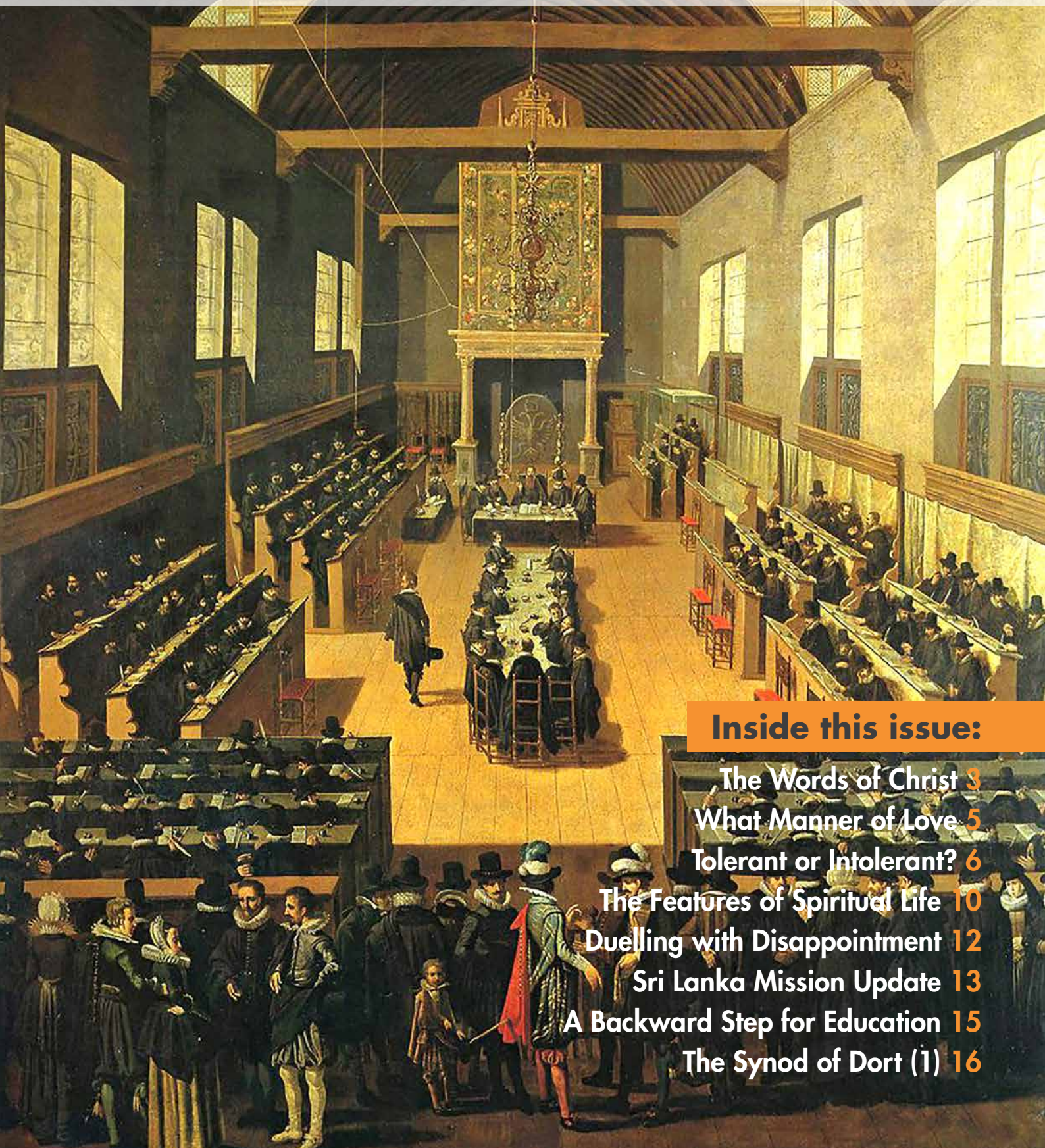
NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR

FREE CHURCH WITNESS

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

December 2018 £2.00



Inside this issue:

The Words of Christ 3
What Manner of Love 5
Tolerant or Intolerant? 6
The Features of Spiritual Life 10
Duelling with Disappointment 12
Sri Lanka Mission Update 13
A Backward Step for Education 15
The Synod of Dort (1) 16

Editor
Rev. David M. Blunt

17 Knockline, Isle of North Uist, HS6 5DT
witness@fccontinuing.org
01876 510305

Assistant Editors
Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland, Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod

Design & Layout
Donald Smith Graphic Design

Correspondence & Copy
Correspondence relating to the magazine and copy for inclusion in the Church News section should be submitted to the Editor; the deadline for copy is the beginning of the month before publication.

Subscriptions
Annual subscription rates (including postage) for the *Free Church Witness* (which includes *The Explorer* for young people) mailed to one address are:

UK £27.50
Europe (Airmail) £30.00
Overseas (Airmail) £35.00

Subscriptions and orders, with cheques / postal orders made out to 'Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)', should be sent to:

Mrs Isobel McQueer, The Manse, Tordarroch, Farr, Inverness IV2 6XF
subscriptions@fccontinuing.org
01808 521474

We encourage churches to take out bulk subscriptions at the lower rate of £24.00. *The Explorer* may be ordered separately for Sabbath Schools for the cost of the postage.

Distribution
For matters relating to the distribution of the magazine please contact:

Mr Bill McQueer, The Manse, Tordarroch, Farr, Inverness IV2 6XF
distribution@fccontinuing.org
01808 521474

Contents

EDITORIAL
The Words of Christ 3

DEVOTIONAL
What Manner of Love (James Morgan) 5

DOCTRINE
Tolerant or Intolerant? (Rev. Iain Smith) 6
The First Commandment (John Calvin) 8

PRACTICAL RELIGION
Piety in the Ministry (Rev. Maurice Roberts) 9
The Features of Spiritual Life (F.W. Krummacher) 10

YOUTH FOCUS
Duelling with Disappointment (Rev. Trevor Kirkland) 12

CHURCH NEWS
Sri Lanka Mission Update 13
Organiser for All-Age Holiday 14

COMMENT
A Backward Step for Education 15
Fantasy versus Truth 15

CHURCH HISTORY
The Synod of Dort (1) (Rev. Trevor Kirkland) 16

BOOK REVIEWS
John Newton – Through many dangers by Brian H. Edwards 18
The Greatest Fight in the World by C.H. Spurgeon 18

COMMUNION DATES 19

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES 19

Magazine on Tape
The Free Church Witness is available on two audio tapes which can be ordered at no cost. Please order your tapes from:

Mr Murdo Campbell
19 Loganswell Road, Deaconsbank, Glasgow G46 8AY
tapes@fccontinuing.org
0141 638 1925

FC(C) Audio Ministry
Selected sermons by Free Church (Continuing) ministers are available on CD and a catalogue may be obtained. Each CD costs £1.00 (including postage). Cheques / postal orders should be made payable to 'Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)'. Please order your catalogue and CDs from:

Mr Bill McQueer
The Manse, Tordarroch, Farr, Inverness IV2 6XF
audiominstry@fccontinuing.org
01808 521474

Psalmody CDs
CDs of psalm-singing are available from the Psalmody Committee. Please contact:

Rev. Andrew R. Allan, 23 Kingfisher Drive, Knightswood Gate, Glasgow, Lanarkshire G13 4QA
psalmody@fccontinuing.org
0141 328 1707

or visit: **sing-the-psalms.webs.com**

COVER IMAGE: The Synod of Dort in session, from a painting by G. van Hove – see page 16.

Website:
freechurchcontinuing.org

Facebook:
facebook.com/fccscot

Twitter:
@fccscot

Editorial

THE WORDS OF CHRIST

Scripture records how the time came when the Jewish leaders sought to apprehend Jesus (John 7:30). The Lord was teaching in the temple during the feast of tabernacles. While the people were divided in their opinion of Him, they were all amazed at His learning. There were some who were persuaded that Jesus was the promised Christ, being impressed by His miracles. The Pharisees and chief priests were concerned at the influence Jesus was having, and sent officers to take Him (v.32), but they returned empty-handed (v.44). Their masters angrily demanded to know the reason why (v.45).

The explanation given by the officers is surprising but enlightening. It was not that Jesus had resisted arrest, overpowering the officers or withdrawing from them. It was not anything Jesus had done, but what He had *said*. The response of the officers to those who had sent them on their fruitless errand was, "Never man spake like this man" (v.46). They had been greatly affected by the words of Christ – so much so that they felt unable to lay hands upon Him.

The Great Prophet

Unwittingly, the officers were confirming what was said about Christ after He had preached on the last day of the feast. When He called the thirsty to come to Him and drink, promising them living water, many of those who heard Him testified: "Of a truth this is the Prophet" (v.40). These people knew their Scriptures. Moses had said centuries before: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deut. 18:15). Now that Prophet had appeared in the world and had been recognised by some.

The church confesses that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God and the eternal Word, is her great Prophet. He occupies that office as the Redeemer of His people, and He executes it, as our *Shorter Catechism* tells us, "in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation" (SC 24). The way of salvation is through faith in Christ crucified, and this is made known to us in the Holy Scriptures, which were given by divine inspiration. The whole Bible is the word of Jesus Christ. He spoke first by the Old Testament prophets and then through the New Testament apostles, to provide His church with the foundation for her faith, with Himself as "the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

The Word made Flesh

While we must never think less of the rest of Scripture (something which tends to be encouraged by 'red letter' editions of the Bible, which emphasise the words of Christ), it is only natural that we should have a special interest in the words which were spoken by the Son of God when He took our nature and dwelt among us (John 1:14). We are struck first of all by their brevity. It is reckoned that when what is duplicated in the different gospel narratives is taken into account, all of our Lord's recorded words would comprise less than twenty pages of the Bible. Contrast this with the thinkers of this world! Their utterances fill countless volumes, yet they do not even begin to compare with the wisdom which came forth from the holy and blessed lips of Jesus Christ. A voice from heaven speaks to us today, just as it did to the disciples who were with Christ on the mount of transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).

When we read or listen to the words of Christ, we find that there is a beauty to them. We delight in passages such as the Beatitudes and the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. Many are moved by our Lord's sayings, and cannot fault His morality. All profess to admire the 'golden rule' which our Lord laid down when He said, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them", or 'do as you would be done by' (Matt. 7:12). Yet if this is *all* that we see in what Christ said, then we are still spiritually blind and in need of a saving change. What more is there to be said about the words of Christ?

Words of Truth

When one of the scribes asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?", He replied by summarising the whole law as a duty of love which we owe firstly to God and then to our neighbour. His answer was so scriptural that the scribe could only respond, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth" (Mark 12:28-32). Truth is fundamental in religion, although many do not seem to see it that way, being led by their feelings instead. When it comes to our eternal interests, surely we can only put our trust in someone who has the truth. We may be sure of that with Jesus Christ, for as the Son of God He *is* the truth (John 14:6). Christ could say, as no one else can, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14:9). Sent by God as the messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1), Jesus spoke the truth concerning God with supreme authority and total accuracy.

Christ also told the truth about man, and especially his spiritual condition. He spoke about sin, always rebuking it and never excusing it. He declared our bondage to sin when He said to the Jews, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). He explained that bondage in terms of our fallen nature, proclaiming in His sermon on the mount that "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit", and "a corrupt tree [cannot] bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:17,18). The remedy for our desperate condition is in Christ's words to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). It is not enough that we try to lead better lives: we must flee from the wrath to come. At the outset of His public ministry Christ said: "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). At its close of His ministry He said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations (Luke 24:47). We disregard Christ's words at our peril, for they will judge us at the last day (John 12:48).

Words of Grace

When Christ stood up and spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, where He had been brought up, those who were present "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4:22). What were these gracious words? Christ first read the Scriptures, choosing these words from the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (vv.18,19) Then Christ spoke to the congregation in His own words, saying: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (v.21).

Jesus was declaring to the people, "I am the Saviour promised by Isaiah!" It was an astounding claim, and yet it was a just one, as we know. Jesus had recently been baptised in Jordan by John, an action by which He was set apart officially for His redeeming work; the Spirit had then descended upon Jesus and rested upon Him, equipping Him for His awesome task. By His obedience unto death, and through the willing sacrifice which He finished upon the cross, Jesus made atonement for sinners. Isaiah foretold that, through the gospel which is preached in His name, Christ would bring spiritual healing, deliverance and liberty to blind, bruised and broken-hearted sinners. Trusting in the Saviour, we are blessed with a new heart, a full pardon and holiness of life. And it is all of God's grace!

Welcome Words

We are told concerning Christ that, "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37). Christ denounced the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, but He was full of sympathy for those who were aware of their sins and faults and looking for help. He preached to people in a simple and homely manner, declaring the truths of salvation in a way which they could easily grasp. His words were welcome to needy sinners then and they are welcome now, for they speak to our deepest needs. They bring comfort to the weary and worn, and hope to the wretched and lost. At the same time, Christ's words were very searching. He spoke to the conscience about the great issues of life, death, judgement and eternity. The apostles followed Him in this, using "great plainness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12). Do we who are ministers of the gospel do the same?

"His words were welcome to needy sinners then and they are welcome now"

Jesus Christ speaks to us today. How does He do this? It is by His Spirit in the Scriptures, and by His servants who preach the Scriptures faithfully. When He sent out the seventy to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom, Christ said to them: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Have we heard the voice of Christ in the gospel? His people hear Him as the Good Shepherd, who gives them eternal life, and they follow Him, safe and secure forever in His loving care (John 10:27,28). How truly blessed we are if we belong to His flock!

DEVOTIONAL

WHAT MANNER OF LOVE

James Morgan

(Rev. James Morgan [1799-1873] was a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, latterly in Belfast. This piece is taken from his work 'An Exposition of the First Epistle of John', published in 1865, and has been edited.)

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"
(1 John 3:1)

The love of God passes knowledge, but we may offer a few thoughts upon it.

The Nature of this Love

It was *everlasting* love. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself" (Eph. 1:3-5). This is an overwhelming thought, that the great God should, self-moved, from eternity, set His love on any of the children of sinful men, and purpose to take them into the intimate and endeared relation of sons.

It was *gratuitous* love. There was certainly nothing in the sinner, unless it were his misery, to call it forth. On the contrary, there was everything to hinder and repel it. This is the testimony of God Himself, when He says by His prophet, "thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (Ezek. 16:5,6). Let any man think upon himself, and remembering what he was when God called him, say wherefore he was chosen of God, unless in the exercise of His sovereign grace?

It was *costly* love. It could not be expressed otherwise than in such a way as would maintain the law and character and honour of God inviolate. This required the death of His own Son, and that was therefore not withheld: "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:18-20). The sinner's redemption was purchased by the greatest sacrifice which heaven itself could offer.

The Effect of this Love

The text specifies one blessing – that we should be called the sons of God. All are the sons of God by creation, but it is to a sonship peculiar to those who are the objects of redeeming love that the text refers. These sons are those who have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23). Adoption into the family of God is singled out as the evidence and effect of His love.

Think of the *work* that is done when the sinner is made a son of God. Then he is "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). When man was first created God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Father, Son, and Holy Ghost united in that work, hence it is ascribed to them indiscriminately. So also is it in the new creation. The sinner is a child of God, born of the Spirit, a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is a new birth unto righteousness. The sinner is made alive unto God.

Think of the *change* that is effected in such a work. They who are the subjects of it are made to pass from death to life, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The infant is ushered into a new world, and so is he. For the first time it beholds the light, and so with him. It enters on activities, and enjoyments, and trials which were unknown before, and so does he. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17)

Think of the *privileges* of sonship. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6) They have access to God as children to a father. They may come to Him in the full assurance of faith, and hope, and love. They may ask what they will, and it shall be done unto them. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." (Ps. 103:13)

Think, finally, of the *inheritance* in store for them. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Whatever Christ is to inherit, they are to inherit. They are to inherit it on the same title, and that is His righteousness. And what is it? It is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4).

O! how just the exclamation, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"! ■

TOLERANT OR INTOLERANT?

Rev. Iain Smith

One of the 'buzz' words in our modern world is 'tolerance'. Everybody is expected to be *tolerant*. However, like many other politically-correct words in the contemporary vocabulary, the definition of tolerance will vary according to who and what we are being asked to tolerate. Toleration is biblical, in the sense that God 'tolerates' things which He did not morally approve. For example, in the Old Testament era, God tolerated polygamy – yet this was only after He had indicated that polygamy was morally wrong, through His teaching on marriage and adultery. God also tolerated men who told lies and abused alcohol, despite such practices being clearly forbidden by His Word.

The recent establishment of a mosque in the town of Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis has brought the subject of tolerance into sharp focus, and has raised serious issues for the Christian Church in the Western Isles and throughout our land. It presents a challenge to the church regarding the practices and principles of a religion which is at variance with the biblical ethic, faith and life. What will the attitude of the church be? Some statements made on the mosque by church leaders have given a mixed message, and have been the cause of some confusion and consternation among local Christians and churches.

> *"The principle of intolerance regarding false religion is consistent throughout the pages of the Old Testament."*

False Religion

As far as tolerance goes, there is one area of spiritual life in which God refuses to show any toleration, namely *false religion*. In both eras of biblical history, God did not hesitate to demonstrate His abhorrence of the religious proclivities of the nations surrounding Israel. And within Israel itself, whenever alien expressions of religion appeared in the 'high places' and the 'groves', God made His displeasure known.

There was no question of God being indifferent towards what was, and remains, a direct challenge to His exclusive right as the sole object of worship amongst the human race. "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." (Isa. 42:8) Israel entered Canaan with a crystal-clear mandate on the subject of false religion, the Lord having issued this command to them: "ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves" (Ex. 34:13).

The Old Testament

The most vivid illustration in Scripture of God's intolerance of false religion is the brief time which the Ark of the Covenant spent in Dagon's temple in Ashdod, as recorded in 1 Samuel chapter 5. It is a given in Reformed circles that the Ark represented Jesus Christ in His dual natures. So when the Philistines stole the Ark and placed it alongside the image of Dagon (1 Sam. 5:2), they were being rather ecumenical, equating their god and the God of Israel, who reveals Himself in His only begotten Son.

God had no intention of reciprocating that ecumenical spirit however. During the first night He threw Dagon's lifeless image to the floor. This is expressed in a very deliberate way. We learn that when the men of Ashdod went into the house of Dagon the next morning, "Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth *before the ark of the Lord*" (v.3). The imagery is vivid: the Sovereign God towered over the prostrate image of a false god! During the second night, the Philistines having replaced their idol, God threw it down again, only this time shattering it into pieces, such that "only the stump of Dagon was left to him" (v.4).

The principle of intolerance regarding false religion is consistent throughout the pages of the Old Testament. From Joshua in Canaan to Elijah on Mount Carmel, from the Major Prophets to the Minor Prophets, there is not the slightest note of indifference to, or a shred of sympathy for, false religion.

The New Testament

The same is the case in the New Testament. During the

Apostle Paul's initial visit to the idolatrous city of Athens, we read that "his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (Acts 17:16). The word translated 'stirred' can mean 'provoked to anger'. So Paul was far from indifferent to this offensive practice and he certainly did not consider idolatrous worship to be a matter for the individual conscience to decide. Against all the ungodliness of the Greek world, Paul preached the Gospel to the Athenians in a sermon which was essentially on the doctrine of the true and living God, and by which he condemned their idolatry and warned them of the judgement to come (v.31).

"We are to be as tolerant as Jesus was during His recorded ministry."

Perhaps the strongest New Testament expression of the divine displeasure against false religion comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In two of His letters to the seven churches of Asia – the ones addressed to the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia – Jesus made scathing criticism of some within these fellowships who had a Jewish background, denouncing them for their blasphemy and lies, and referring to them as "the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9, 3:9).

That is the foundation Christians must work from when considering their attitude to false religions, idols, and unbiblical forms of worship in contemporary society. We are to be just as ecumenical as God is. We are to be as tolerant as Jesus was during His recorded ministry. We are to be as religiously sympathetic as God's Word allows, offering the degree of latitude afforded by His holy law. That far and no further should Christians go.

The Westminster Confession

Our *Confession of Faith* states that: "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture" (WCF 21:1).

Further, where religious practice is concerned, the Confession declares liberty of conscience to exist within the same parameters: "God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience" (WCF 20:2).

There are some obvious conclusions to be drawn from these biblical and confessional statements:

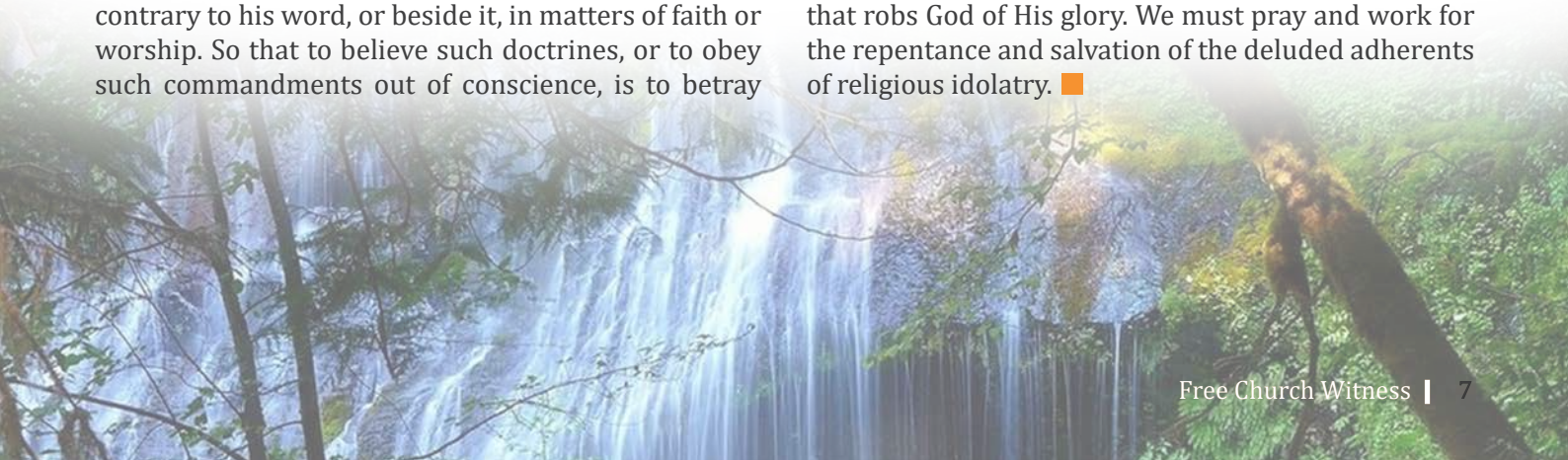
(1) God demands to be acknowledged as the one true God and that He alone should be worshipped;
(2) God has prescribed the method by which He should be worshipped;
(3) All other forms of worship are to be considered idolatrous;
(4) No sympathy, support or respect should be offered to false religions;
(5) False religion should never be considered as a preference based on individual conscience;
(6) Indifference towards false religion does not meet with divine approval;
(7) No false religion should be allowed an equal platform with Christianity.

Proclaiming the Gospel

None of these points allow for the persecution of the adherents of false religion. Nor should these adherents be hated by others. Loving our neighbour includes the person who is an adherent of a false religion. However, the New Testament church has been given a clear example, in Paul's response to the idolatry of the citizens of Athens, of how false religion should be viewed and addressed. As Paul preached the Gospel to the Athenians, so we must challenge the adherents of false religions with the same message.

That, after all, is what the historical mission work of the church was about when missionaries were sent into the heathen parts of the world. These servants of God never suggested to the indigenous people that they could continue to worship their idols if their conscience allowed them to. The evil of every false religion, which can include debased and apostate forms of Christianity, lies in the fact that it deludes its adherents on matters of eternal significance. That was one reason why Jesus referred to some in Smyrna and Philadelphia as the synagogue of Satan.

So, as we struggle with increasing elements and expressions of false religion in our communities, we have a duty to pray for the failure of every endeavour that robs God of His glory. We must pray and work for the repentance and salvation of the deluded adherents of religious idolatry. ■



THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

John Calvin

(Taken from 'Institutes of the Christian Religion', Book 1:8:16)

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"
(Exodus 20:3)

The purport of this commandment is, that the Lord will have himself alone to be exalted in his people, and claims the entire possession of them as his own. That it may be so, he orders us to abstain from ungodliness and superstition of every kind, by which the glory of his divinity is diminished or obscured; and, for the same reason, he requires us to worship and adore him with truly pious zeal. The simple terms used obviously amount to this. For seeing we cannot have God without embracing everything which belongs to him, the prohibition against having strange gods means, that nothing which belongs to him is to be transferred to any other.

Duties

The duties which we owe to God are innumerable, but they seem to admit of being not improperly reduced to four heads: Adoration, with its accessory spiritual submission of conscience, Trust, Invocation, Thanksgiving.

By Adoration, I mean the veneration and worship which we render to him when we do homage to his majesty; and hence I make part of it to consist in bringing our consciences into subjection to his Law. Trust is secure resting in him under a recognition of his perfections, when, ascribing to him all power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, we consider ourselves happy in having been brought into communion with him. Invocation may be defined as the retaking of ourselves to his promised aid as the only resource in every case of need. Thanksgiving is the gratitude which ascribes to him the praise of all our blessings.

Devotion

As the Lord does not allow these to be derived from any other quarter, so he demands that they shall be referred entirely to himself. It is not enough to refrain from other gods. We must, at the same time, devote ourselves wholly to him, not acting like certain impious despisers, who regard it as the shortest method to hold all religious observance in derision. But here precedence must be given to true religion, which will direct our minds to the living God. When duly imbued with the knowledge of him, the whole aim of our lives will be to revere, fear, and worship his majesty, to enjoy a share in his blessings, to have recourse to him in every difficulty, to acknowledge, laud, and celebrate the magnificence of his works, to make him, as it were, the sole aim of all our actions.

Superstition

Next, we must beware of superstition, by which our minds are turned aside from the true God, and carried to and fro after a multiplicity of gods. Therefore, if we are contented with one God, let us call to mind what was formerly observed, that all fictitious gods are to be driven far away, and that the worship which he claims for himself is not to be mutilated. Not a particle of his glory is to be withheld: everything belonging to him must be reserved to him entire.

The words, "before me," go to increase the indignity, God being provoked to jealousy whenever we substitute our fictions in his stead; just as an unfaithful wife stings her husband's heart more deeply when her adultery is committed openly before his eyes. Therefore, God having by his present power and grace declared that he had respect to the people whom he had chosen, now, in order to deter them from the wickedness of revolt, warns them that they cannot adopt strange gods without his being witness and spectator of the sacrilege.

Conscience

To the audacity of so doing is added the very great impiety of supposing that they can mock the eye of God with their evasions. Far from this, the Lord proclaims that everything which we design, plan, or execute, lies open to his sight. Our conscience must, therefore, keep aloof from the most distant thought of revolt, if we would have our worship approved by the Lord. The glory of his Godhead must be maintained entire and incorrupt, not merely by external profession, but as under his eye, which penetrates the inmost recesses of the heart. ■

"All worshipping, honouring, or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is idolatry. The mass is invented by the brain of man, without any commandment of God; therefore it is idolatry."
– John Knox (from *A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry* – a sermon preached before the council of the North in Newcastle, England, on 4th April 1550)

PIETY IN THE MINISTRY

Rev. Maurice J. Roberts

A faithful minister lives for others and not for himself. His great calling is to study the Bible, and preach so as to feed the souls of his people.

Godly Life

The great emphasis of a minister must be to live a godly life. A godly life preaches visibly to all in the congregation, and by it the minister avoids the reproach which is all too easy for people to throw at him, that "he preaches to others, but does not preach to himself". It is a shameful thing when any preacher's personal behaviour contradicts his office as a servant of Christ.

McCheyne puts the case for a saintly ministry well, when he states: "There is no argument like a holy life". Likewise, Spurgeon says: "We must cultivate the highest degree of godliness because our work imperatively requires it". The Bible shows us that professed servants of God can be scandalous in their lives. The sons of Eli, the High Priest, "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle" (1 Sam. 2:22).

Solemn Warnings

In a warning to all would-be ministers whose lifestyle is inconsistent with His Word, God said to Eli: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (v.30). The minister, more than anyone, must recall the words of Moses, "be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23), and be mindful of what the Lord said to the profane priests, "ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law" (Mal. 2:8).

Christ, the great Head of the Church, pronounced solemn words to religious leaders who were insincere: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. 23:25). A minister needs more than a black gown and a clerical collar: he needs a godly heart and a life which conforms to God's great command, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). These inspired warnings must be taken very seriously by us all.

Right Aim

It is helpful to study the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, which lays great emphasis on our duty to keep the Moral Law of God carefully. It is demanded of us all, and not least of ministers, that we should understand, observe and teach the duties required in the Ten Commandments. A Christian is "the epistle of Christ" (2 Cor. 3:3), and it is the duty of ministers to help bring their people into this blessed state.

Matthew Henry wrote: "The main thing that ministers ought to aim at in their labour is to convince their people of the excellence of the Christian religion". This can only be done when a minister's private life and home life are consistent with his preaching, and his preaching with the Word of God. He ought to read the Bible, pray and conduct family worship at regular times each day. He should apply the truth to his secret thoughts, seeking to correct his own faults and to be more perfect in his walk with God and in his relationships with others.

Good Example

The minister's piety is seen in that he makes it his practice to speak about spiritual subjects, especially when in the company of professing believers. He meditates day and night on the truths of Holy Scripture. The Sabbath is marked in his life by a conscientious avoidance of all unnecessary secular distractions.

In his own home the minister conducts himself appropriately. He loves his wife and children and seeks to promote peace and happiness in the lives of all. As head of the house he sets an example as to how to be discreet in his speech and charitable in his references to others. He must mortify pride and self-promotion, the hardest sins to mortify. The Apostle Paul described himself as "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8).

Humility

The wise preacher will remind himself often of Christ's words: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). To humble oneself is a clear proof that one has genuine piety. The minister who exalts himself will be humbled to his own cost – and perhaps to the cost of his ministerial reputation.

A minister needs to make it his rule that he will, by God's grace, prefer to suffer than to sin. If he suffers in the course of his duty, he will receive praise from God. So Christ tells us: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). The preacher serves a Master who was crucified by this world, and from his now glorified Master he will receive his reward. ■

THE FEATURES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

F.W. Krummacher

(Krummacher [1796-1868] was a German Reformed minister, theologian and writer. This piece is taken from 'The Characteristics of a True State of Grace', which was first published in English in 1838. It has been lightly edited.)

It is undeniably evident that the Saviour, in the beatitudes at the commencement of His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-12), had no other intention than that of presenting to our view the inward aspect of His true disciples and followers. Everything that is elsewhere identified in Scripture as a characteristic of regeneration, and of true saving faith, is only a repetition or an enlargement of that which the Lord mentions here. The features of spiritual life, which our Lord connects together in these beatitudes, form, as a whole, the essence and substance of the new creature.

These features must, therefore, all be found in us, if we are true Christians. But do not be too much alarmed at this little word "*all*". The case with these characteristics is this; where one of them exists in a real manifestation, there the germs of the whole are contained; even as they are all assuredly wanting where any one of them cannot be traced. It is true, indeed, that one or the other of these features may appear more strongly, prominently, and vitally impressed, whilst the rest return more into the background of our being, and withdraw themselves from the eye. But if we only sound a little deeper, these will also be found; for they are certainly in existence.

Spiritual Poverty

Which, therefore, are the spiritual lineaments and characteristic features of the true children of God? The first is, *spiritual poverty*. The Lord pronounces them blessed, and solemnly bequeaths them His heaven. Read the Scriptures; it is everywhere adduced as an indispensable mark of Divine adoption. God dwells only with the humble; promises health and peace only to the contrite in heart; He elevates only that which is lowly from the dust; while those that are something in their own estimation He hurls from their throne, and gives grace to the humble. Unable to help ourselves – desponding of all our own righteousness and strength, with reference to salvation – ignorant whither to turn, unless the hand of mercy be extended towards us – destitute of any other consolation than that of free grace – this is being spiritually poor.

Brethren, do you feel that this is the case with you? Is this feeling true; is it heartfelt; is it vital? Does it drive you out of yourselves to seize the hand stretched out from the clouds? And does it impel you to seek that refuge which is set before you in the Gospel? O, then, I congratulate you! You possess a feature of the life of grace, and if it be of the right kind, it comprises within it all the rest.

Mourning

A second characteristic mark of the new nature is, the being a *mourner*. The Saviour pronounces His blessing on such a one, and promises him abundant consolation. It is sorrow for sin which is here implied. Look at the Bible, in any part you please, the new man everywhere appears with the mournful features of godly sorrow; a profound grief at having offended the Saviour, and a painful regret for having so ill repaid his goodness and loving kindness. Are you acquainted with this holy sorrow? Do you find these costly tears on the eye-lashes of your inner man? Do you also experience, when having once denied Him who so cordially took your part, how love can sit in your heart and weep; and how all that is within you urges and impels you to fall, like an affectionate child, upon the neck of the dear and ill-treated Saviour, with tears or conciliating kisses?

I do not mean what is generally understood by the word repentance; I do not speak of the act of the first self-condemnation: I speak of something permanent, something that is constantly returning; of that incessant grief at the coldness of our hearts, and the poor thanks we pay the Lord; and of that pain of soul which has no need to disturb the peace of the heart, but which, as long as we dwell in this mortal tabernacle, always more or less mingles itself with the joy of the saints,

and gives it its tranquil and thoughtful character. O, if you know it, happy are you!

Meekness

A third essential feature of the new creature is *meekness*. The Lord blesses it; it shall inherit the earth. It is, first of all, not that quality which we generally understand by the term; it is a calm submission to all that God appoints; it is the being satisfied with the way by which the Lord leads us, and a being passive under his operation; it is the desire to be saved by grace, through faith, without the merit of works, and the sincere offering up of ourselves to all the will of God. I do not say that this childlike willingness must not sometimes pass through severe conflicts; but it exists nevertheless, and always forms one of the elements of the renewed mind. If it were not in thee, thou wouldst not be a Christian. But tell me, dost thou not, on closer inspection, find it within thee, however deeply concealed? Rejoice, thou hast made a valuable and promising discovery.

Hungering and Thirsting

The fourth feature of a child of God, is *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*. The Lord pronounces it blessed, and promises it eternal fullness. It is the unceasing seeking of Paul to be found, not in his own, but in that righteousness which God imputes to faith. It is the desire breathed forth in those words of an ancient pious writer, "I would condemn my own soul, if I found it in any other righteousness than that of my Surety." It is the being unable to rest until we know that we are beloved in Christ, and acceptable in the sight of God; until we can say with Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Where this holy desire, this languishing for that beautiful robe in which alone we can please God, is wanting – everything is wanting. But where this thirst is experienced, there it is like the quivering of the divining-rod over a rich mine; it is like a mysterious little flame, which points out the existence of the whole new fullness of life.

Mercy

The fifth feature of the new man is *mercy*. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Where any one of the characteristics hitherto mentioned exists, there this cannot fail. I do not say that a true Christian, in seasons of temptation and from weakness, may exemplify the opposite quality. But mercy must be a fundamental element of his being – or his religion is all a delusion. One individual possesses, from his birth, a more harsh and unmerciful disposition than another; and hence it may be the case, that even in a state of grace he may find it more difficult to overcome than many of his brethren, and to manifest a kind, obliging, and merciful deportment. But he means well with everyone, from the bottom of his soul, and most sincerely wishes them all the same salvation of which he has become the recipient. He weeps over, judges, and condemns the bitter root, as soon as he is conscious of it within him. He commences an attack upon it with holy zeal, and in a vital apprehension and enjoyment of the grace and mercy which God has bestowed upon him – he finds it increasingly easy to feel compassion and exercise mercy.

A Pure Heart

A *pure heart* is the sixth requirement. They only who are pure in heart – is the universal language of Scripture – shall see God. This characteristic is the most important, and the most deserving of consideration of all; because it forms the surest test by which the genuineness of all the rest may be tried. Where purity of heart is wanting – there all is deception and illusion, however many other marks of adoption thou mayest find within thee. Not one of the signatures of the children of God can be genuine and exist in thee in a real form.

You are terrified. Be so! But do not feel alarmed without cause and reason. Certainly, when the Lord speaks of a pure heart, he does not mean – as we should be inclined to suppose – a heart that is free from self-righteousness; but the expression is to be understood according to its obvious and literal acceptation. The Lord speaks of a purified heart – a heart delivered from the dominion of sin. We are not, indeed, to understand by the expression, such a heart in which no sinful thought nor impure lust any longer rises up; for where is such a heart to be found? A pure heart, according to the meaning of the Saviour, is one that has solemnly and formally renounced sin – that is most decidedly opposed to the kingdom of darkness – that with all earnestness and zeal, not only delights in the law of God, but also seeks to obey it to the utmost – that judges severely and without dissimulation of its transgressions, and cannot pacify itself for its faults in any other manner than by the blood of Christ.

See, my friends, this is the balance of the sanctuary; this is the only right and infallible criterion by which you ought to measure your state. Proceed therefore to the examination. How is it with you? Are you able to number yourselves with the children of Zion? ■

YOUTH FOCUS

DUELLING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

The Cambridge Dictionary defines disappointment as "the unhappiness or discouragement that results when your hopes or expectations have not been satisfied." Christians are not immune from disappointment.

When we are first converted, we are like a new car straight out of the showroom. The oil is topped up, the engine is running smoothly and the car looks the part. However, as it continues in use, the oil level depletes, the engine makes noises not heard previously, and the vehicle that once looked so bright and neat has mud clogging the tyres, cobwebs hanging on the mirrors and is in need of an overhaul.

Unfulfilled Hopes

The young Christian is full of spiritual vigour. When you begin to run the race you feel strong. You look around and you say with confidence, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). Yet the time comes when you are no longer so sure. You desired something, you dreamt about it and prayed about it, but you did not *receive* it. You wondered: "Why did my friends receive, but I didn't? What wasn't good enough about *me*? And what happened to the verse, 'Ask, and it shall be given you' (Matt. 7:7)?"

Our disappointment may go deeper. Perhaps our church is not what we hoped it would be, our friends are not as we had thought, and our lives are not turning out the way we imagined. Disappointment always has a focus: it will tend to blame someone or something. "She was a fool for overlooking me. They won't listen to what I say. This job is so different from what I expected." Anger solidifies in our hearts, directed at the source of the disappointment – and ultimately at the Lord. Our bibles are unread and our prayers are quenched, the only voice heard from us being one of complaint: "Why have you done this, Lord?"

Wrong Perspective

The Israelites who escaped Egypt under Moses asked God why He kept disappointing them. Rather than reminding themselves of how God had saved them from their cruel enslavement, bringing them out of a land of misery with the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey, they moaned and groaned. Their disappointment with how their lives turned out after their deliverance produced a selective memory: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick" (Num. 11:5). Never mind the beatings and the labour for no pay, "Let's go back!", they said. How wrong their perspective was.

Disappointment also affected Elijah's outlook. When the Lord enabled him to vanquish the prophets of Baal on mount Carmel, Elijah rejoiced, thinking that Israel was returning to God. Yet soon afterwards, threatened by wicked Jezebel, Elijah ran for his life. He sat down under a tree, exhausted, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life". God had to remind Elijah that he was not alone: there were seven thousand in Israel who loved the Lord (1 Kings 18,19).

God Knows Best

"Well, what about today?" you say. "I'm unlikely to have to run for my life to escape danger! Maybe, but what about being isolated by society because of your beliefs? Think of Ashers bakery in Northern Ireland, taken to court for refusing to bake a cake with a slogan supporting same-sex 'marriage'. They lost at the first hearing and then at the appeal. Hopes were low when the matter went to the Supreme Court, with many thinking that Ashers would be condemned by the law and the media. But they won, and their victory has helped Christians in our country. Disappointments had to occur, to bring about the best result and the greatest benefit. What looked very discouraging was really God working to bring about something no one could have foreseen but Him.

The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote: "Have good thoughts of God and make good interpretations of his dealings toward you." This is the way to contentment. "Hold out faith and patience!" cried Bunyan's pilgrim, as the waters rose around him. We can only sink so far in disappointments; we will always touch the Foundation – Christ and His faithfulness. As Christians, the Lord's words to Simon Peter encourage us: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32).

Feet on the Rock

If you are spiralling down in disappointment, call upon the Lord to take you from its depths. Ask Him to set your feet on the Rock, with the same spirit as Christ in Gethsemane, "thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Then turn to other believers, so that they can help you. Do not isolate yourself. There were many with Elijah and many stood with Ashers. The church is a family of believers, and we need the support of our brethren.

Remember that one day soon every shadow will flee away – including the shadow of your disappointment. Until then, when disappointment comes, turn from it, reminding yourself of the Lord's promises. Pour out your heart to Him, crying, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). God knows your difficulty. He will guide you, and you will overcome. ■

CHURCH NEWS

Sri Lanka Mission Update

(Rev. Shanmugam Partheepan)

Dear Friends,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my pleasure to inform you of what God has done in our land. We are very thankful to Almighty God who helps us a lot and teaches us His way and shows us His grace. When we look back and see His providence, what an encouragement this is to us! We fail, but He is faithful!

Congregation in Vavuniya

Our congregation here is not growing fast numerically but they are growing in the knowledge of Christ and His grace. Around 45 people meet for the morning service and around 75 in the evening, including children. It is good to see youths growing spiritually and helping us in our ministry. They are facing lots of problems in the world but they are enjoying protection from our Lord.

Two of our teenage girls came forward at our last communion, made profession of faith and I baptised them. It was really a joy for us and encouraging too. God is proving to us that He is with us always and telling us through these baptisms to keep going forward.

The owners of the land on which our current church building is sited have put the land up for sale. Because of this we think it is better to move to our own land which we own nearby. This is not an easy matter to do, but we need to pray for God's will in this matter.

Baptisms in Vavuniya

Mission in Mullaitheevu

Here we are gathering around 25 to 30 in the morning and 30 to 35 in the evening. Most of the people in our mission are spiritual babies and we need more time to feed them. I am giving a considerable amount of time to them for their instruction according to my capacity. I can see development in their understanding of the Word of God. Please do pray for them continually for spiritual growth. One of the biggest problems in this mission outreach is transport. When there is heavy rain it is difficult for them to come to the church. We are praying for a three-wheeler for transportation.

Sabbath School

In Vavuniya around 45 to 50 children come regularly to the Sabbath School, which is very encouraging to us. Sadly, however, some of them are not keen to study the Bible. We are praying for them regularly. Two girls from the village from which they come said to me, "We have stopped going to the Hindu temple and we know our sins and that Christ is the only Saviour to forgive our sins. We would love to be baptised." These children are coming also to the morning and evening service.

In our Mullaitheevu mission around 16 children come to the Sabbath School. Two girls there are very keen to know Christ and are struggling with assurance. We need to pray for them.

Evangelism

Our evangelist, Mr P. Piratheepan, is doing a reasonable work in the mission in Mullaitheevu and spending time visiting new homes. Out of these, two families have started coming to worship. We do not know as yet what their interest is, but we pray that the Lord will work in them.

Mr Piratheepan also helps in Vavuniya doing some evangelism with Mr K. Sajanthan who works in the church office. I am personally encouraging him to do more work for the Lord and that God will bless His word. A three-wheeler would help in evangelism too.

Ceylon Christian Care Projects

The Pre-school nursery is running reasonably well. The number of children is down a little with around 21 attending. I visit the nursery from time to time. The children's learning and behaviour are remarkable and the teacher works hard. They pray before school starts and before they eat, which is really good. The parents

of the children are very supportive this year to the teacher in all the activities.

The Bible school has also been running fairly well and around 12 students from various places and churches attend. Some students are very keen to study and others are not that keen, but they get solid teaching from us. It is discouraging that there are no new students applying for next year. We continue to invite men to come. If there are no new students for next year, we will have to stop this programme. Please pray for God's will in this project.

We are helping 15 students in Vavuniya and Mullaitheevu with their education. The families of the students are very thankful to Ceylon Christian Centre. Whenever we arrange any church events they send the children without any questions to our programmes. Most of the students are coming to our Sabbath School also.

Thanksgiving

1. FC(C) – for supporting and praying for our family and the work here.
2. Home & Foreign Missions Committee – for taking care of our mission.
3. Kirk Session & Deacons' Court – for giving great spiritual and practical help.
4. Some local congregations in Scotland – for helping practically.
5. Ceylon Christian Care – for the great support they give faithfully.
6. Some of our personal friends who help us personally and as a family.
7. Some of our beloved friends who help our mission and the establishment of the Lord's work (USA, Singapore, UK).

Prayer requests

1. Pray for me and my family, for spiritual and physical blessings.
2. Pray for our young folk and families, to grow spiritually and know Christ more and witness in their lives.
3. Pray for new converts and new people to come.
4. Pray for the Sabbath School children, to come to know Christ more.
5. Pray for our Kirk Session and Deacons' Court, for more wisdom to guide the Lord's flock.
6. Pray for our building project in Vavuniya, as our current place is for sale.
7. Pray for our translation work on the Psalms and sound books. ■

In His service,
Parthee
Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Sri Lanka (Reformed Protestant Mission)

Organiser for All-Age Holiday *(Mrs Isobel Macleod)*

The Welfare of Youth Committee are planning for another FC(C) All-Age Holiday at some point. They would like to find a new venue for the Holiday, in a central location more convenient for the wider Church, and to develop a programme for the Holiday having broad appeal to the families of the Church.

An Organiser is needed however – someone who is willing to take on the responsibility (with support from the Committee) of planning and running the Holiday. The Committee invite volunteers who are willing to consider taking on this work to get in touch with them.

Volunteers must be members of the Free Church (Continuing). As a first step, please contact the Convener of the Committee, Rev. Richard Ross, at: **richardross@fccontinuing.org** ■

Kenya: Christian Teachers targeted in North-east *(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)*

At around 1am on the night of 10 October at least 20 militants – believed to be affiliated with al-Shabaab – targeted non-local teachers at the Arabia Boys Secondary School in Mandera County, close to the dangerously porous Kenya-Somali border. After overwhelming the four security guards, the militants threw an explosive device into the house where the school's four non-local (and therefore presumably non-Muslim) teachers were sleeping, setting it on fire. Philip Okumu (26) and Daniel Wekesa (39) – both Christians – were shot and killed as they fled the flames. The school's other two non-local teachers, Elijah Nderitu and Kelvin Lomusi, managed to escape alive. The militants were clearly working from excellent intelligence; they knew exactly where the Christian teachers would be found. It is not the first time al-Shabaab has targeted Christian teachers in this predominantly Muslim region. Pray for the Lord to protect and bless all Christians working in Muslim-majority eastern Kenya. ■

Quote

"The enjoyment of God is our proper happiness; and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives or children, or the company of any, or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean." ■
Jonathan Edwards

COMMENT

A BACKWARD STEP FOR EDUCATION

LGBTI issues added to curriculum

The progress of the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) juggernaut was evident in November when the Education Secretary John Swinney announced that all primary and secondary pupils in Scotland's state schools will now study LGBTI issues. The Scottish government has accepted in full the recommendations of a working group led by the campaigning organisation Time for Inclusive Education (TIE). TIE describes its aim as "to combat homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools with LGBT-inclusive education". It is endorsed by various local authorities, trades unions and political parties, and Scotland's largest teaching union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, is affiliated with it.

The Scottish government has succumbed to the LGBTI lobby and its allies, who are jubilant. Jordan Daly, one of TIE's co-founders, hailed the decision as "a monumental victory" and "a world first", saying that it marked the end of the "destructive legacy" of Section 28 (legislation which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in maintained schools and was repealed in Scotland in 2000). A sign of the times is that TIE has charitable status.

Scotland's educational curriculum will soon include topics such as LGBTI terminology and identities. Teachers will be trained to address these subjects, using a course which bodies such as the Scottish Trans Alliance and Stonewall Scotland will help to design. The teaching will not be confined to social education classes: *The Guardian* website stated that the new policy will "embed LGBTI inclusive education across the curriculum and across subjects". The Christian Institute said that "Maths lessons should be about maths, not LGBTI politics"; with evidence of declining levels of numeracy among pupils, that is surely correct. Likewise bullying should be about bullying, in the sense that it is wrong *whoever* it involves; it is unhelpful to create special categories of victims.

What is seriously troubling is that there will be no exemptions or opt-outs for schools or parents with conscientious objections to the new teaching. It seems that the sidelining of Christianity in Scottish education is almost complete. It has been replaced by a new religion which has as one of its leading articles advocacy of a deviant sexuality. This is truly to "put darkness for light" (Isa. 5:20), and indoctrinating children in this way may be regarded as a form of abuse. Perhaps this latest development will energise Christians in Scotland to pursue Christian schools as a matter of urgency. ■

FANTASY VERSUS TRUTH

The madness of 'self-identification'

The willingness of the authorities to pander to the 'self-identification' craze is having results ranging from the tragic to the comic. In October, 'Karen' White was given a life sentence for violent sexual attacks on two women in HM Prison New Hall, near Wakefield, Yorkshire. New Hall is a closed female prison, and White, who was born Stephen Wood but now identifies as female and is 'transitioning', was on remand there for offences involving indecency. Apparently he used his "transgender persona" to make contact with vulnerable women. The Prison Service has apologised for the 'mistakes' made, but this will be of little comfort to Wood's victims, who have suffered one of the inevitable consequences of a consistent application of the 'transgender' idea. No doubt they, with all sane people, long for this madness to stop.

Last month Anthony Lennon, a theatre director of Irish background, was accused of being a "racial imposter" for claiming to be of "mixed-heritage" in order to secure public funding intended to help people from ethnic minorities develop their stage careers. *The Telegraph* website reports Lennon's assertion that, growing up in the racially-tense London of the late 1960s, he was regularly subjected to misdirected racist abuse, and began to identify with black culture. He maintains that when he took up acting, he struggled to get parts for white characters and had more success landing black roles. Lennon has said that "everybody on the planet is African", and interestingly describes himself as "African born again". It is the Christian who is truly born again, being regenerated by divine grace to enjoy a new and blessed identity as a child of God through the Saviour Jesus Christ (John 1:12,13).

Also in November, Emile Ratelband, a Dutch politician, media personality and "positivity trainer", asked a court to move his birthday back twenty years. He wants to legally change his age from 69 to 49, saying that he feels discriminated against in various aspects of life. According to the BBC website, Ratelband stated in court: "We live in a time when you can change your name and change your gender. Why can't I decide my own age?" He further argued that according to his doctors he has the body of a 45-year old. We suggest that, whether his legal battle is successful or not, his age will soon catch up with him. By contrast the Christian is 'ageless' in a real and very wonderful sense, for "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). ■

THE SYNOD OF DORT (1)

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

(The first part of a paper delivered at the Free Church School in Theology in September. It has been adapted slightly.)

Introduction

It is a fascinating providence that in the same year, 1618, in which the Five Articles of Perth were imposed upon the Church of Scotland, an Assembly of Divines gathered in the city of Dordrecht in the south-west Netherlands to hammer out a response to the teachings of Arminianism.

1. Background to the Synod

The well-known saying, "God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands", informs us that the Dutch have literally made their country. Since the late sixteenth century, several thousand square miles of land have been reclaimed from the sea and lakes. The Dutch formed their country, but the providence of God formed them, beginning with the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Peter Y. De Jong wrote that the Synod of Dort "marks the time when the Dutch began to come of age".

The region which contains the Netherlands came within the patrimony of the Burgundian princes, a line that became extinct with the death of Charles the Bold in 1477. Mary, the only child and heiress of Charles, married Maximilian I of the House of Hapsburg, which forged a link between Austria and the Netherlands. Their son Philip I married Joanna, daughter of Ferdinand II of Aragon – a union which produced the famous Charles V, the most powerful monarch in Europe. As a devout Roman Catholic, Charles used every means to stifle inclinations to Protestantism within his kingdom.

Charles died in 1558, bequeathing his territories to his son, Philip II. Philip began with a promise to maintain the rights and privileges of the various territories, but ten years into his reign, most of his territories, including the provinces which made up the Netherlands, rebelled against the repressive measures he adopted, leading to eighty years of conflict. Foreign troops, together with the Spanish Inquisition, were introduced.

The rise of Protestantism in the Netherlands began slowly and quietly. There was no national figure like Knox in Scotland and the movement spread rather from individual to individual. The Reformed church lacked unified organisation, and it was under a mixture of ecclesiastical and civil control. The forming of a church often preceded the establishment of civil administration. A landowner would erect a meetinghouse, and the clergy would act in a civil capacity as well as an ecclesiastical, such that Church and State became bound together. This would have consequences later when the Arminian party pushed for greater State control of the Church, since the ruling elites tended to be on their side.

Religious developments saw Lutheranism entering the Netherlands in the 1520s, followed by the Sacramentarians and the Anabaptists. Calvinism was the last to arrive around 1544, being introduced not by ministers but through literature; ministers came afterwards from France and Geneva.

Under Philip II the Inquisition brought terror to the Netherlands. Many were burnt; others were buried alive. William I, Prince of Orange ('William the Silent'), eventually spoke out against the persecution of Protestants, but it was the action of 300 gentry, who in 1565 signed a pledge of mutual assistance to restore the ancient rights of the people, that particularly roused Philip's anger, along with the intolerable practice of evangelical preaching that was spreading across the region. This was reformation from the bottom up.

In 1568 Philip responded by placing all the inhabitants of the Netherlands under sentence of death for heresy. Within three years some 18,000 were executed. In 1579, Holland, Zealand and five other provinces entered into a confederacy known as the United Provinces, declaring complete independence from Spain in 1581 – a *de facto* independence that was officially recognised in 1648 at the end of the Eighty Years' War. It was during these turbulent years that the Reformed Church became established. From the outset the Church was constituted on the lines of the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, composed in 1561, to which ministers and teachers were required to subscribe. The churches considered themselves free of civil control, although successive Synods entered into agreements with the State which undermined that independence.

From 1581, the Reformed faith became the officially recognised religion of the Netherlands. Not surprisingly, the struggle for the Church's spiritual independence was met by resistance. Following the Synod in The Hague in 1585, the States General or supreme legislature of the Netherlands refused permission for a Synod, a situation which continued until 1618.

2. Arminius

The theologian James Arminius (1560-1609) was born in the province of Utrecht in 1560. He was sent to Geneva to complete his education and studied under the French reformer Theodore Beza. In 1588 Arminius became one of the ministers of Amsterdam, and it was not long before his preaching caused trouble. What led to the uproar was his handling of Romans 7:14-25, where

he taught that Paul was not describing the regenerate man but the unregenerate. Protests were lodged, and under examination it became clear that there was a bigger problem: Arminius had difficulties with the Belgic Confession itself, especially Article 16, 'Of Eternal Election'. An agreement was reached whereby Arminius pledged to abide by the *wording* of the Confession. Arminius was soon in trouble again, this time with the teaching of Romans 9:13, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated", and escaped only because he expressed himself so as to avoid investigation.

In 1602, Franciscus Junius, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, fell victim to the plague. Astonishingly he was replaced by Arminius. No sooner was Arminius appointed than trouble erupted between himself and one of his colleagues, Franciscus Gomarus, who took exception to his views. Once again Arminius pledged to abide by the language of the Confession. In private however, he spoke candidly to the students regarding his opinions.

Arminius died in 1609, and his followers took up where he left off. In 1610, the Arminians met at Gouda and prepared a protest or 'Remonstrance' in which they repudiated Calvinism. The Remonstrance formulated their peculiar views into five articles, advocating conditional election, universal atonement, resistible grace, the uncertainty of perseverance and their own understanding of regeneration.

The Calvinists replied in 1611, stating in seven articles the teaching of the Confession on these points. A conference was held in The Hague in an attempt to find agreement, but without success. The controversy continued, to the extent that other heads of state were becoming concerned. Finally, in 1616, Maurice, Prince of Orange and the son of William the Silent, spoke out at the urging of two people – Count William Louis, who was 'stadtholder' or chief magistrate of three of the Dutch provinces, and Sir Dudley Carleton, the English Ambassador to the United Provinces.

James VI of Scotland and I of England threw his support behind the Calvinists. In a subsequent *coup d'etat*, Prince Maurice became ruler of the Dutch Republic, and once in charge he determined to call a Synod. The Arminians complained that they would not get a fair hearing, which had the effect of turning the Synod into an international event with delegates from England, Geneva, Berne, Basel and other places. King James nominated a total of six delegates, one of whom was Walter Balcanquhall, who was born and educated in Scotland. Although a priest of the Church of England, he was officially present as a representative of the Church of Scotland.

3. The Synod

The Synod which met in 1618 was an extraordinary body of men. William Cunningham wrote: "The Synod of Dort, representing as it did almost all the Reformed Churches and containing a great proportion of theologians of the highest talents, learning and character, is entitled to a larger measure of respect and deference than any other Council recorded in the history of the Church".

Here was a Synod of 56 Ministers and Elders, 26 foreign Divines and 18 Political Commissioners. On 13th November 1618, the Synod opened with a sermon given by Balthazar Lydius, the minister of Dort, on Acts 15, after which the Synod got down to business. Some 18 committees were created. The Representatives from the Provincial Synods each formed one committee. The Walloons (within what is now Belgium) formed one committee. The Professors of theology formed a committee and finally the foreign delegations each constituted a committee. The procedure was simple. All questions coming before the whole Synod required a committee to frame a single judgement, which was passed to the Synod. The judgement was then read out and written opinions on it were handed to officials who collated them and prepared a final judgement.

On 6th December the Remonstrants arrived, led by Simon Episcopus (it was noted that this was the latinised version of Bishop!). They came knowing that the outcome was a foregone conclusion, and that the best that they could hope for was to obstruct progress and to engage in a public relations exercise, seeking to portray themselves as victims and the Synod as persecutors.

After a month of fruitless debate, Johannes Bogerman, the President of the Synod, concluded that the only option was to dismiss the Arminians entirely from the Synod, which he did on 14th January 1619. The success of the Remonstrants is seen in that historians have faulted Bogerman ever since for what he said and did on that day.

Thereafter the Synod proceeded smoothly and quickly. The reading and judgement upon the Five Articles of the Remonstrants took place from 7th to 21st March; the responses of the Calvinists, or 'Canons', were formulated from 25th March to 16th April. These were duly signed by all the delegates on 23rd April and promulgated on 6th May 1619. On 9th May the foreign delegates left for home. The Dutch delegates remained in session until 29th May, during which time, among other things, they fixed the text of the Belgic Confession and the Church Order and Liturgy. ■

BOOK REVIEWS

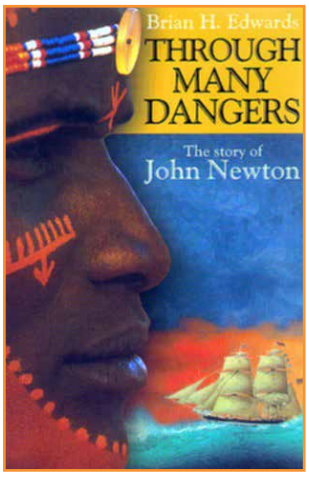
(Books for review should be sent to: Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod, 25c Swordale, Point, Isle of Lewis, HS2 0BP)

John Newton – Through many dangers
Brian H. Edwards, DayOne, pbk, 256pp, £12.00

John Newton's life was certainly colourful and an example of God's amazing grace. His godly mother died just before his seventh birthday. Following in his father's footsteps he went to sea. At the age of seventeen he visited the home of the Catlett family, friends of his mother, and fell deeply in love with their fourteen-year-old daughter Mary. Ever after she was the idol of his life. At sea, he learned every kind of immorality and blasphemy. Through his foolhardiness and self-will, he ended up in many scrapes. Press-ganged into the navy, he deserted to try to meet his father, was caught and could have been shot, but instead was whipped till he was unconscious.

Newton later joined a trader in Africa and ended up, through false accusations, a slave to slaves, starved almost to death. Through a friend of his father he escaped from Africa. On the journey home he was converted in a fearful storm, which saw his ship broken up and barely able to limp into an Irish port. Newton became a captain and was involved in the slave trade. Eventually he became a curate in Olney, Buckinghamshire, and then vicar of St Mary Woolnoth in London. He died at the age of 82. Shortly before the end Newton confided to a friend, "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour".

The story is well told by Brian Edwards. The book is very readable and lots of background information and pictures are provided. Many lessons can be learned.



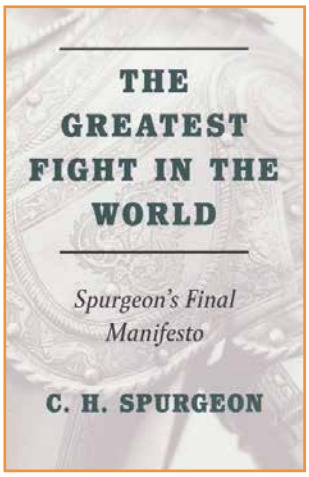
The value of the early, loving, Christian teaching of his mother, which remained with him through all his rebellion, is clear. The ministry which he was able to conduct through his letters was possibly his most abiding legacy. His involvement with Cowper, Wilberforce and Hannah More facilitated the ministry of others.

One chapter deals with Newton's hymns. Edwards acknowledges that the Reformers and Puritans sang only the Psalms in public worship and that hymns really came in only in the eighteenth century. As an eighteen-year-old, Isaac Watts criticised the version of the Psalms which was sung in his father's church. A deacon responded, "Give us something which will be better, young man". Edwards adds, "Watts did just that". Watts dared to rewrite the Psalms, adding his own ideas and regarding these as an improvement. Some of us would disagree. Charles Wesley provided another great impetus to hymn singing. As an Anglican, John Newton did not see a need for a divine warrant for introducing uninspired materials of praise. What was not specifically condemned in Scripture he was happy to practise, especially if it was popular and he thought it to be useful. He and Cowper wrote many hymns.

We have here a useful book, worth reading. ■

Rev. William Macleod

The Greatest Fight in the World: Spurgeon's Final Manifesto
C.H. Spurgeon, Banner of Truth Trust, pbk, 88pp, £5.00



This book contains Spurgeon's final address at the annual conference of the Pastors' College in April 1891. He died the following January at Mentone, France.

After a short introduction, Spurgeon's address is masterly and powerfully presented under three headings: Our Armoury, Our Army and Our Strength. The Armoury is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Under this heading Spurgeon is reminding his hearers that the Bible is to be used for defence and offence without apology. The Army is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which has been purchased by His own precious blood. In the third section Spurgeon presses upon his audience their need of the convicting and converting power of the Holy Spirit to make their ministries effective.

The address is aimed at pastors and would-be pastors, reminding them of the difficulties they face, especially at a time when great changes were occurring in the church in Britain, but providing encouragement and support to enable them to be true to their high calling.

This short book could be read easily in an hour or so and would be a great stimulant to gospel preachers of today. It is well worth buying, reading and re-reading. ■

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.

December
2 Columbia

January
13 St Louis
20 Greenville
27 Atlanta

February
17 Stornoway
24 Harris

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2018 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES Oct 2018 £	Total to Oct 2018 £	Total to Oct 2017 £
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1,500	15,000	15,000
Duthil-Dores	13,845	3,950	22,561	23,512
Inverness	0	6,365	32,402	34,009
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	4,160	20,154	19,592
Poolewe & Aultbea	0	441	9,858	8,255
Total Inverness Presbytery	**13,845**	**16,416**	**99,975**	**100,368**
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	500	907	1,760	3,037
Brora	0	4,856	15,522	14,939
Kiltearn	96	862	5,841	8,854
Tarbat	0	2,420	16,291	22,759
Total Northern Presbytery	**596**	**9,045**	**39,414**	**49,589**
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	443	2,515	9,101	8,441
Ayr	0	1,169	7,754	11,585
Dumfries	0	100	950	700
Edinburgh	99,052	4,117	18,743	23,003
Glasgow - Knightswood	63	7,301	28,807	29,500
Glasgow - Partick	9,635	3,494	18,694	18,850
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	5,630	28,198	20,628
Rothesay	0	130	4,293	4,293
Total Southern Presbytery	**109,192**	**24,456**	**116,539**	**116,999**
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	1,936	19,470	20,383
Harris - Leverburgh	0	4,836	18,286	13,875
Knock & Point	0	3,627	19,366	19,317
North Uist & Grimsay	4,590	3,005	13,620	14,237
Scalpay	195	4,112	22,466	22,812
Stornoway	3,955	14,388	86,161	95,322
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	**8,740**	**31,904**	**179,368**	**185,945**
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	5,978	3,685	17,035	17,650
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	1,613	13,252	13,934
Lochalsh & Strath	525	4,494	23,689	24,838
Portree	271	6,563	25,420	26,202
Snizort	450	9,599	26,495	27,829
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	**7,224**	**25,954**	**105,891**	**110,454**
Smiths Falls	0	0	1,000	1,000
Total From Congregations	**139,597**	**107,775**	**542,186**	**564,354**
Other Donations	0	4,275	28,269	42,005
Legacy	33,831	0	0	0
TOTAL	**173,427**	**112,050**	**570,455**	**606,359**
Included in the above: Tax	**6,778**	**64,365**	**129,740**	**132,993**
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	**166,650**	**47,685**	**440,715**	**473,366**

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
61 Plasterfield, Stornoway,
Isle of Lewis, HS1 2UR
generaltreasurer@fccontinuing.org
(mobile) 07793 535227

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

The congregation at Mullaitheevu, Sri Lanka

"God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

Psalm 67:7

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)