Free Church Witness

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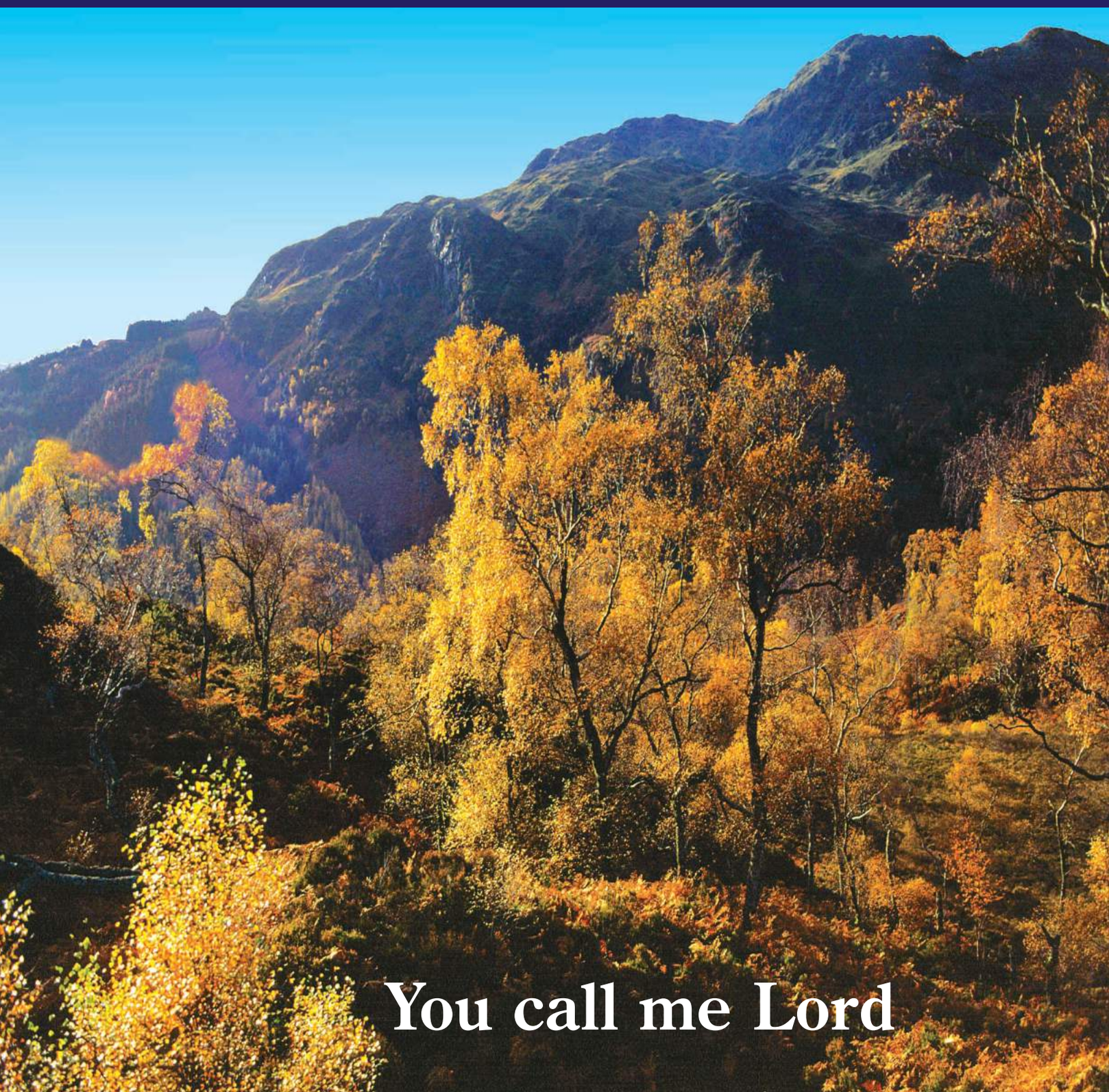

You call me Lord

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You call me Lord

Many people claim to be Christians but their life contradicts what they say. Jesus was grieved and so pleaded with His followers, 'Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' (Lk.6:46). Lots of men and women claimed to believe in Him and be His disciples but they lived evil lives. He tells of a man who dug deep and built his house on the solid rock. It stood in the floods and tempest. Such is the one who takes seriously the teaching of Jesus and seeks by grace to obey it. Another man built on the earth of his own ideas and feelings and the advice of mere men, but when the storm came it fell because it had no foundation. What is your guide for living?

1. An unchanged life

You claim to be a Christian but your life is unchanged. It is easy to say 'I'm a Christian', but are you? We are all born sinners. We need to be born again. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature' (2Cor.5:17). But are you essentially the same old person? Where is the conversion? You are not a criminal, or an outrageous sinner. You are actually quite respectable, but sadly unconverted. You live as you always did, just drifting through life. Is that true?

2. Living like the world

You say Jesus is Lord but your life is just like the ungodly world. You love the world and the things which are in the world. Actually the god or prince of this world is your real master. We read of the Israelites that they 'mingled among the heathen, and learned their works' (Psalm 106:35). The pleasures and pastimes of the world excite you. The values and fashions of this evil age are unquestioningly absorbed by you and become your own. Is Christ really your Lord or is it the world?

3. Self is Lord

You call Jesus Lord but really you are the master. Self is powerful. Our first parents in paradise were tempted to be free, to be like God knowing good and evil, to do their own thing. Unconverted man resents the restrictions of God's law. Sometimes people will justify their actions by arguing that as Christians we are not under the law but under grace and not under the old covenant but the new covenant and so not tied to keeping the ten commandments. Legalism is condemned, but legalism is trying to earn salvation by keeping the law, which of course is wrong. People say all our sins are forgiven so we should not bother about them. But who is lord and master of your life? Is Jesus your Lord or is self the master?

4. You don't want to know God's commandment

You declare Jesus is Lord but you do not want to know His commands. You hide from the truth because you do not wish your conscience disturbed. There is a certain comfort in ignorance. When someone tries to inform you, you close your ears and your mind. You say that it is too

complicated. You don't understand. Someday you will study it. But if the brother or sister persists you are offended. You say you love Christ but actually prefer not to know His laws. Jesus says 'If you love me, keep my commandments' (Jn.14:15).

5. You don't really want God's guidance

You claim to be a follower of the Lord, you say you wish to be guided by Him, you pray for guidance but you don't really want it. You have made up your own mind. After the death of Gedaliah the Jews who remained in Israel came to Jeremiah asking him to pray to God for guidance for them as to whether they should flee to Egypt or stay in the land (Jer.42:1-3). However when Jeremiah told them the word of the Lord, they rejected it and set off to Egypt. They had made up their minds and the only answer to prayer which they would accept was a confirmation that they were right. Do you ask God for guidance but really you have made up your own mind without His help?

6. You are so busy in the world

You call Jesus Lord but you have little time to give Him. Your life is swallowed up by work, business, family and home. These things are fine in themselves and we must all work to provide for our families but has work or your family become your god? You say you love God but you can make little time for Him. Someone looking from outside at your life would see that your religion is not your top priority.

7. You keep a pet sin

You say you have given your life to Christ but there is one area that you exclude from Him. There is one sin which you will not give up. You say it is just a little one but Jesus demands your whole heart. There is one thing which you know is wrong but you will not stop. We all have our besetting sins but they are the ones on which we have to declare war. If Jesus is our Lord we can make no truce with sin.

8. You are worldly

You think you are a true disciple of Jesus and follow Him, yet you are worldly. He says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me' (Lk.9:23). We are told, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col.3:1-3). Recently visiting County Donegal in the Irish Republic I was amazed at the many grand houses – the walls, the gates, the drives, the gardens and the houses themselves, spoke of luxury and wealth. But there was another message which came through. This world means a lot to us. We are going to be here for a long time. It's our heaven. What about you? Are you setting your heart on this world?

9. A life dominated by pleasure

The Christian regards Jesus as Lord but does the part pleasure has in your own life not prove that these other things are more important to you. What part does music, films, TV, YouTube, social media, hobbies, eating and drinking have in your life? Are they your chief delight without which you could not imagine life? What gets you most excited – Is it Christ and the things of God, or your pleasures?

10. An unwillingness to suffer for Him

You say Jesus is Lord but you will not take up your cross and follow Him. When did you last suffer for siding with the Lord? Do you carefully avoid any suffering for Christ? You are happy with a Christianity which causes you no embarrassment. Once pain or trouble or financial loss is threatened, you then compromise. Is that the case? We began with Christ's words, 'And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' (Lk.6:46). He used similarly challenging words in the Sermon on the Mount recorded by Matthew: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Mt.7:21-23). You trust in Jesus as your Saviour; follow Him also as your King. Let him be Master.

Turton's Pillar III

Incidents from the life of James Turton (1839 - 1916)

Wife's Pension

Now the time was drawing near when my dear wife would be entitled to the Old Age Pension. She could not go to register for it because of the affliction in her legs and feet, and when I went for her. I had nothing to pay with. After a time I went again, and told the clerk I had only a few coppers, and he gave it to me for what I had. Then we had to be examined as to what business we did. After the pension officer had examined every stick and straw, he looked about him and said, 'There must be something more, for I can only find seven shillings profit per week on your business'. 'Well', I said, 'if you count twenty shillings a hundred times, you can only make it a sovereign'. 'Well then', he said, 'how do you live and pay your rent?' I said, 'I don't think it has cost that for us to live'. He laughed at me and said, 'Come now, you are pretending'. 'Nay', I said, 'for we have not spent a penny on beef, bacon or anything of that sort for years'. 'Well', he said, 'I cannot make it out - seven shillings for three people! - to say nothing of rent'. I said, 'We only drink water, and oftener eat dry bread than anything else. But I may tell you we have had some good friends that have helped us a good while, or we might have gone to the workhouse'. 'Well', he said, 'I believe you have told the truth; yet it seems a mystery'. 'Eh, man', I said, 'God is in it'. But he could not grasp it. Well, we got the pension book and the five shillings; and often we bent our knees to the Father of mercies. Now I thought God would shut up the hearts He had opened; but O blessed be His name, He kept them open, and kept our hearts overflowing with gratitude for all He had done and was doing.

Wife's illness

I now come to a mighty trial. I could see my dearly-beloved wife beginning to fade like an autumn leaf. This weighed heavily on my spirit. I could see it, but did not like to tell her so. She was always a poor, fearing thing, and yet I used to think if I had her life instead of mine, I should have nothing to fear. This is carnal reasoning I know; but truly her life was exemplary. Often I envied her

quiet spirit, when my flippant tongue would bring guilt upon me.

About the end of May 1910 the man with the scythe seemed ready to cut her down. I had prayed to God for twenty years to remove the affliction from her legs and feet, and now they went down like another woman's; but she was only skin and bone, and what the issue would be I knew not. The doctor had found something internal that he said had been coming a long time, which was the cause of the sudden attack. So the dear Lord answered prayer, but it was 'in such a way as almost to drive me to despair'. Yet after all, when the effervescence has subsided and the sediment settled at the bottom of the vessel, the result looks like pure white crystal with a heavenly lustre about it, worth the riches of India or Peru.

Struggling to be reconciled

What shall I say more? O if I could tell of the marvellous mercy, the rich grace, the abounding love that Jesus Christ shed upon us in the quiet hours of the night, when no eye saw us but that all-seeing Eye which chases away every shadow, and makes all darkness to flee away! O He looked love into my soul when on my knees by her bedside. I could and did say, 'Father, Thy will be done'. After that I was calm and waiting. For two days she seemed a little better, and again I said, 'Thy will be done'. I wept at His feet, looked at the nails, the spear and the tomb, and was led from there to

Bethany. How blessed to behold ascended Glory, the conquering Hero with all His vesture spangled with gems of victory, the Glory-Man, the exalted Lamb! If He did not appear in these marvellous ways and carry us heavenward, what must we do? Die, die, die I feel we must. But He says, 'I will bring the third part through the fire'.

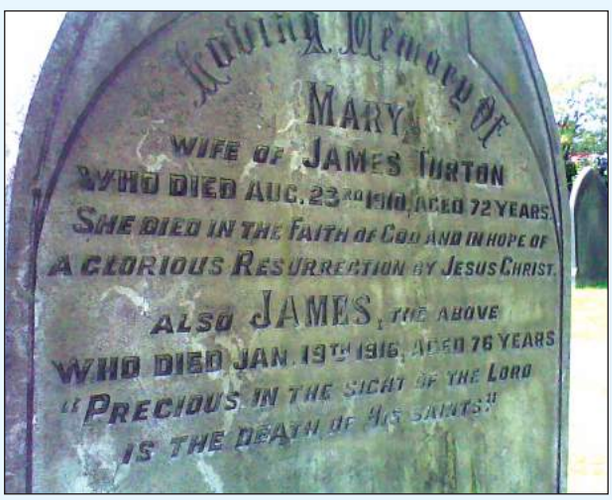
I thought the first week I was willing; then I was bewildered. O I wanted faith to give my dear wife up willingly and unreservedly; but He had touched me in a very tender, vital spot this time! I wanted to get nearer to Him. I had been very near to Him at times, so near once that I felt I could give myself up, but now I hung in the balance, and this portion broke my heart: 'If any man come unto Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple'. He seemed to be trying me on this very point. I could not pray for her restoration; neither could I say, 'Take her'. I sat beside her in the night, and yearned over her; and when I awakened I was afraid to look, lest she should be gone. I wanted to see her die, if she did die; but O I was afraid of it! I loved the Lord, I loved His people and His ways; and all this because He first loved me. And I did feel that if He took my dear wife, I would trust in Him still, I would love Him still; yea, I would call upon Him while I lived; and when I died, hoped to die shouting, 'The Lord has appeared!'

Waning

But the life spark was kept waning. I watched more than twelve months, and never told her my thoughts; but a change came, and she had to lie in bed. The first time death was mentioned, she looked at me and said, 'Do you think I am going to die?' 'Well', I said, 'my dear one, we all have to die'. Now she knew my thoughts. But she lived three months longer, and O the sweet times I had by her side reading and praying! Often she would respond; but the last day and night I read her the 60th chapter of Isaiah, and truly I believe she experienced the latter part of it in her last hours. Her last words were, 'Lord, help me', and she died without a sigh, August 23rd, 1910. O how I missed her! but I could not grieve, feeling that her happy spirit was in glory. I was never chided for loving her too much. She was no hindrance to me in serving my God; she never put a straw in my way. Thus ended a companionship of forty-three years, and I buried her in certain hope of everlasting life. Now after some conflict with the devil, when he was gone, I had a pleasant hour. I laid me down in the green pastures of covenant love and the still waters of sovereign grace, and had a good feed amongst the lilies. I never remember a happier time. Here I gathered strength, and was renewed in the inner man, so that I had no fear at all of the devil. I read the Word with sweet delight; nothing seemed dark to me. I do not want to put me on the same step with dear Job when he said, 'His candle shined upon my head'; but truly the light of heaven seemed to shine about me, and the Word seemed a light to my soul. This is the Light of Life, the Daystar; and O I have had many dawnings of day after dark and terrible nights. God is in the midst of these things, so that Zion cannot be moved. Impregnable is the great Rock.

'Here to this Refuge I repair
When storms around me blow;
Here I for shelter haste away
And flee from all below'.

The Gospel Standard April 2013



James Turton is buried in the graveyard of the Anglican church of St. James the Great in the village of Haydock near St. Helens, Lancs.

When our soul is much discouraged

'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us' (1 Samuel 7:12)

When our soul is much discouraged
by the roughness of the way,
And the cross we have to carry
Seemeth heavier every day,
When some cloud that overshadows,
Hides our Father's face from view;
Oh! it's well then to remember
He has blessed us hitherto.

Looking back the long years over,
What a varied path! And yet,
All the way His hand hath led us,
Placed each hindrance we have met:
Given to us the 'pleasant places';
Cheered us all the journey through;
Passing through the deepest waters,
He has blessed us hitherto.

Surely, then, our souls should trust Him,
Though the clouds be dark o'erhead;
We've a Friend that draweth closer,
When all other friends have fled.
When our pilgrimage is over,
And the gates we're sweeping through,
We shall see with clearer vision
How He's blessed us hitherto.

L. Oakley

Congregational Remittances - September 2016

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2016	ORDINARY REMITTANCES 2016 September	2016 To September	2015 To September
	£	£	£	£
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	0	1300	14625	14649
Duthil-Dores	13016	2281	20347	20097
Inverness	0	7800	27953	21642
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1400	14883	15061
Poolewe & Aultbea	340	500	8576	7818
Total Inverness	13356	13281	86384	79266
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	435	0	810	965
Brora	250	0	10427	12055
Kiltearn	63	1000	6974	6008
Tarbat	0	3500	15550	9378
Total Northern	748	4500	33761	28405
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	378	277	6319	6365
Ayr	0	900	9418	10080
Dumfries	0	0	200	100
Edinburgh	15297	1500	17501	22053
Glasgow-Partick	7645	1200	14800	15900
Glasgow-Shettleston	5	2000	19288	20194
Glasgow-Knightswood	28	2200	20716	18757
Rothesay	0	0	130	2000
Total Southern	23352	8077	88372	95449

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2016	ORDINARY REMITTANCES 2016 September	2016 To September	2015 To September
	£	£	£	£
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	1693	16453	16075
Harris-Leverburgh	203	1650	14170	13909
Harris-Scalpay	0	1800	20149	20845
Knock & Point	0	1210	14090	14105
North Uist	3138	1000	10011	9916
Stornoway	3115	6028	65340	63279
Total Outer Hebrides	6455	13381	140213	138130
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish	120100	1450	14568	7200
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	2600	11305	9750
Lochalsh	230	950	10956	10270
Strath	135	820	6522	5688
Portree	308	1500	12000	10800
Snizort	1104	1500	19851	18064
Total Skye/Lochcarron	121877	8820	75202	61772
Smiths Falls	0	0	1000	
Total Congregations	165787	48059	424931	403021
Other Donations	0	1903	16883	22108
Legacy	0	0	1000	0
TOTAL	165787	49962	442814	425129
Including Gift Aid	2721		67035	58511

Do you understand Islamic Terrorism ?

Rev Greg MacDonald

How can we understand, how can we grasp properly, the rise of violent Islamic terrorism of which we are the weeping witnesses in these last few years?

Many Christian believers, and many who have some Bible background in their lives, are this year trying to figure out if the Bible can give us answers for the terrifying scenes we are witnessing. Every desire to seek an answer from God's Word is good. But can we turn to the Bible for help and guidance over terrorism?

Remember the words of Jesus: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service' (John 16:1-2).

Jesus is talking here directly about the persecution His disciples will face from the unbelieving Jews. He has been telling them that He must go away. He wasn't going to be with them all the time. He would leave them. So then Jesus is speaking about the time of His own absence, after His resurrection. He forewarns of persecution.

The Christians would be hunted and hounded by the Jewish authorities. Power would be given to men like Saul of Tarsus to arrest, torture and imprison believers, even to kill them. Why would this happen?

It would happen because, with Jesus not present, the enemies are more bold. They feel His disciples are more vulnerable.

But these Jews also thought they were right. They really thought that the Christians were blasphemers. Listen to Paul's own testimony: 'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth' (Acts 26:9). They thought Christians were heretics, and that God required them to destroy them, out of zeal for His name, which is why they martyred Stephen. Of course the Bible calls this zeal without knowledge – but zeal nonetheless (Romans 10:2). Jesus prepared His disciples for this exact thing. Take the recent attack in Nice. It was not a direct assault against godly Christians. It was utterly indiscriminate. Nevertheless there are important principles to draw out from the teaching of Christ on this matter.

1. Sincerity in persecuting

It seems insane to us for anyone to choose to be part of IS (Islamic State). We just don't get the appeal. What can possibly make someone from Britain want to be part of it? It seems the very essence of insanity. But Jesus teaches that those who will take life in the name of religion think they are serving God. Jesus teaches us to expect persecutors to be sincere. Now I am not linking sincerity with truth. This sincerity is linked to a fundamental lie. But it is quite possible to sincerely believe what is a lie.

This means we are to expect powerful self-confidence in persecutors. If you act in sincerity, even though you are terribly wrong, yet you can do things that would crush a doubting man. We hear of plenty of young Muslims being radicalised. What does that mean? It means getting rid of their doubts. It means making them utterly sincere. A sincere persecutor is twice the danger.

And this sincerity is a religious sincerity – it is done in God's service. This is what makes it powerful. If you sincerely believe you are serving God, then nothing else matters. No argument can dissuade you. You are serving God. Even the consequences, your death, the innocent lives lost – nothing else matters – all you can see is serving God. How can that ever be wrong? Serving God trumps everything. They think they do God service.

2. Evil in persecuting

Nevertheless sincerity itself can be an evil, and is a display of an evil nature in this case. Sincerely believing a lie cannot make the lie into the truth. In only makes it a more damnable lie. Sincerity is not enough to absolve you of blame. It manifests a depraved nature to choose to believe a lie in place of the truth. This is the evil nature of man – that he chooses the untrue.

3. Ignorance in persecuting

Jesus said, 'They have not known the Father, nor me' (Jn.16:3). The reason man is taken in with a lie is because he is ignorant of God. He knows nothing of the true God, nor his Son Jesus. Persecution arises from ignorance of God. Allah is not God. Mohammed is not God's prophet. Muslims do not know the real God at all. They have no clue as to His nature, they are blinded to His love, they are closed to His Gospel.

What we have seen is that the modern Western world, this multicultural, multi-faith society, is utterly incapable of countering a religious fanaticism that is sincere. Here we see the flaws in our age's post-modern thinking. Anything goes, and we are woefully ill-equipped to deal with religious sincerity. Western culture and prevailing philosophy is bankrupt of moral conviction and clarity. Our society has failed.

And so has the church. Why is the West not used to dealing with conviction in matters of religion? Because the Christian church has not shown any! Because the church in the West is itself a product of 'anything goes' thinking. Even the Bible cannot be appealed to as definitive or authoritative in the wider church in Britain today! We do not speak on the basis of sincerity in religion. We do not convey to our society what it means to be confident that if God has said it, that is enough for me. Whatever the consequences.

How different if ISIS could be met with robust biblical Christianity in the West! How different if we could answer those who are looking for some certainty, with the Bible and its Gospel! Islam is not the truth – but it veneers a lie with sincerity. Christianity has the truth, and yet pollutes that truth with insincerity that nauseates our own culture.

Oh for the church of Christ to model to our poor bankrupt Western society what it looks like when religious truth is coupled with religious sincerity!

Restoring the Fortunes of Zion
Part 1
Psalm 126

Rev Anthony Dallison (USA)

The theme of the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120 -134) is Christian pilgrimage. It is not only a physical pilgrimage, as you remember it was for the ancient Israelites, for we believe that these songs were sung by the men of Israel as they went up to Jerusalem on the three great annual feasts when they were required to present themselves before the Lord. It was above all a spiritual ascent, a continual climbing up nearer to the holy and blessed presence of God our Saviour. The experiences of the covenant people of the Old Testament mirror and parallel exactly the experience of the New Testament church.

The overriding thought of Psalm 126 is that of a pilgrim church that is bursting out in thanksgiving to God and in prayer for their good experiences now. There is a 'now' of Christian experience as well as a 'then' and as well as a 'will be'. This is why we have taken as a title to the Psalm: 'Restoring the Fortunes of Zion', for it simply bursts with gladness and happiness before the Lord.

Now you'll notice that it's divided into two parts, verses 1-3 forming the first part, being a praise for partial restoration, and then verses 4-6 a prayer for powerful renewal.

Praise for Partial Restoration (vv1-3)

First there is praise for partial restoration: 'When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them'. An awakening has taken place in Israel. The complementary thought in verse three is that indeed the Lord has done this and they praise Him for their restoration to His favour and fellowship again.

What is really being referred to here? The traditional view is that this Psalm is celebrating the return of the Israelites from the long seventy-year captivity in Babylon where they had been carried by the Babylonian armies. That's a good interpretation still.

Probably the best interpretation of the Psalm is to translate the word 'captivity' differently. In the original Hebrew the word in the text doesn't refer to captivity at all but to any great deliverance from oppression that God's people have experienced. It would be better rendered, 'When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion, we were like men who dream'. It's the same word that is used in Job 42:10 when the Lord is said to have turned again the captivity of Job. After his long and bitter and excruciating suffering under the hand of God, the Lord turned again the captivity of Job. And of course Job was not a deportee. He had not been taken away to another land. He had suffered grievous misfortune under the sovereign providence of God who planned it all for a purpose. Here is a people who have suffered a misfortune and disaster that is not described. It may have been captivity to a distant land. It may have been one of many things in the long and difficult history of Israel, but what is happening here, blessedly so, is that the Lord is restoring the fortunes of this people from all their bitter and grievous misfortunes that they have suffered.

In verses 1-3 we have a picture of what God is always doing for His people. It is a message for the pilgrim church today, that we should carry the memory of God's deliverances, past and present, just as it were we carry a tune. It should continually be in our thoughts and upon our lips

in order to lead us to the second part of the psalm which is prayer that God may continually repeat those mercies to us again. That's what the psalm is all about. In other words, it's a picture of God's mighty deliverance, as it were, of you His people, from the concentration camp of hell, from the high command of Satan under whose thraldom you were. As you have been taken captive, you've also been set free, and you've been delivered by Christ to be His pilgrim people, and in your mind continually is to be the thought of praise to almighty God that you're no longer behind the barbed wire. 'We are free' is the song of this psalm! Now what it tells us precisely in verses 1-3 is really two things that concern us, the *release* first of all and then secondly the *response*.

The Release

The release is mentioned in verse one: 'When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion'. Now the traditional interpretation is quite possible and it is a good assumption that it may have been what the writer is describing here. We don't know for certain. You remember how it was in Israel in those days of the later kings. First of all, the ten tribes of Israel to the north had been carried off,helpless captives, by the Assyrians. Their land was invaded and destroyed, and the inhabitants were carried away to live among strangers whose speech and customs they did not understand. Then, just a little later on in the year 586 BC, the same thing had happened to the southern kingdom of Judah. The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and, after a terrible time of suffering, all the citizens of the land except the very poorest, who were left to till the ground, were carried away captives, helplessly, into the pagan city of Babylon that sat astride the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. There for seventy long years they bore the chastisement of their God, helpless captives in a foreign land whose speech and customs were not theirs nor their religion. You have the very bitterness of this described in Psalm 137: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept'. They were taunted by their enemies to sing one of the songs of Zion for the entertainment of the heathen. And they responded, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' And in that Psalm you have all the poignancy and the bitterness of a captive people, behind the barbed wire, if you like. In today's terms, they reallywere in the concentration camp of the enemy.

But what now happens if that is indeed the situation being described? The dynasty of Babylon is abruptly ended in the providence of God. Up comes Cyrus, the king of the Persians, and he captures the city. He goes into the royal archives and he reads concerning the Israelites and their

captivity and he does what is an unknown thing in the ancient world. He sets them free. If this is the background to Psalm 126 you can begin to understand the wonder of their release. 'We're free!' they're saying. It's as though the impossible, the unbelievable had happened to them! And they look at these events with wide-eyed wonder. Some of you may remember the dark days of World War II. I barely do myself – six long agonising years of suffering. Do you remember the story of disaster following disaster as you put your ear close to the wireless set in those early years of World War II, as you heard about the prisoner-of-war camps bursting at the seams in Japan and Germany and Italy and other places with allied prisoners of war? And then the tide of war changed and flowed the other way. Then came VE day with the welcome news that the Axis powers had surrendered. And perhaps you read in the newspaper or you saw shortly after on the television those faces of men behind the barbed wire when the news came to them, 'We're free!' and the joy overflowing that this had actually happened. This is what's described here.

But in a sense it's something far grander than this as it speaks to us of the soul kept in bondage under Satan and his tyranny, in the concentration camp of hell, under the high command of Satan, and the Lord suddenly says in wondrous grace, 'Set that man free! Let him go!' And no power on earth or in heaven or in hell itself can stand against the royal decree when the Lord turns again the fortunes of Zion. That is the picture that the pilgrim church on earth is exhorted to carry constantly in its mind every day of present Christian experience.

The Response

But the second thing you notice in verses 2-3 is the vivid response: 'Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing'. It's wonderful because it tells us that the Lord's 'when' is our 'then'. When He does something, then our response is to be something new and wonderful. Our mouths are to be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of rejoicing. So, as you look at verses two and three you see this spontaneous praise breaking out like a great thunder from God's redeemed and ransomed people. They laughed and shouted and sang for very joy! If it does not describe the joy of captives released you can think of many other instances in the life of Israel that would fit. The rejoicing Israelites when the Philistine giant Goliath fell in the valley of Elah and God's people were free from their Philistine oppression. You can think of Jerusalem's joy in the reign of King Hezekiah when of Sennacherib's invading army 185,000 of his soldiers lay dead with the dew resting on their cold bodies as the Israelites woke one morning, because the angel of the Lord had gone out and had struck them all. What the psalmist is saying to us is that when God has worked wonders in the life of His pilgrim church, there's an occasion to shout. Indeed, in our translation in verse two and in verse five and in verse six again, the reference to songs of joy is not songs really in the original Hebrew but shouts of joy. Not only so, but there is grandstand astonishment among the nations. We see it there in the end of verse two, that the heathen nations themselves surrounding Israel are compelled to say, 'Look, what has happened? Before our very eyes, the LORD has done these things for them'. It's as though the message went out over the ancient world's news network. How could such a thing ever have come about? 'It was Cyrus who did this for them', said one nation. 'Oh, no it wasn't, said another nation. He would never have done a thing like that. It was the LORD, the God of Israel. It was their God who did this for them'. It's so amazing and so wonderful, no other agency could possibly explain it. And it became, says the psalmist, the talk of the age when the Lord redeemed His people.

My friend, do you see what this is saying to us? Ask yourself, 'Does the world see this in me in my daily Christian experience as a man or a woman of God?' Have you said to yourself, 'I have to praise God and to shout aloud because of the things that He's been doing for me'. Does the world say, 'The Lord has done great things for him, for her'? Let me challenge you, is the world saying 'Look how miserable he is, she is! They're just like us. They are still behind the barbed wire'. Oh, my friends, when the church of God carries this experience as a present experience, saying continually to ourselves, 'What great things the Lord has done for us', the world around us is moved to envy and to the conviction of seeing the hand of God in your life and in mine, and beginning even to recognize that it should praise God for the restoration of God's people. This is one reason why the Psalm has such a powerful application to the pilgrim church today.

To be continued.

A Call To Thanksgiving

To All Ye Pilgrims

Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, beans, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience; now, I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and little ones, do gather at the meeting house, on the hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November the 29th of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three, and the third year since the Pilgrims landed on the Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to the pastor, and render thanksgiving to the Almighty God for all His Blessings.

(Thanksgiving Proclamation attributed to Governor William Bradford)

In 1623, Governor William Bradford called the Pilgrims to gather together for a day of prayer and thanksgiving. Only three years earlier, they had left their jobs, their homes and their communities in order to escape religious persecution in England. These brave men and women had survived a treacherous ocean voyage, only to find themselves stranded in a strange new land, in a harsh climate, without sufficient food or shelter. During the first winter, half of them died of sickness and starvation. Those who remained had persevered, and though they continued to face many challenges, they had reason to give thanks.

As Governor Bradford now observed, the harvest was plentiful. In the previous winter, food had been rationed to five kernels of corn per person per day. No one would go hungry this year. Whereas the other colonies had been plagued by conflict, the Pilgrims lived at peace with one another and the Indians. The sickness that claimed so many lives had now subsided. Most importantly to the Pilgrims, they were experiencing daily the freedom they had longed for, the freedom to worship God without fear of persecution or interference from the government. By God's grace, they had flourished in the New World. Truly, they were blessed. And so are we today. Unfortunately it's a truth we often lose sight of. Contemporary culture celebrates greed, lusts after riches, and promotes envy. We're tempted to feel sorry for ourselves if we don't have everything we want or everything we see! All too easily, we forget how blessed we have been. We take for granted the freedom and prosperity we have enjoyed.

But if we stop and think about it, we soon realize how much we have to be thankful for. We live in a fruitful land that has never experienced widespread famine or deprivation. We have food to eat and clothes to wear. Our lives have been enriched by access to modern technology, information and education. We have escaped the ravages of disease, at a time when illness has decimated the populations of other countries. And we can gather together to worship God as we please, whenever we please, without the fear of losing our jobs, our property, or our lives.

In addition to these earthly blessings, we have spiritual blessings as well. In His Word, God assures us that when we call upon Him, He hears us (Isaiah 65:24). He has promised to provide for our every need (Philippians 4:19). He will never leave us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

The most precious gift of all is recorded in John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to Himself. We have been rescued from the power of sin and death if we personally receive Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Through Christ we are forgiven. Heaven's door has been opened to us. We will have all eternity to rejoice in the praises of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father. How can we ever thank Him enough?

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News

School in Theology (*Rev John J Murray*)

The 64th Free Church School in Theology met in Carronvale House, Larbert from 5 to 8 September 2016. The School had its beginnings in the 1950s through the initiative of the Rev Professor R A Finlayson, at that time Professor of Systematic Theology in the Free Church College, Edinburgh. It was intended to be an inter-active exercise by ministers and students with a balance between delivery of a paper and a time for discussion. In recent years the School has welcomed the presence of ministers from other branches of the Christian church. Once again this year we were enriched by members of the School from England, Ireland (North and South) and three men from Holland.

The biographical/historical paper was given by the Rev Alasdair J Macleod on 'Alexander Henderson and the Second Reformation'. Henderson's leadership and contribution to the flowering of the Reformation in Scotland cannot be over-estimated. In the theological area two rather neglected teachings were helpfully considered: (1) 'Loving God for His own Sake' (a Jonathan Edwards theme) by the Rev Trevor Kirkland and (2) 'Implications of the Two Wills in Christ' by the Rev Dr Bill Schweitzer (Gateshead). Studies in Old and New Testament passages were entrusted to

School in Theology 2016

Desk

Rev Graeme Craig on 'Christ in Psalm 116' and the Rev Andrew Allan on '1 Corinthians 12 and Ministry in the Body of Christ'. On pastoral and practical issues we had the Rev David Silversides give a timely warning on 'The Church and Satan's Devices' and the Rev John J Murray presented an analysis of the piety/spirituality that marked the church in the Highlands of Scotland for over three centuries.

The School devotes a session to a missionary concern and on this occasion we had the opportunity to hear Rev John Goldby speak of his work, under the auspices of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in Jewish evangelism. He reminded us of the burden that should be ours for the conversion of the Jews and highlighted some of the past efforts to reach out to them. His own involvement in the work in Jerusalem was characterized by many wonderful providences. He concluded by telling of his co-ordinating role in the major endeavour of the Trinitarian Bible Society to revise the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament (DHNT) with aid from the Finnish Bible Institute.

Rev William Macleod has been Chairman of the School for more than 20 years, guiding it with a wise and steady hand through some difficult times. He is now stepping down and the Rev Harry Woods is to take over the responsibility. A debt of gratitude is also due to the indefatigable and efficient Secretary of the School, Rev Andrew Allan. He can be contacted for further information at the website address *www.schoolintheology.org.uk*. The dates for next year are 4 to 6 September. Recordings of the papers delivered in 2016 can be ordered from Mr Bill McQueer at his e-mail address *bill@mcqueer.com*.

Humanist Weddings overtake C of S Weddings (*Christian Observer*)

A 17 August 2016 Press and Journal article by Joe Churcher titled 'Humanist Weddings overtake Kirk Ceremonies for the first time' reports that the number of Church of Scotland weddings has fallen by half since 2005, and that in 2015 for the first time, there were more humanist weddings in Scotland than Kirk weddings.

Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council convener Rev Norman Smith commented: 'The Church of Scotland has always stood with the people of Scotland and helped them take this step together. That is still the case and we would encourage anyone considering marriage to remember their local church when thinking about their very special day'.

Sadly the Church of Scotland having moved with the times and sought to please everyone has pleased few. Having left the foundation of Scripture and the moral law behind, it has no real message and is despised. But at the same time the increase of humanist weddings demonstrates a nation that has turned its back on God and is ripe for His judgment.

Retirement – Rev K Macdonald, Scalpay

(*Rev Greg MacDonald*)

On Friday April 15th, the congregation of Scalpay arranged a beautiful farewell meal to mark the retirement of their minister, Rev Kenneth M Macdonald. Mr Macdonald had pastored the flock in Scalpay since 2009. His first change was in Snizort, on the Isle of Skye, where he was ordained in 1997.

With the Community Hall well filled, the ladies of the congregation excelled themselves with a

Retirement – Rev K Macdonald, Scalpay

splendid three course meal, as well as ample baking thereafter, but of course there was still plenty left over! A specially commissioned commemorative cake was a further token of the esteem and love of the congregation for their minister and his wife.

Donald Macdonald, elder, Stornoway, and the minister's brother, gave thanks for the food at the start of the night. After the meal, speakers and guests were introduced by the minister's younger son, Rev Greg MacDonald. First we had a presentation to Mr Macdonald from the well-loved elder David Morrison, who spoke of his great affection for his minister and his benefit under his ministry. Mrs Rachel Morrison then warmly delivered a token of affection to Mrs Macdonald, followed by a joint presentation by Kirsty Marie and Kirsty Bella, two of the lovely wee girls of the congregation, on behalf of the Ladies Mission Group.

A lifelong friend, Rev Iain Smith, then spoke and soon had the spirits of young and old lightened with his unique story-telling gifts. Mr Smith also laid emphasis on his friend's gifts as a preacher and especially as a pastor. Rev Greg MacDonald gave a few closing comments and thanked the congregation for the way they had taken his parents to their hearts, assuring them that they had never been happier than in Scalpay.

Mr Macdonald replied on behalf of his wife and himself, and humbly thanked the congregation for their many expressions of love and care over the years, as well as acknowledging the Lord's great goodness to both pastor and people during his pastorate in Scalpay. After a Gaelic spiritual song sung by Jenna Morrison, thanks were given to all guidance in their vacancy.

'The Armed Man' (*Andrew Forsyth*)

The 2000th performance of 'The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace', by Karl Jenkins was given on 3rd July this year (2016) at the Royal Albert Hall. Astute Christians will recognise the second track in this concert piece as the Adhan, meaning the Islamic call to prayer, but I wonder how many undiscerning listeners have been beguiled by this seductive musical attempt at peace and reconciliation between man and man?

According to the accompanying blurb, 'this popular choral/orchestral work was commissioned by the Royal Armouries Museum as part of the millennium celebrations and was given its world première at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2000. The resulting album has been in the classical chart for almost 700 weeks, cementing itself in the country's consciousness'.

It has already been performed in Scotland – the (former) land of John Knox – at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 11 November (Armistice Day) 2005, 'in memoriam' to the 9/11 atrocity in New York – this being another attempt to take advantage of the multi-cultural grief overflowing worldwide in the aftermath of the twin towers massacre.

Recordings of The Armed Man: a Mass for Peace are also widely available on CD. No wonder it is 'cementing itself in the country's consciousness'!

And just when you thought the Trojan horse of Rome-ward bound ecumenism was controversial enough, the Trojan camel comes along – with his Islamic nose in the syncretistic tent!

The Adhan recites the Takbir (God is great) followed by the Shahada (There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). It is sad to see this blasphemous message voluntarily listened to by British 'Christian' ears.

Massacre CAR (*E Kendal*)

The Central African Republic (which is 76 percent Christian) remains divided with the north largely under the control of foreign-backed local and foreign Islamic militants. Christians whose towns and villages are in rebel-held territory live with terrible insecurity. Hundreds of thousands are displaced and the 'front-line' is perpetually volatile. On 16 September an Islamic militia swept through the mostly Christian village of Ndomete, north-central CAR, killing 19 residents and wounding dozens. The government has labelled it a 'massacre'. The next day clashes erupted in nearby Kaga-Bandoro claiming at least five more lives. UN peacekeepers were deployed to the area and are now maintaining the 'peace'. Please pray that God will intervene in this forgotten, continuing conflict to bring about peace, justice and liberty.

Please pray for CAR and its church.

Boko Haram kills Christians in Nigeria (*Premier*)

Eight Christians have been killed in northeast Nigeria during a Boko Haram attack.

The Islamist terror group whose name roughly translates into 'Western education is banned' launched three attacks within hours of one another on 18th September.

Reports suggest the terrorists came on motorbikes and gunned down people who were walking home from a church in Kwamjilari village. A number of survivors fled to the nearby town of Chibok in the northeast of the country.

Remember those suffering in Nigeria.

Boko Haram militants

Athlete's parents refused to kill him (*Christian Institute*)

A British Paralympic athlete who won a silver medal at Rio 2016 has revealed how his parents refused an offer to kill him. Ali Jawad was born in Lebanon without legs, prompting a doctor to ask his parents if they wanted him to end their son's life. But his mother and father refused and they decided that regardless of his disability he should have a fulfilling life. Jawad qualified for the Paralympics in Beijing and London but missed out on a medal. In 2014 he became world champion and on 9th September this year he won a silver medal in Brazil in powerlifting. In an interview with The Guardian, he said his dad told him: 'When you were born the doctor wanted to kill you off – he actually asked the question'.

Only God has the right to take away life.

Scottish Government Snubs NO2NPs Campaigners (*Christian Institute*)

Scotland's Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, refused to meet with the *No to Named Persons (NO2NP)* group, which has campaigned against the Named Person scheme since 2014. This is despite his promising to carry out an 'open and inclusive consultation'. In July, UK Supreme Court judges unanimously ruled that key information sharing provisions within the legislation contravene human rights law. NO2NP represents a number of organisations, including *The Christian Institute*. In addition, more than 36,000 Scots have signed NO2NP's online petition against the introduction of the Named Person scheme. Swinney dismissed the prospect of meeting NO2NP recently while he was being grilled by MSPs in Holyrood's Education Committee.

Spokesman for NO2NP Simon Calvert said: 'It's a pity he has declined to meet with us and hear our views in addition to those of his supporters. We represent a significant number of concerned mums and dads who fought long and hard – including donating their own money – to fight a law which they correctly said was illegal'.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney ignores the popular NO2NP Campaign against the *Named Person* Scheme.

Books

James MacGregor: Preacher, Theologian and Defender of the Faith

John W Keddie, www.lulu.com, 214pp, pbk, £9.00

James MacGregor (1829-94) is not a name from the nineteenth century Free Church of Scotland that has been much remembered. He was neither a hugely-memorable character like John 'Rabbi' Duncan, nor a theological writer frequently reprinted in the twentieth century, like Hugh Martin, nor a major leader in ecclesiastical affairs, like Thomas Chalmers or James Begg.

However MacGregor was a notable minister in congregations of the Free Church, a professor of theology in Edinburgh and later a minister in New Zealand. His life is an interesting story, never previously recorded in any substantial account, and our own Mr Keddie has undertaken a fine work of historical research in preparing this biography. The result is a concise narrative, thoroughly referenced, and studded throughout with colour and interest.

MacGregor came from Callander and grew up speaking Gaelic, wearing the kilt, and going barefoot. He excelled at school, went on to Edinburgh University and from there embarked on training for the ministry at New College, under the auspices of the Free Church of Scotland. From his teacher, William Cunningham, MacGregor imbibed the rigorous theology of Scottish Calvinism, and in due course he was recognized himself as an able theologian with a thorough and tenacious grasp of true doctrine that stood him well in an age of intellectual flux.

He went on to pastor congregations in Barry and Paisley, and in wider church affairs assisted in defeating proposals for union with the United Presbyterian Church during the First Union Controversy (1866-73), which he rightly discerned as highly dangerous, particularly highlighting the erroneous doctrine of unlimited atonement, held in contravention of the U.P. Church's stated commitment to the Westminster Confession. In 1869, he wrote a closely-argued 'Memorial' to the General Assembly opposing the proposed introduction of hymns into public worship, the latter being sadly approved in 1872.

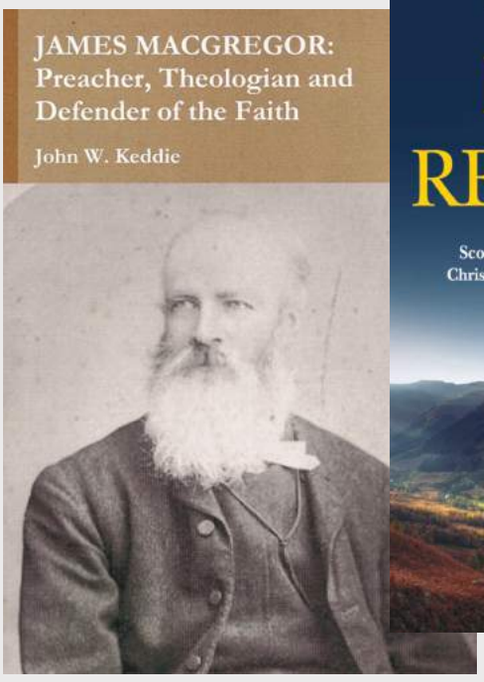
In 1868, the retirement of James Buchanan led to MacGregor's appointment as Professor of Systematic Theology at New College, a hugely important position, one signifying the widespread recognition of MacGregor's capacity as a theologian. He had already published a popular textbook on Christian doctrine and a treatise on Sabbath observance, and it seems to be on the strength of these contributions, together with his occasional articles in theological journals, that he was appointed to the College.

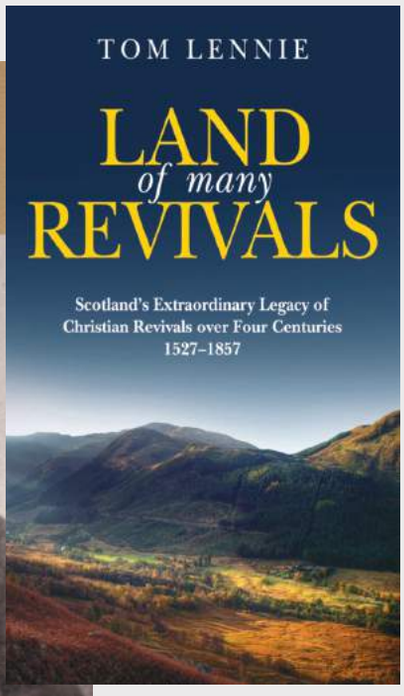
MacGregor's involvement in the Robertson Smith case (1877-81) was much more disappointing. He showed sympathy with Smith in the early stages of the controversy, arguing that his controversial arguments had to be made, and the motions he supported in church courts in dealing with the case downplayed the significance of Smith's heterodoxy, and called for his restoration to his professorial duties with an admonition. Mr Keddie shows that MacGregor believed that Smith's views would quickly be refuted by further study, in retrospect a very naïve position.

In 1881, MacGregor was advised by his doctor to remove himself and his family to a healthier climate, after the loss of two of his teenage children, and they all emigrated to New Zealand that year. MacGregor pastored a church in Oamaru, South Island, for the last thirteen years of his life.

The title of this book gives a good summary of MacGregor's life, especially the latter term, 'Defender of the Faith'. Having been soundly grounded in the Reformed faith, and in the theology of the Westminster Confession, he rigorously defended it all his life. The tragedy of this period is just how isolated MacGregor really was in his generation in this staunch adherence to truth. Sadly, the compromises of the Church in the Victorian period have marred her history ever since. We are thankful to have this account of one better example to follow.

Rev Alasdair J Macleod





Land of Many Revivals: Scotland's Extraordinary Legacy of Christian Revivals over Four Centuries 1527-1857

Tom Lennie, Christian Focus, hbk, 523pp, £19.99

This is a sizeable volume, beautifully produced with many illustrations and covering 400 years of revivals in Scotland between the Reformation and the mid-Victorian period. Tom Lennie has already given us through Christian Focus *Glory in the Glen*, detailing evangelical revivals in Scotland between the years 1880 and 1940. He has done a power of research in digging up histories, anecdotes and analyses of what he considers to be revivals through Scottish history. This cannot but be encouraging in giving us a longing that what the Lord did in the past he may be pleased to do for us in our day. Given the wide time-frame it is inevitable that there is some superficial treatment of some of the evangelical movements which have been such a precious part of our evangelical heritage in this country. But throughout the book there are heart-warming accounts of clear spiritual and sometimes surprising conversions seemingly sweeping through churches and communities. It is a great read and, indeed, it is a good bedside companion as a book which is easy to read and heart-stirring. It is enhanced by periodic maps giving locations, and coloured and monochrome illustrations, though some of the coloured photos of locations are somewhat nondescript, albeit pretty postcard scenes.

To this reviewer one reservation is in the matter of diffuseness. The instances taken to be 'revivals' vary considerably from one another, but there is a tendency to lump them all together as somehow all the same. In some cases a spiritual quickening in a congregation is accounted as revival when it was clearly not part of a wider movement but a result of a normal evangelical ministry in one congregation, albeit sometimes indirectly affecting others in a community.

In addition to this there is a question of a lack of theological distinction in some cases in the matter of doctrine. For example, the ministry of John McLeod Campbell (deposed by the Church of Scotland for his heretical views on the atonement – later an Independent) and James Morison (deposed by the United Secession Church for his preaching of universal atonement – later founded the Evangelical Union Church) in the early/mid 19th century are taken to be revivals like any other. The Arminianism and other theological errors of such men are little touched on. We should be aware of such errors, notwithstanding our willingness to accept that in the divine sovereignty souls may indeed have been saved through their ministries.

Also, when things began to change in the nineteenth century with the importing from America of Charles Finney's 'new measures', learnt from his *Lectures on Revivals*, insufficient effort was made to distinguish between man-made revivals and God's Spirit coming down. 'Protracted meetings' were held in several places to produce revivals. He does quote Finney's belief that 'a revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is the purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means'. Lennie would, I am sure, be critical of Finney but that could have been made more plain.

In this reviewer's opinion care requires to be exercised that revivals and reformation be related to one another (as clearly was the case at the Reformation). The two should go together. This is clearly a Scriptural pattern (see, for example, the Old Testament 'revivals' at the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, and in the New Testament the concern of Paul for church doctrine and order among planted churches).

On the one hand we do well to be generously disposed to any works involving the conversion of sinners, whatever the deficiencies of theology, doctrine or church practice there may appear to be. On the other hand we need to be discerning and have a care to look for the reformation or the strengthening of the church as accompanying elements of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in revival.

We will give just one example of a clear movement of God's Spirit. Rev Peter McBride, Rothesay, had on several occasions before the Disruption visited his native North Knapdale which sits between Kintyre and the rest of Argyll, but expressed grief for the lack of apparent fruit. 'Returning from a preaching tour of the Hebrides in the winter of 1844-5, McBride spent a Sabbath in Knapdale. Though under the painful impression that no good was done, he was pressed to preach again on the Monday. To his astonishment, many were awakened to deep concern and from that day the work rapidly increased. Well before service time, the church would be packed full, so that people were reluctantly pressed to take turns at staying at home! For a number of months he returned to Knapdale almost every week, and on every visit one or more souls were awakened to the gospel. The total number awakened by May 1845 was between 200 and 300... One observer noted that many converts seemed to be "emerging beautifully. There was a humbleness, a self-abasement, a sense of personal worthlessness, a love of the Saviour, and a devotedness to the glory of God which it was a delight to witness".... He insisted that he used no means whatsoever, other than open preaching, in his work among the people. He seldom spoke with them in private … But in his preaching he did emphasise the need to be born again and not merely awakened'. Glory be to God!

It is good to have such a comprehensive account of revivals in Scotland. There is no doubt that this substantial volume should stir our hearts earnestly to seek times of awakening and refreshing from the Lord's presence for our day of such relative spiritual deadness.

John W Keddie

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”

Psalm 119:97

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