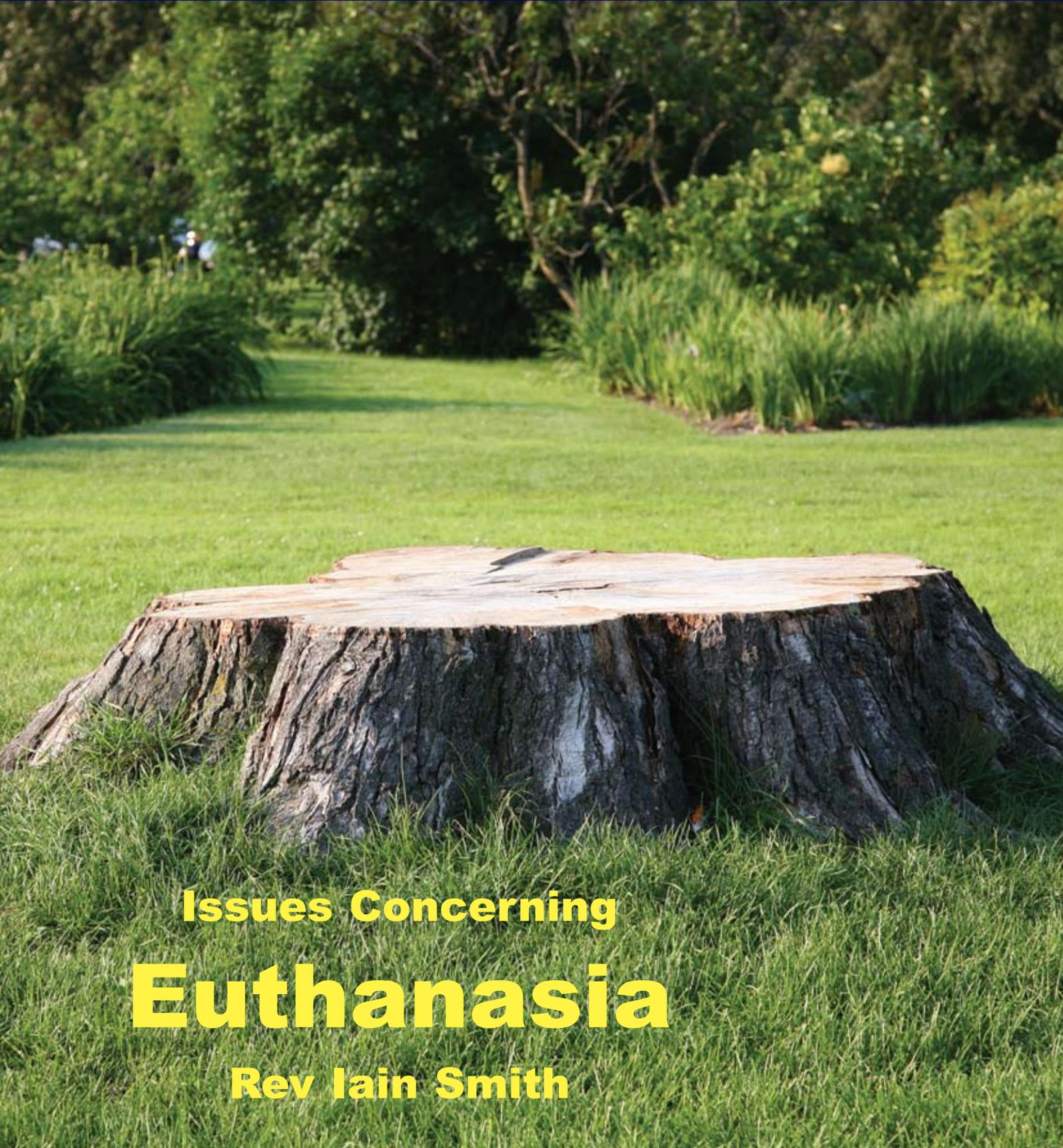


Free Church **Witness**



JANUARY 2010 ISSUE



Issues Concerning Euthanasia

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2010

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Comfort in Death



Recently a lovely old Christian lady in our congregation passed away to be with the Lord. The angels came and carried her soul to Abraham's bosom. The thought which came to my mind when I heard she was gone was the words of M'Cheyne, 'another lily gathered'. Our Saviour delights in feeding among the lilies (Song of Sol.2:16). That morning He had plucked one and as it were placed it in His lapel. She is one of His trophies of grace and 'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied' (Is.53:11). It was 'for the joy that was set before him' (Heb.12:2) that He endured the cross. Now our blessed Lord is enjoying the success of His labours and all heaven is bowing to, and worshipping 'him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood' (Rev.1:5). For her the sufferings of the past five weeks were over and of course 'to depart, and to be with Christ ... is far better' (Phil.1:23). We miss her but she is happy. She is with the Saviour whom she loved and served and soon we will be with Him too, following her there. In a sense she has outrun us. But what will it be like for her and for all our loved ones who have slept in Jesus (1Thes.4:14)? Yes, and what lies ahead for us?

Better than Eden

Heaven is described as a beautiful garden through which a river flows, 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev.22:1). In a dry and thirsty land a river is pleasant. This is no polluted stream such as can be found in our cities but sparkling more purely than any mountain stream. Surely proceeding from God and the Lamb this river must symbolise the life-giving Holy Spirit. There was a river in the Garden of Eden but there is no word about its amazing purity or life-giving quality. In Eden there was the tree of life, but here in heaven there are many such trees, 'in the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river' (v2). They so abound in life that they bear their fruit every month. It is always harvest-time. And 'the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations'. What health, what abounding life, there is in heaven! Surely this tree must symbolise Christ who is our life (Col.3:4). In Eden there was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but there is nothing like that in heaven. No sin can enter, no tempter sneak in and the days of probation are over.

No More Curse (Rev.22:3)

At first this does not sound terribly exciting but on reflection it is wonderful. We live in a cursed world. People ask, Why

is there pain and suffering in the world? In simple terms it is because God has cursed the world. To begin with there was no curse. 'God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Gen.1:31). The world was blessed and man was blessed. God made man in His own image and he enjoyed fellowship with his Creator. God promised him life on condition of obedience and threatened death on disobedience. Man ate the forbidden fruit and so was punished. The threat became a reality. Death means separation and spiritual death followed immediately. Our first parents, conscious of their nakedness before a holy God, hid themselves in the trees of the Garden. But there is no hiding from God. First He pronounced conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Then He declared that there would be pain in childbirth and conflict between husbands and wives. Finally He cursed the ground. It would produce thorns and thistles and only by the sweat of man's brow would he eat food. He stated, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen.3:19). Man was going to die physically. Aging would begin immediately; sickness, disease and disability would follow, and then body and soul would separate. The body would decompose in the grave and the soul would return to God that gave it, in order to render account to Him for the life spent in the flesh. Summing up, we see that the curse involves falling into a state of sin and misery. Temptation, quarreling, fighting, oppression, stress, sweat, weeds, diseases, disasters, pain, weakness, death and sorrow is the common experience of man. The curse appears to reign supreme over this world. What a blessed place it is where there is no curse! 'There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev.21:4). Because our experiences are so limited the best way to describe heaven is in negatives. We know these horrible things here and now, but they will all be missing from heaven. What a wonderful place it will be!

The Throne of God and of the Lamb

God's seat will be in the middle of heaven. The greatest blessing the Israelites enjoyed in the wilderness was the presence of God – the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. God dwelt among them hiding them from their enemies and giving light to them night or day. Hell is a state of God-forsakenness. Some parts of the present world are miserable, crime-ridden places where there is little of the fear of God. It is as if hell had already entered this life.

But heaven is where God dwells. His laws are good and He will enable us to keep them. He will be there as our Father. The throne is that of the Lamb. It is a throne of mercy, grace and love. He will remember our iniquities no more. The past is forgotten and a wonderful future beckons. His kingdom has come at last in all its fullness and it is a mighty and merciful kingdom for the elect of God.

His servants shall serve Him

Some think of heaven as our reigning with Christ and it is certainly that. But it is also serving. In this world we constantly sin and as Christians that is a great grief to us. We long for the day when our besetting sins will no longer cause us to slip and cover us with shame in the presence of our God and Saviour. How easily an idol rises in our hearts, how easily God's name is taken lightly on our lips, how easily God's day is misused! We are constantly indulging in hatred, lust, deceit and covetousness. Surely a mark of the true Christian is hatred for sin, not just outwardly but in our thoughts and attitudes. We long for heaven, never to sin again.

See His Face (Rev.22:4)

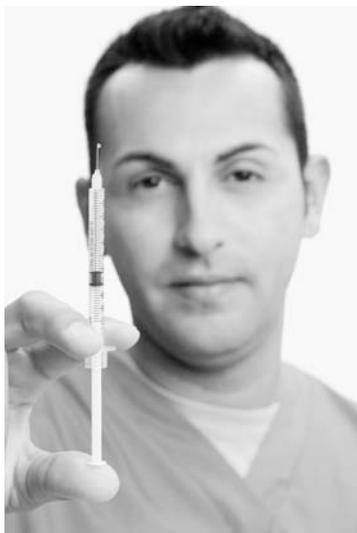
Moses wanted to see the face of God but he was only shown His back parts. The glory of God's face would be too much for sinful, mortal man to see. But one day we shall be glorified and even we, not just saintly Moses shall see God's face. 'We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1Jn:3:2). The Psalmist said: 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness' (Ps.17:15). We shall see, not an angry face, but one full of kindness. We are in love with Him and He with us.

We shall see that face which we struck, which we tore with the crown of thorns, which we mocked and wet with our spits, yet He lovingly bore all that for our salvation. Think of our loved ones, perhaps latterly blind, maybe these eyes quite vacant due to loss of consciousness but now seeing the beautiful, loving face of our Saviour.

His name on their forehead

Some people get tattoos. I think they are quite ugly and disfigure the body. There seems to be a rebellion in tattooing the body. But now His name will be upon the foreheads of God's people and what an ornament that will be! How radiantly beautiful we will appear! No higher honour is possible than to legitimately carry the name of God. We are His people and He is our God. Indeed we are His children and bear His image and likeness, outwardly and inwardly. What an honour in this life if people recognise us on our likeness to Him as our Father, but how often we are unlike Him and let Him down, but one day we shall really be like Him. 'They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels' (Mal.3:17). Not only will we carry His name but we will be as His jewels who beautify and glorify Him.

We sorrow for our loved ones who have passed on. We miss them but they do not miss us. What comfort there is in considering that they are absorbed with the glory of their beloved Saviour. It is good to remember that they have fought their fight and finished their race and now they are enjoying their reward. We must fight on but we do not do so without hope. A wonderful future awaits us and we will yet see that our 'labour is not in vain in the Lord' (1Cor.15:58).



Recently, in Tasmania, a Euthanasia Bill presented by the Green Party was defeated. This article by Mr Smith was widely circulated and helped to that end.

It is incumbent on Christians to be salt and light in their generation. Sometimes this involves simple witnessing amongst friends, family, and acquaintances. Sometimes it calls upon us to put our head above the parapet – something few of us relish doing. In this instance we are being challenged to defend, in the first instance, God's integrity

Issues Concerning Euthanasia

Rev Iain Smith (Hobart, Tasmania)

reflected in the Sixth Commandment, but also the security of the most vulnerable in our society that are protected by the universally accepted *sanctity of life* principle.

The matter is sufficiently serious and literally life-threatening to seek a united face amongst the Christian community. Christians should consider the subject of euthanasia calmly, objectively, Biblically and free from over-emotive language. Euthanasia can be a broader subject with passive and active dimensions as well as various interpretations of 'mercy killing'. Legalised euthanasia can be the catalyst to justify

suicide for those who have low self-esteem or are severely depressed. It would be hugely detrimental to society.

Media reports and talkback radio programmes indicate that people are being won over to an acceptance of euthanasia. The battle is being won, not on principle, but by playing emotional blackmail with worst case scenarios depicting extreme pain and suffering as an unnecessary aspect of dying. It goes without saying that not one of us relishes the thought of loved ones suffering needlessly. Ideally we would wish a peaceful, pain-free deathbed for everyone. Is it right to set aside God's Law depending on the degree of pain and suffering? If that is a legitimate interpretation of Scripture then wouldn't God have been obliged to shorten Jesus' time on the Cross?

Sanctity of life

Some people argue that Christians do not have the moral high ground where *sanctity of life* is concerned. The principle is universally accepted, to a greater or lesser degree, by other religions and by no religions at all. Nevertheless, we are convinced it is distinctly Judaeo-Christian in flavour. It even pre-dates the giving of the Ten Commandments. Genesis 9 makes clear that *sanctity of life* should characterise the post-Flood new world order.

It has also been historically accepted by the Christian church that some exceptions to the 6th Commandment have been sanctioned by God which do not conflict with the *sanctity of life* principle. Whatever we think of war and capital punishment we must accept that many Christians view these as having Biblical warrant to take human life – a necessary evil.

There is another ethical minefield for Christians in the areas of prolonging life by artificial means – for example the withdrawal of nutrition, or distinctions between being permanently brain-dead and indefinitely comatose. We recognise these dilemmas and pray we will never have to face them and profoundly sympathise with those that do. This is not the place to explore the merits and demerits of the complexities that arise in medical ethics. Nor should we consider the merits and demerits of euthanasia on the grounds of such complexities. Nothing less than solid Biblical grounds can warrant setting aside the *sanctity of life* principle.

Dignity

The attack on our Christian culture is being waged on many fronts. One weapon is the use of vocabulary. A favourite with the advocates of euthanasia is the word 'dignity'. The phrase 'dying with dignity' has become the accepted mantra. But what is meant by 'dignity' in this context? As in all other ethical questions the Bible must define how we use language. The Bible teaches clearly that all humans are dignified creatures by our creation in God's image. We have dignity whilst we have life. It doesn't depend on ability, capability, or agility.

Even the death of our Saviour was not without dignity! It is only by viewing the Cross from an earthly perspective that we see the glorious Son of God undignified in His death. Despite the appalling circumstances, His crucifixion as a

willing sacrifice and His love as the Saviour of the world, is surely the very epitome of dignity (Jn.15:13).

In the debate over euthanasia the meaning of dignity has been perverted. It is argued that should a person lose autonomy they have lost their dignity! If one can no longer use the bathroom unaided, or feed oneself, or dress oneself, their dignity is gone. This is not only untrue, it is also cruel. Loss of independence is not loss of dignity. There are lots of people that have little or no independence, from babies to the handicapped, or those recovering from a serious accident or illness. It is absurd to suggest that dignity depends on autonomy. It is outrageous to suggest that Stephen Hawking, the brilliant physicist who has long-since been confined to a wheelchair by motor neurone disease, has no dignity because he can't go to the bathroom like the rest of us!

Physical Pain

Another area being exploited in this debate is *pain*. This is arguably a far more emotive issue. All of us hate the thought of pain in ourselves or in others. It is beyond question that one of the most distressing experiences in life is to watch someone you love suffering a painful terminal illness. Most Christians well understand the desire to hasten the end for suffering loved ones. But again we must temper our considerations, as well as our emotions, by the teaching of God's Word and clear rational thinking. The Bible makes it very plain that pain, to some degree and in some sense, is all part of living and dying. As we manage pain in life and living so we must try to manage it in the process of dying.

Of course there are examples where medication and palliative care fail to free the patient of pain. It is also true that heavy medication of this nature can have undesirable side-effects. But most deathbeds do not involve excruciating pain. Palliative care has improved to such a degree in modern medicine that most pain can be reduced if not removed altogether. Whose pain does euthanasia relieve the most – the patient's or their loved one's suffering?

Psychological Pain

Physical pain is one thing; pain in the mind can be quite different. The problem here is, where do you draw the line? A person can be dying a physically pain-free death yet be in utter torment of mind. Fear of the unknown and the thought of death can be torturous for some people. Do they not qualify to be euthanised as well, particularly if they are old and infirm? Are they to be told: sorry, you have the wrong type of pain? Who decides on the nature of the pain?

But should this proposed legislation have provision for the termination of people in psychological pain, what is the logic of that position? What degree of pain qualifies? How is it to be measured? Is it only those that are also diagnosed as dying from a medical illness that will qualify? What about the person that has no defined illness but claims to be in such torment of mind that they no longer wish to live? Recently a woman in Europe who had lost her two sons in an accident claimed that she was in utter despair and could not continue in this life. There are clinics that agreed with her desire to be euthanised. Who would decide that she was suffering from the wrong type of pain for quick relief?

Old Age

Another related aspect is the inevitability of decreasing function in old age. There is a hill to climb in life and at some time we arrive at the summit and then begin our decline. During this descent we become less functional the older we get. We run less; we walk slower, we take up fewer challenges; we visit the doctor more often; hospital appointments become common place; our sight and hearing become less sharp; our appetites change; and we go to bed earlier. At some stage this decline will inevitably escalate. Health problems become more frequent and more serious. Our independence slowly decreases. Pain becomes routine. Incremental medication becomes necessary.

That is life. It has always been the same. In the Christian worldview such decline never detracts from dignity. Pain, to a greater or lesser degree, is inevitable in old age. Nor does the decline necessarily detract from quality of life. It is another perversion to suggest that an old man or an old woman sitting out their last days, quietly, peacefully, unable to interact anymore, has no quality of life. It is the essence of dignity and quality of life to live one's last days in the quiet environment of a caring home with family, or nursing staff lovingly looking after your needs.

Conclusion

A euthanasia bill is an offence to God and threatens the most vulnerable in our society. Christians must stand firm and oppose this legislation by all possible means.

- Euthanasia defies the principle of the sanctity of life
- Transgressing the sanctity of life principle should have solid ethical grounding such as war or capital punishment
- Compassion alone does not provide sufficient grounds for legislating to take human life
- Human dignity should not be defined merely in terms of what a person can or cannot do
- Instances of extreme physical pain beyond modern medicine are very rare
- Modern palliative care is better than ever and has an excellent track record in reducing if not removing pain
- Instances in America and Europe demonstrate that safeguards in the legislation do not prevent abuse of the legislation
- Euthanasia will threaten the most vulnerable in our society
- The views of a small minority of the population are not a basis for the introduction of morally questionable legislation
- Euthanasia is suicide by another name
- If euthanasia becomes a human right (under this proposed legislation) why not suicide?
- Legislation means obligation. It would become incumbent on the medical authority to carry out euthanasia.
- Who decides which doctor should be involved in this? All, some, most?

Remittances - November 2009

	2009 Nov	2009 Total	2008 Total to Nov				
Presbytery of Inverness				Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Aberdeen	800	10,434	8,781	Cross	1,729	21,686	21,283
Duthil-Dores	2,112	23,456	25,051	Harris - Leverburgh	0	12,399	11,884
Inverness	5,000	33,000	26,000	Harris - Scalpay	1,700	20,459	16,377
Kilmorack & Strathglass	1,300	16,422	15,163	Knock & Point	950	12,525	10,521
Total Inverness	9,212	83,312	74,995	North Uist	1,000	12,053	10,259
Northern Presbytery				Stornoway	5,916	63,898	55,410
Assynt & Scourie	0	2,987	2,570	Total Outer Hebrides	11,295	143,019	125,735
Brora	1,500	18,593	17,268	Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron			
Kiltearn	1,800	19,800	17,400	Bracadale	0	12,078	13,229
Tarbat	4,000	13,739	7,974	Duirinish (Waternish)	0	4,400	4,800
Total Northern	7,300	55,118	45,212	Glenelg & Arnisdale	233	2,048	1,748
Southern Presbytery				Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,350	16,471	15,575
Arran	255	7,016	5,809	Lochalsh & Glenshiel	300	5,764	14,196
Ayr	0	1,538	2,460	Poolewe & Aultbea	852	10,000	11,535
Dumfries	0	0	0	Portree	3,836	19,260	17,206
Edinburgh	15,376	38,454	23,761	Snizort	1,200	15,775	20,061
Glasgow - Partick	2,500	29,500	26,000	Strath	1,000	5,529	5,016
Glasgow - Shettleston	1,000	14,123	10,740	Total Skye & Lochcarron	8,771	91,327	103,365
Glasgow - Thornwood	1,200	26,390	21,402	Total Congregations			
Rothesay	0	220	1,331	Other Donations	1,630	24,760	18,439
Total Southern	20,331	117,242	91,502	Legacy	37,430	37,430	0
				TOTAL	95,968	552,208	459,248
				Including Gift Aid	11,012	75,098	41,983



Mobile Phones

Paul Horwood

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1874, he could never have imagined where it would lead. The name telephone originated from the Greek words *tele*, meaning far, and the word *phonos*, meaning sound. Both words are descriptive of its use in modern society. We are now able to communicate far, and we are bombarded with a multitude of sounds. The telephone has to have been one of the greatest and most useful inventions in modern times but with it have come great dangers as well. Why do I say this? With technological progress came the mobile telephone and the many functions that this machine can achieve.

Technological Progress

Mobile telephones are a most useful tool but with the progress in technology have come grave dangers. The mobile telephone was meant to be for communication but now it can receive and send emails, surf the internet and do many other tasks. They can be used for good or for bad, depending upon the hands they are in. As Christians, we have a great responsibility before God in ensuring that these machines are used for a good purpose.

I was one of those who possessed one of the first mobile telephones that came into existence but since then the advance has been beyond belief. As well as this, there have come advances in computers and the birth of the internet. As the internet grew, we have seen along with the good information it provides, a pit of evil. Man, woman, boy or girl now has access to all their hearts' carnal desires.

Danger to Children

One of the greatest threats to our children is this current and growing mobile phone 'trend'. We have seen the alarming rate at which this phenomenon has spread into almost every child's hand. Most children appear to have had them surgically implanted into their hands or to their ears, only finding detachment in sleeping hours. For Christian parents with children, it is clear that this technically advancing weapon is the new internet and holds great dangers which we ignore at our children's peril. This era of texting has become a plague in our society, but I fear also in our churches and in our home life. Our children are being torn away from the art of communication and from the child's natural God-given pleasures, to playing phone games, texting, listening to pop music on them and all manner of other functions. It would seem in many cases that if a child does not have a mobile phone with which to communicate, they

are unable to communicate! It is addictive behaviour and has become the 'drug' of the younger generation. When a new mobile telephone comes into the market place, there is great interest and a great desire by children to get it. It is most certainly a form of idolatry. When children get a new mobile telephone, at what in most cases is a great financial cost to their parents, they run to their friends showing them their new 'god'. They revel in it, as that which will bring them the praise of others and a new image. It takes the place of God in the hearts of children and the Scriptures take a back seat.

Worldliness

We have to ask ourselves if this is good Christian stewardship in the sight of God. Is not the cost of calls (or contract) an unnecessary expense? Have we lost sight of the things of God and are running after the things of man? After all, why does one need a telephone? Is it not just for the purpose of making a telephone call to someone at a time of importance? Have we lost sight of the real reason why a child may have been given a mobile telephone? Did we not give them a telephone as a means to communicate with us in time of need? Why then do they need to have every other conceivable gadget within the telephone's domain, including the internet? Surely it is now high time to examine ourselves and see if we are honouring God and protecting our children from this grave danger. Many years ago, a Christian friend lent me a very old leaflet entitled, 'Satan's mission of amusement'. Is this not the same case? Are we not giving our children a machine that will provide to the heart a means of worldly amusement? Let us all take great care of our children's hearts and remember to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.



The Reason He Came, Part II

Rev Samuel Watson, EPCI, Finaghy, Belfast.

*This is the substance of his second devotional given at the School in Theology in Larbert 2009
'Now, once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself' (Hebrews 9:26)*

Last month I sought to begin a brief study by considering the 'Appearance He Made', in all the Divinity, Humanity and Mystery of His Person. We now come to the reason He – the Eternal Son, the Sovereign Creator – appeared on earth with human nature. He came to put away sin. This then brings us face to face with:

(a) The Reality of Sin

What is sin? The Shorter Catechism defines it thus: 'Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.' A failure to do what God commands or doing that which God forbids. It takes many forms – disobedience, rebelliousness, self-will, unbelief, missing the mark, impurity – and basically is downright evil and wrong-doing. The Psalmist in Psalm 32 uses three different words in vv1-2, 5 to describe our sins. There is the word 'sin' which refers to our shortcomings in the sight of God. It means 'to miss the mark'. Then there is the word 'transgressions'. This word means 'to step over a boundary'. It refers to intentionally breaching the laws and commandments of the Lord. The third word is 'iniquity'. This word indicates something 'bent or crooked'. It reminds us of the bent within human nature toward evil and its effects! There is a natural tendency within each of us to seek the lowest levels of life. Jacob said to Reuben in Genesis 49:4 that he was 'unstable as water'. Just as water always seeks the lowest level, so men and women, acting according to their fleshly nature, will always seek the lowest levels of living! And since sin is committed primarily against God it brings a sinner into a relationship of guilt before God. Now sins often involve many people. Murder, adultery, theft can and do have an immediate, clear and wide impact on numerous folk. Sometimes sin is excused – because of 'diminished responsibility', 'sure she was a real battleaxe of a wife', 'yes, she stole a loaf, but what was she to do with the hungry children?' etc. But when all these things are set against the sheer, absolute and pure holiness of God they are seen to be totally unclean, loathsome and utterly unacceptable and opposed to Him who is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil; and canst not look on iniquity'. We could speak of sin in thought, word and deed, and as commission or omission, but must forbear. It is a reality.

(b) The Universality of Sin

It is fine to talk in the abstract about sin; we don't mind that, generally. However, the Bible lays it at our own door. 'For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'. 'There is none righteous, no not one'. 'All the world', says Paul, 'is guilty before God'. Except for Christ Himself, who was 'holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners' in that He was sinless, every other person who has ever been born into this world has been born a sinner. Irrespective of who you are, or what your background may be, you are a sinner – just

as I am. Now you may try to deny it and so live as to have people commend you as a good person; or seek to excuse it, and say 'well, we all have our little ways'; and 'I'm not nearly as bad as so-and-so; now they really are sinners' and 'anyway, it's not my fault – he is to blame – they wound me up, made me do it'; or you may be one of those who will try either to ignore it or to cover it up – everything is hunky-dory as long as you don't think about it or nobody knows about it! But the fact is that **God** says we – all of us – have vile hearts, and that we have personal responsibility for our own actions; and there is no person in the world that can hide from the omniscient eyes of God. God is fully aware of the moral and spiritual corruption in disposition and character of every person born into this world. Each of us has been born with a sinful, depraved nature, derived from our representative first parent Adam, and because of that, every part of our being – mind, will, emotions, affections, conscience and even our body – is affected by sin. We give outward evidence of this in the manner we live our life, the motives that drive us, the reactions we display, the deceit in which we will engage, the 'principles' that we can discard when they become inconvenient, etc. Now the reality and universality of sin have to be faced up to because of

(c) The Fatality of Sin

Sin is so loathsome to God that it not only brings a sinner into a position of guilt before Him but also under His just condemnation. Sin incurs a penalty. Because of areas being 'built-up' or because they have been the scene of numerous road accidents, certain sections of road have had speed limits applied to them. Now, if I exceed the speed limit, I have broken the law and incur guilt. I am thus liable to be charged, fined and have my licence endorsed with penalty points. We all understand this and we all accept this: that's how the law operates. And it is no different in relation to the law of God. As guilty sinners we are exposed to the full penalty of God's law – His eternal wrath. We can't come into His presence because of sin. It comes between us and Him as a dark cloud. Scripture is clear that 'the wages of sin is death': everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. So if we want to have fellowship with God, enjoy a relationship with Him and dwell in His presence, we need the problem of our sin dealt with. We need our actual sins forgiven and cleansed, and our sinful nature, from which they spring, overcome and dealt with. That is why Jesus came! To put away sin! For it can be put away! God promises to cast our sins into the sea (the place of no recovery), behind His back (the place of no remembrance) and to separate us from them as far as east is from the west (the place of no return). But how can this be? We will think about that in the next article

as we consider the sacrifice He offered. But for now, as we think about the reality, universality and fatality of sin.

First: We must believe this with conviction

I am very much aware that in today's society the idea of sin is mocked. The way things are referred to nowadays has been changed to take the edge of sin away. We don't talk of 'adultery', but of 'living together'; nor of 'husbands and wives', but 'partners'. Now if a minister is ambivalent about the reality of sin there is no way he will speak of it with conviction to his people. If not convinced of the fatality of sin, men and women will feel no need or urgency in fleeing from the wrath to come. Similarly if not convinced of the universality of sin, both from the aspect of all being under sin and all being corrupted by sin, a church will have no authoritative message of saving grace to proclaim. The doctrine of total depravity does not sit well in today's world. But there can be no evading it if a minister of the gospel is going to faithfully discharge his responsibilities. If people don't like it – well; at least he will have got a reaction and know that the Word has hit home. Remember that the preaching of the Word has a double effect – it is either a saving word (in the widest sense) or a condemning word. It never is preached to no effect – however it may appear to the outward sphere. Be convinced of sin.

Second: We need to particularize sin in preaching

We all know that so long as preaching is kept in general terms, people will happily accept that. They will even be content for the use of illustrations which may be apt, yet totally removed from them. We – all of us – are quite happy to hear about someone else's sins, failures and shortcomings, but the force of a preacher's application must always be to reach those in front of him. And so pride, arrogance and back-biting, deliberate deceit through keeping silent; unclean minds and thoughts; hypocrisy and outward show; losing control of one's temper; conscious cheating in tax returns or social service claims must all be exposed. As must be a determined refusal to apologise, say sorry or admit wrong; or having an unforgiving spirit. How often in Christian circles – indeed even sitting around the Lord's table – are there members who will not speak to one another – or at the most just about acknowledge one another?. The problem in most of our congregations is not going to be murder, corporate fraud, terrorism, drunkenness and the like – but it may be selfishness, covetousness, petty jealousy, envy, lukewarmness, idleness, fickleness (prepared to do anything for peace), wastefulness – including time (addiction to TV?), prayerlessness and lovelessness. For ministers it may be non-compliance with the laws of the land – speeding (ministers are renowned for it)! Or smug self-righteousness – following the May General Assemblies did you, publican-like, thank God you were not associated with the National Church when you should have been on your knees in tears before God at the state of the church in Scotland today? It is the responsibility of preachers so to open and apply the Word of God as that it comes with conviction to both themselves and to those sitting under their ministry.

Third: We must mortify sin in our own members

As I indicated last time, rightly or wrongly, it seems to me that ministers are in particular danger of pride. There are men among us who have immense gifts, both in the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures and in the service of various well-known Christian organisations. These give rise to preaching opportunities, and widespread, including international, recognition. But whether known or unknown, all of us privileged to be in the pulpit are standing before men and women, many of whom are inclined to defer to our supposed greater knowledge, ability and spirituality, and it is tempting to succumb to their opinion about ourselves. Even our elders may have reluctance in speaking to us of our sins and shortcomings. But if our pulpit preparations have become so mechanical that they do not involve our own hearts being convicted by the Word, then we are in a serious condition. Application ought to come first and foremost to a preacher, before he ever seeks to bring it to others. Remember Paul in 1Cor 9:27: 'But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway'. The under-shepherds of the flock must never forget that, generally, the sheep will achieve no greater heights than the under-shepherd. If we warn others about sins – specific sins – of which we are guilty ourselves (and doing nothing about) then we are only hypocrites and can expect no blessing on our ministry.

Fourth: We must confront sin in all its forms in our preaching

We cannot and must not ignore what is going on all around us. Abortion on demand, the 'gay and lesbian' agenda, the push for euthanasia, the increased acceptability of 'living together' rather than within the marriage bond, the immorality of many in public office – whether in lifestyle, false accounting, blatant lying and 'spin' have to be met face-on and exposed. It is the duty of ministers of the Word, not becoming politicians but clearly saying to our society 'here is God's Word; thus saith the Lord on this particular matter'. Now that may give rise to our being regarded as dinosaurs and as those living in the past. So be it! One thing is certain, God has not changed, nor has His Word. Society may not regard things which used to be regarded as sins any longer that, but we must not leave any in doubt as to the supreme authority of God's Word or the unchanging standards God imposes and requires personally and nationally.

Fifth: We must preach deliverance through Christ

That is why He came, after all – 'to put away sin'! It should be our greatest joy to bring the gospel to sinful souls. What a privilege it is to be able to present Christ and Him crucified to a congregation! Sinful though we are, we have hope in Christ, who came 'to take away the sin of the world'. We are greatly honoured to have a message from God for needy souls that meets their need and delivers them from sin and eternal death. May God renew the fire within us to be faithful to Him and His Word in these days of declension; and oh, may we see Him graciously at work in the hearts and lives of ourselves and our people!



News

Free Speech Win

Christian Institute

The House of Lords voted on 11th November to keep the free speech safeguard in the 'sexual orientation hatred' law. Peers voted by 179 to 135 in favour of keeping the protection, which underlines the fact that discussion or criticism of homosexual conduct is not, in itself, a crime. In the House of Commons the following day the Justice Secretary Jack Straw accepted the Lords vote. It means the Government's sexual orientation hatred law includes a protection for the free speech of those who wish to express their beliefs on sexual conduct.

Simon Calvert, Deputy Director (Public Affairs) at The Christian Institute, called it a 'victory for common sense'. He said: 'After many well known cases involving heavy handed policing of Christians, Parliament has decided to protect free speech. The free speech clause simply makes clear that which the Government has always accepted – that criticism of homosexual conduct is not, in itself, a crime. Surely that is a reasonable safeguard in any democratic society that cares about freedom of expression. This is a victory for common sense.'

The free speech clause, first tabled by Lord Waddington, has been the subject of several to-and-fro votes in Parliament. The Government had said the clause was not necessary because the law would not catch reasonable expression of beliefs. But others said recent cases of police investigating Christians for criticising homosexual practice showed that the clause was needed.



Abby Johnson with pro-life activist Shawn Carney

Conversion of Abortionist

Christian Observer

Bryan, Texas, Planned Parenthood Director Abby Johnson viewed an ultrasound of an abortion, and was soon sitting at her desk, crying, and realising that she could no longer work where unborn children were being killed. While wondering where to go, she looked out her office window across the street to the Coalition for Life (CFL) office where people were outside praying. Johnson got into her car, drove to the CFL office, and crying, introduced herself and told the surprised CFL people what had happened. Johnson is currently making the rounds of national media interviews, explaining why she is now a pro-life supporter.

Massive Pro-life March in Madrid

Christian Institute

Up to two million people took to the streets in Spain on Saturday 17th October to protest against

Government plans to weaken the country's abortion law. The Socialist Government wants to weaken current abortion laws. Part of the proposals would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to have an abortion without the knowledge of their parents. But one 15-year-old at the march said: 'I don't think

it is right for a 16-year-old girl to take the decision to kill a child, who is a person who can be like me or you in a few years.' Reports from Spain say many ordinary members of the public marched alongside politicians, including the former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar.

Arbroath Youth Weekend

Irene MacKinnon

The next Arbroath Youth Weekend Away will be from February 12-15, 2010 with Rev Gavino Fioretti speaking on 'What is the church?' The weekend is for ages 16+ and for information on prices and to download a booking form go to:

www.partickfreechurchcontinuing.co.uk/Crow_Road/Weekend_Away.html

For any more information contact: irene.mackinnon@gmail.com or fiona_t1@yahoo.com

Desk



Abortion excluded from healthcare

Christian Observer

Reacting to the U S House of Representatives on 7th November 2009 passing the Health Care Bill minus provisions for government funding of abortion, Christian Defence Coalition Director and Reformed Presbyterian pastor the Rev Pat Mahoney commented: 'This historic vote in the United States House of Representatives signals the beginning of the end for "Roe v Wade". President Obama made taxpayer-funded abortions a key part of his presidential campaign and it was strongly supported by Speaker Pelosi and House leadership. Pro-choice groups spent millions of dollars to have taxpayer-funded abortions included in healthcare legislation, to no avail. It is important to note that taxpayer-funded abortions were excluded from the healthcare bill because of the votes of Democrats in the House, not conservative Republicans. This vote shows what recent national polls have demonstrated, and that is - America is turning away from abortion and embracing human rights and a culture of life. The pro-life community must now passionately and prayerfully work to ensure that taxpayer-funded abortions are not a part of the Senate bill or any final vote on healthcare. The House got it right. Abortion is not healthcare.'

Pope to meet the Queen

Christian Observer

The Daily Record for 15 November 2009 reported that the Roman pontiff Pope Benedict XVI in September 2010 will visit England for three days



Pope Benedict XVI

followed by one day in Scotland, where the pontiff is scheduled to meet the then-on-holiday Queen Elizabeth II and will conduct an outdoor Roman mass, possibly at Hampden Park in Glasgow.

Scottish Secretary Jim Murphy commented on 14 November 2009: 'This is a fantastic honour and an enormous responsibility. A papal visit would be a historic event and I am delighted that [Prime Minister] Gordon Brown has asked me to work on this. We have already been inundated with invites for places for the Pope to visit and people to meet. I know that across Britain, people of all faiths would give the Pope a wonderful welcome. It is for the Vatican to announce any details but it would be a visit to remember for a very long time.'

Believing as we do that the Pope is the antichrist we cannot share Jim Murphy's enthusiasm for this proposed papal visit.

Ten Percent of US Protestant Churches Pastored by Women

Christian Observer

Writing in a 15 November 2009 article in The Birmingham (Alabama) News entitled 'More Protestant Flocks are Led by Female Pastors', Greg Garrison reports that in 1999, women were senior pastors in five percent of U S Protestant churches, and that in 2009, ten percent of U S Protestant churches have women for senior pastors, fifty-eight percent of these in mainline denominations.

The Bible tells us 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man' (1Tim.2:12).



November Queen's Speech

Christian Institute

Schools Bill: Sex education

A new schools Bill was announced for England and Wales which will force all schools there to teach sex education from the age of five. The Children, Schools and Families Bill will mandate that all schools from primary level upwards must teach sex education. Parents will lose the right to withdraw their child from sex education when their child reaches the age of 15. Faith schools will also be forced to teach children about contraception and homosexuality.

Schools Bill: Home schooling

The Bill will also introduce measures in England and Wales aimed at giving the Government more power over parents who wish to educate their children outside of the school system. The Government wants officials to be able to question home-schooled children about their education without parents having a right to be present. Home-schooling parents will be committing a crime if they fail to register with the Government or provide particular information on how they are educating their children. State officials in America recently ordered that a home-schooled girl be forced to attend a government-run school because she was deemed to be 'too Christian' in her outlook.

Dilemma between Academic Freedom and Scriptural Fidelity

Christian Observer

Bayly Blog writer Tim Bayly, in a 4th November 2009 article titled 'Christianity Left Behind...' discusses the current dilemmas being faced by several Christian Colleges including Calvin College and Wheaton College between Scriptural fidelity and the culture 'moving toward the normalisation of sodomy', the result of which 'is the silencing of Scripture's denunciation of sodomy as an abomination before the Lord'. Bayly points out that this cultural shift has only happened after 'abominations such as fornication, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, and adultery have already been normalised'.

Bayly continues: 'There's no conviction of sin going on – none at all. Instead, we're busy balancing compassion and doctrine.... The denial of Scripture formerly reserved

for mainline liberals has made much progress among evangelicals. Most evangelicals are liberals now, although they're lulled to sleep by weekly rest stops in pews where they hear reassuring talk of being "born again" and having "a personal relationship with Jesus". There's no doctrine, though; no membership and submission to elders, no fencing the Lord's Table, no preaching, no repentance; and thus, no Christian faith'.

Bayly reviews the ongoing discussions, procedures, and controversies in evangelical denominations and their affiliated institutions of higher education, focusing upon Calvin College faculty's formal objection to the trustees' earlier reminder of the prohibition of advocacy for homosexuality and same-sex marriage, concluding:

'Yes, yes; always more discussion. No firings. No terminations. No repudiation of tenure. Only more discussions. While our precious children are being led to Hell – the place where discussions of abominations have no end'.

Iran – Update on imprisoned Christian Women

Barnabas Fund

Praise the Lord for a significant development in the case of the two young Christian women, converts from Islam, who were arrested in Tehran in March and charged with anti-state activity, propagation of Christianity and apostasy. On 7 October Maryam and Marzieh were brought back to the Revolutionary Court, where the judge acquitted them of the charge of anti-state activity. Such acquittals are rare in Iran. Now that this charge has been dropped, the remaining charges will be considered in the general court. The two women are thankful to their fellow Christians for ongoing prayer and to the Lord Jesus for sustaining them in prison and giving them the courage to stand firm in their faith during the court hearings.

• Praise the Lord for this rare piece of good news for Maryam and Marzieh. Pray that the two remaining charges will be dropped and that the women will be released from prison soon.

Hundreds protest at sex swap Jesus play

Christian Institute

Hundreds of Christians have held a candlelit protest against a taxpayer-funded Glasgow play which portrays Jesus as a transsexual. Jesus, Queen of Heaven is part of the Glasgow! festival in Scotland, and is advertised as: 'Jesus is a transsexual woman. And it is now she walks the earth.' 'This is a play with music that presents her sayings, her miracles, and her testimony'.

Around 300 Christians stood outside Glasgow's Tron Theatre holding placards reading 'Jesus, King of Kings, Not Queen of Heaven'. Reports say about 20 people were in the audience for the play.

One protestor, Jayne Richardson of Zion Baptist Church, said: 'Jesus is our Saviour and the Son of God and there is no doubt that He came to this earth as a man.' After the play was announced the Christian Institute's Simon Calvert said in August: 'If Glasgow's council taxpayers were consulted, I doubt they would consider this was a good use of their money'.



Like Cat, Like Kitten!

C H Spurgeon

Most men are what their mothers made them. The father is away from home all day, and has not half the influence over the children that the mother has. The cow has most to do with the calf. If a ragged colt grows into a good horse, we know who it is that combed him. A mother is therefore a very responsible woman, even though she may be the poorest in the land, for the bad or the good of her boys and girls very much depends upon her. As is the gardener such is the garden, as is the wife such is the family. Samuel's mother made him a little coat every year, but she had done a deal for him before that: Samuel would not have been Samuel if Hannah had not been Hannah. We shall never see a better set of men till the mothers are better. We must have Sarahs and Rebekahs before we shall see Isaacs and Jacobs. Grace does not run in the blood, but we generally find that the Timothys have mothers of a godly sort.

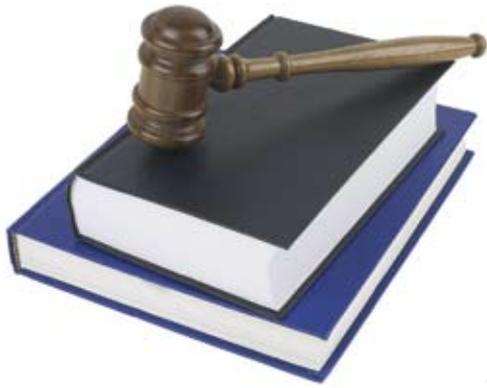
Little children give their mother the headache, but if she lets them have their own way, when they grow up to be great children they will give her the heartache. Foolish fondness spoils many, and letting faults alone spoils more. Gardens that are never weeded will grow very little worth gathering; all watering and no hoeing will make a bad crop. A child may have too much of its mother's love, and in the long run it may turn out that it had too little. Soft-hearted mothers rear soft-headed children; they hurt them for life because they are afraid of hurting them when they are young. Coddle your children, and they will turn out noodles. You may sugar a child till everybody is sick of it. Boys' jackets need a little dusting every now and then, and girls' dresses are all the better for occasional trimming. Children without chastisement are fields without ploughing. The very best colts want breaking in. Not that we like severity; cruel mothers are not mothers, and those who are always flogging and fault-finding ought to be flogged themselves. There is reason in all things, as the madman said when he cut off his nose.

Good mothers are very dear to their children. There's no mother in the world like our own mother. My friend Sanders, from Glasgow, says, 'The mither's breath is aye sweet'. Every woman is a handsome woman to her own son. That man is not worth hanging who does not love his mother. When good women lead their little ones to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus blesses not only the children, but their mothers as well.

Happy are they among women who see their sons and their daughters walking in the truth.

He who thinks it easy to bring up a family never had one of his own. A mother who trains her children aright had need be wiser than Solomon, for his son turned out a fool. Some children are perverse from their infancy; none are born perfect, but some have a double share of imperfections. Do what you will with some children, they don't improve. Wash a dog, comb a dog, still a dog is but a dog: trouble seems thrown away on some children. Such cases are meant to drive us to God, for he can turn blackamoors white, and cleanse out the leopard's spots. It is clear that whatever faults our children have, we are their parents, and we cannot find fault with the stock they came of. Wild geese do not lay tame eggs. That which is born of a hen will be sure to scratch in the dust. The child of a cat will hunt after mice. Every creature follows its kind. If we are black, we cannot blame our offspring if they are dark too. Let us do our best with them, and pray the Mighty Lord to put his hand to the work. Children of prayer will grow up to be children of praise; mothers who have wept before God for their sons, will one day sing a new song over them. Some colts often break the halter, and yet become quiet in harness. God can make those new whom we cannot mend, therefore let mothers never despair of their children as long as they live. Are they away from you across the sea? Remember, the Lord is there as well as here. Prodigals may wander, but they are never out of sight of the Great Father, even though they may be 'a great way off'.

Let mothers labour to make home the happiest place in the world. If they are always nagging and grumbling they will lose their hold of their children, and the boys will be tempted to spend their evenings away from home. Home is the best place for boys and men, and a good mother is the soul of home. The smile of a mother's face has enticed many into the right path, and the fear of bringing a tear into her eye has called off many a man from evil ways. The boy may have a heart of iron, but his mother can hold him like a magnet. The devil never reckons a man to be lost so long as he has a good mother alive. O woman, great is thy power! See to it that it be used for Him who thought of His mother even in the agonies of death.



Books

Come Down, Lord!

Roger Ellsworth

Banner of Truth, pbk, 57pp, £4.00

Surely we would say that revival is much needed and is much sought after in our day! And yet are we truly seeking revival? And are we seeking revival in a biblical way? This little book helps us consider such questions. Drawing on the prayer of God's prophet in Isaiah 63 and 64, the author presents, in seven short but stirring chapters, the situation in Isaiah's day and applies the Biblical principles to our own times. This edition also includes questions at the end of each chapter, which prompt further profitable personal and corporate examination.

Whilst giving no place to the thought that man can produce, or work up revival, the author draws helpful practical implications from the passage. The nature of the people of God as being separate and called out from the world receives its due emphasis. Time and again Scripture sets before us the covenant blessings promised to God's people upon obedience, as well as the contrasting curses upon disobedience. This is no less true or relevant when we consider revival. We are directed to first remember who God is, who we are, and at what price we have been purchased. Living in the light of these great truths we can then look with expectancy for the Lord's mighty working in revival.

Progressing through the book, this reader felt a heightening sense of the need for earnest prayer; and this is exactly where the book concludes. Indeed, we may say that this is the primary goal of the book, to drive us to plead with God, reason with God, and persevere with God in prayer, in a spirit of repentance.

A very succinct and readable little book, *Come Down, Lord!* is a helpful introduction to biblical teaching on revival, and will surely challenge much of the thinking surrounding this subject in today's church. The church must truly come out, before we can expect the Lord to come down.

Daniel Brooks

Let's Study Matthew

Mark E Ross

Banner of Truth, pbk, 352 pp, £9.00

Let's Study Matthew is one of a number of New Testament commentaries in the *Let's Study* series, of which Sinclair Ferguson is editor. The present volume on Matthew is written by Mark Ross who is a Professor of Systematic Theology at Erskine Theological Seminary, USA. Each chapter in the book begins with the printed Bible portion from the English Standard Version (ESV), followed by a very well structured commentary, dividing the quoted Bible portion by clear and relevant headings. For example, dividing Matthew 9:18-38, there are the following headings: 'The Dead are raised'; 'The Blind Can See'; 'Those Who See Become Blind'. In addition, at the end of each chapter of the commentary there is a helpful summary of the passage just considered. At the end of the book there is a Study Guide that is very well written, suited to both group and individual study.

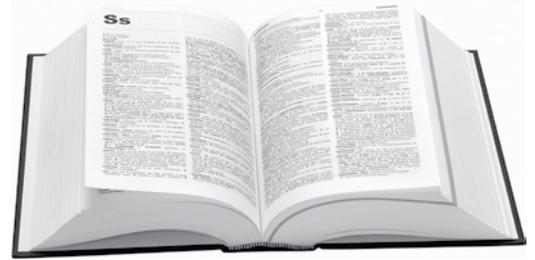
As well as the structural benefits of the book, it is written in a most readable style, with very clear language that flows well. It is a book that could be read easily by Christians of all levels of understanding. As the publishers say in the preface '*Let's Study Matthew* is part of a series of books which explain and apply the message of Scripture. The series is designed to meet a specific and important need in the church. While not technical commentaries, the volumes comment on the text of a Biblical book; and, without being merely lists of practical applications, they are concerned with the ways in which the teaching of Scripture can affect and transform our lives today. Understanding the Bible's message and applying its teachings are its aims.'

Though not a 'technical' commentary, this does not mean that the presentation of theological points and clear expositions are absent. The following two quotes should help to show this:

Commenting on Matthew 27:46 the writer, correcting the often overemphasised –



Books



though not of course to be overlooked – physical aspect of Jesus’ sufferings says: ‘Of greater help to us is the cry of dereliction (verse 46), “My God my God why have you forsaken me?” Quoted from Psalm 22:1, these words reveal the deep and agonising separation from God the Father that the Son experienced in His human nature and consciousness, when the wrath of God came upon Him for the sins of His people. If hell is what our sins deserve, then hell must be what Christ suffers for us.’

In explaining the basis of future judgment as taught in Matthew 25, he says, ‘Reading about this final judgement, focused as it is on the works performed by the sheep and goats, Christian readers are likely to be as surprised as the sheep and the goats. For if judgment is to be on the basis of our works, who can hope for salvation? Have not we all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? Have we not been taught to look away from our works and trust Christ alone for salvation, to trust that His works will be received as our own and that His death be received as our own? Yes, indeed ... But we must also remember that while faith alone saves, the faith that saves us is never alone (Jas.2:14-26). We show our faith by our works ... our lives show our salvation, and on the last day our works will be used to vindicate our faith; showing that it was a true and living faith by which we were saved, and by which we served.’

In sum, I heartily commend this commentary, as perfectly fulfilling its proposed and intended purpose.

Rev Calum Iain Macleod

Why on Earth did Jesus Come?

John Blanchard

Evangelical Press, bklt, 40pp, £1.10

Here we have the latest in John Blanchard’s series of evangelistic booklets. It deals with the incarnation, the mystery of God becoming man,

the history of the birth of Christ, the evidence, the objections raised and the purpose of His coming.

Like previous booklets in this series, it is beautifully produced, very readable, argues with atheists and agnostics and presents the gospel in a clear way. When most evangelistic literature is Arminian it is good to have a thoroughly Reformed and therefore Biblical presentation of the way of salvation. Here is the sort of booklet which you will benefit from reading and can give confidently and profitably to an unbelieving friend.

Creeds, Councils and Christ

Did the early Christians misrepresent Jesus?

Gerald Bray

Christian Focus Publications, pbk, 224pp, £13.00

This book, originally published in 1984, now appears in Christian Focus’ Mentor series. As Christians we tend to know our Reformation and post-Reformation history quite well but are often ignorant of the early church and the controversies which raged then. However as regards the great doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ the early church has much light to shed. Various heresies arose and the true faith had to be defined in contrast to them. Arising from these debates, church councils were called and from them issued the early creeds such as that of Nicea and Chalcedon which define orthodoxy today.

Gerald Bray provides us with a history of the early church, the pagan philosophies which affected it, the different schools which developed, the individuals concerned and the struggles which took place. The book is well written and not too technical though it would be of more use to students and ministers rather than the general Christian public.

There were a number of smaller points on which I felt that Bray was not satisfactory.

For example he asserts that Protestants do not usually deny that Roman Catholics may be true Christians. However traditional Protestantism regarded Roman Catholicism as the church of the antichrist. He states that the Puritans were divisive, but the Puritans stood for the truth against the errors in the church of their day. He states that heretics were often sincere Christians whereas Paul says that heretics after the first and second admonition should be rejected. He gives too much place to Barth’s neo-orthodoxy as the great answer to liberal theology, though he does note some of Barth’s weaknesses. He speaks of the creeds as authoritative expressions of biblical faith while he asserts that the confessions of the Reformation just set out the teachings of distinctive churches. The creeds however are just as subordinate to the authority of Scripture as the confessions. At a recent conference I attended the words of the Apostle’s Creed were raised: ‘Christ ... died, and was buried. He descended into hell’. On the basis of a speculative interpretation of the difficult words of 1Peter 3:19-20 it was confidently asserted that following His death Jesus went to hell to preach to the spirits in prison and this was claimed to be the truth because the Creed taught it – this, despite the fact that Jesus said to the thief dying beside Him, ‘Today shalt thou be with me in paradise’ and when dying Jesus said, ‘Father into thine hands I commend my spirit’. The words, if they must be retained, should be seen merely as asserting that Christ entered the realm of the dead, although, as Bray notices, the Latin word used (*inferna*) has a pejorative connotation. Better to see it as referring to the real hell of God-abandonment that Christ went through on the cross. The creeds were valiant attempts by the early church to assert the truth in contrast to heresy but so also were the confessions of the Reformation. They were not meant for one church but rather a call to all to unite

around the truth revealed in Scripture. The early church in their creeds kept back nothing of the truth that they believed. They did not present a minimalistic basis of faith which anyone could believe but rather the full-orbed truth knowing that it would exclude many professing Christians such as the Arians who believed that Christ was created, and the Nestorians who

believed there were two persons in Christ, divine and human. These heresies are still around today. Despite these points this book deals helpfully with the early church and its creeds.

Rev William Macleod

Ecumenism And The Reformation (Part III)

Rev Dr Wayne Pearce (Associated Presbyterian Church, Lairg)

Having previously considered false ecumenicity Dr Pearce now turns to look at Biblical ecumenism.

The Reformation and the promotion and practice of Biblical ecumenism

In doctrine and in deed the Reformers sought to cultivate true church unity on a local, national and international scale. They did so, not like the modern ecumenicists on the basis of expediency or the perceived claims of any church or worldly head, but on the only sure and solid foundation of God's infallible and inerrant word. In other words the Reformers sought to reform the church on a purely biblical template realising that true ecumenism, that is, Christian fellowship, is in love **and** truth. Moreover they understood as the writers of the preface to the Westminster Confession of Faith did that, 'The two great pillars upon which the kingdom of Satan is erected, and by which it is upheld, are ignorance and error'. Thus Calvin noted: 'A holy unity exists amongst us, when, consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone'. Commenting on the words 'and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd' from John 10:16 Calvin added: 'That all the children of God may be gathered and united into one body; as we acknowledge that there is one holy universal church, and there must be one body with one head (Eph.4:4-5). Now though this *flock* appears to be divided into different *folds*, yet they are kept within enclosures which are common to all believers who are scattered throughout the whole world; because the same word is preached to all, they use the same sacraments, they have the same order of prayer, and everything that belongs to the profession of faith'.

Unity in faith and obedience

The Reformation teaches us that true church unity is only to be had in faith and obedience to Christ and His word. Thus in reply to the question 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3), the Reformers formulated a confessional basis for church unity based solely on the teaching of God's authoritative word. The Reformation fathers did not seek to erect a monolithic ecclesiastical structure but instead they sought to publicise and give true expression to the catholicity of the church and the communion of saints on the basis of our common faith and practice. While the Reformed churches in various parts of Europe formulated their own credal statements it should not surprise us that there was

doctrinal uniformity and a similarly high degree of practice among them. For example the *Scots Confession* of 1560 states the platform for practising biblical ecumenism: 'As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so do we most earnestly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be a church; that is to say, a company and multitude of men chosen of God, who rightly worship and embrace Him, by true faith in Christ Jesus, who is the only Head of the same Kirk, which is also the body and spouse of Christ Jesus; which Kirk is Catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the elect of all ages, all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews, or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with God the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit; and therefore it is called the communion, not of profane persons but of saints, who, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have the fruition of the most inestimable benefits, to wit, of one God, one Lord Jesus, one faith, and of one baptism; out of the which Kirk there is neither life, nor eternal felicity'.

The Elect who believe

Let us note firstly then that the church is not a building nor is it simply a worldly institution, as all too many people are still apt to think. Instead the Reformers make clear that it comprises those who are recipients of and dependents on sovereign grace. The true church is 'a company and multitude of men chosen of God, who rightly worship and embrace Him, by true faith in Christ Jesus'. Understanding this is vital to any ecumenical activity. It is Christ's church for He redeemed all those that collectively comprise its ranks through His active and passive obedience and they must therefore remain ever faithful and obedient to Him. God's people are called and equipped to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. The Reformers rightly expressed the truth that the church has an invisible aspect, for God alone truly knows those who are His. However it is also called to manifest itself visibly in this fallen world. God's people are called to be saints, they are called to be holy, they are called to be salt and light. Like Simeon, God's children are called to be just and devout. While justification and sanctification describe quite different things they always accompany one another in the true believer. Therefore the church 'is called the communion, not of profane persons but of saints, who, as citizens of the

heavenly Jerusalem, have the fruition of the most inestimable benefits'. The Reformers rightly understood God's people to be a holy people: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (1Cor.6:9-11). For this reason the visible church should receive into membership only those who have repented of their sin and who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, along with their seed. Moreover the visible church must exercise biblical discipline in order to safeguard her testimony and witness to the world.

The Reformation fathers also rightly proclaimed that salvation is by sovereign grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. They preached the gospel to every creature but sought fellowship among those who believed the biblical gospel. God alone is the author, worker and finisher of His people's redemption. The Christian is not saved by his good works as the modern ecumenicist believes but he is saved in order to do God-glorifying good works: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works' (Eph.2:10). This great truth was confirmed in the strongest possible terms in the *Scots Confession* which stipulates: 'we utterly abhor the blasphemy of those that affirm that men which live according to equity and justice shall be saved, what religion soever they have professed. For as without Christ Jesus there is neither life nor salvation, so shall there none be participant thereof but such as the Father has given unto his Son Christ Jesus, and those in time come to Him, avow His doctrine, and believe into Him'. The modern ecumenical movement would do well to remind itself that there is only one way of salvation and One Saviour of sinners who is the Way, the Truth and the Life! The exclusivity of the true faith leaves the modern ecumenicist uncomfortable for this is not popular in our relativistic and pluralistic world but we must follow the example of the Reformers and take our stand upon it!

Christ the Head

The *Scots Confession* was also unequivocal in stating that Christ is the **only** Head of the church, which is also the body and spouse of Christ Jesus. One of the great strengths of the Church in Scotland during the Reformation period and in subsequent times, and the true source of her power and blessing, surely lay in her commitment to the Headship of Jesus Christ. The Covenanters contended for Christ's crown and covenant; the Disruption fathers for the Crown rights of the Redeemer! What about us? God's word declares that Christ purchased the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). 'He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence' (Col.1:18). Calvin wisely and rightly reminds us that 'Christ is the Church's **sole** master'. No Pope or Patriarch or any earthly ruler can be head of

Christ's church. The willingness of the modern ecumenical movement to court and curry favour with the Church of Rome in particular testifies to their ignorance and disobedience in this area. Moreover, the dispensationalist teachings among some in modern evangelical ecumenist circles have fostered the aberrant doctrine that a person can receive Christ to be their Saviour without having to accept His Lordship in and over their lives! Again this is a plain denial of our glorious Reformed and biblical heritage! Here in Scotland, Knox during his powerful scriptural refutation of the Roman Catholic Mass in 1550 was adamant that Christ is King and Head of His Church. As such, Knox correctly contended that believers were not only subject to the guidance, rule and protection of Christ's kingly rule but as His subjects they had also to be attentive to and obey His commands. Knox rightly insisted that 'it becomes the kirk of Jesus Christ to advert what He speaks, to receive and embrace His laws; and where He makes end of speaking or law-giving, here to rest; so that all the power of the kirk is subject to God's word'. This is foundational to biblical ecumenism but sorely lacking in the modern ecumenical movement.

True catholicity

Finally the Reformers rightly emphasised the true catholicity of the church. The Confession states that the church 'is Catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the elect of all ages, all realms, nations, and tongues ... who have communion and society with God the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit'. Note this is already a reality! The word catholic simply means universal. The Apostles' Creed declares: 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church'. The Reformation fathers were in no doubt that the church comprises the elect of all ages, all realms, nations, and tongues whom Christ purchased to Himself through His vicarious and sacrificial life, death and resurrection. It appears to escape most people's notice today that the term Roman Catholic is a contradiction in terms! (*Roman* limits while *Catholic* is universal.) We need to reclaim and spread abroad the Reformed teaching on catholicity for this alone has the support and warrant of the Word of God. The church of God truly transcends all national, cultural and social barriers. It transcends denominational barriers. It is not confined or defined by space or time. 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1Jn.1:3). The church of the Reformation sought not only to promote biblical ecumenism but sought to practise it through mutual support, encouragement, fellowship and prayer. And we need to do the same in our day.

True biblical ecumenism is something we must work at within our own congregations, within our denominations and between churches and denominations as Bible-believing Confessional Christians. The Lord Jesus specifically says: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' (Jn.13:35). It is hardly surprising that our witness is so often ineffectual today and even potentially

damaging! What does the world see when she looks at the church? God's word leaves us in no doubt that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand! By contrast the Bible lays great emphasis on the unity, the oneness, the togetherness of Christ's church. 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all' (Acts 4:32-33). The

early church practised true ecumenism and its unity in the faith was expressed and blessed by God with great power and grace. This was emulated by our Reformation Fathers and I believe that it is time for us to follow their example that all the glory would be to God alone. Let me conclude by echoing the words of J C Ryle who once said that if the hedges around our denominations cannot be removed then let them be kept low enough that we can shake hands over them!

Mission Trip to Sri Lanka

Rev James Frew

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal.6:10).

Kerey and Partheepann's older brother Pastor Vijayenthiran sent a cry for help in late July, 'Come over and help us'. The dear brethren in Sri Lanka requested me to come as speaker for their first Mission Camp which was to be held in Hatton.

Background

Sri Lanka has gone through much suffering in recent years. The Tamil Tigers had been fighting for 'freedom' and the government against 'terrorists' and the ordinary Sri Lankan was caught in the middle. As in all wars the poorest and most vulnerable are often those who suffer most. Over 70% of the population of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese who are mostly Buddhist. The Tamil people are mainly Hindu. Christianity, mostly Roman Catholic, accounts for 7.5% and Islam 7%. Spiritually the people are very open to discuss the things of God. Atheism such as is so common in the UK has little footing in Sri Lanka. The climate is tropical with monsoon rains and baking heat. Scots visiting Sri Lanka can find it difficult indeed. Humidity can be very high so that the pages of your Bible can get soggy. Curry and spice and all things nice can be eaten in Sri Lanka. The locals love spicy food, often eating a main meal late at night. Sri Lanka is a third world country with some desperate poverty. To see some of the poor shuffling around in dirty rags with limbs missing, sitting begging during the day and sleeping on the streets under a rag at night can be disturbing.

At the meetings, one thing stood out. The women all sat on one side and the men all on the other – unless they were married. Also the men were very tactile with one another showing amazing affection for each other without any suggestion of uncomeliness. 'These people really love one another', I thought.

Evangelistic Spirit

It is in some degree true that a church not evangelising is a church dying and the brethren in Sri Lanka are most certainly evangelising. Despite the difficulties they face there is missionary spirit about them that is evident in the work. It is wonderful to see young Sri Lankan 'mission workers' full

of desire to learn and to bring the Word of God, not only to Tamils but to Sinhalese, and to any who will know the way of the Lord. There is no spectator Calvinism with them. Our base was in Colombo with Kerey, though we spent a good bit of time with Vijayenthiran. Kerey's wife, Rathy, is a sweet and gentle lady who cannot do enough to keep visitors happy. Other families in Colombo also showed hospitality too. It seems to be a tradition that visitors are treated to a meal. If you like spiced food you will love to visit.

The Mission Camp

I was asked to speak at the first mission camp of Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church which ran from 2nd to 5th September 2009 in Kotagala, in the Hatton hill country of Sri Lanka. The people came from Jaffna, Colombo, Hatton, Trincomalee, and Mannar, as well as other places on the island. It was wonderful to meet the Lord's people there. The theme of the mission camp was personal holiness. We drove all day to get to Hatton from Colombo. The distance is just over 100 km but the roads are so winding and the traffic so chaotic that travel is greatly hampered. Eventually we arrived. Moving from the lowlands to the highlands means a severe drop in temperature but a great increase in rain. Colder and wetter we unloaded the van and found our way to our rooms. There were 104 adults and 39 children. Deacon Jeffrey Soh came as a delegate from the Calvary Bible Presbyterian Church, Jurong, Singapore which has been a supporting church for the work. The titles for the addresses were: 'Personal Holiness in Worship, in Prayer, in Family and Marriage, in Fellowship and in Service for God and Evangelism'. Kerey preached on 'Holiness in the life of David' and Vijeyanthiran 'Holiness in the life of Moses'. It was a blessed time but very demanding.

Blessing Reported

Vijeyanthiran reported that 'many of the people testified of God's blessings from His Word, especially in the area of holiness in the family and marriage. It is the greatest challenge for today's church families to fear and honour the Lord in holiness in the home. I believe this particular topic had a great impact on the fathers and mothers and husbands and wives present'. The children at the camp enjoyed being taught about 'The Fruit of the Spirit'. Working with the



Thayananth, James Frew & Vijayenthiran

children Kerey's wife Rathy was assisted by two of the young workers, Mr Santhamohan and Mr Piratheepan. It was wonderful to see the young learn their Bible lessons and do Art & Craft work to reflect the lessons. The children's speakers were P Sivapalan and S Kirubakara who, I am told, clearly explained the fruit of the Spirit and applied the messages at the level of the children, exhorting them to faith in the Lord Jesus.

Tragedy

During the trip I heard of some tragic things. I mention two. A very pretty young girl from one of the poor areas was violated and told that the right thing to do was to marry the man. The result is that he beats her and abuses her and she is suicidal and so she has come to one of the missions asking for help. 'What do you advise, Mr Frew?' In a culture where women are often abused and treated as possessions clear direction is needed. Another horrific case was in Jaffna. Life can be so cheap here. The mother of one of the mission workers I was speaking to had been burned to death the previous Tuesday. Some disagreement occurred and the result was that she had fuel poured over her and she was set alight. This young man was being comforted by the brethren here and yet he was so calm casting his case into the hands of the Lord – amazing grace, indeed.

Theological Classes

The mission workers also gathered for classes on the theme of Biblical Preaching & Evangelism. All the mission workers met over three days after which I was more than tired and my translator had lost his voice. How strange it was to see these men, notepads in hand, hungry to absorb every little crumb of gospel help that they could get! It was a time of refreshing and of renewal through the learning of Scriptures together with some interesting and thought-provoking questions.

The Lord's Supper

On the Lord's Day after the mission camp a gathering crammed into a hotel

room in Colombo for the preaching of the Word and the observing of the Lord's supper. I was deeply privileged to preach to these dear people and I was so touched to sit at the Lord's table with them. That was a tender time together as we sat around the ordinance of the Saviour having come from North, South, East and West.

Practical Help

On setting out on the trip and knowing how difficult the situation in Sri Lanka can be we did not want to burden the people. Airfares are a great expense and the last thing I wanted was to burden the work there with expenses. With the blessing of the Lord we were able to go to Sri Lanka not only at no cost but also to give a gift. The Lord's people in Adelaide gave very generously. A roof needed to be repaired for the Hatton children's work and we were able to pay for all the materials. One very promising young girl needed financial help to educate her and we were able to fund her for two years. Another young man was funded for a year. Trincomalee, Hatton and Jaffna received gifts to help the poorest of the people associated with the work there. We wanted to be a practical as well as a spiritual blessing to the brethren and by God's great grace we were. Perhaps we may be able to help these dear friends in the future also.

Prayer Needed

Please pray that these meetings will continue to bear much fruit.

Please pray that the Tamil Christians will be protected from persecution.

Please pray that the mission workers will be spiritually helped to go with great boldness to the lost in Sri Lanka.

Please also pray that the young girl mentioned above will be delivered from the thralldom of domestic abuse and that the believers there will give her the necessary support.

Please pray that Thasangan, the young mission worker whose mother was burned, will be kept from a vengeful spirit or bitterness and that he would be comforted by the people here and strengthened by the Lord.

Please also pray that the stronger churches may be able to continue to support the poor people there in Sri Lanka.

If anyone wishes to support the work in Sri Lanka then we can direct what to do – email james@jamesfrew.com



Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57