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Inside this issue:

Beholding our God 3
The Centrality of Christ 6
The Excellency of the Psalms 9
A Coming Change (1) 11
Mebane Induction 12
Obituary of Calum Thomson 12
'Homophobia' 14
The Church with Three Buildings 15

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Contents

EDITORIAL
Beholding our God 3

DEVOTIONAL
Christ is All (J.C. Ryle) 5

DOCTRINE
The Centrality of Christ (Rev. Trevor Kirkland) 6
Christ's Priestly Office (Andrew Gray) 8

PRACTICAL RELIGION
The Excellency of the Psalms (Rev. James Clark) 9
Providence and the Christian (Jabez Burns) 10

YOUTH FOCUS
A Coming Change (1) (Rev. Jonathan Mattull) 11

CHURCH NEWS
Mebane Induction 12
Obituary – Mr Calum Thomson, Stornoway 12

COMMENT
'Homophobia' 14
The Papal Visit to Ireland 14

CHURCH HISTORY
The Church with Three Buildings (Rev. Trevor Kirkland) 15

BOOK REVIEWS
Confessing the Faith by Chad Van Dixhoorn 17
God or Mammon? by Robin Compston 18

COMMUNION DATES 19

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES 19

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Editorial

BEHOLDING OUR GOD

These are lean times for the Lord's cause in our land. The church has been through many such times, and though we lament them, we must not despise them: it is God who has appointed them, just as He has the better times which will come after them (Zech. 4:10). What are believers to do in difficult and discouraging days? We should certainly look to ourselves, acknowledging our sins and shortcomings, but even more we must look to the Lord Himself, from whom all our help comes.

A Covenant God

Isaiah foretold the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, an exile which would last seventy years. Yet this solemn message was followed by words of encouragement. The Lord instructed Isaiah and his fellow prophets to proclaim to the church the comforting truth of her gracious salvation. They must declare that man is nothing: because of his sin he is a mortal creature; his life withers as the grass and his beauty fades like the flower. Man is perishing, but there are good tidings from the Lord. He has been pleased to reveal the glory of His goodness to sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ. The call comes to us: "Behold your God!" (Isa. 40:9). Believers are to look continually to their covenant God, Father, Son and Spirit, and the wonderful provision He has made for them. In so doing they will renew their strength, and be kept from fainting in the way. God will deliver His people out of their difficulties. "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net." (Ps. 25:15)

The Bible shows us how God blesses those who keep their spiritual eyes upon Him. Moses was one who did that. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27) After the exodus a great song ascended from the shores of the Red sea. Moses and the children of Israel were joyfully praising God for their deliverance, and these words rang out from their lips: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exod. 15:11). Having witnessed His mighty power, they knew that none of the gods of the heathen could compare with Jehovah. As the Psalmist said, "his name alone is excellent" (Ps. 148:13). What should we see in our covenant God?

Holiness

Our God is *glorious in holiness*. He is excellent in His being and in all His perfections, but holiness is mentioned in the Scriptures more often than any other divine attribute. Even the sinless angels are in awe of it, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). God's holiness is the uncreated purity which belongs to His nature. As the apostle John says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The holiness of God ought to be a great comfort to the church. He delights in all that agrees with His holy character, but He abhors whatever does not. The consequence is that the church's enemies will never triumph over her. Their defeat is inevitable and the saints need not fear them.

Since Adam's fall, man tends to bring God down to his own level. The Lord's complaint against the wicked is, "thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Ps. 50:21). God has brought many judgments upon our sinful race, including the expulsion of our first parents from Eden, the universal flood of Noah's day, and the fire and brimstone which rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah. These visitations point to the final judgment which is to take place at the return of Christ (Acts 17:31). The God of the Old Testament has not changed, as some people seem to think. His love is never at the expense of His holiness and justice – as those who continue in sin will one day discover to their cost. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. 2:19)

The holiness of God was very evident at Calvary, in the suffering and death of His own dear Son. When He came to His most desolate hour, the Saviour cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why

art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (Ps. 22:1) He was able to answer the question Himself: "But thou art *holy*, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (v.3). Christ knew no sin personally, but He was the Surety for His people, taking on the debts they owe to God. The guilt of their sins was charged to Him, and He bore the wrath of God which was due to them. How willing and obedient the Lamb of God was, going to the slaughter for our sakes! God is well pleased in His beloved Son, and He is well pleased with all who have trusted in Christ and are covered with His perfect righteousness.

Praises

Our God is *fearful in praises*. He is excellent in His worship. God has made Himself known supremely in His word, which He has magnified above all His name (Ps. 138:2). When we approach God in worship, we are to tremble at the thought of His greatness and our sinfulness. The acceptable way of serving Him is "with reverence and godly fear", for He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28,29). The Scriptures direct us how we are to worship God, but sadly in many churches the praise is what suits men, rather than what pleases God. Often the Psalms of David, which extol God's sovereignty and bear witness to Christ's rule over the nations, are not sung at all, and the church is deprived of much of the comfort her King has for her.

David's great desire and prayer was that he might "behold the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). Is that what we long for when we are in God's house – to behold the beauty of His holiness and the beauty of His grace, by which He beautifies the meek with salvation? In worship we enjoy communion with Christ, and "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). This gracious work goes on in the midst of the various trials and troubles which believers encounter. With a view to the world to come, we should pray that the Lord would sanctify to us all His dealings with us. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:17,18).

When we worship God in the earthly sanctuary, we are being prepared for our eternal home in heaven. The Lord is gathering the whole church there to praise Him in perfect holiness and harmony, with one voice and one spirit. That may seem very far off to us today, witnessing as we do the many inroads Satan is making into the visible church, with multiple divisions and much worldliness and error. It is obvious that the work of sanctification must be continued in every member of the body of Christ until each one is fully conformed to Christ. It is encouraging to know that it *will* be. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

Wonders

Our God is *doing wonders*. He is excellent in all that He does. Creation and providence are wonderful works, making known the goodness, wisdom and power of God, but His greatest work is redemption. It was a sort of redemption that Moses and the Israelites were celebrating at the Red sea. They had just enjoyed a great victory over the tyrant Pharaoh, in which every one of his host had perished, and all his chariots had been destroyed. Yet it was not Israel that fought and won against the Egyptians: God *fought for them*, and they saw "the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. 14:13,14). It is a picture of what Christ has accomplished for unworthy sinners by His own obedience, and an illustration of a salvation that is all of God's grace and not at all of our own works.

> ***"If we had a greater sense of our indebtedness to God and His grace, we would be better and brighter Christians in this dark day."***

Is that what we see when we read our bibles? Is that what we understand when the gospel is preached to us? It will only be so when the Lord opens our eyes to behold the "wondrous things" contained in His word (Ps. 119:18). To many in the world – and to their eternal shame – a crucified, bleeding and dying Saviour is nothing, and they pass Him by in their unbelief (Lam. 1:12). Yet to some out of every nation, "Christ is all" (Col. 3:11). Looking upon Him by faith, they are enabled to turn from their sins and be saved. What a feast for the eyes we have in Christ crucified! Because of His human nature, His crucifixion was possible; because of His divine Person, it was infinitely valuable and effectual. By the cross of Christ, God and man were reconciled. It was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes (Ps. 118:23).

A Christian is a great wonder too, especially to himself. The Christian knows that he did not make himself to differ from others, but is God's workmanship from start to finish. If we had a greater sense of our indebtedness to God and His grace, we would be better and brighter Christians in this dark day. Do you have the same song in your heart as was sung by the Red sea? Is the Lord excellent in your eyes? ■

DEVOTIONAL

CHRIST IS ALL

J.C. Ryle

(Taken from a tract with the same title, which is also found in the book 'Holiness'.)

"Christ is all" (Colossians 3:11)

Christ is all in the Christian's hopes

Few men and women, I suppose, are to be found who do not indulge in hopes of some kind about their souls. But the hopes of the vast majority are nothing but vain fancies. They are built on no solid foundation. No living man but the real child of God – the sincere, thorough-going Christian – can give a reasonable account of the hope that is in him. No hope is reasonable which is not Scriptural.

A true Christian has a good hope when he looks forward: the worldly man has none. A true Christian sees light in the distance: the worldly man sees nothing but darkness. And what is the hope of a true Christian? It is just this – that Jesus Christ is coming again, coming without sin – coming with all His people – coming to wipe away every tear – coming to raise His sleeping saints from the grave – coming to gather together all His family, that they may be for ever with Him.

Why is a believer patient? Because he looks for the coming of the Lord. He can bear hard things without murmuring. He knows the time is short. He waits quietly for the King.

Why is he moderate in all things? Because he expects his Lord soon to return. His treasure is in heaven: his good things are yet to come. The world is not his rest, but an inn; and an inn is not home. He knows that He that shall come will soon come, and will not tarry. Christ is coming, and that is enough.

This is indeed a "blessed hope"! (Titus 2:13). Now is the school-time – then the eternal holiday. Now is the tossing on the waves of a troublesome world – then the quiet harbour. Now is the scattering – then the gathering. Now is the time of sowing – then the harvest. Now is the working season – then the wages. Now is the cross – then the crown.

People talk of their "expectations" and hopes from this world. None have such solid expectations as a saved soul. He can say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Ps. 62:5).

In all true saving religion Christ is all: all in justification – all in sanctification – all in comfort – all in hope. Blessed is that mother's child that *knows* it, and far more blessed is he that *feels* it too. Oh, that men would prove themselves, and see what they know of it for their own souls!

Christ will be all in heaven

I cannot dwell long on this point. I have not power, if I had space and room. I can ill describe things unseen and a world unknown. But this I know, that all men and women who reach heaven will find that even there also "Christ is all".

Like the altar in Solomon's temple, Christ crucified will be the grand object in heaven. That altar struck the eye of every one who entered the temple gates. It was a great brazen altar, twenty cubits broad – as broad as the front of the temple itself (2 Chron. 3:4; 4:1). So in like manner will Jesus fill the eyes of all who enter glory. In the midst of the throne, and surrounded by adoring angels and saints, there will be "the Lamb that was slain". And "the Lamb shall be the light" of the place (Rev. 5:6; 21:23).

The *praise* of the Lord Jesus will be the eternal song of all the inhabitants of heaven. They will say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:12,13)

The *service* of the Lord Jesus will be one eternal occupation of all the inhabitants of heaven. We shall "serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev. 7:15). Blessed is the thought that we shall at length attend on Him without distraction, and work for Him without weariness.

The *presence* of Christ Himself shall be one everlasting enjoyment of the inhabitants of heaven. We shall see His face, and hear His voice, and speak with Him as friend with friend (Rev. 22:4). Sweet is the thought that whosoever may be wanting at the marriage supper, the Master Himself will be there. His presence will satisfy all our wants (Ps. 17:15).

What a sweet and glorious home heaven will be to those who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Here we live by faith in Him, and find peace, though we see Him not. There we shall see Him face to face, and find He is altogether lovely. "Better" indeed will be the "sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire"! (Ecc. 6:9). ■

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

The apostle Peter proclaimed to the Jewish leaders that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The name which Peter refers to is the name of Jesus Christ, which is confirmed by the reference to Psalm 118:22: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner". This prophecy was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In an age of pluralism, it is of fundamental importance that evangelicals affirm their loyalty to the first commandment, namely, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). To that end it is essential to consider the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, where, as we shall see, the *centrality, uniqueness and exclusivity* of Christ is declared, according to the Scriptures. Anything less is not true Christianity.

Preliminary Considerations

The Confession tells us that those God predestinated unto life were eternally "chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory" (WCF 3:5). They are redeemed by Christ (3:6) and their sinful corruption is pardoned and mortified through Christ (6:5). In the covenant of grace, the Lord "freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved" (7:3). This covenant is set forth in the Bible "by the name of a Testament", in reference to the death of Christ (7:4). Significantly, there is but one covenant, though differently administered under the two Testaments into which the Scriptures are divided. In the Old Testament Christ is foreshadowed (7:5); in the New he is more clearly and fully exhibited (7:6). Christ is the centre of the covenant.

Main Observations

Chapter 8 of the Confession is given over in its entirety to the Person and Work of Christ, in the following way:

1) In his eternal purpose God ordained his only begotten Son to be the Mediator between God and man. As such he was and is Prophet, Priest, King, Head and Saviour of his Church. He is also the Heir of all things and Judge of the world. In fulfilment of this great work a people were given to Christ who in time would be redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glorified by him (8:1).

2) The Son of God became incarnate in order to fulfil his office of Mediator. The Confession very carefully and deliberately asserts that our Saviour, as the second person of the Trinity, "being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did...take upon him man's nature". This is a most glorious doctrine – that in Jesus Christ the invisible God became visible. However we must not draw wrong conclusions regarding the incarnation. The whole divine nature and whole human nature are joined together in one person, but there is neither "conversion, composition or confusion" of the two natures. So Christ is "very God and very man" (8:2).

3) The Lord Jesus Christ was eminently qualified for this office of Mediator, in that in his human nature he was "sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure". Yet Christ did not take this office to himself: he was called to it by the Father (8:3).

4) The Saviour fulfilled all that was required of him as the Mediator. Thus, "he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption" (8:4). This was followed by his bodily resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand. By his "perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself", Christ has fully satisfied divine justice. In doing so he purchased reconciliation and everlasting life for the elect (8:5). Astonishingly, the benefits of Christ's redeeming work were communicated to the elect under the Old Testament, and not just in the time of the New. This is evident in the "promises, types, and sacrifices" which pointed forward to Christ, thus indicating there was only ever one Saviour (8:6). To all for whom Christ purchased redemption, "he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same" (8:8). Christ is uniquely the Saviour of sinners. As Peter put it, "there is *none other name*...".

Some Further Aspects

There are other aspects of the centrality of Christ which are often overlooked. Consider the issue of the salvation of infants. Our Confession states: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit" (WCF 10:3). This is not a claim that every individual who dies in infancy is elect: rather it is an acknowledgement that, even in this circumstance, divine election cannot be ignored. Once again, the Lord Jesus Christ is seen to be absolutely necessary. The Confession then goes on to declare in unequivocal terms there is no other way to be saved but through Christ. To assert and maintain otherwise "is very pernicious, and to be

detested" (10:4). In other words, loyalty to the first commandment demands faithfulness to the exclusive claims of Christ.

Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Saving Faith and Repentance unto Life are all intimately connected to Jesus Christ. The elect are justified "*for Christ's sake alone*", by the imputation of his obedience and satisfaction (11:1). Adoption is "*in and for his only Son Jesus Christ*" (12). Sanctification is "*through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection*" (13:1). The principal acts of saving faith are "accepting, receiving and resting *upon Christ alone* for justification, sanctification and eternal life" (14:2). Repentance unto life includes "the apprehension of [God's] *mercy in Christ* to such as are penitent" (15:2).

Finally, Good Works must also be considered in reference to Christ. The Confession states: "the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him" (16:6). It says that works done by unregenerate and Christless men, "although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others", are "sinful", and "cannot please God" (16:7).

Ecclesiastical Obligations

Regarding religious worship, the Confession states that since the fall it is unacceptable to God "without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone" (WCF 21:2). This means that everything in worship is directly related to Christ. Prayer specifically is to made "in the name of the Son" (21:3). The sacraments are "instituted by Christ" (21:5). The day of worship is related to the resurrection of Christ, being changed by that event to the first day of the week and given the title "the Lord's Day", which is "to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath" (21:7). This day is to be "kept holy unto the Lord" (21:8), by our abstaining from worldly activities in order that we may engage in the worship of God.

As for the church itself, the Confession says that the invisible church "consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof" (25:1). The visible church "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children", and is "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ" (25:2). As its Head, Christ has given to the visible church "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life" (25:3). However, disloyalty to Christ means that a church may cease to be his. Some churches "have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan" (25:5). The great example is the Church of Rome, which gives its allegiance to the Pope, and not to Christ.

"When there is no discipline in the church, Christ is not properly honoured."

Within the church, a communion exists among those who are united to Christ by his Spirit and by faith. The saints have fellowship with Christ "in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory", and "communion in each other's gifts and graces" (26:1). This communion is "to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus" (26:2).

The sacraments "represent Christ and his benefits". They "confirm our interest in him" and "put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world" (27:1). The "two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord", which are "Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord", are not to be dispensed "by any but by a minister of the word, lawfully ordained" (27:4).

As the King and Head of his church, the Lord Jesus Christ "hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers" (30:1). The *form* of that government is not a matter of indifference, but is something determined by Christ himself. This government includes the imposition of such spiritual censures as may be necessary "for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren" and "for deterring of others from the like offences" (30:3). When there is no discipline in the church, Christ is not properly honoured.

Eschatological Events

Eschatology is the study of the last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. It is wonderful to realise that death and eternity are related to Christ. The Confession declares the blessedness which belongs to believers at their death: "The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies" (WCF 32:1). At the last day all the dead will be raised. The bodies of the unjust shall, "by the power of Christ", be raised to dishonour, and the bodies of the just shall, "by his Spirit", be raised unto honour (32:3).

Christ will then judge the world in righteousness, meaning that "all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil" (33:1). The righteous shall go "into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord". The wicked shall be cast "into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (33:2).

If there is one lesson we learn from this brief study, it is how central the Lord Jesus Christ is to everything. The Reformed faith is truly Christ-centred, and to be Reformed is to think in these terms consistently.

CHRIST'S PRIESTLY OFFICE

Andrew Gray

(Andrew Gray [1633-56] ministered briefly in Glasgow, dying at the young age of 22. This piece has been adapted from one of his sermons.)

There are three parts of Christ's office, His kingly, priestly and prophetical office. His kingly office points out His absolute dominion, and infinite sovereignty. His prophetical office points out His infinite wisdom in teaching sinners. His priestly office points out His boundless compassion and goodwill towards us.

Regarding Christ's priestly office, consider the following:

1) The mysteriousness of the act of Christ offering up Himself for us

First, *the divine harmony and sweet consent* that was among all the persons of the blessed Trinity, that Christ should accomplish this work of dying for sinners; there was not one negative aspect to this.

Was not the Father, the first Person of the blessed Trinity, most willing for this? Hence it is called the Father's will (Ps. 40:8; Heb. 10:7,9).

Was not the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, most willing to accomplish this work? We hope none will dispute His willingness, for oftentimes He says, speaking about this work, "I delight to do thy will".

Was not the third Person of the blessed Trinity most willing and content? He evidences His willingness, not only in that He furnished Christ with all gifts for this work (Isa. 42:1); but likewise He manifested His will in this, that when Christ was under His sorest exercises, He was comforted by the consolation of the Spirit of God.

Second, *the highness of this person, and the deepness of His sufferings*. Put these two together, and this will make you fall into a sea of wondering.

Was not this mighty condescension, that He who was clothed with light as with a robe, and with the garments of immortal glory, should have clothed Himself with the nature of man? That He who was dwelling in light inaccessible, should now dwell in the tents of mortality? That He should descend into hell that we might ascend into heaven? That He lay three days in the grave, that we might live with Himself in heaven through all the ages of eternity!

Third, *the end of Christ's coming into the world*. Might not Christ have come to condemn sinners? But, O, here is infinite love! He came to condemn that which condemned us (Rom. 8:3).

2) The advantages that flow to a Christian from Christ's priestly office

First, Christ's death is the evidence of our justification, and the cause of our sanctification, and the pledge of our glorification, and the hope of our eternal and complete victory, and the door of hope that shall make you sing, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory" (1 Cor. 15:55). These are the four streams whereby we are brought to paradise.

Second, Christ's death may be a strong argument to embrace and entertain Christ. It may stir us up to that duty, "Open to me, my sister, my spouse, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night" (Song of Sol. 5:2). If Christ has died and now risen again, will not that persuade you to love Him?

Third, if the sufferings of Christ were believed, it were a compendious way to bring your souls under the constraining power of His love (2 Cor. 5:14).

Fourth, the way to heaven is now made manifest through the sufferings of Christ (Heb. 8:8,9). Believe it, there was a greater difficulty for Christians to go to heaven under the Old Testament dispensation than under the New. Christ is now crucified before your eyes; so that we are not to exercise faith in Christ as yet to come, but as already come; and certainly the sin against the gospel shall be greater than it was under the law.

Fifth, if once ye believed that Christ died for sinners, then your unbelief would be put to an end (1 Tim. 1:15). If once you believe that Christ came over that infinite distance that was betwixt Him and man, how easily, think ye, that He will come over that infinite distance that is between you and Him?

Sixth, Christ's death is an excellent way for a Christian to bring his soul to a divine detestation and hatred of sin (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:1).

In closing, we shall say two things:

First, Christ dying is the immediate object of justifying faith. Second, a Christian should be much in the consideration of the eternity of this design of Christ's dying (Prov. 8:30,31).

Finally, three questions:

1. Were you ever, through the consideration of Christ's death, constrained to sit down and put your mouth in the dust?

2. Were you ever, on consideration of Christ's death, constrained to love Him, and cry out: "His love to us has been wonderfully great, passing the love of women"?

3. Were you never constrained to wonder at that union between Christ and us? ■

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE PSALMS

Rev. James Clark

The Psalms of David were appointed by God for worship. What is the value of the Psalms for Christians and others?

1) The Psalms focus on God. He is at the centre of their thought. They are not produced by men for their 'feel-good factor', and to reflect man's wisdom for inventing praise. They are the means for reinforcing our fellowship with God; they get us away from ourselves, lift us out of ourselves, out of present moods and circumstances and into a higher sphere of praise and adoration of God. They direct us to look away and upward to God, to rejoice in God, who alone changes not. For example, when the psalmist is in danger of being swallowed up in his inward-looking dejection and contemplation of his own emotions, asking, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?", in the next moment he corrects himself, saying, "hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him" (Ps. 42:11).

2) The Psalms focus on all our different kinds of experiences. They describe the soul of man; his faith, repentance, distresses, gratitude, struggles with others and with himself. The Psalms have psychological applications, such as handling anxiety and overcoming fears. They do not minimize the realities of the Christian life by using bland, inane expressions of pseudo-piety as are found in the superficial choruses of today, which address mindless emotions. They will touch the conscience, if honest self-application is present. The Psalms address those on the edge of despair, those who no longer 'feel' what they believe. They describe 'the house of God' and the experiences of worship there; the anticipation and expectation, the beauty of the fellowship there, the corporate worship in the fellowship of others. Here is the church at worship, the individual lifted out of his or her isolation, looking for God by the pathway of the means appointed – the Word of God. And the Psalms are the Word of God, which is the only Word which the Holy Spirit will use in the conversion and edifying of sinners, because it is His own Word. They describe the tensions of living in the world; the social differences, the oppression by the powerful, the violence of the lawless, the cries of the exploited to God for justice, and the innocent for vindication. To live in the world is to live in a barren land, a wilderness, a battleground, an ocean of storms, a place to get through for the restless pilgrim.

3) The Psalms focus on how God acts in the history of the world – past, present and future. They describe His mighty acts, His judgments, His future Self-manifestation. Whether our age is calm or turbulent, there is always a psalm that is appropriate to the current situation of the world, or the church. The Psalms deal with God's wondrous works in the physical universe (the sun, stars, sea, harvest) as well as His interventions in human society. Issues of life and death are treated in such a way as to remind us of our temporary existence in this world, a world which began with His word and shall end at His word. Such a wide-ranging view of God's activities calls us to heartfelt devotion. The Psalms are timeless and not 'culturally bound' to the era in which they were written down; they reflect the experiences of today, and of every day (1 Cor. 10:11).

4) The Psalms focus on Christ. Peter preaching at Pentecost declared, "For David speaketh concerning him [i.e. Christ]..." (Acts 2:25). The Lord uses Providence to advance His own glory and works to build His church despite the opposition (Psalm 2). His love for His people is declared (Psalm 45), though sometimes misunderstood (Psalm 73). His sufferings for sinners are detailed (Psalms 22 & 69), and the application and experience of forgiveness set out (Psalms 32, 40, 51 & 130). His leading and feeding His flock, His correcting of them in mercy, are also declared (Psalms 23 & 89). Calvin summed this up beautifully: "Christ reigns, Christ saves, Christ commands". The Psalms set forth Christ in all His fullness. Luther called the Psalms a 'mini-Bible'; Kennedy of Dingwall said that every kind of Christian experience is in the Psalms; Spurgeon said that if he were high, David had gone higher, if he were low, David had been lower. Calvin and Knox recovered the Psalms for worship at the Reformation. They do a disservice to the Reformation attainments who wish to replace the Psalms with 'hymns'. Christ Himself used the Psalms in worship; we would do well and be safe to follow Him. ■

> "There is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise."
> – John Calvin (Preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*)

PROVIDENCE AND THE CHRISTIAN

(Taken from 'Christian Philosophy: or, Materials for Thought' by Dr Jabez Burns [1805-76], which was published in London in 1845. The language has been updated.)

Providence is the superintending care which God exercises over all his creatures. We may contemplate it either in its vast comprehensiveness, or in its more minute details. We may view it in its relation to all creatures and events, or judge of it in its more direct relation to men.

Providence is another term for the government of God, by which all events are made to concur with his wise and holy purposes and designs. Thus it includes both the visible and invisible worlds – both angels and devils – men and all the irrational creatures.

Divine providence recognizes the fixed laws, by which all things are subservient to the divine will, and redound to the divine glory. These fixed laws being based on the infallible judgment of God, disorder or confusion cannot possibly ensue. At the head of all the links of the mysterious chain is the ever blessed Deity, by whom, and for whom, and to whom, are all things.

In providence, as Ezekiel shows, the celestial hosts are prominent and active instruments, ever hearkening to the divine voice, and flying with ardent delight to do his bidding. All men in their respective spheres are the agents of the divine will, and the executors of his purposes; even wicked men and fallen spirits are made to accomplish his pleasure and to do his will. The envy of the brethren of Joseph, and the wrath of Pharaoh, and the unbelief and cruelty of the Jews to the Messiah, all instrumentally effected what God had preordained to be accomplished. Divine providence restrains the violence of the ungodly, and makes the wrath of men to praise God.

Divine providence employs the holy and excellent of the earth, to be the direct ministers of his benevolent designs and pleasure. It fixes the boundaries of our habitations, it orders our earthly lot, regulates the events of our lives, environs our dwellings and persons from perils, numbers our hairs, guards our steps, and supplies all our wants. It has to do with our health and sickness, with our joys and sorrows, with our life and death. Divine providence never slumbers, and never withdraws its influences. It rises with us in the morning, and lies down with us at night. It is our companion in going out, and in coming in. It intermingles with all our concerns, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual – relative and social – for time and for eternity. Yet providence coerces not, it interferes not with man's free agency, nor mars his entire accountability.

To the righteous no subject can be so interesting, except that of the redemption of our world by Christ Jesus. Who can be really against the Christian, if God be for him? what can harm him who is a follower of that which is good? what can surprise him on whom the eyes of omniscient love are fixed? or injure him when the arms of Almightiness surround him? or beggar him that the infinite treasures of heaven supply? or destroy him to whom God is both a shield and reward?

In the oracles of truth, providence is revealed; and in the experience of the Christian, providence is enjoyed. To admire providence is the privilege of angels; to trust in it, the high vocation of saints. A providence of knowledge should be the light of our minds; a providence of power, the stay of our souls; a providence of goodness, the delight of our hearts.

Let reason adore – let faith trust – let hope rejoice – let praise be offered – and prayer presented – and the homage of cheerful obedience be constantly given. Especially, let the providence which clothes the fields with verdure, that restrains the foaming waves of the sea, that beautifies the lily, that provides for the young lions, that feeds the birds of the air, that observes the falling of the sparrow, have our daily, our unswerving confidence, and our incessant ascriptions of thanksgiving and delight. ■

"Labour to get as full and thorough recognitions of the providences of God about you, from first to last, as you are able. O fill your hearts with the thought of him and his ways!"
– John Flavel (From *The Mystery of Providence*)

YOUTH FOCUS

A COMING CHANGE (1)

Rev. Jonathan Mattull

A great change is coming. All who are alive in this world will experience it, for it will not belong to just one city, nation or generation. When time as we know it is brought to an end everyone will experience this change, for all will see clearly what should have been prized by them and what should have been despised. A great change of perspective will be experienced.

A Temptation

Riches, comforts and recreations – these are greatly prized today. The evidence is everywhere. Advertisements tell us how we deserve the luxury their products offer. Lyrics sing sweetly and powerfully to us of all manner of pleasures. The newest device promises to save us more time, keep us more connected to the things we like, and place us ahead of others. All this while the preaching of Christ, the sanctification of the Sabbath, and daily repentance and communion with the Lord, are largely rejected.

Churches holding to these and similar principles face a great temptation: either compromise on them in order to keep the younger generation, or risk seeing them venture to larger, more 'relevant' ministries. While churches face this issue, young people are often wrestling with it too. Perhaps *you* have questions which you are struggling with, such as: "Do I really have to keep the old ways today?" or, "Should I perhaps go to a bigger church, where there are more young people?" If that is your situation, then I hope to help you.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Christ's account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) helps us consider a perspective most people cannot see. They will see it in due course, but for now their perspective is only on the pleasures of this world. So it was with the rich man. He "was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day". This man would be the idol of many in our time. Rich, finely dressed, and fed by the best cuisine. Contrasted with this rich man is Lazarus, "a certain beggar". A rich man and a beggar – could it be more different? Yet the contrast grows, for Lazarus "was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores". The world would instinctively desire the rich man's position. However, the world's perspective is wrong, just as the rich man's perspective was wrong.

The error in perspective comes about because the world is shortsighted. Our *flesh* is shortsighted. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). But the world does not see beyond death. Once these two men die, the perspective is entirely reversed. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke 16:22,23) Either at death or at the return of Christ, all men will experience this perspective eternally, one way or the other. It is then that all will understand what ought to have been prized in this life.

Covenant Privileges

God has privileged the children of believers in ways that an unbelieving world cannot discern. Young people, you have privileges given to you by the Lord which exceed the luxury of a child born to the Royal Family. The question I wish to ask you is whether you prize those privileges or despise them? Perhaps it is here that the question arises in your mind, "What privileges do I have that exceed the privileges of those living the life of the rich and famous?" The privilege is found in that rich summary of God's covenant found in Scripture, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people". It is repeated and clarified time and again. It is the promise that includes all the promises which God makes to his people.

God, having sovereignly placed you in a Christian home, claimed you as his. He placed you within his covenant instead of outside of it. Be sure, he could have placed you in any family, but he chose to place you in a Christian family. This means that he has offered you light instead of darkness, for he placed you in the church where his holy word is read and preached. He has provided you with the loveliest sound ever to be heard, for he has caused his messengers to declare the good news of Jesus Christ to you regularly and frequently. He has surrounded you with the greatest support an individual could ever possess among men, for he has given you countless men and women who pray for your earthly, spiritual and eternal good. Only those in the church have such privileges. You have these privileges. Do you prize them, or do you despise them? ■

Mebane Induction *(Dr James Wanliss)*

May 4, 2018, was not just another evening in North Carolina. This lovely night saw Rev. Gavin Beers inducted to the pastorate of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Mebane. Mr Beers, who was for a decade the pastor of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) congregation in Ayr, received a warm welcome, along with his family, from the 200 or so guests present at the induction service.

Immediately prior to the service Mr Charles Greenewald, Presbytery Clerk, proclaimed three times to the assembly that if any person had any objections to the life and doctrine of Rev. Gavin Beers, Minister of the Gospel, they might now meet with the Presbytery in the building and substantiate the same. There being no objections, the solemn worship proceeded. Worship began with song, in the words of Psalm 65:1-5. There our mighty King reminds his people to fix their confidence in him, to rejoice in the riches of his grace, and to trust in the goodness of his providences. Mr Beers' induction as the first pastor of the Mebane congregation is a remarkable testament to the fact that God's kingdom is a kingdom of abounding grace. For many years the congregation have wrestled in prayer and the Lord has now, as always, shown that he is Jehovah Jireh.

The Scripture reading from Titus 1 and the sermon by the Moderator of the Presbytery of the US, Rev. Robert McCurley, reminded the congregation that the church is to acknowledge and hold fast the truth. Preachers, and hearers in the pews, must take trouble to warn about the alternative to truth, namely, error and sin, the wages of which are death. Mr Beers has arrived in a post-Christian America which has little interest in the problem of sin and the salvation which God offers. Indeed, around the world there is a fascination with evil and a willingness to accommodate it up to a point. This the church must resist.

Next the Presbytery Clerk read the Narrative of Proceedings. The Moderator then read Act V 1932 and put to Mr Beers the appointed questions. Mr Beers having answered the questions satisfactorily, the Moderator then read aloud the Formula which Mr Beers duly signed. The documents were then attested. In the name of the Presbytery, and by solemn prayer, the Moderator then inducted Mr Beers to the Charge of Minister at Mebane and granted him a seat on the Presbytery as minister of the Mebane congregation. The Ministers and Elders present extended to Mr Beers the right hand of fellowship, wishing him all success in his ministry by the Lord's blessing.

Following the prayer of induction, Rev. Warren Gardner, retired Minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), gave the Charge to the Minister. Mr Gardner referred to 1 Timothy 4:16 and called Mr Beers to not only watch carefully over the flock entrusted to his care, but also to be diligent to look after his own soul. In these things we must constantly rely on the grace of God for all good help. Rev. Robert McCurley gave the Charge to the Congregation. Mr McCurley exhorted the congregation, from Hebrews 13:17, to follow Scripture in obeying those that watch over their souls. This is not a popular teaching in this egalitarian age, which at best scorns calls to Biblical submission, and especially in a nation that exalts independence. But the end of submission to the will of God is joy.

Rev. Gavin Beers

Following the singing of Psalm 72:16-19, the Benediction was pronounced. Our cry to the Lord of Sabaoth was that it would please him to extend the peace, duration and happiness of his glorious government: "And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen." The service was recorded and can be viewed at: www.freechurchcontinuingus.com

Immediately after the service, the congregation proceeded to a delightful reception. Greetings from our congregations to Mr Beers and his family were read. Mr Beers briefly addressed his new congregation and the guests with some feeling. He was especially grateful to those in Scotland whom he had left behind. He challenged all present to acknowledge the hand of God in providing for his people, and to remember always to look not to man but to the Lord for help. We look forward to a blessed ministry and trust that Mr Beers will feel as loved and appreciated in America as he is in Scotland and his native Northern Ireland. ■

Obituary – Mr Calum Thomson, Stornoway *(Rev. Graeme Craig)*

When the Stornoway congregation met to thank God for another new year on 1 January 2018, they did so with a mixture of sadness and thanksgiving, having learned of the passing of their Elder, Calum Thomson, a few hours earlier, at the age of 86. For him, it was not the beginning of another

year's battle in this vale of tears, but the beginning of everlasting blessing in the nearer presence of the Lord.

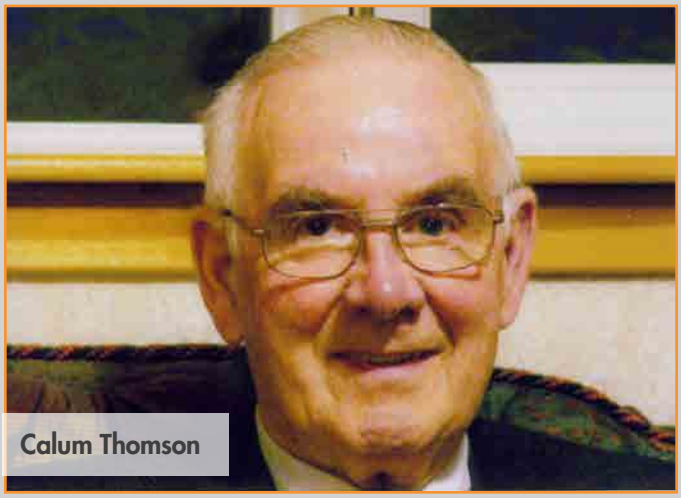
Brought up in Habost, Ness, Calum joined the Merchant Navy, gaining his Master's Ticket in 1961. For over forty years he sailed the seven seas, until, in providence, ill-health led him to retire in 1990. It was while at sea in 1971 that he came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. While commanding a ship through the Panama Canal, he found the craft in a precarious position which seemed beyond hope, and cried out, "Lord, save us". The cry of the needy was heard, and amazingly, the ship swung round and all was safe. No sooner did this happen than Calum went to his cabin and was on his knees. He arose a changed man, and this definite experience of God's grace left him in no doubt as to God's work in his soul.

His wife Gena, at home, was also converted at that time. She had just gone out to the Prayer Meeting for the first time and told her husband when he phoned from London on an unexpected journey home. On hearing this Calum told her, "If all goes well, there will be someone with you at the Prayer Meeting next week". Gena was puzzled as to who this could be, for in her mind the high seas were not the place where the Lord worked and Calum's conversion was not therefore expected. She soon learned, however, that the Lord has many ways of drawing souls to himself. They were one of a number of couples who began following in Stornoway at that time.

Calum professed faith in Stornoway Free Church and was later elected a Deacon. Such was the esteem in which he was held by the brethren that he was made a Trustee of the Relief Free Church Support Trust, which played such a valuable role in supporting the ongoing work of the FC(C) in the early days after the division of 2000. He was elected an Elder in Stornoway in October 2000, an office he discharged faithfully and cheerfully until ill health rendered him housebound in February 2015. As well as direct involvement in church courts, Calum was also involved in various organisations, including thirteen years with the local branch of the Gideons, where he took great pleasure in distributing God's Word to youngsters.

Calum delighted in hearing of and discussing the things of Christ. These were the most important things in his life. In discussion or in speaking to the Question, he would often bring his nautical experiences to bear on the subject. On speaking of the backslider, Calum spoke of once being on command in the bridge of his ship during a fierce storm. The ship was sailing forward, on course, but such was the effect of the wind and currents that the ship was actually moving backwards. So it is with the backslider. He is a true believer and is always heading onwards, even when he is drifting backwards! Comments such as these edified many.

In 1962 Calum married Gena MacPhail, a nurse from Laxdale, Lewis, and they set up home in



Calum Thomson

Stornoway. For fifty-five years the Lord blessed them together and gave them four children, Catherine, Mairi, Norma and Malcolm. To them we offer our sincere sympathy and commend them to the God of all grace. How precious it is to know that the Infallible Pilot is most faithful, and brings his people safely through the storms of life to the haven which they desired to see. Calum, along with all believers, could say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". ■

Nigeria: Captive Leah Sharibu is Alive

(Elizabeth Kendal, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin)

In February 2018 a faction of Boko Haram abducted some 110 girls from a school in Dapchi town, Yobe State, northern Nigeria. Then, on 21 March, after their international sponsors chastised the jihadists for taking Muslim girls captive, they returned the girls – all except one: Leah Sharibu (15), a Christian girl who "refused to cooperate" and convert to Islam to secure her freedom [see RLPB 448 (28 March)]. Nigerian independent online newspaper *The Cable* has managed to obtain proof-of-life. The jihadists sent *The Cable* a photo of Leah dressed in a hijab and sitting on a mat, along with an audio file in which Leah appeals for "the government and people of goodwill to intervene to get me out of my current situation". Pray that the Lord would intervene in Nigeria. Pray for the suffering Church in Northern Nigeria, and that Leah Sharibu will be returned to her family. ■

Quote

"Walk in this garden of the scripture, and pluck up the flowers of gospel promises, and put them in your bosom; live by faith upon the promise, and be persuaded, whatever stands in the way, that he will do as he hath said. He will do so, for what he hath said he hath written, what he hath said he hath sealed, what he hath said he hath sworn, what he hath said he will never unsay; therefore, take hold of his word of grace, and hold him at his word in life and death, saying, 'Do as thou hast said'." ■

Ralph Erskine

COMMENT

'HOMOPHOBIA'

The new morality

One of the ways in which fallen man tries to avoid facing up to his sin is by redefining what sin is. By this device he can hold on to his sin and yet appear very moral, at least to himself. The redefinition involves twisting the meaning of the Bible, or setting it aside altogether, in order to substitute a different moral code. The new code has the wisdom of man at its foundation, rather than the Word of God. Its leading principle is 'tolerance' (often viewed as 'love'), manifesting itself in 'diversity' and 'equality'. The great sin now is an intolerance or disapproval of other people's beliefs and lifestyles, no matter how absurd or harmful they are – although strangely no sin seems to be committed if the intolerance is directed towards evangelical Christians.

The redefinition of sin is accompanied by a new terminology. Those whose morality is shaped by the Ten Commandments have various 'phobias'; the milder advocates of the new morality recommend that these people undergo 'treatment'; the more militant of them insist on punishment. One of the greatest modern 'sins' is 'homophobia'. We might think that this word indicates a *fear of man* – an odd thing – but somehow it means a *hatred of homosexuals*. If a Christian expresses a criticism of homosexuality, perhaps referring to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, or Paul's treatment of the subject in Romans 1, then he or she *hates* homosexuals.

God certainly does not hate homosexuals – except those who continue impenitent, as with other individuals. Words in the Bible demonstrate for all time both the sinfulness of homosexuality and God's love for sinners of every kind. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

If God does not hate homosexuals, then neither must His people. Love for our neighbour means that we seek his good, especially his eternal good. In the light of Scripture, it is a loving thing to say that there is nothing 'gay' about homosexuality, to insist that it is a choice rather than a condition, and to urge the homosexual to turn to God in repentance and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. ■

THE PAPAL VISIT TO IRELAND

Roman Catholicism in decline

The official reason for Pope Francis's visit to Ireland was the World Meeting of Families, an international event held every three years to celebrate the importance of the family. There were hopes that his visit would strengthen the Roman Church in the Republic, but from the start it was dogged with the problem of clerical sexual abuse. When it was over, an opinion poll for the *Irish Times* found that 55% of those polled did not think the Pope had gone far enough in addressing the matter.

Compared to the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979, attendances at the various events were much lower. Although 500,000 tickets for the open air mass in Phoenix Park in Dublin were distributed to the public, only 130,000 turned up. The issue of children taken from single parents in Roman Catholic institutions is another major problem. Historically Rome taught that if such children tried to discover their birth parents, they were committing a mortal sin. Francis has reversed yet another teaching, declaring that their quest was not a violation of the fourth commandment. Rome's meddling with the moral law is seen here, in that the instruction to honour our parents belongs to the *fifth* commandment.

Some 78% of the population of Southern Ireland claim to be Roman Catholics, but attendance at mass has fallen to 35%. In 2015 Ireland became the first country in the world to approve same-sex 'marriage' at a nationwide referendum, and moves to diminish Roman Catholic influence across Irish society are increasing, especially in education and health. There is growing disillusionment with the Roman Church. In welcoming the Pope to Phoenix Park, Diarmuid Martin, the Archbishop of Dublin, spoke of 'the hope of a spring for the Irish Church', but given the widespread distrust, it seems unlikely.

Despite his acknowledgement of the Roman Church's past failures, the Pope is in trouble over allegations that he personally knew of sexual abuse. One American Bishop has called for him to step down. Rome's teaching of a celibate ministry is contrary to Scripture, and the entire edifice is one of heresy, error and false claims, of which the papacy is the major purveyor. In the dedication of his work *Anti-Christ Pointed and Painted out in his true Colours*, written in 1655, the Scottish Presbyterian minister William Guild asserted that "if we prove the Pope to be Antichrist, then all Popery is overthrown". All the evidence demonstrates that he is, and thus all the efforts made by the Roman Church to solve its difficulties will fail. ■

THE CHURCH WITH THREE BUILDINGS

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

(Our Ballyclare & Doagh congregation belongs within the Parish of Templepatrick, a small village in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. The history of Presbyterianism in Templepatrick is instructive for us.)

Beginnings

In 1625, Josias Welsh, a grandson of John Knox, was ordained to the ministry in Templepatrick Parish Church. He had gone to Ulster because he refused to follow the Articles of Perth which had been agreed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1618 (see September *Witness*). Welsh arrived at the time when the Six Mile Water Revival was beginning and was used by God to show many the way of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. His installation was quite extraordinary in that Captain Robert Norton, who held the patronage, arrived at the church with Welsh and ordered the curate to leave the pulpit and Welsh to enter it. Presbyterianism had arrived in Templepatrick.

The communion season at Templepatrick followed the Scottish custom, with one addition, namely the Monday Thanksgiving service. It was a practice begun in Ulster that was initially criticised by some in the Scottish General Assembly. Records indicate that communicants came forward to the table during the singing of verses from Psalm 116: "I'll of salvation take the cup...". Prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, lead tokens were given out to the communicants, and the names of the communicants were carefully noted. Following a communion season in 1632, Welsh wrote to a friend that 1,500 communicants had been present, including 300 who had not professed previously. However trouble was soon to come. In 1634 Thomas Wentworth, who had been appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland by Charles I in 1632, ordered that the Church of Ireland must conform to the Anglican order and the Arminian doctrine which was being promoted by Archbishop Laud. Welsh was deposed from the Parish Church by the Bishop of Down. He then preached in his own house, standing in a door so that the people who gathered in his garden could also hear him. His constitution was weak and he caught a cold which led to his death.

The First Meetinghouse

Following their ejection from the parish church, the Presbyterians met in various locations, finally erecting a makeshift meetinghouse. Eventually, under the lengthy ministry of Welsh's successor Rev. Anthony Kennedy (1646-1697), a permanent meetinghouse

First Meetinghouse

was built. The Session book notes in 1652, "trouble for their minister being debarred from preaching from 1 Aug 1650 until May 1652". It notes in 1670 that "no minutes were recorded from Dec 1660 until June 1670 on account of the persecution of the prelates". Scattered throughout the Session book are references to arrangements for the communion. Thus, for 28 June 1647, we read: "for the ordering of matters at the communion, for keeping the elements, drawing the wine and cutting of the bread Adam M'Nielie. Gilbert Berrihill to attend Adam M'Nielie for reaching the elements to the servers at the table. For receiving the tokens at the table Gilbert M'Nielie and John Petigrew. For serving with the bread Major Ellis and Lieut Lindsay; Major at the East door; Lieut at the West; for serving with the cups Mr Shaw and Hugh Kennedy. Thomas Windrum and Thomas Taggart for keeping west door that all may be kept out that wants tokens; John Inglis and Thomas Taggart for the East door. Hugh Sloan and Guian Herberson for filling cups and delivering them to the Elders, and Alexr Coruth to relieve them by turns. Hugh Sloan is to provide the table cloths."

All was prospering until the sixth ministry in the congregation, that of Rev. John Abernethy (1774-1796), who leaned towards theologically liberal 'New Light' ideas. Lord Templeton of Castle Upton, who now held the patronage, requested his resignation as a consequence. His successor, Rev. Robert Campbell (1796-1829), was however a more 'principled' liberal than Abernethy; when asked to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith he refused. The subsequent split in the Synod of Ulster in 1829 led to a division in the congregation, and the orthodox party lost the building.

The Second Meetinghouse

Having lost the meetinghouse, the orthodox found themselves homeless. First they met on the grounds of Castle Upton, removing to a barn on a nearby hill when Rev. John Carson was ordained in 1831. At

Second Meetinghouse

this point there were 118 families connected with the congregation. The Session records state that at the communion service held on 21 August 1831, the worship was conducted in the open air. Mr Carson presided while Rev. Robert Magill, Antrim, assisted, and 135 people communicated. The pressing need was for a meetinghouse. After negotiations with Lord Templeton, a plot of land was allocated. Templeton agreed to cover the cost if the farmers in the congregation carted the stone, sand and lime. The meetinghouse was opened on Thursday 23 June 1836 by the Rev. Henry Cooke, Moderator of Synod. The following Sabbath, 26 June, some 212 people communicated in the new meetinghouse. Session minutes note that "the meetinghouse was crowded almost to suffocation... the day commenced at 11:00 a.m. and terminated at the usual hour of 8:00 p.m.". Such was the stance of the orthodox believers, their sacrifice, and the ministry of Mr Carson, that the number of families increased to 201. But trouble was once again in store.

The Third Meetinghouse

In September 1844, Mr Carson received notification to quit the meetinghouse on the last Sabbath of October. Despite strenuous efforts to persuade him to change his mind, Lord Templeton would not relent, arguing there were too many meetinghouses in the village! The plight of the congregation was published in the *Banner of Ulster* for July 1845, which compared their circumstances to those facing the Free Church of Scotland, where sites were refused for buildings. The minister himself received notice to quit his home, as it too belonged to Lord Templeton, who also withdrew financial support from the congregation. The Session book records the details of the last service in the church on 27 October 1844, as follows: "On the Sabbath on which the house was to be closed, the people assembled in great numbers to hear the last sermon and to witness the last communion in that house, at which 240 communicated."

At the close of the service Mr Carson read a portion of Scripture, ending with the words, "Arise, let us go hence". He closed the Bible and walked down from the pulpit and out of the church with the whole congregation following. When all were out, Templeton's agent locked the door. Once again, the congregation were forced to meet in a barn. The subsequent communion was held in the open air on 29 June 1845. It was a wet day. Carson records that a man aged 91 was drawn by cart to the communion, travelling some six miles and arriving "with his locks dripping with rain as he took the sacramental bread and wine to testify his adherence to his Saviour and His Church". Another old man of 86 years was also drawn by cart to take part in the service. The plight of the congregation became a matter of grave concern across the country. Eventually, a plot of ground two miles from the village was obtained from Sir Hercules Pakenham. The new meetinghouse was opened on 26 October 1845. The Session book notes that at the first communion on 16 November 1845, 200 people communicated. Meanwhile, Mr Carson was evicted from manse and farm and was forced to remove to lodgings in Belfast. It was thus decided to erect a one-story manse for Mr Carson near the meetinghouse. To help defray costs, which had risen to almost 1000 pounds, appeals were sent for funds from other congregations. Providentially, all these things occurred before the tragedy of the 1845 potato famine, during which funds were extremely scarce.

Third Meetinghouse

Lessons

There are four lessons to be learned from this brief account of the early history of the Presbyterians in Templepatrick:

First, we see that truth is worth sacrificing for. The church and people of God prosper spiritually in a period when a stand is made.

Second, while liberalism comes in by degrees, it will not go undetected where the Westminster Standards are believed and firmly adhered to.

Third, material prosperity often weakens adherence to conservative belief and practice. A congregation which endured so much, in time abandoned the Regulative Principle of Worship, along with the other marks of orthodoxy.

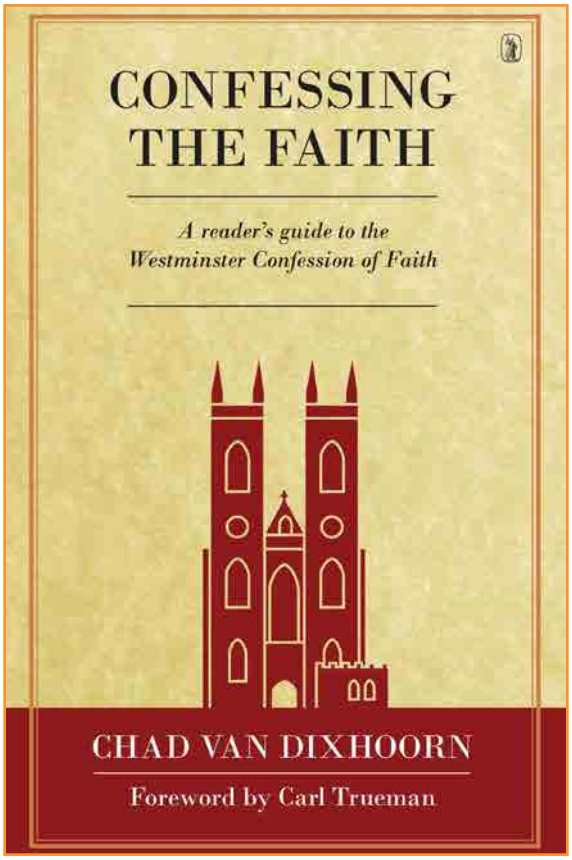
Fourth, it is essential that we remember the events of the past, in order that we may be thankful to God for what he has preserved for us, as well as warned about the danger of losing our precious heritage.

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Confessing the Faith
Chad Van Dixhoorn, Banner of Truth Trust, hbk, 484pp, £17.50

Confessing the Faith Study Guide
Emily Van Dixhoorn, Banner of Truth Trust, pbk, 171pp, £6.00



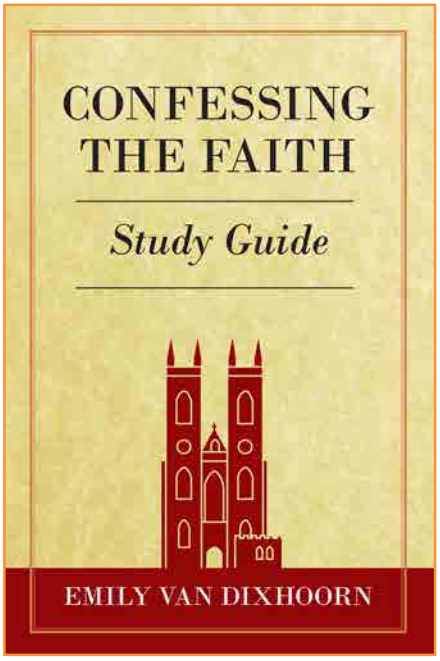
The May 2015 issue of the *Witness* contained a commendatory review of the Canadian scholar Chad Van Dixhoorn's commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, entitled *Confessing the Faith*. Dr Van Dixhoorn's wife, Emily, has now supplemented that work with a study guide containing questions for discussion or reflection. This review will assess the value of the two publications for individual or group study.

As a Church passionately committed to the theology of the Westminster Standards, we are pleased to see such works being published, and long to see greater attention devoted to our theological heritage. The Westminster Confession was, as the name indicates, not a Scottish document, and it is tragic indeed that it has not had a greater influence on the development of the Church in England, and elsewhere, in later generations. There are other works on the Confession available: Robert Shaw's 1845 Exposition still stands alone in value as a defence of the entire original text of the *Confession*, to which we as a Church subscribe, but is inevitably dated. Similarly, the Princeton theologian A. A. Hodge's *Commentary* from 1869 is unmatched in analysis of the theology of the Confession, but is rather dry, more a work of reference than a book to encourage a popular readership. Much more useful for this purpose is *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* by G. I. Williamson, first published in 1964. Williamson is still fresh and readable, and explains the teaching of the Confession with great clarity for readers without a background of theological study.

Confessing the Faith is pitched between Hodge and Williamson, being grounded in the detailed historical research into the minutes of the Westminster Assembly that earned Van Dixhoorn a Cambridge doctorate. He is able to shed light on certain passages of the Confession from his knowledge of the debates, and from his reading in the other published works of the Westminster divines. For example, with regard to confessional teaching on preaching, he quotes the comment of Assembly member Anthony Burgess that preachers "must dresse every sermon at the glasse [mirror] of the Word; they must preach as they read in Scripture" (p.284). Furthermore, Van Dixhoorn carefully expounds the proof texts that the Assembly chose to append to the chapters, thus following the chain of reasoning that supported each assertion. He elucidates the meaning of the Confession with great clarity, and, for the most part, defends it as thoroughly Biblical. His discussion of the chapter on 'God's Eternal Decree' is particularly thoughtful and edifying: "God has decided the end from the beginning, but the middle still matters. It still matters because God not only decides what will happen in the end, but how it will happen...he specifically decided to save sinners *by Christ Jesus*" (p.46). His more experimental observations are also helpful: "Those who piously content themselves with general confessions of their sinfulness often prove to be the most stubborn sinners" (p.200).

It is, however, a pity that he seeks to evade the force of the confessional assertion of the preservation of the Scriptural text in purity (I.viii), and demonstrates the problematic result by quoting inconsistently from different translations of Scripture throughout. He also attempts to undermine the force of the Assembly's prescription of psalm singing in worship by trying to suggest (without any historical basis whatever) that the Assembly was open to the use of uninspired hymns. In fact, these were not introduced

into mainstream Scottish Presbyterian worship until the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, like Hodge and Williamson, Van Dixhoorn accepts the revisions to the Confession of the American Presbyterian tradition, which drastically reformulated the teaching of the Confession with regard to the relationship of Church and State, and abandoned several other Confessional teachings, such as the Papal Antichrist. It would be good to see a modern work in this field prepared to defend robustly the full text of the original Confession as thoroughly Biblical and Presbyterian. It is, however, commendable that in the use of parallel columns, Van Dixhoorn sets out very clearly the alternative versions of the Confession.



Emily Van Dixhoorn has rendered a valuable service in preparing study questions on the text. She gives a good balance of revision questions on Confessional content, and of more reflective questions on what this teaching implies for our own walk with the Lord, such as: "How does knowing that God's Word is meant to be read as one book help you as you read it?" (p.7) A study group using this guide could be very beneficial.

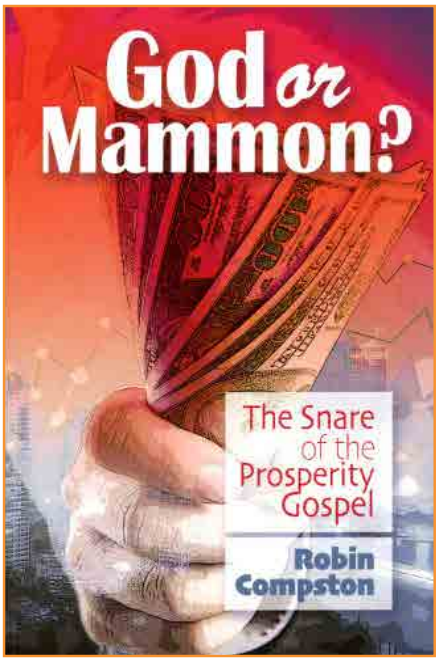
The Westminster Confession is unmatched as a summary of Biblical truth, and I would recommend study of it to professing Christians in general, but especially to men preparing to enter, or already in, office in the Church. We are bound by solemn vows to uphold the teaching of this document, and therefore a thorough familiarity with it is desirable, and indeed essential. Van Dixhoorn's volume would be an aid in this endeavour, but popular readers from our own Church may prefer to purchase Williamson's commentary. He defends fewer amendments to the original text, promotes psalmody, and includes study questions within the one paperback volume, making it half the price of this set. For faithful exposition of every part of the original Confession, including its teaching on Church-state relations, Robert Shaw should be consulted. For the purposes of modern scholarly historical research, however, Van Dixhoorn's book is now deservedly the standard work on the Confession. ■

Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod

God or Mammon? The Snare of the Prosperity Gospel

Robin Compston, The Wakeman Trust, pbk, 71pp, £3.50

This courteous yet critical book is a warning to the affluent modern churchgoer not to slide into the error of the Prosperity Gospel movement. It will come as a shock to most serious Christians that some members of the Pentecostal church have over the years promoted a theology of wealth. This teaches that God's will is to bless Christians with worldly prosperity. Among the Pentecostal leaders to promote this doctrine are Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and Kenneth Hagin. These and other charismatic leaders got this doctrine, not from the Bible, but from "revelations" given to them privately by God, as they claimed. The Christian (so they argue) has the right and the duty, when it comes to money, to "claim it by faith".



Robin Compston, a leading member of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church in London, shows us in this carefully-written book how radically different is this Prosperity Gospel from the Word of God. He here shows us, in a number of clear quotations from Pentecostal writings, what unscriptural views are taught by Prosperity Gospel preachers. Then as a true Bible-lover he shows us what is the orthodox scriptural doctrine. The real message of the Bible is, "seek the true riches", because the real Christian's greatest desire is in these words: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). ■

Rev. Maurice J. Roberts

"The foundation of true holiness and true Christian worship is the doctrine of the gospel, what we are to believe. So when Christian doctrine is neglected, forsaken, or corrupted, true holiness and worship will also be neglected, forsaken, and corrupted."
– John Owen

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.

October
7 Ayr, Snizort
14 Cross, St Louis
21 Ballyclare & Doagh, Greenville
28 Atlanta, Glasgow–Partick, Knock & Point, Poolewe & Aultbea

November
4 Arran, Edinburgh–St Columba's, Kilmorack & Strathglass
11 Aberdeen, Tarbat
18 Brora, Glasgow–Shettleston
25 Kiltearn

December
2 Columbia

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2018 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES August 2018 £	Total to August 2018 £	Total to August 2017 £
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1,500	12,000	12,000
Duthil-Dores	11,535	1,535	16,815	16,817
Inverness	0	5,600	24,037	21,986
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,450	14,544	14,016
Poolewe & Aultbea	0	1,000	8,500	6,289
Total Inverness Presbytery	**11,535**	**11,085**	**75,896**	**71,108**
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	450	0	853	878
Brora	0	0	10,666	10,527
Kiltearn	53	0	4,979	6,896
Tarbat	0	4,000	13,871	18,706
Total Northern Presbytery	**503**	**4,000**	**30,369**	**37,006**
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	310	366	6,264	5,920
Ayr	0	0	6,585	8,503
Dumfries	0	0	750	600
Edinburgh	13,747	2,000	14,626	15,749
Glasgow - Knightswood	50	1,650	19,006	18,637
Glasgow - Partick	6,795	1,200	14,100	13,600
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	2,000	20,568	13,641
Rothesay	0	0	3,163	3,130
Total Southern Presbytery	**20,903**	**7,216**	**85,062**	**79,778**
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	1,470	16,015	16,366
Harris - Leverburgh	0	2,000	12,100	10,950
Knock & Point	0	1,500	14,239	14,210
North Uist & Grimsay	3,393	1,050	9,565	10,089
Scalpay	0	1,800	16,554	17,396
Stornoway	2,919	8,813	65,579	74,499
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	**6,311**	**16,633**	**134,050**	**143,509**
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	4,654	1,500	11,850	14,750
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	1,300	10,339	9,977
Lochalsh & Strath	320	1,650	16,545	17,394
Portree	271	1,500	17,357	17,561
Snizort	425	1,500	15,396	21,341
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	**5,670**	**7,450**	**71,487**	**81,024**
Smiths Falls	0	0	1,000	1,000
Total From Congregations	**44,921**	**46,384**	**397,864**	**413,426**
Other Donations	0	1,899	22,629	33,691
Legacy	33,831	0	0	0
TOTAL	**78,752**	**48,283**	**420,493**	**447,117**
Included in the above: Tax	**2,866**	**0**	**65,375**	**71,016**
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	**75,886**	**48,283**	**355,118**	**376,100**

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

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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)".

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

The building where our Mebane congregation meets –
Champions Martial Arts, 1107 East Ruffin Street, Mebane, NC 27302, USA

"Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

Psalm 106:1

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