the ministry of the Church, and Mr Alan Blaney (Ballyclare & Doagh) is beginning a three year course as a private student.

There will be a service to mark the opening of the new Session on Tuesday 13th September at 7.30pm in Greyfriars' Free Church, Westhill, Inverness (DV). The service will be led by the Principal, Rev. Graeme Craig, who will also give the address. Some literature and refreshments will be available and it is hoped that there will be a good show of support. Timetables have been distributed to the students, who will attend lectures on the Tuesday and Wednesday.

Above all, the prayers of the Church are requested, that the Lord would uphold the lecturers and students and that He would send forth more labourers into the harvest field.

2022 Youth Conference *(Rev. James MacInnes)*

This year's Youth Conference is to take place from Friday 14th to Monday 17th October (D.V.). The subject is 'Being a Christian: Conversion, Confession, Change', and the speaker is Rev. Tom Budgen (Staffin). The Conference begins with a meal on Friday at 6pm and ends with breakfast on Monday morning.

The venue is Ratagan Youth Hostel, Ratagan, Glenshiel, Kyle, Ross-shire IV40 8HP, the Conference having exclusive use of the facilities. Located in the West Highlands, on the shores of Loch Duich, the Hostel looks across to the dramatic Five Sisters of Kintail. There are public transport links, either by train to Kyle of Lochalsh or bus to Shiel Bridge (follow-on transport to the venue can be arranged when booking).

All catering will be provided and prior booking is essential. The Conference is open to those aged 16 years and above. The cost is £60 for those in employment and £50 for the unwaged. To book, please contact Rev. James MacInnes at: ajamesmac@hotmail.com

Uganda: Death for Apologetics *(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)*

In what is becoming a common occurrence in Uganda, Muslims have responded to an open-air debate about Christianity and Islam, not by doing their homework and presenting answers or better arguments, but by violently attacking Christian apologists. Morning Star News (MSN) reports that, on 6 July, Robert Bwenje (28) accompanied Assistant Pastor Ambrose Mugisha (25) of Elim Pentecostal Church in Nyamiringa village, Kiboga District, to an open-air debate about Christianity and Islam in Sirimula village, in neighbouring Kyankwanzi District, 140km north-west of Kampala.

After the debate, eight Muslims put their faith in Jesus Christ. As Bwenje and Mugisha were returning home they were ambushed by a mob of angry Muslims shouting "Allahu akbar" (Allah is greater). The Muslims forced Bwenje and Mugisha to hand over their Bibles and Christian literature, which they burned while beating the believers with sticks. Mugisha managed to escape; but by the time Bwenje was rescued, he had sustained serious injuries. Both men were hospitalised, but on 10 July Bwenje succumbed to serious head injuries. Police have arrested and charged the lead instigator and are searching for the other assailants. The MSN report includes several cases of serious persecution in the same area.

Please pray for Uganda – which is around 82 percent Christian with religious freedom – that it will rise to the challenge posed by escalating Islamic radicalisation and intolerance.

Quote

"Do you call heaven your home? Then be like one passing through a strange country, to whom the sweetest cheer comes in letters from home. Be increasingly dependent on communion with the Lord for your joy. And be not anxious about your brief surroundings here. What does the man who is eagerly journeying home care for the discomfort of a night by the way? His home feeling must be getting very weak and chill if he engrosses himself about the arrangements that bear on his convenience as he is journeying. And you have what he lacks to reconcile you to the way of your homecoming. You can meet with nothing but what your Father appointed for you."

John Kennedy

NEW PREACHING STATION IN MEXICO

REV. JONATHAN MATTULL

The believer longs to see others brought to Christ. We delight to petition God for the advancement of his kingdom, and to sing in faith, "O let the nations be glad, in songs their voices raise" (Ps. 67:4, metrical, first version). How good it is to hear of the Lord at work!

You may remember the report in the November 2021 *Witness* concerning the city of Nuevo Laredo in northeastern Mexico. Over the past ten years God has been working among a group of believers there. He led them to the doctrines of grace and purity of worship, and to embrace the doctrines and practices articulated in our Westminster Confession and Catechisms. He eventually brought this group into contact with the Presbytery of the United States. The relationship developed over the past year, and after much deliberation and prayer the point was reached where, at their meeting on February 8th, 2022, the Presbytery erected a Preaching Station in Nuevo Laredo – a great day indeed!

Religious Poverty

Nuevo Laredo, in the state of Tamaulipas, sits just across the border from the state of Texas in the United States. The Rio Grande river divides the two states and nations, but represents much more than national boundaries. A visitor to Nuevo Laredo is quickly aware of the social and economic differences. Based on 2020 figures, an average monthly income is around £676 or $823. Such jobs are regularly worked ten hours a day, six days a week. Sadly, if we ever hear of Nuevo Laredo, it is usually because of the wicked acts of various cartels. As a border town, there is much profit in all forms of trafficking: drugs, women, children and money. This drives all manner of crime.

There is religious poverty also. Roman Catholicism looms large, and then a form of Charismatic Pentecostalism. Both represent degenerate forms of Christianity appealing to the sensual and superstitious. While there is a National Presbyterian Church, it has largely adopted non-Confessional positions on doctrine, worship and practice. One may find Baptist churches, but these are mainly in the fundamentalist tradition. Sound Bible teaching and preaching is rare. Basic Bible knowledge is scarce. The Sabbath is neglected and desecrated. A form of atheistic Satanism is growing among young people. The true gospel is largely hidden.

God's Providence

The Lord has been pleased to call these dear believers out of this darkness. Most came from Pentecostal or Fundamentalist Baptist backgrounds. Though each story is unique, they unite in praise to God. He gave them a deep love for the Scriptures and a desire to study and practise their teaching. Divine providence brought these brethren into contact with our Presbytery. Mr Doner Bartolon is a native Mexican, who now has United States' citizenship. While in Mexico, the Lord worked to bring him to saving faith, and to the truths we believe and love. He studied in America for his undergraduate degree, completed a course of theological training in Mexico, and was pursuing the ministry. During the Covid shutdowns in Mexico, Mr Bartolon took his family to St. Louis in order to have access to the ordinances of worship and join with the Free Church (Continuing).

Mr Bartolon has now begun distance learning in our Seminary. While in Mexico he had communication with a brother from Nuevo Laredo, and suggested a

A group discussing the practical issues surrounding the Nuevo Laredo preaching station

visit to provide pastoral support and addresses to the people there. In June 2021, he and I were able to visit. They had given up instruments in worship, and eventually embraced the Sabbath day and the covenant of grace. They were now desiring the oversight of a Confessionally-sound Presbyterian church. Through ongoing discussion, video conferences and meetings, they eventually petitioned the Presbytery for oversight.

2022 Visit

The brethren in Nuevo Laredo are without a minister, and have depended largely upon our brother Rev. Jorge Ruiz Ortiz and his recorded services in Spanish. They are singing from the Spanish version of the Genevan Psalter produced by Rev. Ruiz. While the Lord is sustaining them, they have been without local administration of ordinances for a year. Additionally, the families have not been able to have their children baptised.

Mr Randall Taylor (Elder, St. Louis) and I, with Mr Bartolon, were able to visit the brethren for four days in June this year, visiting families and providing pastoral counsel and prayer. The congregation gathered for two addresses on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Elder Taylor helpfully presented the qualifications and work of elders and deacons. Mr Bartolon delivered two addresses, one on pride as the temptation of Eve, and another on children as an inheritance of the Lord. I was able to provide two lectures regarding the Sabbath, one showing its biblical foundation and the other directing us unto the delightful observance of its duties. On the Lord's Day, there were twelve baptisms administered! It was a time of much rejoicing.

Prayer

Please pray that the Lord would continue to uphold, protect and sanctify our brethren in the midst of many dangers. While none of our brethren are dominated by the fear of man, all realise the physical dangers represented by the cartel. Additionally, others from Mexico are beginning to reach out for guidance and help. It may be that the Lord is opening a door into Mexico and the Spanish-speaking world. Please pray for the Lord to give wisdom and favour to this labour.

It is likely that our brethren will lose their ability to meet in their current building in August or soon after. Please pray that the Lord would provide a suitable place for them to assemble and worship. There is a great need for local elders and deacons. A number of men already display the gifts requisite to office, but require further training on the particular work of officers, while also becoming more familiar with our form of government, history and heritage. Please pray that the Lord would further furnish qualified men.

There is need for more regular supply and eventually a pastor. Please pray that the Lord would sustain our brothers in the absence of a local minister, and that he would both prepare and provide a man suited to shepherd our brethren faithfully. Lastly, please pray that the Lord would give wisdom and assistance to the overseeing Session, as well as the Presbytery, as we seek to serve our brethren well. May he continue to bless his cause! ■

VAVUNIYA MANSE COMPLETED

REV. JAMES MACINNES

It was with much thankfulness to the Lord that Rev. Partheepan was able to move into the newly-completed manse in Vavuniya at the end of July (see photo on rear cover). This project encountered various unexpected challenges because of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The generous response of the Church made it possible to meet the rapidly escalating costs, but the shortage of fuel made it difficult for resources to be gathered and for the labourers to travel to work.

Although the project took far longer to complete than anticipated, the fact that it was completed during a time of turmoil is a testimony to the Lord's gracious provision for His cause. An interesting detail is that the utility company have connected the manse, which is less than five yards from the church building, to a different power zone. Consequently, when the present rolling power cuts impact one property, an extension cord running over the wall from the other can be used to relay power. Please pray for Sri Lanka in its ongoing political and economic instability, that the unshakeable Kingdom of Grace would be extended there. ■

COMMENT

ACADEMIC CENSORSHIP

A worrying trend in universities

In an article 'Censorship on campus', the *Times* of 10 August reported that ten British universities have begun to remove books from reading lists, or make them optional, to protect students from "challenging" content which may cause them harm. So-called 'trigger warnings' have been applied to over a thousand texts. Censorship is not new, but the rationale *is*. Formerly books were banned because they were subversive of the rule of law and the stability of society; now censorship is based upon the sensitivities of students pampered by an emasculated academic elite afraid of upsetting their new masters.

Students have become enslaved by a marxist-inspired movement, pejoratively called 'wokeism', that has harnessed the grievances of minorities to produce an ideology intolerant of anything that is not a reflection of itself. Our academic elites are targeting such 'dangerous' authors as Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens. The universities tried to circumvent Freedom of Information requests from the *Times*, and academics portrayed its investigation as "right-wingers pursuing a culture war". The 'war' is the one being waged by people mesmerised by a progressive ideology that disdains western, Judaeo-Christian achievements in any field, taking offence at them and ridiculing them.

Not every item mentioned by the *Times* has an appeal to Christians, but we have a vested interest in classic history texts such as Chaucer. That important works dealing with cultural, historical and social matters can now be removed or prejudiced is not in the interests of robust academic study. The trend began in the USA, and was first exposed in 1963 in Richard Hofstadter's book *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*. In 1987, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, the philosopher Allan Bloom warned about the relativising of truth. In 2018, in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt showed how the intellectual and emotional development of young people is being cramped by a culture of 'safetyism'.

The cause of this malaise is the rejection of objectivity. Where there is no absolute truth, anything goes, no matter how unreasonable. Today's university education is not designed to produce scholars but 'social justice warriors'. Essentially our society is witnessing the judgement announced in Romans 1:18-32. When the uncorruptible God is replaced by the 'gods' of man's imagination, the result is moral depravity and intellectual irrationality. ■

'FUNDAMENTALIST'

What does it mean?

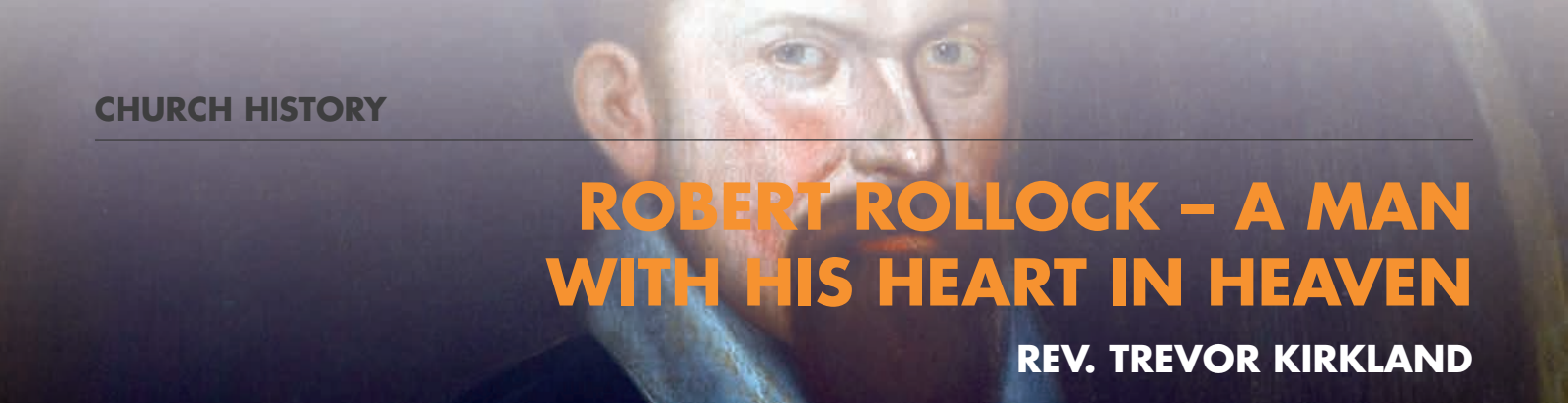
In the UK, a Christian country, Christians are portrayed unkindly by the media. By 'Christians' we mean people who have saving faith in Jesus Christ. Such individuals are said to be bigoted, reactionary, intolerant and extreme. These labels imply that Christian believers pose some sort of danger, yet understanding the meaning of the labels we know that they are misapplied. Genuine Christians are sometimes also described as 'fundamentalist'. What are we to make of that label?

The term 'fundamentalist' comes from a Latin word meaning a *foundation*. It was first used over a century ago in relation to a movement in America which resisted liberal ideas in the church and emphasised the key principles of Christianity. These were defined as: the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture; the Trinity; the deity and virgin birth of Christ; the creation and fall of man; the substitutionary atonement of Christ; the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ; the regeneration of believers; the personal and imminent return of Christ; the resurrection of the dead and the final assignment of individuals to heaven or hell. To sincere Christians, these principles represent vital Bible truths upon which their salvation depends.

Today, a follower of any religion who has dogmatic views tends to be labelled as a 'fundamentalist'. Some Hindu fundamentalists, and particularly Islamic fundamentalists, are prepared to use violence and terror to advance their religion. Although the beliefs of born-again Christians do not permit them to do this, there is a sort of 'guilt by association' in the public mind because of the 'fundamentalist' label.

The original 'fundamentalist' movement became authoritarian, insistent on taking everything in the Bible literally and scornful of academia and analytical thinking. Yet the Bible must be interpreted. The right way to do this is according to its own rules and not according to rules imposed upon it by fallible, unbelieving men. We believe that the Bible is wholly accurate and trustworthy, not only in the matter of salvation but also in what it says about history, science and morality.

Atheists and others who decry 'fundamentalist' Christians are fundamentalists themselves, without realising it. Their spiritual blindness prevents them from seeing that in approving such things as abortion, same-sex 'marriage', transgenderism and euthanasia *they* are extreme, because these things are forbidden by God. As Christians we are up against this secular fundamentalism, and we need grace to stand firm. "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). ■



ROBERT ROLLOCK – A MAN WITH HIS HEART IN HEAVEN

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

Robert Rollock (1555-99) lived in extraordinary times. There was uncertainty in relation to the King. In 1567, Charles James Stewart, at thirteen months old, was crowned James VI of Scotland. Within three years there were three Regents: in 1570, the Earl of Moray was assassinated; in 1571, the Earl of Lennox was killed in a raid by the Queen's Party; in 1572, the Earl of Mar was assassinated. There were also decades of turmoil in relation to the Church. The *First Book of Discipline* was produced in 1560 by the 'six Johns', one of whom was John Knox, as an initial attempt by parliament to formulate the order of the reformed Kirk. Providentially, in 1574 Andrew Melville returned and in 1578 the General Assembly adopted the *Second Book of Discipline*, which was more thoroughly Presbyterian.

The low watermark was reached in 1584, when Andrew Melville was effectively charged with seditious preaching. His response was a 'declinature', where he refused to recognise the court, arguing that any complaint should in the first instance be dealt with by the Presbytery, not the State. This event was a consequence of the infamous 'Black Acts' passed by Parliament the same year, which condemned presbyteries and reasserted the authority of episcopalian bishops. In a remarkable twist of events, presbyteries were 'reinstated' in 1586.

The high watermark was the Golden Act 1592, which endorsed the presbyterian system of church government, with kirk session, presbytery, synod and General Assembly.

A Life of Usefulness

The general facts of Rollock's life are simple enough. Born in 1555, the first son of the Laird of Powis near Stirling, he studied for the university under Thomas Buchanan, nephew of the renowned George Buchanan. He entered St Salvator's College, St Andrews, in 1574 and gained his MA in 1577. He then taught philosophy at St Salvator's whilst pursuing further studies in theology at St Mary's College, and in 1580 he was appointed Examiner for St Leonard's College. Rollock evidently combined teaching in St Andrews with further studies in theology. He then attended divinity classes at the newly founded St Mary's, under the principalship of Andrew Melville. It was here that James Melville, nephew to Andrew, also taught Rollock "*the Hebrew toung*".

Meanwhile, there was a decision to establish a college in Edinburgh. In April 1583, two masters were appointed to supervise the building project and in September Robert Rollock was recruited from St Andrews as master and regent of the new college. Rollock delivered his inaugural address on 1st October 1583. Some 47 students were enrolled. Rollock was not only Principal of the college; he was also minister of Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh. Rollock was given a second master in Duncan Nairn, another product of Andrew Melville in Glasgow. The provision of a college library soon became a matter of urgency. The first theological books were the 276 volumes bequeathed by the lawyer Clement Litill (1527-80) to the Town and Kirk of Edinburgh. Litill wrote the legal documents that established the Kirk.

Naturally the spiritual welfare of the divinity students was Rollock's chief concern. Each Saturday he read to them from a work of the French Protestant theologian Theodore Beza (1519-1605), *A Book of Christian Questions and Answers*, and then expounded it. Each morning and afternoon the students attended worship, where Rollock preached; this was followed by students giving detailed feedback on the sermon. The practice of catechising, using the *Heidelberg Catechism*, was also maintained.

Influence

It is no surprise that a generation of men entered the ministry who themselves became notable. They included Edward Brice (1569-1636), the first Presbyterian minister with a living in Ireland; Robert Boyd (1578-1627), theologian and Principal of the University of Glasgow; David Calderwood (1575-1650), historian of the Church of Scotland, author of a major work against episcopacy and joint-author of the *Directory for Public Worship*; John Row (1568-1646), historian and zealous opponent of episcopacy; and John Welsh (1568-1622), who for his faithfulness to Presbyterian principles was for many years banished to France. It should also be noted that Rollock was the instrument under God of Robert Boyd's conversion. In 1587 Rollock's position was both affirmed and specified by the Town Council. Essentially he was given a new job description and a proper stipend: Master and Principal of the college, teaching theology, and teaching and preaching every Sabbath in one of the Town kirks.

Preacher

William Gunn edited the *Select Works of Robert Rollock*, which were published in 1849. He commented regarding the method of his preaching: "It is Rollock's greatest glory that he introduced into Scotland the expository system [of preaching through books of the Bible], which had already so much benefited religion on the Continent." In a biographical introduction to the two-volume republication of the *Select Works* by Reformation Heritage Books (2008), Andrew Woolsey notes that Rollock observed young men gathering early in the morning in the East Kirk. There was no service; they just met to chat and gossip. Rollock had a great desire to preach the gospel to them, and approached the Presbytery to see what could be done. The result was that Rollock was appointed as Professor of Theology to train men for the ministry. From the autumn of 1587, Rollock added to his other duties in the University what no one had done in Edinburgh previously: he preached every Sabbath from 7.00am to 8.30am to a large congregation of people from every walk of life. William G. Blaikie (1820-99), a biographer of Rollock, described him as "one of the most powerful and useful preachers of his day".

Commentator

The year 1590 witnessed Rollock's first publication, a commentary on Ephesians. Commentaries on Daniel (1591), Romans (1593), 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Philemon (1598), select Psalms (1599) and John (1599) followed. Three posthumous commentaries appeared, on Colossians (1600), Galatians (1602) and Hebrews (1605) and 1 Peter, demonstrating a continued demand for Rollock's works. It is thought that Rollock preached and taught through most of the books of the Bible, especially the New Testament. Rollock's commentary on Ephesians brought him to international attention. Beza obtained a copy of it, and of the work on Romans, and described them to a friend as "a treasure, and that most precious". The Ephesians commentary has been republished by Reformation Heritage Books.

His Greatest Contribution

Presbyterianism and covenant theology are inseparably connected, for numerous reasons. Rollock's greatest contribution was in the area of covenant theology. In his work on effectual calling published in 1597, Rollock famously asserts that "*all the word of God appertains to some covenant; for God speaks nothing to man without the covenant.*" (*Select Works*, Vol. I, p.33)

Rollock imbibed the language of the covenant from Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), the German Reformed theologian and main author of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He developed the truth of the covenant of works and its relation to the covenant of grace, as the way to understanding the position of man before and after the fall. Rollock explains that both covenants are rooted in and flow from the same eternal decree in Christ, since both are ultimately fulfilled by Christ as the Mediator. He put Christ firmly at the centre, insisting that grace, as a divine attribute, has a governing role in the character and aims of God's decree. Rollock's Christ-centred theology shines through in his commentaries and sermons.

In 1596 Rollock produced a remarkable catechism on *God's Covenant*, which has also been reprinted. It has three sections: (i) regarding the Covenant of God in general, then the Covenant of Works (Q.1-30); (ii) regarding the Covenant of Grace (Q.31-102); (iii) regarding the Sacraments in general (Q.103-167).

Lessons

In his *Select Biographies*, the historian and Free Church minister William K. Tweedie (1803-63) wrote concerning Rollock: "*He bred many able and faithful ministers, a man very learned, as his works in print shew, yet very plain and also powerful in preaching....He was of a meek and sweet disposition....*"

We can learn four lessons from Robert Rollock:

1. It is not birth and education, but conversion that makes all the difference in the world. Conversion to Christ altered and reshaped Rollock's life.

2. The influence we have upon others may travel across generations. The Covenanter minister John Livingstone (1603-72), who while still a probationer preached the sermon so used of God in the Shotts revival on 21 June 1630, wrote: "*Those whereby I profited most were the preachings of four men, Mr Robert Rollock, Mr John Welsh, Mr Robert Bruce, and Mr David Dickson*".

3. Truth is always practical. Rollock said: "*it is not enough for the Christian man to know the things that are revealed in the gospel unless he knows how to use that knowledge in daily life.*"

4. Self-abasement is a constant mark of grace received. Rollock said: "*the Christian, acknowledging God as the author of all, assigns glory to God, gives him thanks, seeks from him what must be sought.*"

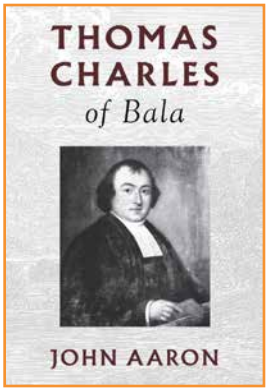
When Rollock was dying, one who stood by said to him, "Happy is the soul that is so near to God as yours is." Rollock replied: "In myself there is nothing which I do not regard as dung, that I may win Christ. Christ is my only source of comfort: all my own righteousness is as filthy rags."

To another he said: "I bless God, that I have all my senses entire, but my heart is in heaven." ■

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Thomas Charles of Bala
John Aaron, Banner of Truth Trust, hbk, 382pp, £15.50



Thomas Charles (1755-1814) is well known as the man who gave a Bible to Mary Jones. There have been several biographies but this is a thorough and edifying new work. Charles was converted through hearing the great revival preacher Daniel Rowlands. He studied at Oxford and was ordained in the Church of England, remaining loyal to that church all his life. He fell in love with Sally Jones, a Methodist of Bala, and spent many years wooing her, but once married she loved him dearly.

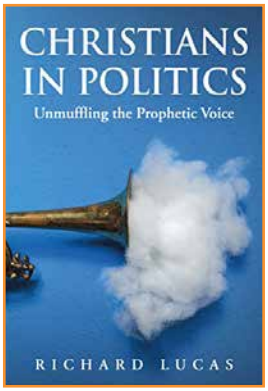
Sally could not leave Bala because she had the care of her ageing mother. Charles tried hard to get a curacy near Bala but failed because the local Anglican clergy were hostile to his evangelicalism. His wife kept a shop in Bala and he eventually joined the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. Though not the most eloquent and emotional of preachers, he saw much blessing. The congregation in Bala grew greatly under his ministry, and he saw several revivals both there and more widely as he travelled around Wales. In the early days he was subjected to persecution. He once had a tooth knocked out by a stone while preaching in the open air, and had to flee for his life from the mob.

As an organiser and church leader, Charles excelled. He started schools in many places, training children and adults to read the Scriptures. He is known as the 'Father of the Sunday Schools' for his labours in setting up Sabbath Schools. He often preached for months at a time in Lady Huntingdon's Spa Fields Chapel in London. He worked alongside leading evangelical Anglicans in various projects, was involved in the Religious Tract Society and London Missionary Society, and was behind the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was concerned to provide affordable Bibles for the Welsh in their own language, and edited a definitive Welsh translation. He wrote a Welsh Bible Dictionary, *Geiriadur Ysgrythyrol*, which was greatly used by lay preachers.

In 1811, Charles was finally convinced of the need to ordain several of the gifted lay preachers such as John Elias as ministers in the Calvinistic Methodist Church. This led to a breach with the Church of England, but was essential for the growth and health of the Welsh Methodist Church. An informative book, well worth reading. ■

Rev. William Macleod

Christians in Politics
Richard Lucas, Brown Dog Books, pbk, 77pp, £7.99



Richard Lucas is the indefatigable leader of the Scottish Family Party (SFP), which seeks to bring politically conservative views to the fore in Scotland. He would claim to be a Christian and many of our readers would endorse most of the views that he and the party promote. The author exposes opinions expressed to him over the years by Christians who are reluctant to get directly involved in politics. People who enter politics take their worldview with them, seeking to make decisions and provide services consistent with it, and Mr Lucas argues that it should be the same for the Christian.

The book's basic thesis is that Christians should be active in politics, bringing their biblical convictions with them in order to improve society. The SFP is not an explicitly Christian party, however, and Lucas provides eight reasons for this (pp.72-74). He says: "Politics should be about policy not identity. Political parties should offer voters policies, a plan to run the country, not identity alignment." He argues that a Christian party would alienate people from other religions who might otherwise be sympathetic to the party's moral viewpoint.

Mr Lucas, a former teacher, has been trying to break into politics for some years, but to date has not been successful. We hope he will make progress, for the views espoused by the SFP need to be heard, and that others may be encouraged to take their Christian views into the public arena. The author is clearly a thinker and not afraid to ask important questions and expose immoral policies.

The book is in three parts made up of 26 short chapters and is easy to read. It is thought provoking, challenging and written with passion. ■

Rev. Andrew R. Allan

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.

September
4 Portree
11 Duthil-Dores, North Uist & Grimsay
18 Glasgow–Knightswood, Kilmuir & Stenscholl, Scalpay Harris
25 Inverness–Greyfriars, Lochalsh & Strath, Mebane

October
2 Ayr, Greenville, Snizort
9 Cross, St Louis
16 Ballyclare & Doagh
23 Atlanta, Knock & Point, Poolewe & Aultbea
30 Glasgow–Partick

November
6 Arran, Edinburgh–St Columba's, Kilmorack & Strathglass
13 Aberdeen, Tarbat
20 Brora, Glasgow–Shettleston

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

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2022 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES July 2022 £	Total to July 2022 £	Total to July 2021 £
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1,950	13,650	12,950
Duthil-Dores	0	1,500	13,996	14,741
Inverness	0	2,000	19,164	20,545
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,450	14,371	13,846
Poolewe & Aultbea	4,904	975	6,795	6,720
Total Inverness Presbytery	4,904	7,875	67,976	68,803
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	0	0	1,292	9,734
Brora	4,011	700	9,672	9,184
Kiltearn	225	0	3,208	8,363
Tarbat	0	1,000	11,583	12,562
Total Northern Presbytery	4,236	1,700	25,754	39,842
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	0	1,264	5,922	6,064
Ayr	0	1,000	8,598	6,630
Ballyclare & Doagh	0	1,100	10,575	7,700
Dumfries	0	230	1,635	1,343
Edinburgh	0	1,600	14,067	13,483
Glasgow - Knightswood	0	1,750	16,750	19,947
Glasgow - Partick	5,078	1,500	15,000	14,500
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	500	9,713	13,000
Rothesay	0	2,000	2,500	3,000
Total Southern Presbytery	5,078	10,944	84,758	85,667
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	1,587	12,576	12,807
Harris - Leverburgh	0	1,750	13,624	13,133
Knock & Point	0	1,600	11,737	11,200
North Uist & Grimsay	2,175	1,050	9,746	9,666
Scalpay	233	2,200	17,775	17,931
Stornoway	0	5,794	57,208	52,223
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	2,408	13,981	122,666	116,960
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	278	1,500	11,851	12,344
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	500	3,800	4,433
Lochalsh & Strath	390	1,500	18,742	15,807
Portree	600	1,500	15,030	15,665
Snizort	625	1,600	16,203	15,245
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	1,893	6,600	65,626	63,493
Smiths Falls	0	0	995	985
Total From Congregations	18,517	41,100	367,775	375,750
Other Donations	0	3,557	31,353	22,909
Legacy	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	18,517	44,657	399,128	398,659
Included in the above: Tax	1,573	0	75,567	72,581
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	16,945	44,657	323,561	326,077

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
Mr Murray Mackay
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(mobile) 07793 535227

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The newly-completed manse in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

"Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."

Psalm 145:13

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)