

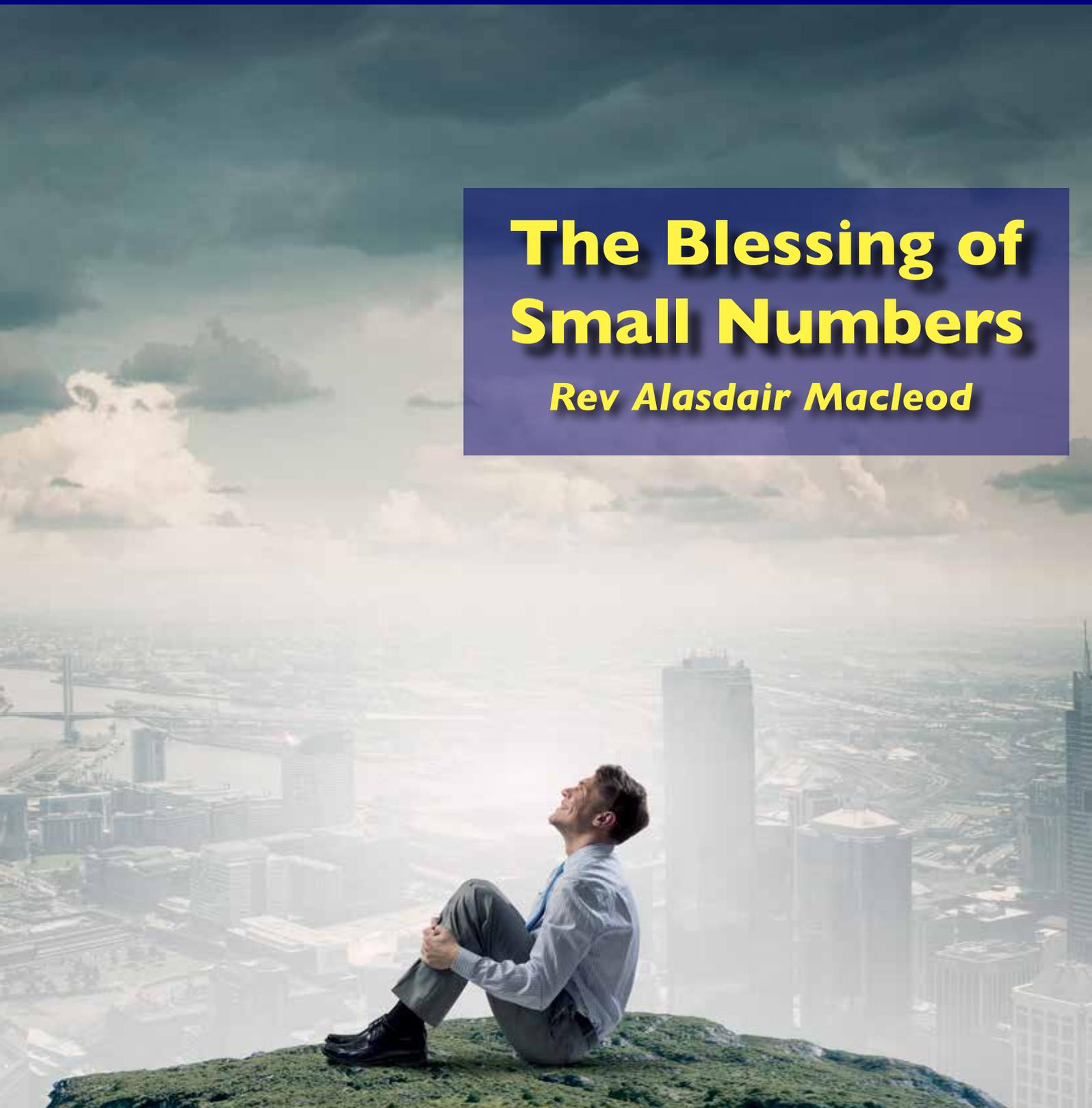
Free Church **Witness**



JANUARY 2016 ISSUE

The Blessing of Small Numbers

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I Shall Come Forth as Gold

The Christian life is not always easy. For years we may have health and strength, riches and prosperity, peace and happiness and then trouble comes. Sometimes it comes as one overwhelming event, other times it is one thing on top of another. Usually you can cope but today you are crushed. Why has this happened? Where is God? What is the purpose in this? Your situation appears hopeless and despair is coming over you.

The case of Job was similar, though worse than any of us are likely to endure. It is recorded for us in the Scriptures to comfort and encourage us in the midst of our trials. There is a purpose and our loving Father will ensure that all our troubles work for our good. He will not push us beyond our capacity and He gives us His grace to sustain us. Job wrote: 'But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (Job 23:10).

God knows

There is wonderful comfort even just in the fact that God knows the way that I take. He has chosen me from all eternity, He sent His Son to die for me and His Spirit to live in my heart. He who spared not His own Son so that I would be saved, will He withhold any good thing from me? He is the all-seeing, all-knowing God, totally aware of my situation. He is the Almighty who is in complete control. Nothing whatsoever happens in this world nor anywhere else but according to His will and counsel (Eph.1:11). He knows our frame and our

weakness. Our Advocate, the Lord Jesus, was tempted in all points like as we are and therefore knows in His own experience what we are going through and He makes continual, effectual intercession for us.

Job wrote: 'Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning' (23:2). In the bitterness of my suffering I sigh and groan but cannot adequately express how miserable I am. He had lost all his great wealth. His family, ten children, were killed in a tragic accident. His health was gone, his body covered in itchy and painful boils, so he sat in misery among the ashes scraping himself with a potsherd. His wife encouraged him to end his life, 'Curse God and die' (2:9). His three friends visited to comfort him but ended up accusing him of sins which he had never committed.

What is your situation? Have you suffered a burglary, fraud, or a financial disaster? Are you in debt? Have you had a bereavement? Are you afflicted with some horrible, incurable disease, a terminal illness? Has your spouse turned against you and wished you dead? Are your friends spreading false allegations about you? What is troubling you? Remember, God knows.

God is trying me

God is sovereign, so that nothing happens by chance. There is a good purpose in all the Lord's dealings with us. He is putting us through trials for our benefit. But, you ask, how can this be beneficial to me? Job also had his questions. He exclaimed: 'Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I

would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me' (23:3-5). Job is confused. He has no answer to his questions. If only he could speak to God face to face then he would find out why his life is in a mess and why all these troubles have come upon him.

Just when we need God He can feel far away. We try praying but it is hard. Our words seem to bounce back from the ceiling. We are confused and troubled and feel either God is angry with us or does not care. But, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me' (Is.49:15-16). God cares deeply. Abraham was severely tried when he was asked by God to offer up his only-begotten son, the only one through his wife Sarah, the child of promise and the delight of his old age. Jacob was severely tested when he returned to the promised land and was then confronted by Esau with 400 soldiers. David was very low when he returned to Ziklag and found it burned with fire, his wives and children gone and his men in their despair plotting to stone him, but he encouraged himself in the Lord. God is trying us and we must not give up, nor faint in the day of testing.

I shall come forth as gold

God has a wonderful plan for us. When we were first converted we were far from perfect. That was only the beginning of the road of sanctification. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. We believe in effectual sanctification just as we believe in effectual calling. God

will purify us and make us holy. He does not spoil His children. Training can be painful but it leads to a good outcome. One day we will come forth as gold.

The story is told of a missionary visiting an Indian workshop. The craftsman was purifying gold. He had melted it in a crucible and kept on applying the hot flames to it. The missionary asked, 'When will you know that it is ready?' The Indian replied, 'When I see my face in it'. God will only be satisfied when we are like Him. You feel the pain of the flames but they are necessary to separate the dross from you. Pride is hard to cure; so is self-righteousness, lust, worldliness and our many idols. Faith, hope and love must be strengthened.

Paul had many trials. He endured beatings, stoning, hunger, cold, shipwrecks and friends forsaking him. Speaking of his converts he said, 'All they which are in Asia be turned away from me' (2Tim.1:15). That must have been very hard. He had a thorn in his flesh which troubled him greatly. Three times he pleaded with the Lord to remove it but the reply he got was, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me' (2Cor.12:9). Paul, like Job of old, emerged from his trials as pure gold.

When we remember God's purpose and the inheritance awaiting us, surely we can be patient. Paul said, 'We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us' (Rom.5:3-5). God will see to it that we too emerge as gold.

The Emotional Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part IV

Rev David Silversides

(Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland)

The substance of an address given at the Free Church School in Theology, Larbert, in 2006.

Last month Mr Silversides noted the emotions involved in Christ's sufferings.

Some Lessons

The completeness of Christ's humanity must not be neglected.

Liberals have attacked his Deity continually and we have had to defend that. We all feel the compulsion to rise up with indignation against these ungodly men who deny that the Lord Jesus is Jehovah. But do not neglect his complete humanity, including his emotions.

There are several reasons. One is, a less than fully human Christ cannot be a substitute for men. His Divinity means that his sufferings are of infinite value, but he is a substitute of men and he must be fully a man in body and soul. That's why the common idea that he had divine blood is a grave error. He had human blood because he was fully a man without ceasing to be God.

'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham' (Heb.2:16). Why

didn't he become an angel? Because he didn't come as the Saviour of fallen angels. He came as the Saviour of fallen men. That's why he was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death and he is now crowned with glory and honour. A Saviour who became less than fully a man, even though remaining God, could not save us. Only a Divine Saviour who became fully a man could deliver us. An emotionless Christ could not suffer nor save.

We must bring Christ near to sinners in our preaching.

We must show Christ in his divine glory, but in his humanity too, including his feeling, his emotions. We must not be afraid to do this. He must be evidently set forth, crucified amongst us, as the object of faith for sinners. If we have indistinct views of Christ, it will show. We will be afraid to bring him near because we are not sure of what we are saying. We need to be clear on these things.

The suitability of the Psalms for New Testament worship is shown.

The inner sufferings of Christ are set forth in the Psalms as nowhere else in Scripture. The reproach that broke his heart and the billows of divine wrath going over his soul are described in the Psalms as nowhere else because God who knows the end from the beginning, who has foreordained all things, was able to give a Book of Praise in the Old Testament that was suitable to sing of the sufferings of the Redeemer even after the event. Only God can do that.

Christ's continuing sympathy.

We are told that Christ 'learned obedience by the things which he suffered' (Heb.5:8). Not that he learned to obey for he never disobeyed; he was always sinless. But he learned the experience of obedience and for him it meant what it will never mean for us – bearing damnation. For no-one else will obedience to God mean being damned. The wicked don't obey God. They will be damned. But conscious and loving obedience leading to damnation is unique to Christ.

And God made the captain of our salvation 'perfect through sufferings' (Heb.2:10). Perfect, that is, not in the sense of morally perfect, which he always was, but fully qualified, complete and so a sympathetic High Priest, 'able to succour them that are tempted' (Heb.2:18).

The glorified Christ is sympathetic in his human nature in Heaven and yet there is complete blessedness. There are things that seem to be able to coexist in Heaven that cannot do so on earth. For example, the redeemed in Heaven are aware that they are redeemed and that they have been redeemed from sin, their own sins. And there must be a holy abhorrence of the sins from which they have been redeemed and yet it must be painless, because they are blessed and satisfied.

In similar manner, Christ, in his glorified humanity is exalted and free from all suffering. And yet the Scriptures teach us that he is a sympathetic High Priest. Sympathy on earth involves sorrow but there is, surely, no sorrow in Heaven. But understand it or not, the Scriptures teach it and we are not to be robbed of the comfort because we cannot understand how everything fits together.

Christ's atonement was the only time that sinlessness and sorrow co-existed in one person. That atonement is now complete but Christ is still a sympathetic High Priest in Heaven, whether we understand all the aspects of that or not. There may be something in the heavenly state that makes the compassion of his human nature consistent with complete blessedness.

It is that same Jesus who is made both Lord and Christ. And he is still a man. His becoming a man, as such, was condescension. His being born and that in a low condition was humiliation. The humiliation has finished. But the condescension of being God become Man, continues. He still has two natures in the one Person forever. And he's the same Saviour.

Samuel Rutherford has this: 'If Christ pities blind eyes, he also pities a blind heart and all the corruptions of our nature, and his mercy is the more tender that he sees us wrestling with unbelief and burdened, pained and overwhelmed in spirit with a hard heart. Could we lay our spiritual wounds before Christ, he that touched the blind eyes out of tender compassion, can touch a blind heart and loose an obdured soul out of its fetters. That thou mayest say to the prisoners, 'Go forth', Isaiah 49:9. But is that enough to say? Yes it is. His word can break through iron chains and if this were not enough he is anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek and there is more than words. 'He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted'. This is an alms-deed and not a word only. But we do not employ him. We might be afraid if we thought Christ to be changed and that he were not the old Saviour. But he has the same heart and infinite compassion in Heaven, that he had in the days of his flesh'. He is the old Saviour, the sympathetic Saviour, the compassionate Saviour!

The place of emotion in the Christian life.

It is an insult to the Saviour to call in question the place of godly emotion in the Christian life. The difference between mysticism and godly emotion is that mysticism makes our feelings determine truth; it makes our feelings equivalent to revelation. Godly emotion is truth-governed or truth-led emotion. Truth itself is derived from Scripture properly handled.

The Christian has distinctive joys and sorrows, both of which the world knows nothing of. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy' (Jn.16:20). There are distinctive

godly sorrows for the Christian; sorrow for his own sins, sorrow for the cause of Truth, sorrow for the dishonour done to God, sorrow when we consider the terrible condition and danger of sinners in this world. There are distinctive joys – joy and peace in believing; joy in God. These sorrows and joys are believing responses to revealed truth. Of course emotion has a place in biblical Christianity!

Conformity to Christ's compassion.

That aspect of Christ's emotions on earth which is most frequently referred to in the Gospels is his compassion; his being moved with compassion, his having pity upon men and women.

Reformed Christians should be like Christ. Reformed Christians should be Christ-like in their compassion. Reformed people should be known, yes, as people of strict biblical principle. But they should not be known as hard men and women. And we have not rightly grasped the truth if we are. There is nothing reformed about being unfeeling. Ministers particularly should be compassionate.

'And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things' (Mark 6:34). On this occasion, it doesn't talk about his healing miracles, though that was an expression of his compassion. He does not feed them – that was an expression of his compassion. But he taught them many things. That means that a Christ-like minister is to teach many things out of compassion for his fellow-sinners. 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God' (2Cor.5:20). Zeal for God's glory and compassion to men go together as a holy motive for preaching the truth.

Conclusion.

The Lord Jesus cried, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And it was in order that he should say as he said to Mary, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God' (Jn.20:17). Christ cried out, 'My God, my God', in order that we his people should have his God as our God; that we should be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, so that we should be able to sing in truth, 'Yea mine own God is he' (Met Ps.42:11). The promise to Abraham 'to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee' (Gen.17:7) is fulfilled to the elect seed, both of the natural branches and the wild (Rom.11:24), through the One Seed, Christ Jesus (Gal.3:16). He is the 'God of the living' (Mt.22:32) and of both the Jews and the Gentiles also (Rom.3:29) through Christ the mediator. He is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom.8:29) and is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb.2:11) and God is not ashamed to be called our God (Heb.11:16). This covenant bond will reach its perfection: 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name' (Rev.3:12). 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God ... and I will be his God, and he shall be my son' (Rev.21:3&7). That is why the Son of God became a man, and suffered so much in his human emotions, the intensity of sorrow and anguish and he cried out, 'My God, my God'; it was in order that we should be able to call God 'our God' through him. This is our Beloved and this is our Friend.



**"He was moved with compassion toward them,
because they were as sheep not having a shepherd"**



John Knox

Calvin & Knox - A Comparison & Contrast (Part III)

Donald John Maclean (Cambridge)

The substance of a paper given at the 2014 School in Theology.

As we have very briefly gone through the lives of Knox and Calvin we have seen some comparisons and contrasts. We have seen that both men have had their reputations assaulted by the world; we have seen that in both their cases the external call to the ministry preceded the internal call; we have seen that both persevered in the face of setbacks before, under God, their labours were blessed; we have seen that Calvin is the senior figure of the two, and that Knox, though he forms his own opinions, looks to Calvin for advice and guidance. Some further comparisons and contrasts will now be highlighted.

Preaching

If one lesson stands out from the life of both these men it is the power of preaching. Knox usually preached up to five times a week, with sermons lasting up to three hours! He said, 'I consider myself called of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud; by tongue and lively voice in these corrupt days'. Knox was nothing if not a preacher, and it was his preaching that turned the nation of Scotland upside down. Knox truly believed that, 'The person of the speaker is wretched, miserable, and nothing to be regarded, but the things that are spoken are the infallible and eternal truth of God'. Calvin held the same convictions. He could say that Christ's 'kingdom consisteth in the preaching of the gospel ... Christ ... reigns ... as he subdueth unto himself (all the whole) world by the preaching of the gospel'.

And yet there is a clear difference of style. Calvin is more expositional, more rational, more thoughtful. Knox is more immediate, more powerful. There is the well-known description by James Melville of the preaching of the elderly Knox: '[he was] lifted up to the pulpit, where he behovit to lean at his first entry, but ere he had done with his sermon he was so active and vigorous that he was likely to ding the pulpit in pieces and fly out of it'. And there is a place for both. Each preacher brings his

own personality to the pulpit. Paul is not John. Elisha is not Elijah. Knox is not Calvin, and nor should he be. And yet, what mighty preachers both were! It is not so much the style or the mould, but the gospel content of preaching that matters. And God blessed both their preaching to the saving of souls.

Difference in Personality

To continue on the theme of difference, Knox and Calvin were different personalities. Calvin is a man who is quite hard to get to know. To cast it in modern terms he is probably an introvert who does not like to reveal too much of himself. As the standard modern biography of Calvin states: 'He deliberately wrote next to nothing about himself and his life. In the preface to his 1557 commentary on the Psalms he provided a spiritual autobiography, but to the modern eye it is conspicuously short of facts ... There are scattered fragments ... but on the whole we search Calvin's writing in vain for much personal information'. Knox on the other hand is much more visible as a man. You feel you get to know Knox. He wears his heart on his sleeve. We have a record of him in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*. He is a man of action. He is the typical extrovert. He thinks, and he speaks and he acts. As Carlyle has said, 'We find, in that old Edinburgh house of his; a cheery, social man, with faces that loved him! They go far wrong who think this Knox was a gloomy, spasmodic, shrieking fanatic'. And again, neither one nor the other is better. God uses both. And what is wonderful is, that despite their differences in personality, they had such a respect for one another. Calvin regarded Knox as a 'distinguished ... and honoured brother'. And we have seen already that Knox calls Calvin, 'the reverend servant of Jesus Christ, John Calvin'.

One was a writer and a preacher

Continuing on the contrasts Calvin had gifts Knox did not. Knox and Calvin are not equals. For instance Knox

painted a picture of himself as a 'painful preacher of ... [the] blessed Evangel...' rather than a theologian. Again Knox disclaimed himself as a writer, believing it better to use his 'tong and lively voice' than 'compose bokes for the age to come'. Now, Knox has to be challenged somewhat on this description of himself. He was a good theologian (as a preacher he had to be!) and he was a composer of books. His treatise on predestination is a good work, and his writings fill six volumes. But, compared to Calvin he was no theologian, and no writer. He produced no Commentaries or Sermons or Institutes like Calvin. He had his gifts and he used them to the utmost of God's glory. And there is much wisdom in that. Our calling is not to cultivate gifts that God has not given us. We will never be criticised for that. Our calling rather is to use every gift God has given us for His praise and glory.

Both able to be moderate when required

If you think of Knox and Calvin, immediately you probably think of rigidity, of unflinching faithfulness to the truth whatever the cost. And you would be right. But there was also moderation when required. Knox, for instance, advised his former congregation in Berwick to receive the Lord's Supper in the posture of kneeling. He said that 'kneeling at the Lord's Super I have proved to be no convenient gesture for a table ... But because I am but one, having in my contrair magistrates, common order, and judgments of many learned, I am not minded for maintenance of that one thing to gainstand the magistrates, in all other and chief points of religion agreeing with Christ and with His true doctrine, nor yet to break nor trouble common order, [therefore I] thought [kneeling] meet to be kept for unity and peace in the congregations for a time'.

And Calvin, too, was prepared to be flexible. In his 1561 letter to Knox referred to earlier he said, 'With regard to ceremonies, I trust, even should you displease many, that you will moderate your rigour. Of course it is your duty to see the church purged of all defilements which flow from error and superstition. For it behoves us to strive with careful perseverance [sedulously] that the mysteries of God be not polluted by the admixture of ludicrous or disgusting rites. But with this exception, you are well aware that certain things should be tolerated even if you do not quite approve of them'.

Now, Knox and Calvin were passionately concerned with the reformation of worship. John Calvin famously stated that the fundamental principle of the reformation was the reformation of worship: 'If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of

Christianity: that is, a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped...'

The first point in which 'the whole substance of Christianity' is comprehended is particularly the 'mode' of worship. And yet there has to be balance, and a certain degree of toleration.

Both were absolutely and passionately committed to the doctrine of predestination

If Knox and Calvin are known for anything it is their robust and thorough teaching on predestination. They loved the sovereignty of God. Calvin stated, 'The doctrine of Election and Predestination. It is useful, necessary, and most sweet. Ignorance of it impairs the glory of God, plucks up humility by the roots, begets and fosters pride. The doctrine establishes the certainty of salvation, peace of conscience, and the true origin of the church'. Knox similarly stated that 'the doctrine of God's eternal predestination is so necessary to the church of God, that without the same, can faith neither be truly taught, neither surely established; man can never be brought to true humility and knowledge of himself; neither yet can he be ravished in admiration of God's eternal goodness, and so moved to praise Him as appertaineth'.

Both were committed to a holistic vision of the Christian life that impacted every area of society

In particular Knox and Calvin were committed to the importance of care for the poor and also education. Regarding the poor, the First Book of Discipline states, 'Every several kirk must provide for the poor within itself; for fearful and horrible it is, that the poor, whom not only God the Father in his law, but Christ Jesus in his evangel, and the Holy Spirit speaking by Saint Paul, has so earnestly commended to our care, are universally so contemned and despised ... for the widow and fatherless, the aged, impotent, or lame, who neither can nor may travail for their sustenance, we say that God commands His people to be careful. And therefore, for such, as also for persons of honesty fallen in[to] decay and penury, ought such provision be made that [of] our abundance should their indigence be relieved'. In Geneva care for the poor was important too. The deacons had to 'take heed to and care for the sick and administer the pittance for the poor'. A hospital too was maintained 'not only to [care for] the sick but also other aged persons who are unable to work, to widows, orphans and other needy persons'.

In the West today much of this diaconal care has been ceded to the state. But is that right? And are there not opportunities where we could seek to do good to all men, through the provision of hospitality, and thereby advance the witness of the church?

Regarding education the First Book of Discipline states, 'of necessity it is that your honours be most careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm, if either ye now thirst unfeignedly [for] the advancement of Christ's glory, or yet desire the continuance of his benefits to the generation following. For as the youth must succeed to us, so we ought to be careful that they have the knowledge and erudition to profit and comfort that which ought to be most dear to us – to wit, the church and spouse of the Lord Jesus'. As such, 'Of necessity therefore we judge it, that every several church have a schoolmaster appointed, such a one as is able, at least, to teach grammar and the Latin tongue'. Calvin, in the ecclesiastical ordinances of Geneva had a similar concern: 'since it is necessary to prepare for the future in order that the church may not be neglected by the young, it will be necessary to establish a school to instruct the youth, to prepare them not only for the ministry, but for government ... This we hope to do to further the work of God'. An education for all, dedicated to the glory of Christ. Has the church retained that vision?

Men at Best are but Men

But Knox and Calvin had one other thing in common. They were both sinners. We could talk of the faults of Calvin. We could talk of his role in the execution

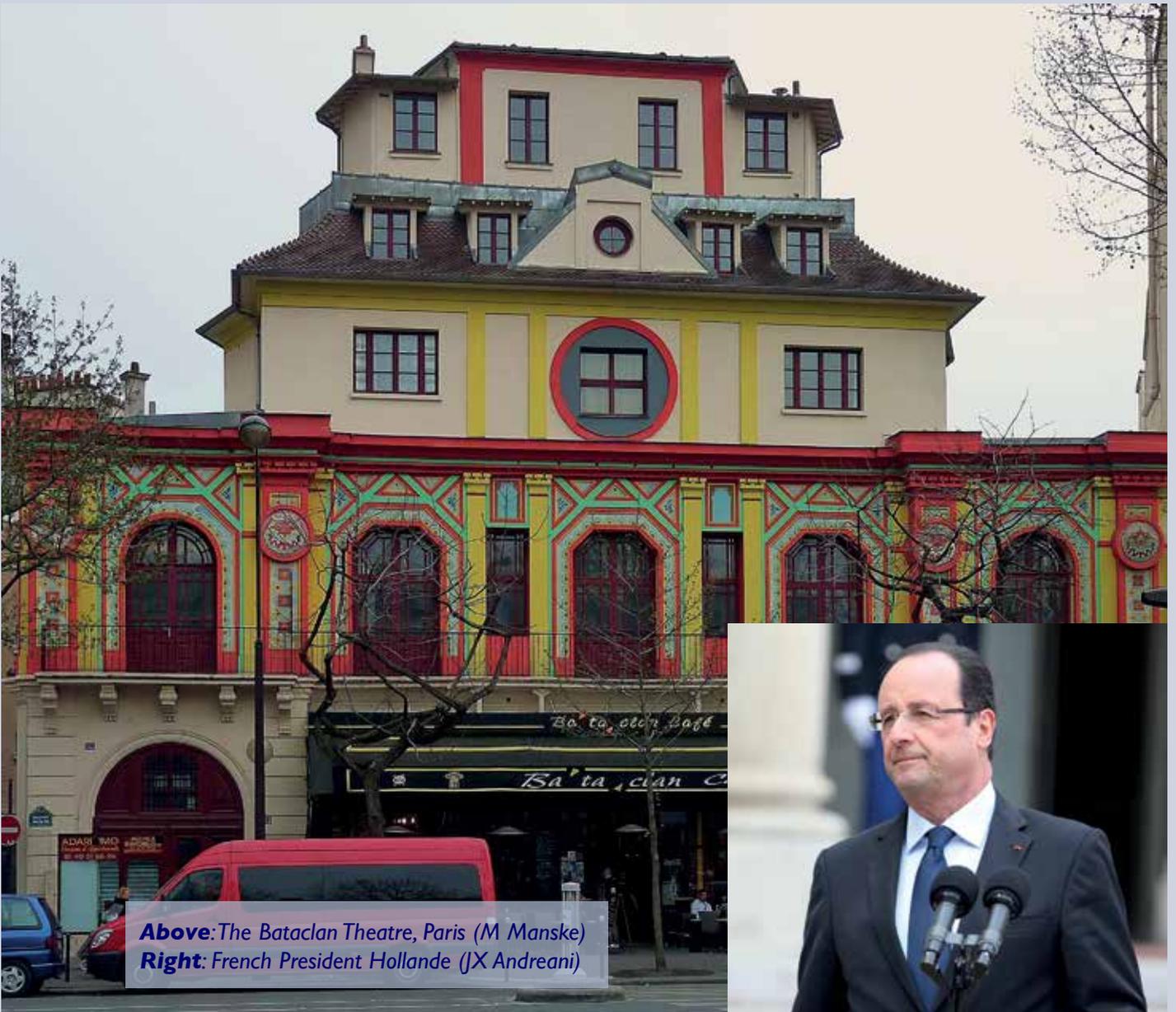
of Servetus. We could talk of his occasional lack of charity in dealing with others, of his occasional lack of Christocentricity in exposition. We could talk of the faults of Knox – of his, at times, overly literal application of the Old Testament; of his alienating people he need not have alienated; of becoming overly involved in the political intrigues of his day. But this would not surprise Knox, who said of himself, 'It hath pleased God of His superabundant grace, to make me, most wretched of many thousands, a witness, minister, and preacher'.

And that in a sense is the wonder of Knox and Calvin, or rather the wonder of God's working in the world. To be confronted with these two giants of the faith reminds us of this one great truth – God in His glory uses weak sinful creatures to turn the world upside down, for 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence' (1 Cor. 1:27-29). To that Knox and Calvin would add their amen, for Knox himself said, 'I sought neither pre-eminence, glory, nor riches; my honour was that Christ Jesus should reign'.





News



Above: The Bataclan Theatre, Paris (M Manske)
Right: French President Hollande (JX Andreani)

Violence in Paris

The Western World was shocked by the violence in Paris on Friday 13th November. At the time of

writing 130 have died and hundreds were injured, many seriously. ISIS claimed responsibility and that the

massacre was done in the name of Islam. The majority of Muslims, of course, would dissociate themselves

Desk



from this barbarity. They wish to live peaceable lives, making money and having a good time, but there is a small, radical minority who hate democracy, Western values and all followers of other religions. Engaged in special door-to-door outreach the following week I was repeatedly asked as to what our take was upon what happened. Many were frightened and feared this would come to Glasgow. Others were filled with hatred and desire for revenge. They spoke of their wish to get a gun and go to fight to destroy ISIS. Some say, If there is a God, how could He allow this to happen? Atheists can pass no moral judgment on what happened. They do not believe in God, and therefore if they are consistent, do not believe in good or evil. Life is simply a series of happenings, the reaction of molecules and the survival of the fittest.

As Christians, we believe that God is in control and we find great comfort in that. All that happens, happens according to the plan of God. He is in control and is working out His own purposes for the glorifying of His name and the salvation of His elect. Further He is a good God, so there will be a good, God-glorifying, ultimate end to this violence. What took place in that concert hall and at the restaurants in Paris shows what is in the human heart. These Islamic terrorists love violence. Sadly, but for the restraining grace of God, there would be far more violence in our society. We thank God for

the residual Christian values in our civilisation.

God raised up Nebuchadnezzar and others to chastise His people in the past. Islamic fundamentalism certainly has that purpose. Trials are beneficial for faith and therefore we are to expect fiery trials. Also God may well use this bloodshed to shake the complacent West out of its spiritual sleep. Will there be increasing violence before a great revival when many will turn to the Lord seeking mercy? A further purpose is to show Muslims how different their religion is from Christianity which teaches men to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them and persecute them. Already we hear of Muslims turning from Islam in disgust. 'God reigneth, let the earth be glad' (Psalm 97:1 metrical).

Sunday Trading

Christian Institute

Plans to extend Sunday trading in England and Wales have been put on hold by the Government, after a cross-party group of MPs said they would oppose the move.

A vote on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill was expected in the House of Commons in November, which would have devolved the issue of Sunday trading to local authorities. But 20 Conservative MPs, the Labour Party and MPs from the SNP and the DUP have all said they oppose the plans.

According to the BBC, the Government maintains that there has been 'absolutely' no U-turn on

the issue. And The Daily Telegraph has reported that the Government still hopes to extend Sunday trading using the Enterprise Bill. The 20 Tory MPs, including David Burrowes, Fiona Bruce and Caroline Ansell, raised their concerns about the policy in a letter published in The Daily Telegraph on 11th November. They said: 'Scrapping Sunday trading restrictions will not help high streets; instead it will benefit large out-of-town business. The latest estimates suggest that small shops would lose £870 million in sales, resulting in 3,720 job losses in the retail sector'. The letter also highlighted recent polling, showing that more than two-thirds of people do not want to see the law changed.

We are happy for any restraint or delay in the desecration of the Sabbath.

Gambling Machines

Christian Institute

David Cameron has come under fire from his own MPs after a review of dangerous Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) was blocked.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport had proposed a review of the machines, dubbed the 'crack cocaine' of gambling, but the move has been blocked by the Cabinet Office. Conservative MPs believe the block was sanctioned by No 10, prompting anger that their concerns are being ignored.

Charles Walker, the Vice-Chairman of the 1922 Committee of Conservative backbenchers, said



Mr Hussain with his damaged car.

that there are a 'growing number of colleagues on our benches who are concerned about FOBTs'. He said he would have 'very much welcomed a review', and added 'I don't like the idea of them, I don't like the way they operate and I don't like the way that the betting industry tries to defend them'.

Mr Walker continued: 'We all know what they are – they are a way of extracting vast sums of money from people who can mostly ill-afford to lose it'.

We are against all gambling. This form is one of the worst.

Persecution in UK

Christian Institute

A father-of-six who converted from Islam to Christianity is recovering in hospital after being violently attacked in Bradford on 17th November.

Nissar Hussain was set upon as he walked towards his car outside his house. The attack was captured by Hussain's home CCTV cameras which show two men emerging from a car at around 5pm and attacking the 49-year-old. Neighbours quickly come to his aid, as the men are driven off.

Police are investigating the attack as a religious hate crime, and have urged witnesses to come forward.

Speaking about the incident, Hussain said: 'I couldn't see their faces. It happened so quickly that I couldn't run.

One immediately hit me with a pick axe. The full force was on my head, I put up my arm instinctively to protect my head and that's how my hand got broke. From there I tried to back pedal and my heel caught the kerb. I fell and from that point I was a lame target. They laced into me'.

It is understood that Nissar and his wife Kubra

converted to Christ in 1996. In 2008 the family were part of a Channel 4 documentary about people who have left the Muslim faith.

We thank God for those who stand firm in the midst of persecution.

Russia in Syria

E Kendal

Many hundreds of Sunni jihadist groups are fighting in Syria, but virtually all are aligned with either al-Qaeda (represented by al-Nusra) or Islamic State (IS). While al-Qaeda and IS diverge on strategy, they have the same goals – to establish a Caliphate and attack the West – and the same attitude towards Christians, who must convert, submit or die. While the 'young guns' of IS excel in spectacular theatrics, the 'old guard' of al-Qaeda excel in strategy. While IS attracts more youths, it is also far more vulnerable.

Also, though al-Qaeda is rarely mentioned in the media these days (for political reasons), it is just as dangerous as ever. In February, when it became apparent that the Iran nuclear deal would empower Iran massively, regime-changers Turkey and Saudi Arabia began escalating their assistance to rebels, in the hope they could oust Syrian President Bashar al Assad before Iranian funds were unfrozen and sanctions lifted. Subsequently, five Sunni jihadist groups announced an alliance. Led by al-Qaeda's al-Nusra and backed by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the Jaysh al Fateh (Army of Conquest) coalition includes US-armed and trained jihadists formerly associated with the Free Syrian Army. By late March Jaysh al Fateh had captured the provincial capital of Idlib and was



threatening the Alawite heartland of Latakia.

As Jaysh al Fateh advanced through Idlib into north-west Hama and launched rockets into Latakia, IS seized Palmyra and started expanding towards Damascus. On 12 August, with Islamic jihadists advancing on two critical fronts, we appealed for the Lord's intervention. As the situation continued to deteriorate we prayed concerning the Christian crisis and appealed again for the Lord's intervention.

On 28 September Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the UN General Assembly. Putin noted that foreign support for illegal regime change along with the arming of terrorists has reaped nothing but disaster and insecurity. Consequently he appealed for co-operation in the fight against terrorism, which, as he noted, is a threat to everyone. (Russia particularly is at risk with an estimated 2000 'Chechens' fighting with IS and with al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Syria.) On 30 September Russia started bombing Jaysh al Fateh positions in north-west Hama and Idlib. Aided by Russian air-cover, the Syrian army has been able to roll back Jaysh al Fateh, thereby securing sanctuary in Alawite-dominated Latakia (which is also home to many Christians and thousands of refugees) and Tartus (where Russia has long had a naval base). Russia has also been bombing IS positions from Palmyra (central Homs) and Ghouta (eastern Damascus) to the commercial capital of Aleppo in the north. Friday 16 October saw the launch of a new Battle for Aleppo. Danger looms for Aleppo's remnant Armenians and Assyrians, for not only have Sunni rebel forces acquired much US-made heavy weaponry which they will be firing into government-held districts, but Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani is on the ground in Aleppo leading an array of Shi'ite militias. Whilst the Alawite-dominated Syrian army has long protected Syrian Christians, how Iranian and Arab Shi'ite militias will respond to the Christians they come across is really unknown.

Meanwhile, the emir of al-Qaeda's al-Nusra, Abu Muhammad al Julani, has issued a video message entitled 'The Russian Intervention – The Last Arrow'. Referring to Russians as 'Eastern Crusaders', he called for mujahideen

in the Caucasus (southern Russia) to match the killings in Syria: for every jihadi a Russian soldier; for every Syrian civilian a Russian civilian. He also called for greater jihadist unity in Syria and for an escalation in rocket attacks against Nusayri (Alawite) towns and villages. This conflict is sure to escalate. How bad it gets will doubtless depend on how long it takes the West to correctly identify the enemy.

Please pray asking God to:

**forge unity and co-operation in the fight against international Islamic jihad and the Islamic ascendancy and stop repeating the errors of the past; may we put aside the ambitions, interests and hatreds that since the mid-19th century have allowed Islam to play the West against the East.*

** shield, guide and provide for his existentially imperilled people as the Syrian conflict escalates and intensifies around them, praying especially at this time for remnant Armenian and Assyrian Christians in war-ravaged Aleppo.*

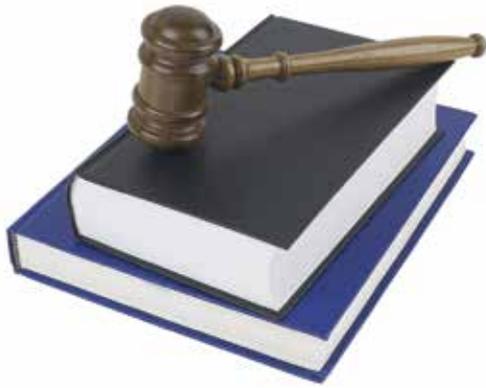
London Free Church (Continuing) Outreach

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) began holding services every Sabbath in London on the 25th of October. We believe there is a need for the distinctive emphasis of the Free Church (Continuing): evangelistic, experimental, expository, applicatory, reformed, protestant, presbyterian and psalm-singing. As a Church, unlike many other churches, we are totally committed to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, to holiness of life, to church discipline and to purity of worship. Services for the time being are held in Putney Evangelical Church, Sefton Street, Putney, SW15 1NA (kindly granted, but we understand the building is being sold to a developer) at 3pm and 6pm with refreshments and fellowship in between. Location details: <http://www.putneyevangelicalchurch.org.uk/location.html>.

For further information and to check venue and times of services please contact Rev William Macleod, email: william@themacleods.org.uk, tel. 0141 959 0292 or Mr Stephen Pontin, email: stephen.pontin@ntlworld.com, tel. (07852 571040).



Current Temporary location: Putney Evangelical Church



Books

Baptism

Rev John Macleod (Rtd)

Free Church (Continuing)

Copies can be obtained from Rev David Blunt, 17 Knockline, North Uist, HS6 5DT, bklt, 16pp, £2.00.

This is a useful addition to the 'Finding out about...' series of booklets issued by the Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Rev John Macleod writes clearly, orderly and concisely. Much ground is covered in this short treatment. The meaning of baptism is explained including its significance for the one baptised. The case for infant baptism is clearly given. With regard to the mode, it is shown that immersion is unnecessary and that it cannot be decisively shown to have been practised in even one case in the New Testament. It is extremely unlikely to have been used either on the day of Pentecost or in the prison in Philippi. The interesting point is made that water was brought for the baptism of Cornelius rather than him being brought to the water; 'Can any man forbid water...' (Acts 10:47). Sprinkling is the emblem used of the giving of the Spirit (Ezek.36:25). The role of the kirk session and congregation is emphasised along with that of the parents in caring and praying for the baptised child.

Rev William Macleod

Mr Hill's Big Picture

John Fowler

Saint Andrew Press,
pbk, 216 pp, £9.99.

A whole book about a single picture seems a bit extravagant, but then it is no ordinary picture. The vast oil painting of the General Assembly of 1843 is a remarkable memento of that

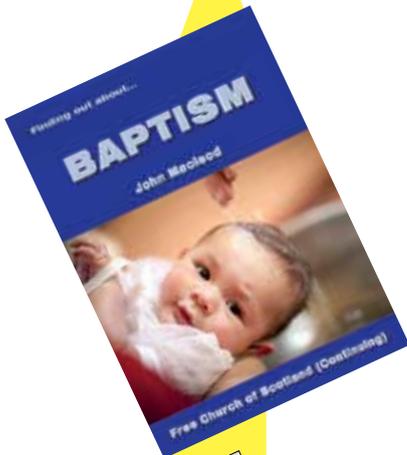
great occasion, a reminder of the massive scale, and tremendous importance of the Disruption.

A shaft of sunlight from above illuminates Thomas Chalmers in the Moderator's chair, and Dr Patrick M'Farlan, as he signs away the richest living in Scotland for a Free Church minister's stipend. Assembled around them are 450 individual portraits, each one an exact and careful likeness, of the founding ministers, elders and key supporters of the Free Church of Scotland, together forming an extraordinary visual representation of the great Assembly. Above the painting are inscribed the words: 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness'.

The cover of this book is superb – the great painting displayed as on an invisible wall, while in the foreground, a father and son in modern dress gaze upon the scene. The sub-title says it all: 'The day that changed Scotland forever – captured on canvas'.

The book is about more than the painting, of course, and encompasses a narrative of the whole Disruption controversy, an account of the leading figures, and especially the genesis of the great picture. Written in a fresh and easy style, by professional journalist John Fowler, the volume introduces us to the artist, David Octavius Hill, and his photographer, Robert Adamson. It is fascinating to read evidence that these men, Free Church members both, were indeed committed Christians.

Hill devoted 23 years to the massive endeavour of the Disruption painting, working on it from 1843 onwards, until its eventual completion in 1866. The technical challenge was vast: to get each individual, some of them ministering in



remote corners of the British Isles, and indeed of the whole world, to sit individually for portraits would be out of the question. Therefore, the pioneering art of photography was harnessed to capture the necessary likenesses.

Fowler gives fascinating insight into the difficulty of early photography, with mechanical supports sometimes necessary to hold the posers in place for the long exposure times, and many hours of patient chemical washing required for the development of each image. These primitive calotypes, as they were called, of founding Free Church Fathers, such as Chalmers, are among the earliest photographic portraits taken, and the collection is quite as interesting as the eventual painting itself.

Over time, the gathering grew and grew as more and yet more faces were added. Hill's determination to make his painting a definitive record of the early Free Church led him to add many faces of men obliged to be absent from the first General Assembly in Tanfield Hall, including at least one belated commissioner who continued to sit in the Established Church Assembly that day and only later cast in his lot with the Free Church. Apparently, Mrs Hill became so impatient with the slow progress that she began rising early in the morning to fill in shirt-fronts and cuffs before her husband was in his studio!

The end result is a gathering quite overwhelming, and such is the size and detail of the work that reproduction is difficult. A high-resolution rendering is included as a fold-out inside the rear cover of the volume, but even that cannot do justice to the vast picture and individual faces remain somewhat blurred. In truth, the painting is not a great success as a piece of art, so overwhelming is the sheer number of individuals portrayed. One genuinely cannot see the wood for the trees in looking at this painting, and the significance of the occasion is somewhat lost. George Harvey's *Quitting the Manse* is a far more successful visualisation of the sacrifice of the Disruption fathers.

In his narrative, Fowler wishes to bring his readers back to the Disruption; but in this, he does not wholly succeed either. Like many secular authors, he doesn't quite get it. He does not understand what the Headship of Christ means, nor does he appreciate that the difference between the people's choice and the patron's appointee was usually the difference between a fervent Gospel preacher, a winner of souls, and a stipend-seeking placeholder. He understands the Disruption as a movement of democratic assertion, not as the outpouring of Evangelical conviction and commitment it truly was. In giving subsequent history, the usual sneers about 'Wee Frees' are cheerfully included – does anyone still talk about 'Wee Frees' nowadays except supercilious journalists? No understanding is shown of the rapid defection of the next generation of Free Churchmen

from their commitment to confessional truth.

Fowler is also careless in details, especially in misspelling so many names that one almost wonders if he is testing us: 'Horatio Bonnar', 'Merle D'Aubignon', 'Richard Buchanan' and so forth. Furthermore, despite telling us much about the calotypes, he fails to include a single reproduction of them in the book, though thankfully Google searches will obtain most of them. Worst of all, despite including the reproduction of the painting itself, he fails to include the key. This is a staggering omission – a whole book about a painting and it does not even name everyone in it!

But this book is genuinely recommended. It is a fresh and lively work, easily read, that brings alive again the events of the Disruption. For any who would like a fresh reminder of how we came to be the FREE Church, and to be introduced to the painting that commemorates that, a quick read of Mr Hill's Big Picture would be just the answer.

Rev Alasdair J Macleod

Staying Pure Online

Lovewise

CD and accompanying information book, 14 Portland Terrace, Newcastle, NE2 1QQ, Tel. 0191 281 3636, www.lovewise.org.uk, £10.

This is a resource to help parents and church leaders teach young people about the dangers of watching pornography in contrast to the blessings of following God's design for relationships.

Lovewise was set up in 1992 by two paediatricians and a Secondary-school headteacher in Newcastle in response to their concerns about the number of young people affected by family breakdown and damaging relationships. The organisation produces a variety of online and printed material for parents, schools and churches.

We live in a day when access to the internet is almost essential in most areas of life and whilst there are undoubted benefits it is also the case that much unprofitable, and indeed sinful, material can easily be accessed. It is against this background that *Staying Pure Online* has been produced by Lovewise.

The resource consists of a CD aimed at 14 – 18 year old teenagers and an accompanying information book for the use of parents or youth group leaders. The CD contains over 50 Powerpoint type slides under five main headings: What is pornography; Why is pornography wrong?; The dangers of pornography; Avoiding pornography, and, If you have made mistakes. The third part is further subdivided into a further five sections which describe in more detail the terrible consequences of pornography. The information book includes the images from the CD with detailed notes, further information and references. It is suggested that the CD is viewed by the young

person with an adult – either a parent or youth leader – guiding discussion utilising the information contained in the booklet. I personally think that most parents would however prefer to address this, and other such sensitive issues, with their own children rather than 'delegating' such responsibility to others.

A clear message is given throughout the presentation of the Biblical institution of marriage and how this is a picture of God's relationship with His people. Specific advice is given regarding the importance of reading God's Word and attending the means of grace to help protect us from situations of temptation and falling into sin. The presentation contains almost thirty Biblical quotations and whilst it is disappointing that these are mainly from the ESV as opposed to the AV with which most of our people will be more familiar, it is

nevertheless encouraging that the resource is so clearly grounded in the Word of God.

The final section of the presentation offers hope to those who have 'made mistakes', ie in some way been ensnared by pornography. There is a clear presentation of the Gospel and that 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'.

Lovewise are to be commended for their efforts in addressing these important matters in a day when the prevailing worldview is so contrary to that of God's Word. I believe this resource could if used in a careful and sensitive manner, be of help to young adults and parents with young children.

Dr Andrew Naylor, Leverburgh

The Blessing of Small Numbers

Rev Alasdair J Macleod (Knock & Point)

The substance of this article was delivered as a devotional address on Judges 7: 1-8 to the 2014 Free Church School in Theology, Larbert.

Introduction – Purpose in Smallness

Churches that take a stance for Reformed truth differ in many respects, but nearly always share one common characteristic – they are small. We find that too many respond to Gospel truth as they responded to our Lord in His earthly ministry: 'This is an hard saying; who can hear it?' And just as the Master found, many 'went back, and walked no more with him', so it is in the Reformed Church in our day of spiritual declension. We can be grieved by such sin, and that is not wrong. But as God's people, we recognize the truth of the Apostle's words: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to purpose' (Rom.8:28). This indicates that there is a beneficial purpose for us in these sinful departures, if we can but learn it. There is purpose in our smallness.

In Judges 7:1-8 we find that the Lord purposefully reduces the number of the army of Gideon in preparation for the battle that will secure the deliverance of God's people from the persecution of the Midianites. He has a purpose that is both good and wise, which requires smallness. In the moment, it must have seemed mystifying; but in the

light of the whole story, we understand God's wisdom in reducing Israel's army. This passage can help us to discern God's purpose in our own smallness. We recognize that for Gideon, smallness was ultimately a blessing and a privilege, and we too may see privilege and blessing, even in the discomfort and hurt of reduced numbers. We will therefore address the passage under the theme: 'The Privileges of Smallness in Christian Service', discussing three such privileges.

I. Smallness Glorifies God Not Man

See how the Lord Himself explains to Gideon the need for the reduction: 'The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me' (v.2). Imagine the vast crowd: 32,000 men gathered together, ready for battle, firing up one another with enthusiasm and determination. Still they are outnumbered, some four to one, by the enemy, but, given the right conditions and tactics, the odds of victory are not impossible. And so God warns that, given victory, the soldiers will consider the achievement their own, and take the praise to themselves. And God does not just intend to secure their deliverance; He is saving them for

a purpose which is that He might receive their worship and obedience. And we in the New Testament Church are saved for the same purpose.

See therefore that smallness teaches man's need. When 32,000 men surrounded them, then Israelite soldiers could forget God; when they were down to 300, then they had to trust in Him – there was no rational alternative. Victory was impossible without supernatural aid. That applies equally to the Christian Church, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: ... that no flesh should glory in his presence' (1Cor.1:26-29). It is when we see vast numbers attending public worship and professing Christ's name, the church functioning as a well-oiled machine, a steady stream of converts, that we are apt to forget the desperate need we have of God's grace at every moment. In our little churches, we have the privilege of seeing the reality of our need, of seeing that apart from the power of God our Church has no hope and no future. We have no room for complacency, and therefore, if we are to avoid despair, we are obligated to trust in the power of Almighty God, who can, by His grace, win victories over the forces of sin with our unpromising and inadequate little gatherings.

Smallness also demonstrates the Spirit's power. He can and does work through this unpromising little army, and through our reduced churches, as the Word says: 'Not

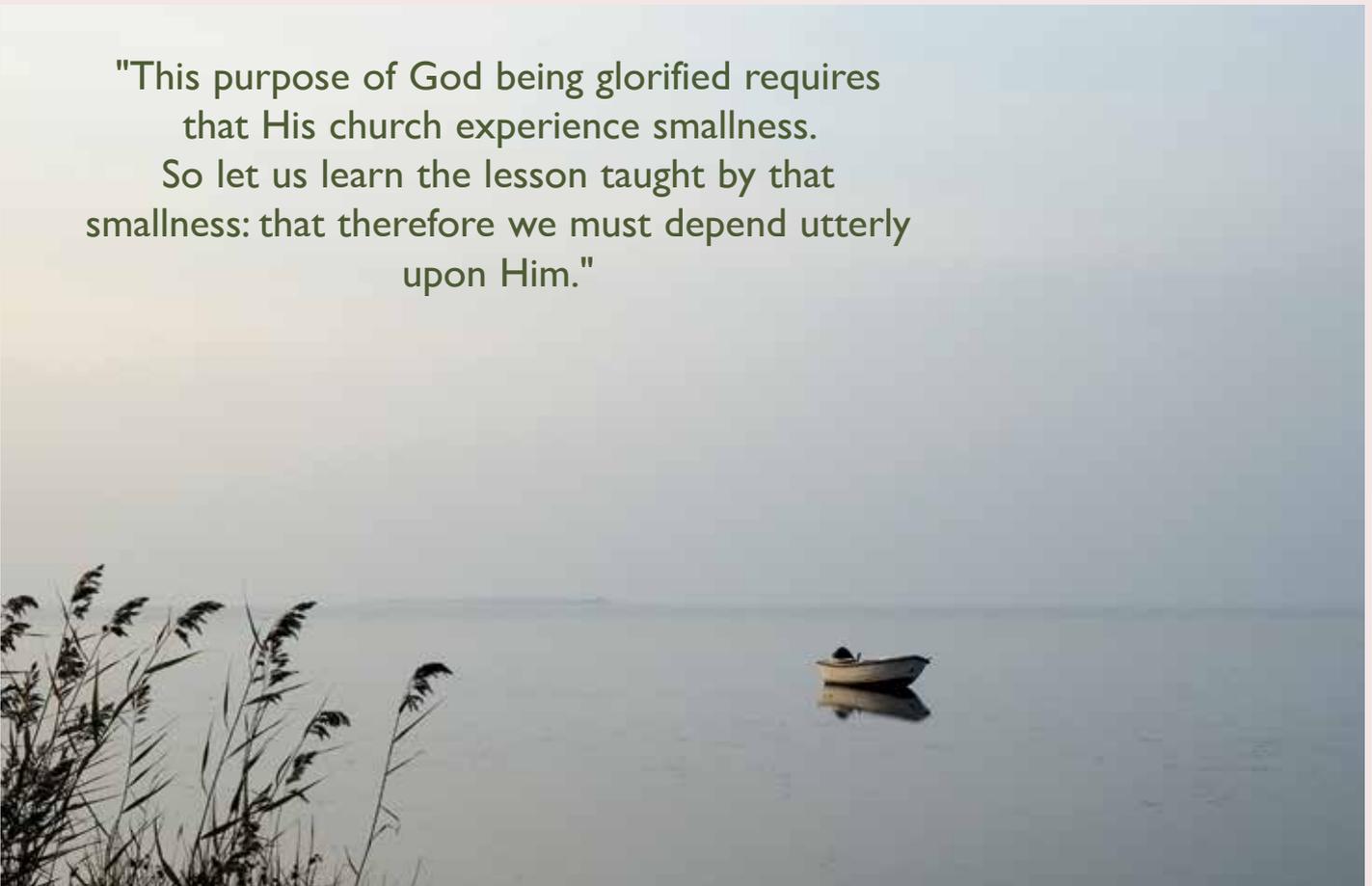
by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts' (Zech.4:6). It is memorably expressed by John Benton: when someone appears to be converted at the mega-church down the road, with the boy band on the stage, the trendy pastor, the young and enthusiastic crowd, one can only wait and see. But when one is converted in the church with just two old ladies, a blind man and his dog, then you realize that something remarkable, indeed supernatural, has occurred.

Therefore we see that smallness exhibits God's grace. As the Lord said to Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2Cor.12:9). What did He mean, 'made perfect'? It indicates that His strength is shown with the greatest clarity, when it is working in the weak and powerless. So this purpose of God being glorified requires that His church experience smallness. So let us learn the lesson taught by that smallness: that therefore we must depend utterly upon Him.

II. Smallness Proves the Faith of God's People

The Lord commands Gideon: 'Proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand' (v.3). Gideon gave his soldiers the opportunity to depart, and it turned

"This purpose of God being glorified requires that His church experience smallness. So let us learn the lesson taught by that smallness: that therefore we must depend utterly upon Him."



Congregational Remittances - November 2015

| | CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2015 | | | | ORDINARY REMITTANCES | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| | | 2015 Nov | 2015 To Nov | 2014 To Nov | | 2015 Nov | 2015 To Nov | 2014 To Nov |
| Presbytery of Inverness | | | | | | | | |
| Aberdeen | 205 | 1,300 | 20,243 | 20,191 | | | | |
| Duthil-Dores | 21,719 | 762 | 25,550 | 24,972 | | | | |
| Inverness | | 3,100 | 30,216 | 25,990 | | | | |
| Kilmorack & Strathglass | | 1,400 | 20,085 | 21,021 | | | | |
| Poolewe & Aultbea | 397 | 800 | 11,187 | 11,273 | | | | |
| Total Inverness | 22,321 | 7,362 | 107,281 | 103,447 | | | | |
| Northern Presbytery | | | | | | | | |
| Assynt & Scourie | 427 | 3,000 | 5,205 | 5,975 | | | | |
| Brora | 620 | 800 | 15,233 | 17,058 | | | | |
| Kiltearn | 879 | 1,000 | 8,012 | 7,212 | | | | |
| Tarbat | | 1,000 | 11,101 | 12,414 | | | | |
| Total Northern | 1,926 | 5,800 | 39,550 | 42,659 | | | | |
| Southern Presbytery | | | | | | | | |
| Arran | 498 | 297 | 9,293 | 8,352 | | | | |
| Ayr | | 0 | 13,883 | 9,195 | | | | |
| Dumfries | | 0 | 100 | 0 | | | | |
| Edinburgh | 18,696 | 2,250 | 28,683 | 30,242 | | | | |
| Glasgow - Partick | 9,364 | 1,600 | 22,600 | 26,600 | | | | |
| Glasgow - Shettleston | 64 | 1,000 | 25,662 | 25,200 | | | | |
| Glasgow - Knightswood | 331 | 1,000 | 25,314 | 28,177 | | | | |
| Rothsay | | 1,000 | 3,130 | 1,000 | | | | |
| Total Southern | 28,953 | 7,147 | 128,665 | 128,766 | | | | |

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Cross | | 1,968 | 21,513 | 24,533 |
| Harris - Leverburgh | 400 | 1,150 | 18,664 | 17,994 |
| Harris - Scalpay | | 0 | 25,567 | 28,133 |
| Knock & Point | | 1,770 | 19,006 | 14,811 |
| North Uist | 4,011 | 1,000 | 13,887 | 12,449 |
| Stornoway | 5,187 | 6,542 | 82,503 | 100,647 |
| Total Outer Hebrides | 9,598 | 12,430 | 181,141 | 198,568 |

Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Bracadale & Duirinish | | 1,100 | 12,594 | 18,788 |
| Kilmuir & Stenscholl | 160 | 1,300 | 15,514 | 18,916 |
| Lochalsh | 420 | 1,650 | 15,332 | 17,818 |
| Strath | 55 | 400 | 7,720 | 7,649 |
| Portree | 500 | 1,200 | 13,200 | 20,495 |
| Snizort | | 1,300 | 23,395 | 24,743 |
| Total Skye | 1,135 | 6,950 | 87,756 | 108,409 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--|---|---|-------|
| Smiths Falls | | 0 | 0 | 2,000 |
|--------------|--|---|---|-------|

Total Congregations **63,933** **39,689** **544,393** **583,848**

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----|--------|--------|
| Other Donations | 346 | 973 | 26,004 | 26,291 |
| Legacy | | 0 | 0 | 111 |

TOTAL **64,279** **40,662** **570,397** **610,249**

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-------|---------|---------|
| Including Gift Aid | | 2,704 | 122,319 | 130,773 |
|--------------------|--|-------|---------|---------|

Continued from previous page

out that more than two thirds of his army did not truly believe in an Israelite victory, and were not really trusting that God would deliver the Midianites into their hands. The believers had to watch as most of their comrades mumbled their excuses and made their way out of the camp. Yet see the faith of that minority! Ten thousand men believed in God and in His victory, and determined to stand with Gideon.

Smallness therefore tests faith. Large numbers can test faith as well, as David found, numbering Israel to draw encouragement from his armies rather than his God, and so incurring His wrath. We are tested in the opposite direction, to persevere and press on when numbers are so few as to challenge our faith. We see the half-hearted and the disbelieving fall by the wayside, yet we remain. We continue to attend the despised church, we continue to read our despised Bibles, we continue to pray to our despised God, and we prove the reality of our faith by our adherence to it amid such circumstances. For all our discouragement, we do believe in God, and trust in Christ for salvation. And this very adherence in the face of challenge, contempt, and hostility, can itself assure and encourage us with the reality of the work of God in our souls. It must be of Him, for how else would we persevere?

And our faith is recognized. Ever after, these 10,000 soldiers would have that noble commendation: 'He was one of those who stood with Gideon against Midian, when most went home'. And we who profess Christ's name have the honour to continue to serve Him in a hard and challenging day, knowing that our Lord sees the challenges we face. Note the Lord's sympathy for His church in Philadelphia: 'Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name' (Rev.3:8). The Divine verdict was: a little church, not much strength and yet persevering in faithfulness! Let us be encouraged that He looks upon our small church with such compassion.

III. Smallness Demonstrates the Preciousness of Salvation

The final reduction of Gideon's army comes in the division of the majority from the 300 whom God has chosen, who are identified by Gideon by the way that they drink water (vv.4-8). All 10,000 want to fight, but only 300 will at last have that privilege. This speaks to the Christian church of the marvel of God's election of some to salvation, and of the wonder and privilege of being one chosen for such eternal blessing.

The division is between those who stood and lapped water from their hands, and those who knelt down to drink. The commentators do not agree: some think this is an arbitrary division, just a characteristic to separate the chosen 300. In this case, it would speak to us of election in the eternal plan of God, not rooted in any merit of our own, but solely of His good pleasure. Other commentaries suggest that those soldiers who lapped exhibited a more vigilant demeanour that was itself commendable. In this case, the division would speak to us of election from the human perspective, that God has chosen for salvation those who earnestly seek Him. But of course we know that our seeking is a product of God's work in us, just as God determined the soldiers' apparent vigilance. Either way, we are told of the preciousness of election. What a wonderful thing it is to be saved, and especially from a generation that has overwhelmingly rejected the Gospel of Christ. In our fewness, we see the marvel of such a choice, just as the 300 could see by their fewness the incredible privilege of being part of God's army, chosen for victory!

And those of us in ministry can see an additional privilege, that of helping and leading those chosen for this victory, like one of Gideon's officers. We may sometimes feel that our hearers are few, and question the worth of leading such tiny groups towards glory; yet when we recognize the preciousness of a human soul, we see the wonder of being able to help even one individual towards everlasting victory. Psalm 102 prophesies the time when Christ's Kingdom will know universal blessing, and identifies that the time will come when 'thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof' (vv.13-14). Do you feel that you are just sweeping up the dust of the Kingdom? Well, is that not precious, and wonderful, and can we not love the very dust of Christ's building site?

See then the preciousness of advancing that Kingdom. The 300 were chosen to win, and so have we been chosen by God to obtain victory both here on earth, and an everlasting crown in His Kingdom. The Psalmist prophesies the coming blessing: 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee' (Ps.22:27). So let us delight to prepare for it, as our service to Him. Consider the words of the prophecy of the rebuilding of God's Temple: 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things?' (Zec 4:9-10). Small things prepare for great, as the modestly-sized second Temple prepared for the coming of its incomparably more glorious fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Himself. Just so, let us lay foundations, not despising the day in which we live, waiting for the

time when His glorious promises of worldwide blessing are fulfilled!

Conclusion – Privilege of the Day of Small Things

Therefore, let us minister as men of faith; pray believing that He can and will answer in power; preach convinced that His power will follow the faithful proclamation of His Word; teach the young, trusting they will uphold the cause in days of greater things; and thus lay the foundation for the blessing yet to come! Let us embrace these privileges of smallness in Christian service.

A Sunday School Teacher's Prayer

Make of my heart an upper room, I pray,
Swept clean of pride; let self be but a door
Through which young lives may come to Thee this day
To know Thee as they have not known before.
Speak through my voice that they may hear Thine own;
Shine through my life in beauty and in truth,
That they may see the Saviour Christ alone,
And in the glad impulsiveness of youth
Rise up, as did those fisher-lads of Thine
Who left their boats and nets to follow Thee;
So may they walk beside Thee, these of mine
Whom out of all the world thou gavest me.

Author Unknown



“ Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.
And in thy majesty ride prosperously...
Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies;
whereby the people fall under thee.
Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”

Psalm 45:3-6