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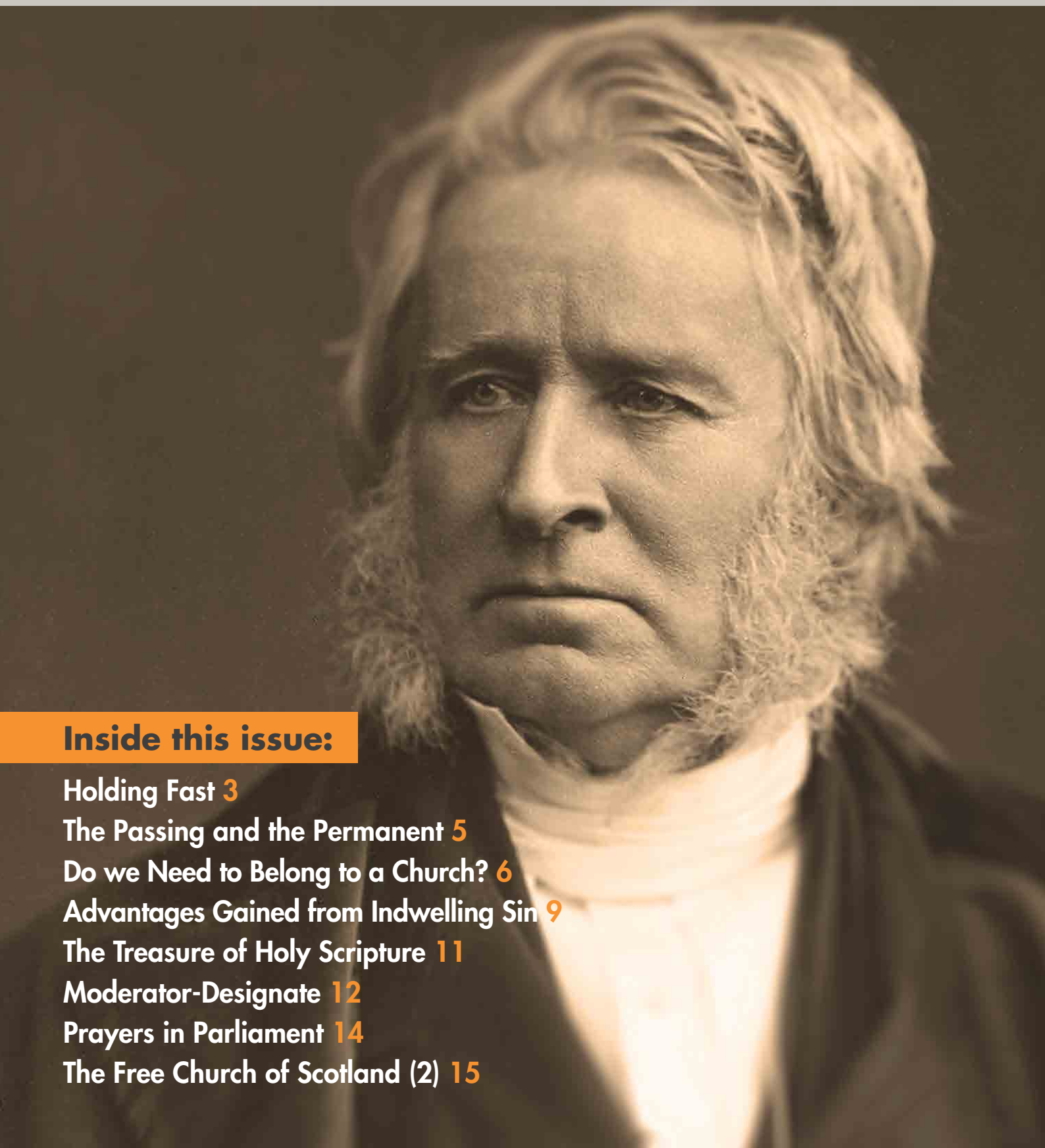

Inside this issue:

Holding Fast 3
The Passing and the Permanent 5
Do we Need to Belong to a Church? 6
Advantages Gained from Indwelling Sin 9
The Treasure of Holy Scripture 11
Moderator-Designate 12
Prayers in Parliament 14
The Free Church of Scotland (2) 15

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Contents

EDITORIAL
Holding Fast 3

DEVOTIONAL
The Passing and the Permanent (Alexander Maclaren) 5

DOCTRINE
Do we Need to Belong to a Church? (Rev. Trevor Kirkland) 6
The Kingdom of Christ (Martin Luther) 8

PRACTICAL RELIGION
Advantages Gained from Indwelling Sin (John Newton) 9

YOUTH FOCUS
The Treasure of Holy Scripture 11

CHURCH NEWS
Moderator-Designate 12
Certificate in Theological Studies 12
Protesting against Abortion in the USA 12

COMMENT
Prayers in Parliament 14
'Sheep Stealing' 14

CHURCH HISTORY
The Free Church of Scotland (2) (Rev. Alasdair Macleod) 15

BOOK REVIEWS
Christ All in All by Philip Henry 17
The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield 18

COMMUNION DATES 19

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES 19

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Editorial

HOLDING FAST

As Christians we long to see the Lord's cause advance in the world. Our hearts rejoice whenever we learn of sinners being converted to Christ, congregations flourishing and churches reforming. We delight too in hearing of missions prospering in lands where false religion dominates, nations giving their allegiance to the Lord, and the ingathering of God's ancient people, the Jews. These things are signs of our Saviour's gracious reign, and tokens of that time when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). They encourage us in our hope of the promised glorious future for the church.

Christ taught us to pray that God's kingdom would come. As we pray, the Lord grants His blessing upon His word, and His cause makes progress. Yet there are periods in the history of the church when it can appear as though the cause is actually going backward. This is surely our present experience. The number of professing Christians is declining, society is becoming more ungodly, and few are showing any interest in the gospel. At such times we must remember that God's kingdom comes first and foremost in the hearts of His people, as they grow in grace and likeness to Christ, and that this is a work which is always going on. We need to realise too that when the enemy has come in like a flood (Isa. 59:19), as he has now, it is a great thing that believers are simply able to stand, and not be carried away by the swelling tide of sin.

Faith

For our eternal salvation we must embrace Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose again as the Redeemer of His people. Saving faith, the gift of God, is the hand whereby a bankrupt sinner, forsaking every other help and hope, lays hold of Christ as the "pearl of great price" (Matt. 13:46), for acceptance with God. The believer has no dearer possession than Christ, for in Him is pardon of sin and the promise of heaven. Christ makes all the difference, as John shows us: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). The rich young ruler, while he clung to his earthly treasure, delighting in it and depending upon it, could not have Christ, and so could not have eternal life (Matt. 19:22). Sadly there are many like him.

It is striking how often in Scripture believers are exhorted to *hold fast*. For instance, the Lord said to the church in Thyatira, "hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25). If we are holding a thing, then we have some grasp of it, but if we are holding it *fast*, then we have such a firm grip upon it that we will not let it go – under any circumstances. The devil's method has always been to cast doubt upon the Word of God, challenging its accuracy and authority, but we must keep the biblical faith without compromising it. We must not change our beliefs to suit the age or to please men. Christ was able to commend the church in Pergamos for holding fast His name (Rev. 2:13).

Truth

In our day Satan has launched a fierce assault on the Bible's teaching concerning origins, marriage, the family, sexuality and gender. We may be tempted to think that such things are secondary, not affecting the gospel, and so not make an issue of them. Yet, if we would be faithful to the Lord, that is not an option. All Scripture has been given by God, and all of it is profitable for man. Paul urged Timothy to "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). We do not lack for words today, in the world and in the church, but for sound or 'wholesome' words on any subject of importance, we must go to the Scriptures. It is not just the words of Scripture that we are to hold fast, but the *form* of those words. There is a pattern or system of doctrine taught in the Bible – one which we believe is faithfully summarised in our Confession and catechisms – and we are to adhere to it at all costs.

When people "turn away their ears from the truth", they are in danger of being "turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:4). In the Bible, fables are the same as myths: they are things which, although widely believed, are untrue.

In Paul's day some were following "profane and old wives'" fables (1 Tim. 4:7), and others "Jewish" fables (Titus 1:14). Today people give heed to fables of all sorts. Some fables are found in the scientific world, such as the 'big bang' and evolution, but there are religious fables which beguile many too. There are blatant ones like the mass and purgatory, but no less dangerous are errors such as a universal atonement, free will and the denial of hell, which lead countless souls astray. In any war, the combatants must be loyal to their side and fully committed to its cause. In the church's spiritual war, the soldiers of Christ must hold tenaciously to the whole truth, and not abandon any part of it!

Grace

In encouraging Timothy to hold fast to biblical doctrine, Paul stressed that this is to be done "in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus". If we are going to hold the truth fast, we must love it as well as believe it. Too many are like the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt – double-minded, and not steadfast in God's covenant. "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel" (Ps. 106:12,13). The graces of faith and love are always found together in those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and Christ is the object of both. Faith in Christ involves more than the intellect, for the seat of faith is in the heart, and while we can only love a Saviour we know, we must love Him with all our heart, as well as with all our understanding (Mark 12:33).

"Believers today have the same faithful God, who will also bring them to glory."

In the parable of the sower, Christ teaches us that there are many who receive the word of God but do not retain it; their hearts are like rock, and the word cannot take root. The Lord has blessed His people with "an honest and good heart", so that they, having heard the word, "keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). By the working of divine grace, God's word sinks down into our hearts, and we hide it there, that we might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11). Christians are far from perfect in this life, but it is their sincere desire to please the Lord, and honour His name.

Duty

Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Heb. 10:23). It is a challenge to us all. If a tall building loses contact with its foundation it will shift, before eventually toppling over. It may happen suddenly, as in an earthquake, but it can also occur gradually, when there is subsidence; much of the church today is like that, leaning further and further away from Christ and towards the world. What we have professed as Christians we are bound to maintain, for it is not just sinful to go back: it can be fatal (vv.38,39). After violent storms in our island, the beaches are strewn with seaweed: the stem or 'holdfast', which seemed so securely fastened to the rock, did not in fact have a strong enough contact, and it came free. Likewise the shores of eternity will be littered with professing Christians who, when they were called to suffer and endure for Jesus' sake, did not hold on, and fell away.

It is only by the Spirit that we can truly confess Jesus Christ as our Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). There is always the possibility that, for all our Bible reading and sermon hearing, we are not profiting spiritually, because we lack saving faith in Christ. Paul dealt with this danger when he told the Hebrews, "we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1). If our hearts are not to be like leaking vessels, unable to retain the truth, then fervent prayer for the Lord's blessing upon His word is necessary, along with humility and a godly fear.

Promise

Christians enjoy the hope of eternal life, which encourages them to hold fast their profession. That hope rests upon the promises of God, which we need to hear often. These promises are wrapped up in the original promise of the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the Saviour who would destroy the works of the devil and bring blessing to the world. God gave this promise repeatedly to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and he believed it (Gen. 12:3,4; 18:18,19). Abraham was blessed with a land, an heir and a people, and after he had obediently offered up his only son Isaac on mount Moriah, the Lord gave him the promise once again, this time with an oath (Gen. 22:16-18). Abraham was upheld by a promise-making and promise-keeping God; he was not mindful of the country he had left, but was looking for the heavenly country. He had hope "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast" (Heb. 6:19). He endured, and he obtained the promise.

Believers today have the same faithful God, who will also bring them to glory. In eternity He embraced His people in His covenant love, and He has held them fast ever since, and will not let them go. God is so faithful to us; we must be faithful to Him. ■

DEVOTIONAL

THE PASSING AND THE PERMANENT

Alexander Maclaren

(Maclaren [1826-1910] was born in Glasgow and became a Baptist minister, first in Southampton and then Manchester. This piece is taken from 'The Freeman' of April 29, 1881 and has been lightly edited.)

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." (Isaiah 54:10)

There is something of music in the sound of these words. The stately march of the English translation lends itself with wonderful beauty to the melody of Isaiah's words. But the thought that lies below them, sweeping as it does through the whole creation, and parting all things into the transient and eternal, the mortal and immortal, is still greater than the music of the words – these are removed – this abides. And the thing in God which abides is all gentle tenderness, that love mightier than all the powers of Deity beside, permanent with the permanence of His changeless heart....And grander than that, we have the revelation of the inmost nature and character of God in its bearing upon men: "saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee".

1. We have the contrast between the apparently enduring which passes, and that which truly abides.

(i) "The mountains shall depart...." And so we begin to think that humanity is small and life insignificant, and sometimes we feel as if we were ruined and there was nothing left to us, and so our text comes and says, "the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee", etc.

(ii) The other side of that great truth. There rises high above all that is mortal, which although it counts existence by millenniums, is but for an instant, and there appears to the eye of faith the great Spirit who moves all the material universe, Himself unmoved, and lives undiminished by creation, and undiminished if creation were swept out of existence. Let that which may pass, pass; let that which can perish, perish; let the mountains crumble and the hills melt away; beyond the smoke and conflagration, and rising high above destruction and chaos, stands the calm throne of God, with a living heart upon it, with a council of peace and purpose of mercy for the creature of a day, but that shall live when the days shall cease to be.

And so look how wonderfully there come out of these words phases of that Divine revelation to us, which are meant to strengthen us in the contemplation of that which changes. "My kindness"! The tender-heartedness of an infinite love, the abounding favour of the Father of my spirit. What a revelation of God! If only our hearts could open to the right acquaintance of that thought, sorrow and care and anxiety, and every other form of trouble, would fade away and we should be at rest. The infinite, undying, imperishable love of God is mine.

(iii) And then there is the other side to the same thought. The consequent outpouring of the imperishable and immovable loving-kindness is what our text calls "the covenant of my peace" – that is to say, we are to think of this great, tender, changeless, love of God, which underlies all things, as being placed, so to speak, under the guarantee of a solemn obligation. God's covenant is the great thought of Scripture which we far too little apprehend in the depth and power of its meaning; and this covenant with us poor creatures is this, "I promise that My love shall never leave thee". Have you entered into this covenant of peace with God? Then you may be sure that that covenant will stand for evermore, though the mountains depart and the hills be removed.

2. We have a few practical lessons from the contrast between the perishable mortal and the immortal divine love.

(i) To warn you and me from setting our hearts upon these perishable things. What folly it is, looked at from the last point of view, for a man to risk his peace and the strength of the joy of his life upon things that crumble and change, when all the while there is lying before him open for his entrance, and wooing him to come into the eternal home of his spirit, this covenant!

(ii) To stay the soul in seasons which come to everybody, when we are made painfully conscious of the transience of this present. Whatever comes, thou canst not be desolate if thou hast God's loving-kindness.

(iii) To give to us hopes of years as immortal as itself. We are immortal as the tenderness that encloses us. God's endless love must have undying creatures on whom to pour itself out. The hope that is built upon the eternal love of God in Christ is the true guarantee to me of immortal existence, and this all turns on the one thing. Come into the covenant – the covenant of peace. Take the covenant God offers you, close with the offer, and then life and death, principalities and powers, things to come, height and depth, and every other creature, shall be impotent to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ■

DO WE NEED TO BELONG TO A CHURCH?

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

Some Christians appear to think that they do not need to belong to a local church, or at least, that is the message they convey by their actions. Their attendance at public worship is sporadic, they are not regular in their giving, and they do not place themselves under the discipline of the church by seeking membership. All that seems to matter to them is their personal salvation. Is this biblical? We shall look at five truths concerning the church.

1. The Church is the Body of Christ

The Dutch-born American theologian R. B. Kuiper (1886-1966) wrote a book with the title *The Glorious Body of Christ*. It was a phrase he delighted to use, since it was his belief that "the Christian Church is glorious in its very nature". Kuiper consistently emphasised the central place of the church in the plan of redemption. Of all God's institutions, which include the family and the state, it is the church which is glorious.

First, the church is glorious because it was *redeemed by Christ*. We read that Christ "loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Paul had previously told the Ephesian elders that God had purchased the church "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states that God chose and ordained the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be "the Head and Saviour of his Church", and that the church is "the spouse, the body, and fulness of him that filleth all in all" (WCF 8:1; 25:1). The church is *the body of Christ*; no other institution has that said about it.

Second, the church is glorious because it is built *by Christ*. Our Saviour declared, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Christ's message is unmistakable. He speaks of the church's foundation: it is *His* church. He then refers to the church's foes, namely, *the gates of hell*. Finally He reveals the church's future: despite Satanic opposition, it will be built. Note that Christ is the builder of the *church*, not any other institution or organisation; may this point ever be remembered. It is the reason why our Confession can state that, notwithstanding error and apostasy, "there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will" (WCF 25:5). The Lord looks after His own cause – something evident in Scripture and subsequent history. "As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof." (WCF 5:7)

Third, the church is glorious because it will be *eternally with Christ*. The family, despite its importance to the human race, is a temporary institution. There is no family in eternity: there are no husbands, wives, parents and children, and no marriages will ever occur. This point needs emphasising, because there are some who have elevated the family, not only above the church but even to the exclusion of the church. The plan of redemption was not that Christ would die for the family, but for the church, which is eternal. In addition it must be noted that marriage itself was ordained by God "for the increase...of the church with an holy seed" (WCF 24:2).

2. There is no Salvation outside the Visible Church

Our Confession asserts concerning the visible church, that out of it "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF 25:2). Modern evangelicals, with their emphasis on the individual and personal, might take exception to such a statement, but it is common to the Reformed confessions. The point being made is simple. The visible church, which, as we learn in the same section of the Confession, consists of "all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children", is the kingdom of Christ, and the benefits of salvation are communicated to us by our King in the visible church through the word and sacraments.

3. Without Membership of the Church we are Rebels

John Owen rightly argues that since Christ appointed the visible church as the ordinary means of salvation, therefore those who will not join it are putting themselves against Christ. It is unknown in Scripture for believers to identify with Christ, without also identifying with His church. This is seen in numerous places. Luke tells us that, after Christ had ascended, the disciples continued to gather in an upper room in Jerusalem, and that at that time, "the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty" (Acts 1:15). John Gill comments: "these were the number of persons that met and embodied together in a church state, and who not only gave themselves to the Lord,

but to one another, by the will of God...their names being taken and registered". We later read that the Lord "added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). There is no hint of any believers anywhere who fail to join a local church.

Descriptions of the church

It is significant that when the Bible is describing the church, it uses metaphors which are communal in emphasis, and not individualistic:

– Christ is the vine, and believers are the branches in that vine (John 15:1-8);

– Christ is the cornerstone, and believers are the stones which make up a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-7);

– Christ is the head, and believers are the members of His body (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 12:12-31).

In none of these metaphors is there any hint of that wretched individualism that has become so common amongst professing Christians. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture of Christians living their own spiritual lives cut off from the rest of the body of Christ.

Evidences of rebellion

The Bible states that believers are to submit to those who are in authority over them in the church (Heb. 13:17). But without church membership on the part of believers, such submission cannot exist. There cannot be any discipline (1 Cor. 5:3-5), participation at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:17-34), or a host of other things which belong specially to the church.

Occasional hearing

The term 'occasional hearing' refers to 'sermon tasters'. Such Christians exist upon a spiritual diet of listening to any minister of their liking, as it suits them, while ignoring the local ordained shepherd of Christ's flock. In his work *A Preservative of Piety*, the Puritan William Thomas (1593-1667) rebukes the practice of occasional hearing when he says: "It is to be carefully considered and weighed, that faithful Ministers and provident Pastors speak to the diseases of their people". He corrects the idea that there are sermons available elsewhere which may be received as profitably as those of one's own minister: "the matter of them is not like to be so proper to, and fitted for, their spiritual condition as the Sermons of their own Pastor, who knows their particular state, and constitution, and is solicitous to dispense and administer that Instruction which is most suitable thereunto".

In other words, attending upon a local ministry means that we hear sermons which speak to our condition. By contrast, occasional hearing often means hearing sermons which speak to our vanity.

4. Missing Church is a Sin

We are familiar with Paul's instruction to the Hebrew Christians: "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24,25). It is obvious that, if we drift around from one place of worship to another, failing to gather regularly with a particular congregation, then we cannot do the things which are commanded here. We cannot 'consider' or give thought to one another; we cannot 'provoke' or stir up one another to love and good works; and we cannot 'exhort' or encourage one another. Those who are not connected with a congregation fail to do any of these things. They are effectively rejecting the word of God.

5. The Psalms and the Church

Christ has given His church a book of praise in the Psalms. There are three dimensions to the Psalms, namely Christ, the church and the Christian. It is no surprise that the Psalms have much to teach us about the church. Consider the following verses from the metrical Psalms:

Psalm 74: "O call to thy rememberance / thy congregation, / Which thou hast purchased of old; / still think the same upon:" (v.2). This refers to the church's redemption by Christ, something which is made explicit in the New Testament. "Amidst thy congregations / thine enemies do roar:" (v.4) This tells us of the church's foes, who endeavour to destroy her.

Psalm 22:22: "I will shew forth thy name unto / those that my brethren are; / Amidst the congregation / thy praise I will declare." Christ is declaring that He will bless His people with salvation, and that they may expect to enjoy His presence when they gather for worship.

Psalm 87: "God, more than Jacob's dwellings all, / delights in Sion's gates." (v.2) This tells us that God delights in the church's public worship more than family or private worship (although these are also important). "Things glorious are said of thee, / thou city of the Lord." (v.3) God has made wonderful promises to His church – something which should comfort us in these dark times.

May we value the congregation where the Lord has placed us! ■

"May we value the congregation where the Lord has placed us!"

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Martin Luther

(Taken from Luther's 'A Manual of the Book of Psalms', first published in English in 1837. It is his summary of Psalm 89.)

"For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens." (Psalm 89:2)

This is a remarkable prophecy concerning Christ and his kingdom; he speaks of the church or kingdom of Christ, as a "kingdom in the heavens"; in the same manner as Christ himself calls it "the kingdom of heaven". And though this spiritual kingdom of Christ is here upon earth, yet the Psalmist gloriously describes it as being "in the heavens".

Spiritual Riches

The Psalmist, indeed, here apprehends the promise made to David concerning Christ; and, opening that promise in a wonderful manner, he describes the riches of this spiritual kingdom. He enforces the everlasting firmness and sureness of that promise; and, taking a stand of heavenly meditation therein, he dwells upon the effectual power of that promise against all the violence of sin, and the malice and accusation of the devil; and here the Psalmist takes up his divine abode; here he fixes his standing; as the apostle hath it, "by faith ye stand" (2 Cor. 1:24): and he says that this truth of God, this his promise was prepared from everlasting, built up in the fulfilment of God's purpose of mercy, and firm, and "established in the heavens".

"Thy faithfulness and truth" (says the Psalmist), "are established in the heavens"; that is, a heavenly righteousness is preached by the gospel, which is not placed in us, or in any worthiness or merit of ours; but is out of us, and is the righteousness of Christ, and is imputed, for Christ's sake, unto all that believe in him: and hence, the promised riches of this kingdom are the gift of the Spirit, and the remission of sins, with all other spiritual blessings: all which are not offered unto us on any condition of the law, or of our works or our merit, but are given unto us freely of God. Salvation, therefore, is not a matter conditional on our works, but freely given unto us for Christ's sake; that thus all doubting and uncertainty may be taken from our souls; and that we may safely rest, entirely and only on the immutable and immoveable certainty of this truth and promise of God.

The Rock of Truth

The temporal kingdom of the Jews was promised to that people, on condition of a law given to them; that, if they kept that law, nationally, as a people, if they were therein good and obedient, they should be preserved and blessed. And, in the same way also, all the kingdoms of the world are given to their people under a like condition of a law, and, as long as they are good and obedient, God preserves them. But the immense and glorious riches of this spiritual kingdom, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, victory over death and the devil, etc., are promised and held forth without any condition of a law; and, in a word, the remission of sins is promised, freely, not only to those who have done nothing to deserve it, but to those who have done everything to forfeit it. This is a throne, therefore, not of angry and destroying majesty, but of grace alone; and being founded, not on the basis of our good works and merits, but on the rock of the sure and everlasting truth of God, it affords a great and marvellous consolation to the afflicted consciences of sinners.

After, however, the prophetic Psalmist has described the flower and glory of this kingdom and church of Christ, he deplores, on the other hand, from verse 38, in the most powerful expressions, the desolations and destructions of it: saying, that it shall come to pass that this kingdom, like as the apostle has also foretold, shall be so disturbed and torn to pieces by antichrist, that it shall seem as if God had wholly forgotten his promise unto it; nay, as if, contrary to the word of his promise, he did nothing but show his wrath against this kingdom.

Comfort and Consolation

All these things, however, are written for a consolation unto the godly; and especially unto us who, in these last times, have witnessed such abominations of the papacy; these things, I say, are written for our comfort and consolation; that we should not be broken-spirited, or terrified, at the multitude and diversity of offences; nor be driven to despair, though wickedness should have the dominion for a time, and though Satan should, as it were, so subvert all things human and divine, that there should seem to be no church of Christ at all, no remains of the kingdom of Christ upon earth. For if you look at the abomination of the Pope, and of Mahomet [Mohammed], which have spread themselves over the whole world, no other appearance is presented than that there is not a vestige of the true church remaining: and yet, it is not wholly blotted or rooted out from the earth; for, under the reign of each abomination and tyranny, there has ever existed a true church of Christ, although greatly despised and greatly oppressed. ■

ADVANTAGES GAINED FROM INDWELLING SIN

John Newton

(John Newton [1725-1807], the converted slave-trader who became an evangelical Anglican clergyman, published a selection of his letters in 1780 under the title 'Cardiphonia: or, The Utterance of the Heart'. The first part of the volume consists of twenty-six 'Letters to a Nobleman', written over the period 1765-77. This is the sixth letter, which was written in April 1772. It has been lightly edited.)

My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as they who have no hope. The Lord has provided His people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being overruled for good, He would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from His hatred to sin, and the love which He bears to His people.

One with Jesus

As to the remedy, neither our state nor His honour are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom He has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars, it shall not reign; and though it breaks our peace, it cannot separate from His love. Nor is it inconsistent with His holiness and perfection to manifest His favour to such poor denied creatures, or to admit them to communion with Himself; for they are not considered as in themselves, but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are accepted in the Beloved, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and ever lives to make intercession for their persons. Though they cannot fulfil the law, He has fulfilled it for them; though the obedience of the members is defiled and imperfect, the obedience of the head is spotless and complete; and though there is much evil in them, there is something good, the fruit of His own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than His glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon Himself.

There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by Almighty Power, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. They shall see Jesus as He is, and be like Him, and with Him for ever.

Christ Endeared to the Soul

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient are manifold. Hereby His own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed; His power, in maintaining His own work in the midst of much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames; His wisdom, in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of evil of our nature, is encouraged to practise against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely, he cannot prevail; notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love and the riches of His mercy are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons He bestows upon His people than if they needed no forgiveness at all. Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to Him alone.

The Righteous Scarcely Saved

If a mariner is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy is presently brought safe

into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly as if, after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favour cannot be disappointed, but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls.

"He has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle."

They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not ascribe any thing to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished (if possible) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Saviour, their Shepherd, and their Shield. When they were wandering He brought them back, when fallen He raised them, when wounded He healed them, when fainting He revived them. By Him, out of weakness they have been made strong; He has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of His excellence have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known so much of Him, if they had not known so much of themselves.

The School of Experience

Farther, a spirit of humiliation, which is both the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord – He has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. But that we are so totally depraved is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only told it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in Scripture, it would probably save us many a mournful hour; but experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by Him usually learn that they have no wisdom by the mistakes they make, and that they have no strength by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words: "without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5); and the necessity of crying with David: "for Thy name's sake lead me, and guide me" (Ps. 31:3).

Unworthiness and Forgiveness

It is chiefly by this frame of mind that one Christian is differenced from another; for though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated in Ezekiel 16:63: "that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God". The knowledge of My full and free forgiveness, of thy innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make thee ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of thine heart. Thou shalt open thy mouth in praise; but thou shalt no more boast in thyself, or censure others, or repine at My dispensations. In these respects we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips. But a sense of great unworthiness and much forgiveness checks these evils. Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing, that if there be a difference, it is grace that has made it, and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart; and under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved. These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root, indwelling sin. ■

YOUTH FOCUS

THE TREASURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

(Adapted, with kind permission, from Douglas A. Sweeney's book, 'Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment')

The American minister and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is well-known, sometimes notoriously so, for the copious amounts of time he spent studying. His student and friend Samuel Hopkins said Edwards "commonly spent 13 hours every day in his study". Historians have sometimes used this to argue that Edwards must have shirked other – and more important – duties. This is questionable, though, since it does not seem to explain how many close to him saw things differently. Nor does it account for his relationship with his wife, by all accounts quite tender and fulfilling. Plus, Edwards often shared his study with family, friends, and parishioners. Debates aside, what Edwards's study time does point to is the man's deep love for the Bible.

Religious Principles

Edwards' wonder and passion for the Bible got him up before sunrise almost every day of the year (between 4 and 5am). Hopkins once remarked of his priorities: "*He studied the Bible more than all other books, and more than most other divines do....He took his religious principles from the Bible, and not from any human system or body of divinity.*"

Edwards vowed in his 'Resolutions' while in his late teens that he would: "*Study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.*" Edwards devoted most of his waking life to studying Scripture, its extra-biblical contexts, its theological meanings, and its significance for everyday religion. And he did this because he believed the Bible was unique.

Insatiable Appetite

Despite appearing a backward-looking thinker to some, Edwards surely would have jumped at the chance to live with us today. He would have given almost anything for access to the historical and scientific knowledge that has burgeoned so dramatically since the early 19th century. His 18th-century world seems far away, a distant land. And Edwards was a man of his times. But he was also keenly curious and usually open-minded. He was a forward-looking thinker with an insatiable appetite for information about the Bible, its ancient historical contexts, and the structure of the natural world in which its events, stories, songs, poems, prophecies, morals, and other teachings were – and continued to be – realised. Edwards saw great value in the expanse of extra-biblical learning.

Yet the truth remains that biblical knowledge was supremely important to him because it was foundational to reality. He thought the Word of God was that by which the entire world – sacred and secular – was sustained and held together. Its record in the Bible was God's speech in writing, our most basic, proper, and helpful frame of reference for interpreting all else.

Precious Treasure

"The Bible is full of wonderful things", Edwards attested to his people. It has stood the test of time as the world's "most comprehensive book". It is "divine". It is "unerring". The splendid light it sheds on our world "is ten thousand times better than [that] of the sun". The Scripture's sacred texts, Edwards contended, are "the most excellent things in the world". In fact, they tower "as much above those things" we study "in other sciences, as heaven is above...earth". Further, the knowledge held in these heavenly texts is "infinitely more useful and important" than the knowledge attained in "all other sciences". Edwards lauded Scripture as a "great" and "precious treasure". He pleaded with his congregations to "search for" biblical treasure, with "the same diligence...with which men...dig in mines" for gold. Because it supplies truth from God, the Bible provides the basic framework for understanding life and the world.

Scripture thrilled Edwards. And he encouraged a similar devotion in the people he served. He assured his congregations that biblical learning was for all, not just clergy and "men of learning, but...persons of every character". God calls everyone to hunt the treasure hid in Scripture, both the "learned and unlearned, young and old, men and women".

Inexhaustible Subject

Not even the brightest Bible scholar will begin to find it all. In fact, the ones who "studied the longest, and have made the greatest attainments...know but little of what is to be known". The Bible's "subject is inexhaustible", for God "is infinite, and there is no end to the glory of his perfections". Consequently, all should apply their hearts and minds to Holy Scripture, making the study of its books "a great part of the business of our lives".

We may not be able to spend 13 hours a day in God's Word as Edwards did, yet his warning remains true: "He that has a Bible, and doesn't observe what is contained [in] it, is like a man that has a box full of silver and gold, and doesn't know it, doesn't observe that it is anything more than a vessel filled with common stones. As long as it is thus with him, he'll be never the better for his treasure." ■

Moderator-Designate *(Rev. John MacLeod)*

The Moderator-Designate for the 2019 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is Rev. William Macleod, minister of the Knightswood (Glasgow) congregation.

Mr Macleod comes originally from Stornoway in the Western Isles where he was born in 1951. He professed faith before leaving home to study at Aberdeen University to study for a BSc degree, which he completed in 1972. During his time at university he became persuaded of his call to the ministry, and on completion of his degree became a student at the then Free Church College, Edinburgh. Completing his studies there in 1975, and aware of his relative youth for the ministry at age 23, he went on to study at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, where he completed a Masters degree in Systematic Theology in 1976. Returning to Scotland he was ordained and inducted to Partick Free Church, Glasgow.

In 1981 he married Marion Johnston, the daughter of the late Rev. Alasdair Johnston, who was at that time the Free Church minister of Dumbarton. They have three adult children: Murdo makes films, including a highly-acclaimed one on the reformer John Knox, and is married to Csilla from Hungary; Alasdair is minister of Knock and Point Free Church (Continuing) in Lewis, and he and his wife Esther have two boys; Christina is married to Ian and they have two young children.

Rev. William Macleod

Following seventeen years as minister of Partick Free Church, Mr Macleod accepted a call to be minister at Portree in 1993, and then in 2006 to Knightswood Free Church (Continuing), where he ministers at present. He has also served the Church as editor of the denomination's monthly magazine, the *Free Church Witness*, from 2000 to 2017, and as Principal of the Free Church Seminary from 2003 to 2014, where he is now lecturer in Systematic Theology. He also served as Moderator of the 2005 General Assembly.

The General Assembly will meet at Liberton Kirk, Kirkgate, Edinburgh, EH16 6RY, on Monday 20th May 2019 at 6.00pm (D.V.). It is expected that the Assembly will conclude on the Thursday afternoon. All are welcome to attend as visitors.

Certificate in Theological Studies *(Rev. John Keddie)*

The Free Church (Continuing) Seminary has initiated a two-year course leading to a Certificate in Theological Studies. The course is a distance-learning course. It is modular in structure, with ten modules – two in each discipline – to be completed within 2 calendar years, 5 modules being taken in each year. The subject matter of the various modules focuses on core elements. The course will run from the beginning of a calendar year.

The course is open to any men, office-bearers or otherwise, concerned to receive basic instruction in biblical and reformed doctrine, history and practice. It is not restricted to men within the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), but it is to be understood that it is not intended as a course to prepare men for office in that Church. Two students have already commenced this course.

For details of the course, timetable and fees, those interested should write to the Clerk to the Seminary Committee: Rev. Henry J.T. Woods, 4 Braeview Park, Beauly, Inverness-shire, IV4 7ED.

Email: harrywoods@fccontinuing.org

Protesting against Abortion in the USA *(Rev. Warren Gardner)*

There are many who peacefully protest against the killing of unborn children in the USA. The infamous date of January 22nd, 1973, when our Supreme Court "legalised" a mother's killing of her unborn child, is annually remembered with sadness and horror by many people. I recently shared with the Atlanta congregation God's testimony condemning the

worship of Molech which involved the killing of Israel's young sons and daughters, a sin which God declared He would punish if the people did not (Lev. 20:1-5). This abomination was most flagrantly practised under the reign of king Manasseh of Judah, and was a sin which God would not pardon (2 Kings 24:4), even though He had mercy on repenting Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:12-19).

To date in the USA the blood of over 60 million innocent unborn children has been shed, a number in excess of one-eighth of our present population. This is a hideous crime against God and those innocent children who have been slaughtered, and there is good reason to believe, on the basis of Biblical testimony and example, that God will punish it, since our nation refuses to do so. We pray for God's mercy on us and on our nation, and ask Him who raises up kings and brings them down, that He would bring an end to the shedding of innocent blood in our land.

On January 19th a large number gathered in Washington DC, our nation's capital, to protest against the killing of unborn children. The media reported the number gathered to be variously "thousands" and "tens of thousands", but one of the organisers reported that the crowd was so large that she could not see the end of it. Previously the numbers have been accurately reported to be in the hundreds of thousands, and closer to a million.

In Atlanta on January 22nd, our gathering had fewer people than have turned out in the past. It was probably slightly under 1000 (the media reported 750), and this was perhaps due to the very cold weather (3 degrees Celsius) and the absence of a nationally recognised speaker. This Atlanta gathering was organised by Georgia Right to Life. Elizabeth Greenewald, Elder Charles Greenewald's wife, is employed by Georgia Right to Life, a pro-life organisation separate from the National Right to Life organisation because the national organisation allows for abortions in certain circumstances. Some states here are considering legislation that would allow abortion even up to the time of delivery.

Pastor Brent Evans and a number of our Atlanta congregation gather several times a year at a local area abortion clinic, to speak out against the practice of abortion and urge women coming to the clinic to turn back and spare the life of their unborn child. We encourage Christians elsewhere to do the same. ■

Sharia Law Descends in the Philippines

(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)

On 21 January some 2.8 million voters in western Mindanao participated in a plebiscite organised to facilitate the establishment of an Islamic sub-state in southern Philippines. Once the 'yes' victory is confirmed, a three-year transition period will follow. During that time a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)-dominated council will govern the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and facilitate the decommissioning of tens of thousands of MILF fighters. If all goes to plan, polls to elect an 80-seat parliament will then be held in 2022. The Bangsamoro Basic Law will impose Islamic Sharia Law on all of the BARMM's Muslim residents. Consequently, Islamic zeal and repression will escalate, with serious repercussions for Christian ministry, witness, freedom and security. Please pray for the Philippine Church, especially for Mindanao's minority Christians. ■

Quote

"They are seated on the highest throne of joy, and revel in the sweetest sunshine of delight, who know that God is their sure possession. They who hold Him as their own by the hand of faith have greater riches than earth can give, and surer property than this world can amass. And can it be that WE may enjoy this treasure? By the faith of Jesus we have this privilege of glorious possession." ■

Henry Law

Leave a Legacy

Please prayerfully consider the ongoing work of the gospel by leaving a legacy to the Church. A helpful information leaflet is available on request. Ask your local treasurer for a copy or email:
generaltreasurer@fccontinuing.org

COMMENT

PRAYERS IN PARLIAMENT

Move to end worship at Westminster

At the beginning of the year an 'Early Day Motion' was submitted in the UK Parliament, "That this House recognises that religious worship should not play any part in the formal business of the House of Commons", urging that "prayers should not form part of the official business of Parliament". Such motions are rarely debated, their main point being to attract media coverage and obtain public support for a particular cause. An amendment states that the House "recognises the importance of prayer to the work of Members, whatever their faith or beliefs".

This latest attempt to end prayers in Parliament is backed by the National Secular Society. Their chief executive said: "Religious worship is for individuals who choose it – not for nations or legislative bodies. Members of parliament are of course free to pray in their own time, but institutionalised prayer doesn't belong in the legislative process. Parliament should reflect the country as it is today. Ending this anachronism would be a tangible example of the reform needed in the House and represent a positive step forwards for modernity, equality and freedom of conscience."

Prayers have been said in the House of Commons since 1558, according to the form of the Church of England. The Speaker's Chaplain (presently a woman) reads set prayers (John Brown of Haddington criticised this practice, saying that it "checks the teaching of God's Spirit"). The main prayer is scriptural enough in its content: "Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen."

While the present arrangements are unsatisfactory from a biblical point of view, and require reform, there is no reason to stop prayers altogether. In the UK the Protestant Reformed Religion is established by law, and this should be reflected in our national institutions. It is very appropriate that there be prayers in Parliament. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Tim. 2:1,2) ■

'SHEEP STEALING'

The wrong way for churches to grow

In a former age, and in times of scarcity, poaching, cattle rustling and sheep stealing became a means of survival for some. Such activities are of course illegal, and punishable with serious penalties. Yet something similar now happens in evangelical circles. In a day when few people are being converted, some congregations resort to sheep stealing. Approaches are deliberately made to members of other congregations, especially in other denominations, with the suggestion that they give up their membership and join something better. Instead of evangelising the unconverted, these people prefer proselytising.

Raiding the sheep pens of other shepherds is not only considered beneficial; the 'success' enjoyed is used to justify this illegal activity. It is 'illegal' because a whole raft of biblical teaching is conveniently overlooked. To begin with, there is the relationship between shepherd and sheep, or pastor and people. While it is not sheep stealing to liberate sheep from *false* shepherds, encouraging believers in sound churches to leave, in order to fill the seats of another, is not advancing the cause of Christ; it merely advances one congregation at the expense of others.

In addition, sheep stealing is not real church growth. It is a pretence, and thus a lie before the world. We grant that the sheep are not owned by a congregation like a commodity; they belong to Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20). The phrase 'sheep stealing' is used merely to describe the nefarious activities of those in certain congregations who engage in wilful slander of another part of the Bride of Christ in its gathered form, as though they themselves are the true (or truer) church. The Saviour never said, "Go ye into the world and steal the sheep from other congregations". However, there are congregations which exist simply because of this activity.

While Christians have always moved about from congregation to congregation, and even from denomination to denomination, it is significant that when conversions become fewer, sheep stealing tends to become the norm. We evangelicals need to depend entirely upon the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and conversion, and leave 'transfer growth' to those who prefer to rely upon stealing. Biblically the Church grows in a twofold manner: internally, through covenant families, and externally, by conversions. This is long term, and less exciting than the unbelieving method of sheep stealing. Here then is a lesson for us: we should leave the unbelief to others, and give ourselves to prayer, along with witnessing to the unconverted. ■

THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (2)

1892 – THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST IN DOCTRINE

Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod

(The second of four articles, based on addresses given at the US Presbytery's Family Conference in August 2018.)

Christ Himself is King over what is taught in His Church. His Word defines truth, and determines the doctrine to be taught in His Church. This does not sound controversial or radical, yet, incredibly, that truth became a battleground in the Free Church of Scotland.

1. Overview

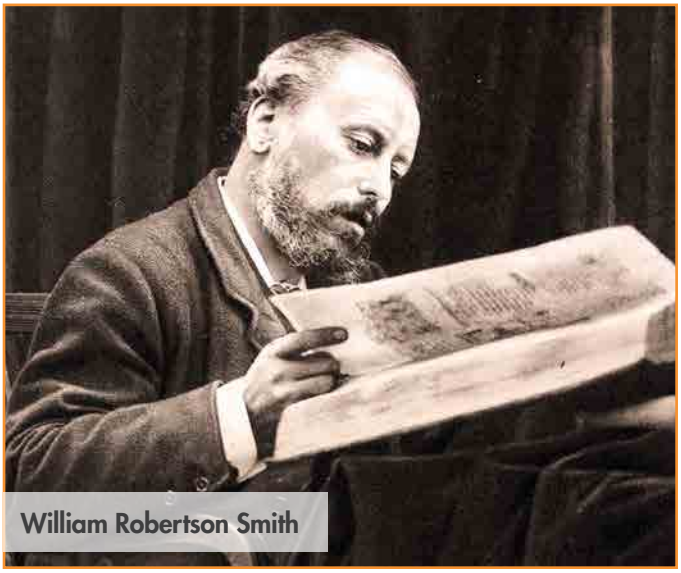
The course of nineteenth-century Free Church history is one of the great tragedies of all church history. The Church that in 1843 took a great stand for the Kingship of Christ was not perfect, but was passionately Evangelical, Reformed and Protestant. All across the country, the Free Church was known for reverent services of worship structured around the Word, unaccompanied psalm-singing, and confessional Calvinistic preaching of the Gospel.

But in 1892, less than fifty years after the Disruption, while some of the same ministers still sat in the General Assembly, the Free Church passed a Declaratory Act that declared that "diversity of opinion is recognised in this Church on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth". It was a definite loosening of commitment that indicated a private declension from rigorous doctrinal commitment to the Confession amongst ministers and members alike.

Why did this change occur? I believe the trends evident in the nineteenth-century Free Church are those that have dominated Scottish church history ever since. The line from the Declaratory Act of 1892 to the worst modern heresies is evident, as is, more positively, the line of opposition to these trends. By 1892, the Free Church still looked conservative. It was dignified and black-suited, reverent in its services, using the Authorised Version in pulpit and prayer – but on everything that mattered, it had capitulated. The outward changes still to come in the Scottish Church were just the logical outworking of the intellectual change at source in the divinity colleges.

2. Case Study – William Robertson Smith

One particular case indicates this shift, and why it matters. In 1876, a young Free Church Professor began to contribute to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. William



William Robertson Smith

Robertson Smith was a genius of the first order, arguably the outstanding academic that nineteenth-century Scotland produced *in any field*. As a young man, he studied at New College under A. B. Davidson, and was inspired to a love of Hebrew. Davidson was a crucial transitional figure: he argued that the Old Testament books contained "sporadic flashes of the Divine". This was a subtle but devastating change from the Christ-centred exegesis of older writers, such as Patrick Fairbairn.

Then Smith went to Germany, where he studied under the rationalist Ritschl, and imbibed more higher criticism. In 1870, he was ordained and appointed Professor of Hebrew at the Free Church College, Aberdeen, aged just 23. The invitation to contribute to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* underlined Smith's growing scholarly reputation. There is a danger here: one cause of the decline in the Free Church was the quest for academic respectability. We must examine ourselves on this point: Whose approval do we desire above all? Is Christ really your King?

As the volumes of the Encyclopedia were published, the Free Church public received a shocking insight into the outlook of their own Professor. On 'Angels', his article suggested that he did not believe in their existence; under 'Hebrew Literature', he treated the Song of Solomon just as a secular love poem.

Worst of all, with regard to Deuteronomy, Smith argued for a late date, which made its origin as a work of Moses impossible. This problem was huge: the book presented itself to the reader as Moses' sermons to Israel on the eve of her entry to Canaan; furthermore, Christ quoted from Deuteronomy, attributing it to Moses. If Scripture could not be trusted, if Christ could not be trusted, where was Smith's authority in religion? Who was his King? Here was the problem in

the Free Church: a fundamental refusal to submit the mind, the reason, the opinions, to the Word of Christ.

The result was uproar. There was little initial support for Smith's position – in 1876, he was agreed on all sides in the Free Church to be wrong. The question was whether he should have liberty to be wrong on such points. Many disagreed, and the matter became a disciplinary case before courts of the Free Church. The case commenced in 1877, and dragged on until 1881.

Essentially, there emerged three positions. The conservative men, notably James Begg, held that Smith was a heretic and should face church discipline. The liberal wing of the Church, including men like Alexander Whyte, held that Smith had merely been too forthright, and should exercise greater caution in future. The middle way, advocated by Robert Rainy, was that Smith had overstepped a mark and should be removed from his position, but not disciplined, and with no condemnation of his teaching. This proposal eventually triumphed. In 1881, Smith was dismissed accordingly, but as a minister in good standing. He went on to a very distinguished academic career, latterly as full Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge.

It looked like a conservative victory – but it was not. The case gave huge publicity to Smith's views, and made him a martyr. As Smith was defeated in the final vote, he saw the younger generation of ministers overwhelmingly support him, the students' bench applaud him, and, at a rally afterwards, two younger professors both declare with impunity that they held the same doctrines as Smith. In five years, Smith's views had gone from unheard of, to widespread.

3. Broader Movement of Change

As the century progressed, there was movement in other areas. In worship, there was pressure for change. Victorian society demanded respectability: it was an age that prized taste, refinement and culture. The trend was therefore to replace precentors with organs; metrical psalms with more elegant and literary hymns; and extemporaneous prayers with read devotions from a service book. Even the sacraments were not immune: the common cup was replaced with thimbles, and eventually alcoholic wine with grape juice. The movement was from the taste of Scripture, to the taste of popular culture.

But this was more than cultural change; the issue was theological. The rejection of psalm-singing is always rooted in discomfort with the content of the Psalms. Specifically, with calling for the vengeance of God upon the enemies of Christ; with cursing and expressing hatred for the enemies of Christ; and with expressions of extremes of emotion, including intense spiritual despondency. Again, there is a warning here. Is your taste bowing to Scripture, or not? If you prefer the sentiments in hymns, do you not refuse to submit to Christ? If you are more comfortable singing some hymns than some psalms, then you must accept that in these respects, you are diverging from the mind of Christ.

Another vital area of theological change was the question of the extent of the Atonement – for whom did Christ die? The whole spirit of the age was sentimental. The evangelist D. L. Moody had a massive influence in this area, although not by challenging the doctrine; he simply omitted it from his teaching. Without ever really being confronted head on, the majority of Free Church ministers just stopped preaching limited atonement, and the next generation did not believe it.

4. Culmination – the Declaratory Act

With change evident in views held on Scripture, worship, and theology, there was a growing demand in the Free Church to ease the standard of confessional subscription. In practice, this flexibility functioned already, but the majority wanted to formalise it, and in 1892, the Assembly's Declaratory Act did just that. There was extensive dissent and protest throughout the Church against the Act. One minister went further, and tabled a protest in the form of separation. Another minister joined him, and some thousands of people, chiefly in the Highlands, formed the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Others – those whom we believe continued the Free Church testimony – remained in the Church under protest. The point is important: no one has an automatic right to separate when they choose. The Church can declare something, and one can dissent, and even protest. The Free Churchmen were still under the same vows, still had the same rights and responsibilities as before, and could remain under protest against the Declaratory Act. The Act placed no obligation upon any man. You did not have to agree with it, and could oppose it with might and main, and still be a Free Churchman. Our forebears in the Free Church continued to testify to the Kingship of Christ in doctrine, and so do we. ■

> "Schism is separation from the Church without adequate cause. It is a breach of Christian fellowship and subjection, enjoined by Christ on His people. This has ever been regarded as a great sin. No man is justifiable in thus breaking up the unity of the Church, unless he is required to profess or do something which the Bible condemns as false or wrong, or else he is prohibited from professing or doing what the Bible commands."
> – Charles Hodge (from *Discussions in Church Polity*, 1878, p.412)

BOOK REVIEWS

(Books for review should be sent to: Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod, 25c Swordale, Point, Isle of Lewis, HS2 0BP)

Christ All in All: What Christ is Made to Believers
Philip Henry, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, hbk, 365pp (price not available)

Philip Henry (1631-1696), father of Bible commentator Matthew Henry, lived during that turbulent period of English history covering the reigns and rules of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, Charles II, James II and William of Orange. A marble tablet in St Almunds, the parish church of Whitchurch in Shropshire, describes Henry as "an elegant scholar, a profound divine and an exquisite expositor of the word of God". Following the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which made the use of the Book of Common Prayer compulsory in religious services, Philip Henry, along with many other like-minded men, continued to preach as a non-conformist minister outside the established church, until the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689.

This volume is a compilation of sermons and meditations on our Saviour. The author considers forty ways that Christ is "all in all" for believers: he is their refuge, freedom, shield, wisdom, and song, to name but a few. Each chapter is taken up with a particular facet of Christ's character and sufficiency, calling on us to find our satisfaction in Christ. Henry's writing is biblically orientated, unashamedly doctrinal and experimentally practical. He is also very orderly and logical in his presentation.

An example is the chapter 'He is our Refuge', based on Hebrews 6:18 ("who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us"). Henry states that the chief doctrine taught us in these words is that the Lord Jesus Christ is a Christian's refuge to which he must fly every day. Headings are then given: 1) what is meant by refuge; 2) what need we have of a refuge every day; 3) what kind of refuge Jesus Christ is; 4) what it is to fly for refuge, and what should move us so to do. Each heading is then dealt with under sub-headings. Concerning heading 2), we need a refuge on a fourfold account:

a) Guilt contracted; we are sinning daily besides old scores. The avenger of blood, that is, God's offended justice, is in pursuit of us, at our very heels, though we see him not.

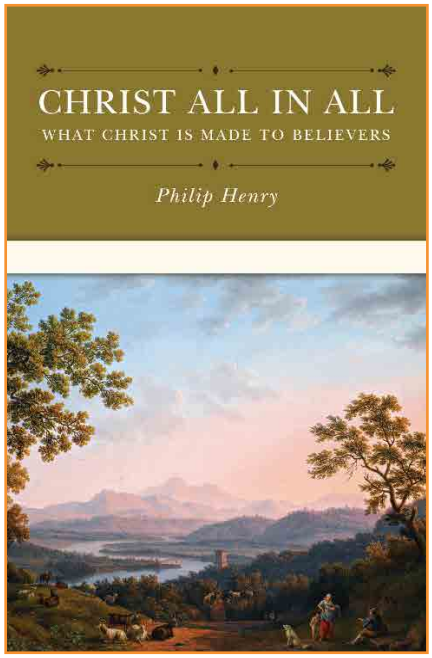
b) Temptations assaulting. The world, the flesh and the devil are all busy, by fair means or foul, to draw us from God and duty, to sin and folly.

c) Troubles befalling.

d) Dangers threatening.

This is followed by an Application.

Regarding the much-debated issue arising from the words of Hebrews 9:14 ("who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God"), as to whether Christ offered himself in his human nature on the cross through the resources of his own divinity, or whether he did so in the exercise of faith by the help of the Holy Spirit who indwelt him, Henry prefers the first of these views. He deals with this in the chapter on 'Christ our Altar'. Using the analogy of the Levitical altar, he states that Christ is not only our priest and king but also our altar. The Levitical altar, he says, was made of wood, covered with brass. Not wood outermost, for the fire would have burnt it; but wood within, brass without, signifying the two natures of Christ, his divine nature and his human nature. The brass of the divine nature secured and safeguarded the wood of the human nature, else the fire of God's wrath had consumed it, and if so, no atonement could have been made. This was the "*eternal Spirit through which he offered himself without spot to God*". Interestingly, this appears to have been also the view of the Westminster men. Question 38 of the *Larger Catechism* states: "*Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God? It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God and the power of death...*".



The reviewer would make one small criticism concerning a matter in the chapter on 'Christ our Propitiation', where Henry states, "the mercy seat was a type of Christ; he is our mercy seat". The mercy seat, that is, the lid or covering over the ark, played a vital part in the ritual of the Day of Atonement. On that day the High Priest, undoubtedly a type of Christ as our great High Priest, entered within the Most Holy Place bearing sacrificial blood from off the brazen altar and sprinkled some of that blood upon the mercy seat. Now, if the mercy seat were a type of Christ, that would mean that the High Priest – or Christ, his antitype – was sprinkling that blood upon himself. Surely not!!! Might it not be better to say that the mercy seat was

the location ordained of God where the claims of the offended justice of God, represented by the tablets containing the decalogue within the ark, obtained satisfaction, but that they obtained that satisfaction only when the High Priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood on that location?

That small matter apart, this is an excellent book which should be read by all who wish to grow in a doctrinal knowledge of the scriptures. ■

Rev. John Macleod (retired)

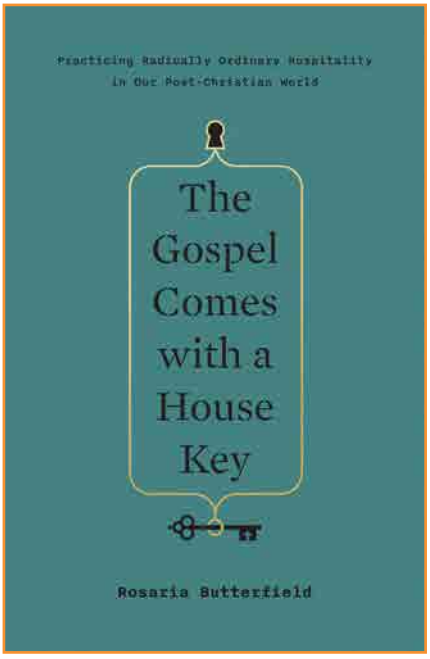
The Gospel Comes with a House Key
Rosaria Butterfield, Crossway, hbk, 240pp, £10.99

I was given this book as a gift on a recent visit to the United States, and enjoyed reading it very much. Mrs Butterfield has an extraordinary testimony of conversion from living as a feminist professor of English literature in New York, in a lesbian relationship, to the Christian faith. She is now the wife of a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in North Carolina, and a homeschooling mother to several adopted children. Her conversion account, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, received a commendatory review in the *Witness* in November 2015.

This book, however, though it includes many aspects of personal testimony, is rather a summons to what the author calls "radically ordinary hospitality" – a good, thought-provoking phrase. Mrs Butterfield was herself brought to faith through the witness of an elderly pastor and his wife who opened their home to her and befriended her. She and her husband Kent continue to exemplify this hospitality in their lives in Durham, NC; they open their home to neighbours, friends and members of their congregation. The Lord has blessed such hospitality in different ways to many individuals.

The teaching on practical evangelism here is good: "The truly hospitable aren't embarrassed to keep friendships with people who are different....Jesus dined with sinners, but he didn't sin with sinners. Jesus lived in the world, but he didn't live like the world. This is the Jesus paradox. And it defines those who are willing to suffer with others for the sake of Gospel sharing and gospel living, those who care more for integrity than appearances." (p.13)

But it is the first-hand accounts that give particular power to this book. Mrs Butterfield's description – very honest – of dealing with the chaos in their community after a neighbour and friend was exposed as a drug peddler, is poignant yet practical. The Lord has owned their witness in this distressing situation in the conversion in prison of both the neighbour and his partner.



Two particular chapters stood out to me: 'Judas', which speaks of the pain and grief of church discipline, and the aching blow that such cases can bring to a fragile congregation; and 'Ghosts', which describes Mrs Butterfield's own painfully dysfunctional family background, yet the miracle of grace granting conversion to both her mother and stepfather at the end of their lives. It was particularly interesting to see the role of psalm-singing in both cases: there is power in music, in four-part unaccompanied singing with the human voice, and above all in the Word of God!

One issue that did concern me was that Mrs Butterfield did not seem to acknowledge any limit necessary in hospitality, any point at which the needs of the family, and indeed the married couple, need to be prioritised. Children do need space, and privacy, and uninterrupted time with their families, and a failure to safeguard this can be damaging, even spiritually. The family of Francis Schaeffer, for example, later testified to the difficulties that their parents' extreme 'open-door' policy had caused them.

With this caution, I would commend both the book and the call to evangelism by hospitality that it brings, however challenging this may be to translate into our rather more reserved Scottish culture. Mrs Butterfield brings the skills of a former English professor to her writing, and the resultant book is lively and readable, vibrant with the feel of everyday life in a busy Christian home. ■

Rev. Alasdair Macleod

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
10 Cross, Portree
17 Glasgow–Knightswood
24 Inverness–Greyfriars, Mebane
31 Scalpay Harris

April
7 Ayr, Bracadale, Duthil-Dores
14 North Uist & Grimsay, St Louis
21 Ballyclare & Doagh, Greenville
28 Aberdeen, Atlanta, Glasgow–Partick, Knock & Point, Lochalsh & Strath

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

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2019 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES Jan 2019 £	Total to Jan 2019 £	Total to Jan 2018 £
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Duthil-Dores	814	1,500	1,500	2,238
Inverness	0	3,000	3,000	2,000
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,450	1,450	1,450
Poolewe & Aultbea	0	920	920	900
Total Inverness Presbytery	**814**	**8,370**	**8,370**	**8,088**
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	80	0	0	0
Brora	0	0	0	0
Kiltearn	0	0	0	0
Tarbat	0	2,000	2,000	0
Total Northern Presbytery	**80**	**2,000**	**2,000**	**0**
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	50	879	879	754
Ayr	0	0	0	800
Dumfries	0	100	100	100
Edinburgh	0	0	0	1,500
Glasgow - Knightswood	0	2,000	2,000	1,900
Glasgow - Partick	849	1,600	1,600	1,600
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	1,500	1,500	2,000
Rothesay	0	0	0	0
Total Southern Presbytery	**899**	**6,079**	**6,079**	**8,654**
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	3,495	3,495	1,854
Harris - Leverburgh	0	1,400	1,400	1,400
Knock & Point	0	1,900	1,900	1,729
North Uist & Grimsay	380	1,050	1,050	1,050
Scalpay	0	1,800	1,800	1,800
Stornoway	637	6,076	6,076	6,140
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	**1,017**	**15,721**	**15,721**	**13,973**
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	518	1,500	1,500	1,450
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	0	0	1,000
Lochalsh & Strath	110	150	150	150
Portree	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Snizort	0	1,500	1,500	1,500
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	**628**	**4,650**	**4,650**	**5,600**
Smiths Falls	0	990	990	1,000
Total From Congregations	**3,438**	**37,810**	**37,810**	**37,315**
Other Donations	0	2,072	2,072	4,045
Legacy	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	**3,438**	**39,882**	**39,882**	**41,360**
Included in the above: Tax	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	**3,438**	**39,882**	**39,882**	**41,360**

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

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

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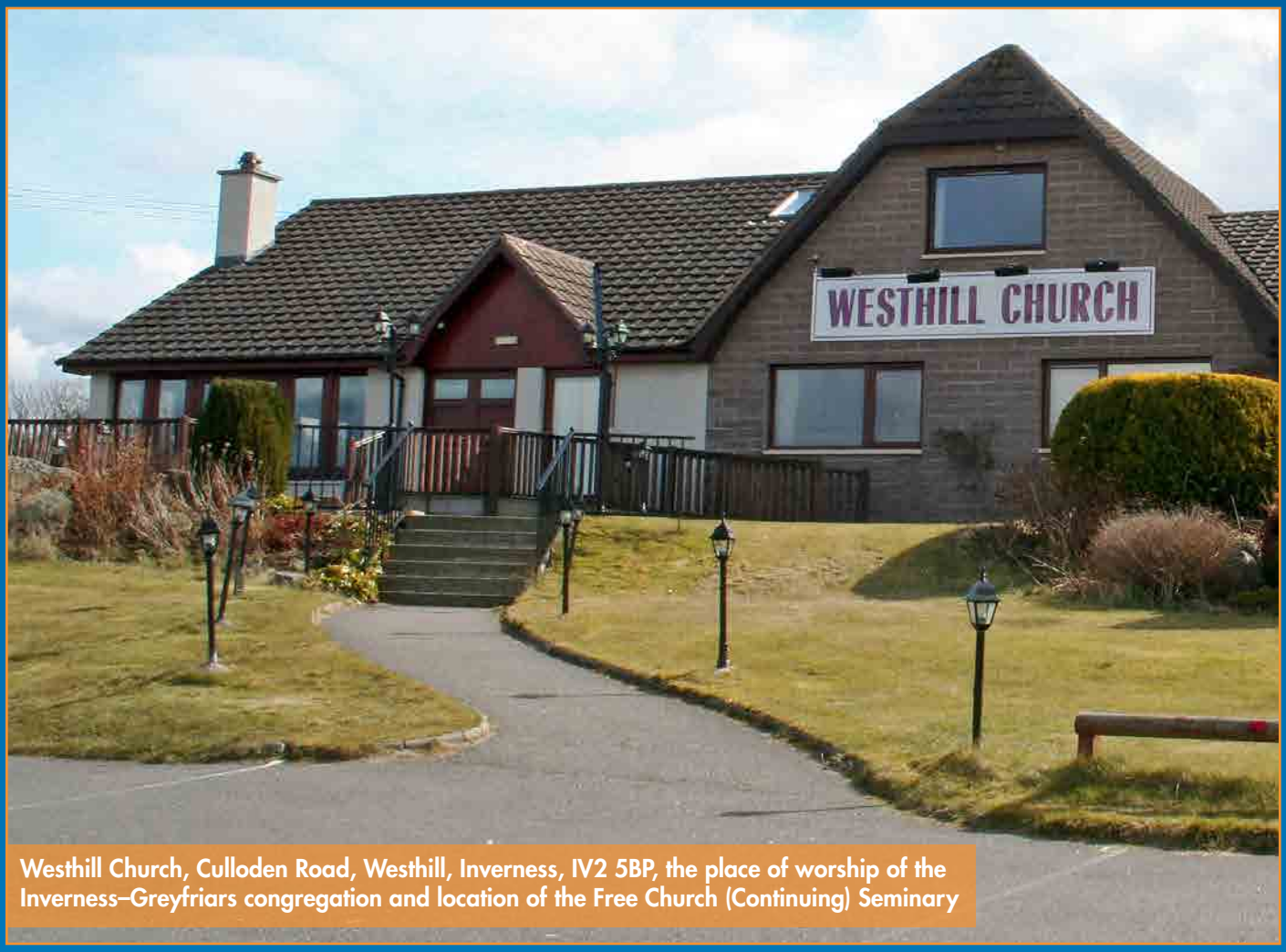

Westhill Church, Culloden Road, Westhill, Inverness, IV2 5BP, the place of worship of the Inverness–Greyfriars congregation and location of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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