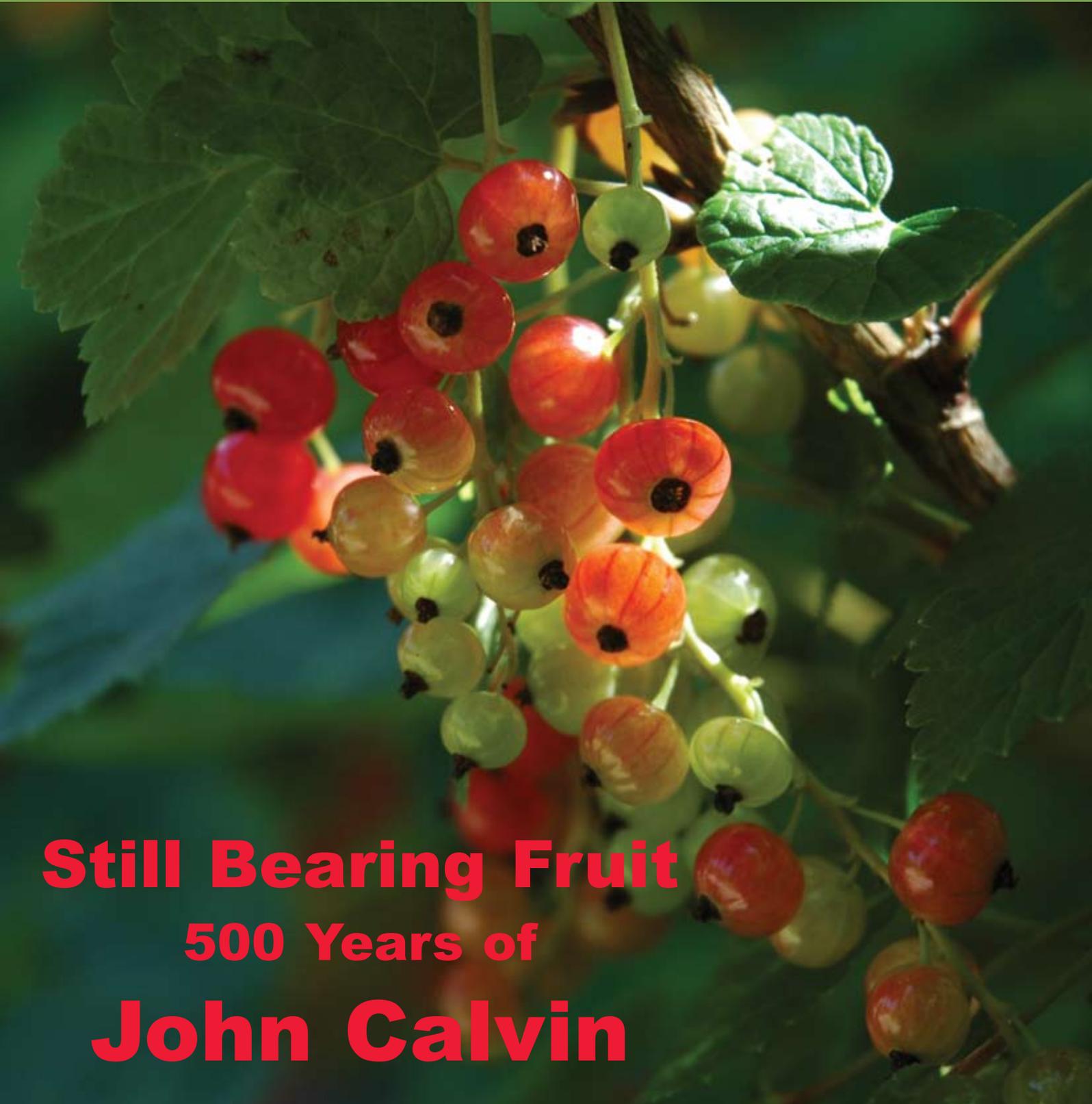


Free Church

Witness



MAY 2009 ISSUE



Still Bearing Fruit
500 Years of
John Calvin

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I Will Be With Thee

Some people have a tendency to depression and despair. All of us at times are shaken, anxious, panicky and struggling. We wonder how can we cope. We feel stretched to breaking point. We hear Satan whispering in our ear, 'You are in big trouble. You are finished. God doesn't care'. But instead of listening to Satan let us hear what God really says: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee' (Is.43:2). God is with all those who trust in Him. Wait patiently and you will be wonderfully delivered.

The Reality of Trials

God says 'When thou passest', not 'if'. Every true Christian will have their sufferings in this life. Calvin, the great Reformer, had his share of sufferings. His three children all died in infancy. His wife, Idelette de Bures, died after only nine years of married life. He himself suffered from many painful illnesses. Wicked people sometimes get through this life very easily. The Psalmist is perplexed at this: 'For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men' (Ps.73:3-5). It was only when he went into the house of God and thought on the future of the ungodly that his equilibrium was restored. Their punishment is kept for the next life. God's children however suffer in this life, yet it is never meaningless suffering: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth' (Heb.12:6). As a loving Father He corrects them. He will not spoil His children but trains them for a wonderful future in heaven. As gold is purified in the fire so the Lord places His people in the crucible to prepare them to be jewels in His crown, shining as the stars throughout eternity.

As we look at some Christians we wonder, How could I cope if that was me? Other times we wonder, Why am I going through all this? Has the Lord specially selected me as a target for His arrows? Again our comfort is in the Scriptures: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it' (1Cor.10:13).

The Variety of Trials

Illness can be hard to bear especially if it is one on top of another. Pain, weakness and disability stretch us to our limits. Worst of all is mental illness. It is not just a limb or an organ that is affected but the whole system is disabled.

Because the brain controls our thought patterns, plans and strategies, illnesses of the mind are doubly crippling. Further, because people cannot see the affected organ, they often have little sympathy or understanding. Foolishly they think that it is just a matter of pulling yourself together. Also it is sometimes thought that because the illness is in the mind it is a spiritual illness which can be sorted out by prayer, repentance and faith. This increases the pain and sense of guilt for the one whose brain is not functioning properly.

Bereavement brings many tears and a great sense of loneliness and loss. Family breakup is a great and common trial in these days. I have heard people say that if their spouse had died it would have been easier to bear. Careless and ungodly children are a trial to many a loving parent. How hard it is to cope with the thought of your beloved flesh and blood ending up in hell! Another increasingly common problem in today's financial climate is the loss of work. For someone who has been employed all their life this can cause great anxiety. Financial problems can make the future look very grim. There are many other trials: robbery, violence, fraud, an accident, unkindness of friends and persecution. You know your trials.

Sometimes several trials come together. If it was just one you could manage but when there are three you feel overwhelmed. Remember if you could cope easily it would not be a trial. We all get what will test us. Some could be crushed by a small test, but others need much more. Our loving, caring, heavenly Father fills our cup of sufferings for us and He measures every drop.

God's Special Relationship With Us

A large part of the answer to trials is to look up: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Ps.46:10). Instead of constantly focussing on the troubles, or looking inward at our own reserves and abilities to cope, look up to God. Think of His special relationship to us and His promises. Continuing to look at our sins and failures will lead to despair. 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not' (Is.43:1). The Lord created us from nothing but the focus here is especially on the new creation. Everything good that we are is as a result of Him. The name Jacob reminds us of our nature as deceivers yet the Lord made us into Israel, the prince who prevails with God. We were slaves but He redeemed us and bought our freedom with His own blood. 'I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee' (v3), no, more than that, I gave my Son for you. Therefore having paid this huge price for you, will I not value you highly? 'Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee'

(v4). I have adopted you, 'I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine' (v1).

God's Wonderful Promise

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee' (Is.43:2). We have many examples of this from Scripture. God was with Israel passing through the Red Sea whereas the Egyptians were drowned. He was light to Israel and a troubling darkness to their enemies and caused their chariot wheels to come off. Jordan was overflowing her banks when God went with His people through the river into the promised land. At the command of Nebuchadnezzar Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace but before long Nebuchadnezzar was able to see someone else with them in the flames, the Lord Himself. The soldiers died but not a hair on the head of the faithful was singed.

You are going through terrible trials but He has given you the Comforter and 'He dwelleth with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you' (Jn.14:17-18). Why are we afraid when He is with us? 'Why art thou

cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God' (Ps.43:5).

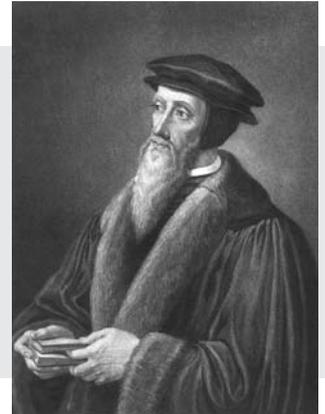
Calvin's Comment

'While he (Isaiah) shows that the church will not be exempt from calamities and afflictions, but must maintain a constant warfare, he encourages to patience and courage; as if he said "The Lord hath not redeemed thee that thou mightest enjoy pleasures and luxuries, or that thou mightest abandon thyself to ease and indolence, but rather that thou shouldst be prepared for enduring every kind of evils". By *fire* and *water* he means every kind of miseries to which we are liable in this life; for we must contend not with calamities of one kind only, but with infinitely diversified calamities. At one time we must pass "through the water", and at another time "through the fire"... For it often happens that he who has been victorious in one combat has been baffled by another kind of temptation. We are therefore tried by afflictions, but are at length delivered; we are baffled by the billows, but are not swallowed up; we are even scorched by the flames, but are not consumed. We have, indeed, the same feeling of pain as other men, but we are supported by the grace of God, and fortified by the spirit of patience, that we may not faint; and at length He will stretch out His hand and lift us up on high.'

John Calvin

A Man Sent By God

Rev Maurice Roberts



John Calvin was born just five hundred years ago, on July 10th 1509. Few men have lived such fruitful lives as he did. He was a man raised up by God to do a mighty work on earth. He deserves our deep respect and our heartfelt affection as we recall how much we owe to him under the sovereign grace of God.

John Knox, our eminent Scottish Reformer, had the highest regard for Calvin, whom he knew personally. Knox said of Geneva, the city where Calvin preached, that it was 'the most perfect school of Christ which has been since the days of the Apostles on earth'. The Reformed Church in Scotland owes an immense debt to the influence of John Calvin. It is a debt which in this anniversary year should be gratefully remembered in our land.

Calvin's Conversion

Calvin was a Frenchman, born not far from Paris. In early life he was a Roman Catholic. He was sent to Paris to study for the priesthood. Here his exceptional intellectual gifts

were recognised. For a time he turned his attention to law, and was such a brilliant scholar that he often lectured to the class in the absence of the professor. His conversion to Christ and his turning from Catholicism came about in the year 1532, when he was in his early twenties. He was influenced by evangelical friends who had come under gospel teaching emanating from Luther's disciples in Germany. Eager to know the truth, Calvin began to search the Scriptures and to read the early Church Fathers. His conversion was not gradual but rapid. He said: 'Like a flash of light, I realised in what an abyss of errors, in what chaos I was.' God, he wrote later, was pleased by a 'sudden conversion' to subdue him and make him willing 'to know the truth.'

From now on Calvin's greatest study was of the Bible. His vision was to have a pure church based on the Bible as the Word of God.

Calvin's life was full of activity. In 1534 he met with a few friends for the first time to celebrate the Lord's Supper in

a biblical way. They met, for safety, in a cave at Poitiers – known today as ‘Calvin’s Cave’. In 1536, at the age of twenty-seven, he published in Latin the first edition of his famous *Institutes*.

Calvin’s *Institutes*

This wonderful book may fairly be called probably the greatest book ever written, with the exception of the Bible. Over the years of his life Calvin enlarged the *Institutes*, which is a textbook of Bible doctrine. This first edition of 1536 contained just six chapters: 1) God’s Law; 2) Faith; 3) Prayer; 4) the Biblical Sacraments; 5) the so-called Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church; 6) Church Government. As time went on Calvin enlarged the *Institutes* till at its final edition of 1559 it had eighty chapters. It is the finest summary of Christian teaching ever written and deserves to be carefully studied by us all today. It is full of life and power. It is in no way ‘dry’ or ‘academic’.

Calvin at Geneva

Calvin’s life’s work was done at the Swiss city of Geneva. God’s plan is clearly seen in the way this came about. After some years of fleeing from persecution he arrived at Geneva on August 5th 1536. He intended to leave next day. But William Farel, a fiery evangelical preacher, had heard that Calvin was passing through the city and he went to the house where he was lodging. Farel threatened Calvin with the curse of God if he should prefer a quiet life of study to the work of the Lord. Calvin wrote later that Farel’s words ‘terrified and shook’ him.

In this dramatic way God made known to Calvin’s conscience that he must stay at Geneva. This he did, faithfully and courageously preaching the Word of God and reforming the state of society. It was to this ‘model’ church and state, in which the principles and doctrines of Scripture were most thoroughly promoted and practised, that John Knox was to come some years later.

Calvin’s Sufferings and Labours

It was not, and never is, an easy task for a preacher to curb the passion and control the evil desires of fallen men and women. Calvin’s life was at times in danger. Some gave the name of ‘Calvin’ to their dog to show their hatred of him! Again and again the great Reformer had to stand up for truth and for righteousness against opponents who arrived at Geneva to weaken his godly influence.

It should be noted that the reform of the people was done mainly through preaching. Every second week he preached daily in plain language. Being asthmatic he spoke slowly. His hearers sometimes made notes of what he said. It is from such notes that we today have several volumes of Calvin’s Sermons.

The church services at Geneva, besides having excellent biblical sermons, also included Psalm-singing. Calvin himself composed some of these ‘spiritual songs’, or Metrical Psalms, as we now call them.

Calvin also laid stress on the importance of having a Catechism so that basic Christian truths could be learnt at

the start of life. From these things it is clear that we today owe a great debt to Calvin’s influence.

Calvin’s Personal Life

It would be unfair to think of John Calvin as having been a severe or unkind man. It is certainly true that he was intolerant of false doctrine and irreligious behaviour. But it was a sense of his duty to God and to men’s souls that made him resolute in such matters. As a Christian he was deeply humble, sincere, pure and conscientious. His motto was ‘I offer my heart to Thee, O God’. In Latin: *Cor meum tibi do*.

Calvin loved his wife, Idelette de Bures, whom he married in 1540. By her he had three children. His marriage however was to be overshadowed with sadness. His children all died in infancy. His wife died after only nine years of married life with him.

In health, too, Calvin was deeply acquainted with pain. He was, as one writer put it, ‘a walking hospital’. Theodore Beza, a close friend and associate of Calvin, could say of him: ‘We have in this man a most beautiful example of a truly Christian life and death’.

Calvin’s Death

The best tribute to this great Reformer’s zeal for God is the voluminous number of his books, just about all of which are in print today and are read all over the world.

He wrote numerous letters and promoted the gospel by them far and wide. For example, he wrote letters to Cranmer in England, inspired Knox, our Scottish Reformer, guided the believers of Moravian background, helped the Polish brethren, assisted the cause of Christ in Hungary and strengthened the hands of the many French evangelicals who suffered persecution for their faith. Calvin even promoted a mission to Brazil in 1555 – though it was not successful.

Calvin mounted for the last time the pulpit of his church (called St Peter’s) in Geneva on February 6th 1564. But he was troubled with difficulty in breathing. He could hardly complete his sermon. When forced to take to bed he was still endeavouring to complete unfinished work or else dictating letters. He said that he wished to be busy in God’s work until his ‘last sigh’. Those who heard him speak in these last days of his life were so moved that they could scarcely keep back their tears.

Towards the end of May 1564 he was reduced to the last flicker of life here on earth. At the end he was in constant prayer, especially using the words of Psalm 39: ‘I opened not my mouth because thou didst it’. When he died Geneva was heartbroken. The city deeply lamented the passing of an eminent servant of the Lord.

In remembering John Calvin we do not think only of the *man*. What is most important to realise is that he was a precious, gifted servant of God, raised up by Christ to be a blessing to His church in after ages.

May God help us all to learn from the life and labours of this faithful Reformer! And may God see fit to raise up others like him in this world so that Christ’s church may be revived – and the glorious truths of the gospel spread far and wide, to the glory and praise of God!

John Calvin

A Man Whom God Prepared

Rev Ronald Mackenzie

Born at Noyon, France in 1509, John Calvin was described by William Cunningham as 'by far the greatest of the Reformers with respect to the talents he possessed, the influence he exerted, and the services he rendered'. The second of three sons who survived infancy, he was bereaved of his mother in childhood. His father Gerard was a man of considerable ability who rose from humble beginnings to enjoy a lucrative career as cathedral notary, registrar to the ecclesiastical court and procurator fiscal, and was ambitious to have his three sons, Charles, John and Antoine educated for lucrative positions in the hierarchy of the Roman Church. By the age of twelve, John was employed by the bishop as a clerk and received the tonsure (a shaven head, marking out his preparatory consecration to the priesthood). But the religiously devout young Romanist 'as yet knew not the Lord' who was to bring him out from the spiritual darkness which enveloped the pre-Reformation Church and make him a blessing throughout the Christian world.

Student for the Priesthood

Among the many abuses in the unreformed Church at the time was the practice of bestowing benefices (ecclesiastical church offices and titles, even upon young children who received the major part of the revenues while the duties were performed for a pittance by others). Such revenues were often used like modern day bursaries to provide promising young men with the best education available in Europe at the time. Patrick Hamilton also benefited from this corrupt system when he was appointed titular abbot of Fearn, Ross-shire while only a young child. It is significant that Calvin shortly after his conversion surrendered publicly his benefices and their income.

Calvin also obtained the patronage of an influential aristocratic family, the Montmars, by whose additional assistance he was able at the age of 14 to attend the College de la Marche in the University of Paris where he was taught Latin by one of its greatest teachers, Mathurin Cordier who became his close friend. The course completed, Calvin entered the somewhat forbidding College de Montaigu as a philosophy student for the priesthood. Here the hard-working, self-disciplined Calvin made rapid progress, acquiring a thorough knowledge of the early church fathers such as Augustine. But discipline at this college was harsh and severe. Trivial offences were punished with birching. As for Calvin he embraced it as a challenge. He threw himself into his studies with characteristic intensity, working both night and day. His sleep suffered and fasting was enforced. The food provided for the students was poor and meagre

and it is not surprising that Calvin's health was undermined for life.

Change to Study Law

In 1525 his father who had fallen out with the ecclesiastical authorities withdrew his son from studying for the priesthood and enrolled him in the University of Orleans to study law and Greek under Melchior Wolmar, believing that his exceptionally gifted son would earn more money as a lawyer than as a priest. But Wolmar was a Lutheran whose newfound friendship and discussions with Calvin aroused earnest enquiry in the latter who then began to question Church teachings in his search for Gospel truth. Having heard that the famous humanist lawyer Alciati was teaching in the University of Bourges Calvin enrolled in 1529. During his eighteen months there he continued his Greek studies. By 1532 he had already both graduated in law and published his first book, a philosophical commentary and dissertation on Seneca's *De Clementia*. It won high praise from fellow humanist scholars on account of its erudition, clear thinking and acute analytical skill. But it was merely an academic work on heathen philosophy. A profound alteration was about to take place in his whole outlook similar to that of the Apostle Paul who testified: 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ ... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ'.

Conversion

It was sometime during this period that Calvin appears to have undergone a saving change. Although morally blameless in his outward life, an obedient son to his father, and an exemplary student not given to frivolities, Calvin's soul was deeply disturbed by a growing sense of the utter sinfulness of his heart and life. Convicted of his natural pride and self-righteousness and finding no peace from the directions or penances imposed by his priestly father-confessor, he had begun to search the Scriptures and to cry to God for light and mercy. While little is known of the circumstances surrounding his conversion we do have a reference to the event in the preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*: 'God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life'.

Another incidental reference occurs in Calvin's *Letter to Cardinal Sadolet*, when testifying to the saving power of the Gospel in his own case and calling upon God as witness, he confesses that 'all my life I had been nourished in error and

ignorance. And when my mind had been made ready to be truly attentive, I began to understand, as if someone had brought me a light, in what mire of error I had wallowed, and had become filthy, and with how much mud and dirt I had been defiled. Being then grievously troubled, I judged nothing more necessary to me after having condemned with groaning and tears my past manner of life than to give myself up to betake myself to Thy way². Here we have a young man who, like Luther, was overwhelmed by his consciousness of sin and found pardon and peace by resting on Christ alone for salvation.

Calvin, however, was reticent about the details of his conversion. Knowing something of the deceitfulness of his heart, its pride and self-love, he felt that the details concerned no one but himself and that to God alone should the glory be ascribed. His conversion was not some cold intellectual decision on his part but a soul-humbling discovery of God's mercy in Christ to a lost sinner. He saw how an all-wise Providence had hitherto directed his steps. The love of Christ now constrained him to a life of entire devotedness to his new Master. 'My heart', wrote Calvin, 'I offer as a sacrifice unto Thee'. It was to be the motto of his life. For Calvin, salvation first to last was of the Lord.

Hebrew and Greek

Following his father's death, Calvin returned to Paris in 1533 to study Hebrew as well as Greek at the new humanist college of Fortet where he made friends with a group of fellow students interested in the teachings of Luther. Among them was Olivetan, his cousin (who later translated the Bible into French). Both Melchior and Olivetan appear to have been instrumental in leading Calvin step by step to Christ. In debate with Olivetan, Calvin found he could not resist the cogency of his friend's appeal to the Holy Scriptures. It convinced him of the impossibility of harmonising evangelical truth with papal dogma. For some of his reforming friends who were terrified at the thought of separating from the visible Catholic Church (which seemed to them a sinful schism) the reformation was to be effected from within, Gospel truth working like leaven within the corrupt organisation. But for Calvin a return to the apostolic concept of the visible church was required, founded on the truth of Scripture alone.

Persecution

Another of his student friends was Nicholas Cop, a reformer who had been appointed rector of the University. On November 1st, 1533 he devoted his inaugural address to the need for reform and renewal in the Catholic Church. It was forceful Lutheran evangelical truth delivered to an audience comprising members of the hierarchy, nobility, and chief citizens of Paris. It aroused the fury of the faculty who denounced it as heretical. That Calvin had helped Cop in its preparation seems undeniable. In any case he was implicated in Cop's offence and for the next year he and Cop were forced into hiding. To avoid detection by their enemies, they separated: Cop to Basle, a city then under the influence of the reformer Oecolampadius; Calvin to Angouleme where he found shelter with his friend, Du Tillet, a scholarly parish priest and canon of the cathedral who had already embraced



John Calvin (1509-1564)

Lutheran doctrines. Here a splendid library of almost 4000 volumes and manuscripts was placed at his disposal.

The respite, however, was short-lived and in common with other Protestants he was forced to flee France during the Affair of the Placards when unknown but imprudent reformers provoked a violent backlash against Protestants by posting placards in Paris and other cities strongly attacking the Mass. While their zeal for truth was commendable, the manner of its execution and the language used in the placards was highly inflammatory and instead of convincing their fellow countrymen of the idolatry of the mass it served only to enrage the French King and his Roman hierarchy. Many suffered death by torture and burning at the stake.

The Institutes

Finally, in January 1535, Calvin joined Cop in Basle where he resumed his studies and wrote his great work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In 1536 it was published as a brief perspicuous exposition in six chapters of the true faith of the church drawn from the Bible and arranged systematically. Above all it was readable and intended for ordinary readers. Not since 1517 when Luther published his 95 Theses did a publication create such a sensation throughout Europe. Calvin at the age of 26 found himself among the foremost of the European reformers.

In the words of the historian Schaff: 'This book is the masterpiece of a precocious genius of commanding intellectual and spiritual depth and power'. Throughout Europe it was welcomed as the clearest, strongest, most logical, and most convincing defence of Christian doctrine since the days of the apostles. Its preface to Francis I King of France explains one reason for its appearance: to defend the persecuted believers from the calumnies of the Romanists and to show that the faith the sufferers professed was none other than the teaching and practice of the apostolic church. Calvin continued to expand the original edition throughout his lifetime to become a dogmatic textbook of four volumes. William Cunningham summarises our debt to Calvin: 'If Calvin's system of doctrine, government and worship is in the main Scriptural, he must have enjoyed very special and abundant communications of God's Spirit in the formation of his convictions, and he must have rendered most important services to mankind by the diffusion of invaluable truth'.

John Calvin

The Preacher of St Pierre

Rev Tim McGlynn

In obedience to Jesus' command: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk.16:15), the apostolic church placed preaching at the forefront of its efforts. Its emphasis was on 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). However, this emphasis soon declined, and for many centuries, with certain notable and noble exceptions, preaching was relegated to a secondary place behind the sacraments or suffered the damaging effects of an increasingly-unrestrained allegorical method of preaching. Luther and other first generation Reformers returned the proclamation of God's Word to its rightful place. Therefore, when Calvin entered the pulpit, determined to put the Bible first, he was following in the footsteps of others. 'Before him there was a Luther, a Bernard, an Augustine and an Origen' (T H L Parker).

Calvin had not intended to preach when, in 1536, he arrived in Geneva. However, in God's providence, the passionate entreaties and vehement imprecations of William Farel turned the shy young scholar from his journey to Strasbourg. He had hoped that in Strasbourg he might write in defence of the Reformation in relative peace and tranquillity. Instead, he found himself on a path which would be marked by ceaseless labours and continual opposition. 'The course of his life was changed. Not just geographically, but vocationally. Never again would Calvin work in what he called the "tranquillity of studies". From now on, every page of the forty-eight volumes of books and tracts and sermons and commentaries and letters that he wrote would be hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility' (J Piper). Thus, suddenly and unexpectedly, John Calvin was thrust into the role of a preacher of the Gospel.

Calvin's Estimation of Preaching

Calvin felt a deep sense of wonder when he considered the condescension of God in entrusting the ministry of the Gospel to men. He wrote: 'Those who think the authority of the Word is dragged down by the baseness of the men called to teach it disclose their own ungratefulness. For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that He deigns to consecrate to Himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them'. He viewed preaching with the utmost seriousness and solemnity and never lost his sense of accountability to God and responsibility to his hearers. The great privilege that he should 'preach the unsearchable riches of Christ' did not allow him to stand above the Word. 'For Calvin the message of Scripture is sovereign over the congregation and over the preacher. His humility is shown by submitting to this authority' (T H L Parker). It is clear that

for Calvin the pulpit was no place for mere professionalism. He stated that, for the preacher, 'It would be better for him to break his neck going up into the pulpit if he does not take pains to be the first to follow God'.

The tendency of many to portray Calvin as a cold, rather aloof figure, content to wrestle with abstruse points of theology, is a caricature unworthy of any well-informed and honest individual. While he carefully and calmly preached to his hearers the truths of Scripture, he burned with a deep conviction that he and his fellow Reformers were engaged in a most important work. 'With Scripture as our guide, we are calling men back to the knowledge and preaching of the grace of Christ alone'. Throughout his life this passionate conviction shaped the great Reformer of Geneva's pulpit ministry. He called for pulpits to be filled with the type of preaching by which men and women were 'touched to the quick, and that they feel that what the Apostle says is true (Heb.4:12), that "the Word of God is a two-edged sword, piercing even through the thoughts and affections to the very marrow of the bones". I speak thus Monseigneur, because it appears to me that there is very little preaching of a lively kind in the kingdom, but that the greater part deliver it by reading from a written discourse'. Geneva had in John Calvin a man who sought to strike the Word of God into the hearts of all who heard him.

Calvin's Example as a Preacher

One of the first things to strike you in the sermons of John Calvin is their profound reverence for Scripture. He writes: 'Our wisdom ought to be in nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness...whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture'. In particular, we note Calvin's frequent warning that preachers are not to preach their own 'dreams and fancies'. He states: 'Therefore, let those who desire to be wise with sobriety, and to teach others well, appoint themselves these bounds, that they utter nothing but out of the pure fountain of the Word'. His method of systematic expository preaching was a direct result of his belief that 'the Scripture is the fountain of all wisdom, from which pastors must draw all that they place before their flock'. Year after year, book by book, section by section, Calvin sought to unfold the meaning of the Bible to the St Pierre congregation. T H L Parker explains 'Almost all Calvin's recorded sermons are connected series on books of the Bible ... he preached on a New Testament book on Sunday mornings and afternoons (although for a period on the Psalms in the afternoon) and on an Old Testament book on weekday mornings'. Calvin was banished from the pulpit of St Pierre's on Easter day, 1538, and only returned to the same pulpit over three years

later. When he re-entered the pulpit in September, 1541, he simply picked up at the next verse in his exposition and continued as if he had never been away.

In preaching Calvin studiously avoided difficult words or complicated sentences. His intention was to make Scripture understood by all that heard him. He had a brilliant mind and a first-rate knowledge of classical literature, but he refused to flaunt his learning. Favouring the use of illustrations drawn directly from Scripture or daily life he also preferred the use of familiar words and images. When explaining the nuances of the text he rarely mentioned the original language and completely avoided the use of Greek and Hebrew words in the pulpit. He frequently engaged the minds of his hearers by asking searching questions. The combination of his legal training, classical education, and piercing intellect enabled him to use such questions to great effect. He might by this means expose the folly of erroneous teaching, reinforce the logical coherence of a particular truth, encourage his hearers to think more deeply on the topic in hand or forcibly apply the passage to the hearts of the congregation.

In applying the text he sought to declare the gracious message of the Gospel to the hearts of wounded sinners: 'Now let us fall down before the face of our good God, with acknowledgement of our sins, praying Him to make us so

to feel them, as being right cast down as we ought to be, we may repair to the sovereign refuge of His infinite goodness which He has promised to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and there take so sure foundation, as we may not doubt of His favour towards us'. Calvin also sought in his application to exhort his hearers to live good and godly lives and not to be hearers only: 'Then if God give us any authority, or so replenish us with this Holy Spirit, as we be honoured among other men: It is not for us to advance ourselves, nor to overrule them like Lords (for that were an abusing of God's gifts, and a wresting of them clean contrary to His meaning:) but it behoves us to know that our Lord employs us to the comforting of the poor and afflicted ... that such as seek to serve God with all lowliness of heart may be cheered by hearing and seeing us'.

The church of our day stands in need of a generation of preachers possessed of similar convictions. Too often men imagine that faithful Biblical exposition and fervent Gospel proclamation cannot dwell together. The result is either dry and heartless commenting on the words of the Bible, or superficial appeals based on little or no deep acquaintance with the Word of God. Calvin's preaching shows us that far from being incompatible, faithful pastoral instruction and fervent Gospel application are most effective when united in truly powerful preaching.

Congregational Remittances - March 2009

	2009 Mar	2009 Total	2008 Total to March				
Presbytery of Inverness				Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Aberdeen	2,099	3,932	3,050	Cross	2,989	6,358	5,604
Duthil-Dores	2,281	5,341	4,098	Harris - Leverburgh	1,774	3,774	3,000
Inverness	2,000	6,000	6,000	Harris - Scalpay	2,026	5,196	4,620
Kilmorack & Strathglass	2,156	4,756	3,300	Knock & Point	900	2,700	2,550
Total Inverness	8,536	20,028	16,448	North Uist	1,441	3,041	2,400
Northern Presbytery				Stornoway	5,800	15,278	14,341
Assynt & Scourie	325	325	900	Total Outer Hebrides	14,931	36,348	32,515
Brora	2,453	5,053	3,600	Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron			
Kiltearn	1,800	5,400	5,100	Bracadale	1,688	3,688	3,000
Tarbat	1,422	2,922	2,250	Duirinish (Waternish)	400	1,200	1,200
Total Northern	6,000	13,700	11,850	Glenelg & Arnisdale	297	566	416
Southern Presbytery				Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,812	4,462	3,900
Arran	1,110	1,927	964	Lochalsh & Glenshiel	1,379	3,695	3,068
Ayr	413	613	1,500	Poolewe & Aultbea	1,637	3,387	2,519
Dumfries	0	0	0	Portree	1,200	3,600	3,600
Edinburgh	6,000	10,179	6,000	Snizort	2,633	3,833	4,950
Glasgow - Partick	4,251	7,751	3,500	Strath	1,164	1,574	0
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	1,000	600	Total Skye & Lochcrn.	12,209	26,005	22,654
Glasgow - Thornwood	2,844	6,498	5,248	Total Congregations			
Rothsay	73	73	250		56,368	124,123	101,529
Total Southern	14,691	28,041	18,062	Other Donations	1,946	3,798	3,044
				TOTAL	58,315	127,921	104,573
				Including Gift Aid	16,500	22,121	0



News

Evangelistic Witness

Over the past few years the *June Free Church Witness* has been evangelistic with some 10,000 to 12,000 copies being produced. We hope to do the same this year. It will contain testimonies, challenging articles for unbelievers and explanations of the Gospel. It is in full colour, the usual 20 pages in length and has no date on it so that it can continue to be distributed for months or even years. We make it available at 20p per copy for free distribution. It should be available by Assembly time (late May). If you would like to order extra copies please contact Rev David Blunt, Free Church Manse, Knockintorran, North Uist, HS6 5ED. Tel: 01876 510305; Email: davidblunt@fccontinuing.org.

Persecution in Pakistan

Barnabas

The Christians of Pakistan, already vulnerable and beleaguered, are now in serious danger from a rising tide of radical and violent Islamism. A Christian leader from Pakistan's North West Frontier Province has told Barnabas Fund how the Taliban are trying to enforce their interpretation of Islam on the whole nation. 'That is why the religious minorities fear for their safety and their future', he said. He described how Christians, desperate to blend in for safety's sake, are beginning to dress like Muslims and the Christian men to grow beards so that they look like Muslims. Parts of the North West Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan, are now almost ungovernable, as a wide range of militant Islamic groups are currently engaged in violent insurrections. They need your prayers.



Peter & Penelope Duff

First British Couple Die in Swiss Suicide Clinic

An elderly couple have become the first British pair to die together in a Swiss suicide clinic. The retired millionaires, Peter and Penelope Duff, were both suffering from severe forms of cancer when they travelled to the Dignitas centre in Switzerland. Mr Duff, founder of the Wine Guild of the United Kingdom, had cared for his wife until he was also diagnosed with cancer. The couple moved out of their Georgian mansion in Bath and told friends they were retiring to a second home in Dorset. They travelled to Switzerland to die together shortly afterwards. How sad an end for those who have been so successful in this world. Those who love God are assured that all will work for their good and they can trust their heavenly Father who first gave them life to take them to heaven at the right moment.

Anyone can be a 'Father'

Christian Institute

Family values are under attack again with the news that single women having IVF will be able to name anyone they like as their baby's father on the birth certificate. New regulations mean that a mother could even nominate another woman to be her child's 'father'. The 'father' does not need to be genetically related to the baby, nor be in any sort of romantic relationship

with the mother. The second parent, who will have to consent to being named, will take on the legal and moral responsibilities of parenthood. This raises the spectre of a legal minefield in which female 'fathers' will fight for visitation rights and be chased for child support payments if their fragile relationship with the mother breaks down. The changes will apply to many of the 2,000 women a year who have IVF using sperm from anonymous donors. The regulations are part of the controversial Embryology Bill passed by Parliament last year. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority said they will give lesbian couples in civil partnerships who undergo IVF the same rights as married heterosexual couples. Baroness Deech, a former chairman of the HFEA, said the practice would lead to the 'falsification of the birth certificate'.



Andrew Motion

Atheist Says Children Should Know More About the Bible

Poet Laureate and atheist Andrew Motion said during an interview that children should be taught more about the Bible because it is an 'essential piece of cultural luggage'. Motion additionally said that too

Desk



many students now arrive at the university to study English Literature with scant knowledge of its deeply biblical foundations. 'When I ask [my students] anything about the Bible, they frankly, by and large, don't know. I don't particularly blame them for it. I do think there is a real problem with the education system that has allowed these great stories to disappear, to fade out of the diet everyone gets at school.'

Tax Benefits Encourage Parents to Split

Christian Institute

The Government's tax and benefits system encourages divorce among poorer families, according to a weighty new study. Evidence published by the Royal Economic Society (RES) shows a mother is £100 a week better off if she splits from her husband. The report also reveals that the divorce rate for low-income families surged by 160% in the three years after tax credits were introduced. It concludes that the Government's tax credit system provides incentives for mothers to divorce husbands with low incomes.

Covenant College

Zwemstras

We are very thankful to start this year at Covenant College, Zambia with eight new students. This brings us to a total of 22 students. There are still people that show interest, and we hope to get some more students during this year. Most of our 'old' students are back and working actively.

Attacking Civil Liberty

Christian Institute

The Government is attacking civil liberty by attempting to remove a

free speech protection from a law on 'inciting homophobic hatred', says a new report. The report was produced by University College London (UCL) in collaboration with a new campaign against the erosion of civil freedoms. The campaign is backed by the *Guardian* newspaper, and groups such as Amnesty UK and Liberty. The report refers to wording in the incitement law which makes it clear that criticising homosexual practice or urging people to refrain from such conduct is not, in itself, a crime. The Government says this protection is 'unnecessary' and is using its new Coroners and Justice Bill to try to remove it. This attempt is listed as an example of the erosion of human rights in Britain in the UCL report, entitled *What We've Lost*. The report 'describes the wholesale removal of rights that were apparently protected by the HRA [Human Rights Act] and set down nearly 800 years ago in Magna Carta' and 'shows how the unarticulated liberties that we assumed were somehow guaranteed by British culture have been compromised'.

Smacking is 'Child Abuse' says NI Children's Chief

Northern Ireland's Children's Commissioner, Patricia Lewsley, has twice failed in her court appeal to ban smacking in the Province. She claims: 'Parents who smack their children are like "child abusers"'. Patricia Lewsley was giving her first interview since her second failed attempt to ban smacking in the Province. The Commissioner responded 'no' when asked if she thought there was any difference between a person deliberately setting out to harm a child and a loving parent



Patricia Lewsley

smacking in the hope of making their child a better person. She told the *Belfast News Letter*: 'Children have told us that hitting is humiliating. Even though they would say their parents are loving and caring, it is still humiliating'. The Commissioner's unsuccessful legal campaign is so far thought to have landed her office with a bill for £50,000, which will be paid by the taxpayer. She is now considering taking her appeal to the House of Lords, and one newspaper has estimated it could rack up further costs of £200,000 to the taxpayer. The Commissioner told the *News Letter* that she did not want to criminalise parents and drag them through the courts but they should stop smacking their children. She suggests using 'positive parenting strategies' such as 'time out' instead, which she says would allow both parties to consider their actions. The Commissioner stated that children should be treated equally to adults. But when asked about whether children should be able to vote or join the armed forces she was unsure. She maintained

that her role was to teach children their rights but not responsibility.

Sabbath School & Bible Class Syllabus

Parents may be interested to know that last month's and this month's 'Explorer' includes sample material from the Church's Syllabus for Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes. Please take a look. If your children are not using the *Workbooks* then perhaps you would like to consider taking up the Syllabus for the 2009-2010 Session? Further information about the Syllabus is available from the Clerk to the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee: Rev David Blunt, Free Church Manse, Knockintorran, North Uist, HS6 5ED. Tel: 01876 510305; Email: davidblunt@fccontinuing.org

Scotland to Halt Cut-Price Booze

A minimum price is to be set on a unit of alcohol in a bid to tackle Scotland's binge-drinking crisis, the Scottish Government has announced. Ministers hope the move, to be introduced next year, will help put an end to teenagers buying cheap booze at 'pocket-money prices'. Other proposals include a ban on drink promotions like three-for-two offers. There are calls for the plan to be taken up in England. A precise figure for a minimum limit has yet to be set, but press reports suggest it may be 40p per unit.

Bibles Placed on Top Shelf

Observer

Great Britain's Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC), a "quango" that answers to the culture secretary Andy Burnham, has issued guidance to librarians telling them that they should store Bibles and other religious texts on the top shelves in order to avoid offending Muslims. The MLAC guidance suggests moving all religious texts to the top shelf because of the Muslim belief that the Koran should not be kept among 'common things'.

Gay Adoption Report Kept Secret

Christian Institute

The results of an official investigation into the effects of gay adoption in Scotland will not be made public, the Scottish Government has said. Laws allowing same-sex couples to adopt were passed in 2006 and the Scottish Government now wants to allow gay fostering. Ministers instigated an investigation into the effects of gay adoption on children last month. It has now emerged that the results will not be published, sparking concerns that they may contain findings which would alarm the public. The Scottish Government claims the findings are for 'in-house' use and therefore do not need to be disclosed. The gay adoption law will come into force this June. The Christian Institute's Mike Judge criticised the government for concealing the report on the effects of gay adoption. He said: 'This is an issue of massive public interest – we are talking about the country's most vulnerable youngsters. We all deserve to know the outcome and the fact it is not being published will raise concern that ministers know their findings may alarm the public.'

New Psalmody CD

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) hope to release Volume 5 in their Psalm singing series, *Worthy to be Praised* in time for the forthcoming Assembly. This double CD continues to follow the 12-year teaching programme that has been produced by the Church. This volume contains the tunes for 2009-10. The 'Listening Disc' as in Volume 4 includes four of the more familiar Psalms which are now set for younger singers. These are sung by the children of some of our Sabbath Schools. Also included are the two Gaelic Psalms set as an option for Gaelic speakers. As in former years this disc has twelve Psalm portions sung, unaccompanied. As an aid to devotion and as an encouragement to praise, this CD is to be commended. With its focus on God's grace in the gospel of His Son and its richness in Christian experience, the Book of Psalms has provided a truly catholic manual of praise spanning the ages.

The second disc is a teaching one, designed to assist people in learning to sing the twelve tunes and any of the three harmony parts. There are four sections: the tune, the alto, the tenor and the bass. Within each section each tune part has two tracks. On the first track the tune/part is heard sung in Solfa. On the second track it is heard again but with the other three parts sounding in the background. Those with no knowledge of Solfa just need to hum along with the singing. For those who are willing to learn new tunes and learn the parts, this CD should prove helpful.

This double CD costs £8.00. For all interested in promoting unaccompanied Psalm singing and for those who enjoy listening to the Psalms, this is a useful volume. May God use it for His glory and may He who is worthy to be praised, be honoured by many making melody in their hearts to the Lord.

Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 are available from Mrs Isobel Scott, 36 Pinewood Place, Blackburn, West Lothian, EH47 7NX. Volume 5, God willing, will be available in May. More details about these can be found at www.fccontinuing.org where a sample of volumes 1 and 2 can be heard.

New Church – Point

The Knock and Point congregation state: 'It is with thankfulness to God that after due legal process, a new church site at a central location has finally been awarded to us after a three year struggle with obstructions. As we read in the New Testament, churches helped each other, often with direct apostolic authority and in dependence upon the Lord (Ps 127:1), and so we appeal to you, brethren, to contribute towards the ongoing construction of our new church building, no matter how insignificant you feel your contribution to be. The way ahead will be difficult and the demands upon us great and so any help in addition to finance eg small contributions of time, skill and materials, would be much appreciated.'

The Environment Required for a Godly Education

Rev David Blunt

The Bible teaches us that the Lord's will for Christians is that they remain in society and do not seek to flee from it. Different groups have made that mistake throughout history, perhaps thinking that they will thereby be free from many harmful influences. But experience has shown that whether we are found on a mountain, in a cave or in a desert place sin will always be found in our hearts. Are we not told, 'But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed' (Jas.1:14)? In addition it is a fact that we are organically linked to the rest of the human race and we are commanded to take part in all the lawful activities which concern mankind – marriage, work, education and so on. The separation to which we are called is a spiritual and ethical one rather than a physical one (2Cor.6:17).

Jesus says that if we have His grace and His truth in our hearts then we are the salt and light of the world. Such things can only have a good effect when they are scattered abroad. Therefore we are challenged by Christ to lift up our candle: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' (Mt.5:16) What a responsibility we have to bear public witness to the Lord by the character of our lives! And then there are the dangers we are warned about. Unless we are watchful and careful to guard our souls, rather than influence the world for good the world may influence us and press us into its ungodly mould. In the extreme case the salt may 'lose his savour' (Mt.5:13): a professing Christian may be found after all to be empty of grace and in love with sin and its pleasures. We must take heed how we hear the gospel!

The Young are Unsited to a Hostile Environment

One lesson which flows from these things is that it is really only the mature, those who have sanctified the Lord God in their hearts, that are ready to make a defence of their faith before unbelievers (1Pet.3:15,16). While the Lord may on occasion perfect praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, in order to shame the wicked (Mt.21:16), the exception is not to be made the rule. When we read of Daniel and his companions making their stand for the true and living God in heathen Babylon, braving the fiery furnace and the lions' den, we should remember that these 'children' had already been so trained in the truth at Jerusalem that they were 'skilful in wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and ... had ability in them to stand in the king's palace' (Dan.1:4). They were teenagers or young men by the time they were put to such a test.

Young life of any kind is unsited to a hostile environment, the sort where it will be blasted by the elements and a target for predators. Yet for many children from godly homes this is now the reality, in spiritual and moral terms, with regard to their everyday education in the schools of our land. What then is the right educational environment for these tender olive plants?

The Right Educational Environment

1) It must be an environment where the curriculum is consistent with the Bible. This should be obvious to us. If the Scriptures

are the Word of God then they are 'the only rule of faith and obedience' (Larger Catechism Q./A.3). Each subject taught to our children should be conformed to the truth of Scripture, our infallible guide in comprehending the world in which we live and our place in it.

2) It must be an environment where the teachers fear the Lord. Teachers should model themselves on the great Teacher Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Children are great imitators: they will more easily follow the instruction of actions than the instruction of words, for the eyes receive more information than the ears. Christ spoke with authority and won respect because His life matched His teaching in every detail.

3) It must be an environment where the discipline encourages godliness in all its aspects. The tendency today is for authority at all levels to indulge sinfulness. What else would we expect? How can men reprove sin in those under their rule when they practise the same things themselves? 'The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted' (Ps.12:8). It is no kindness to a child to spare the rod when disobedience demands its use: it is part of training for life – eternal life.

Education 'in the Lord'

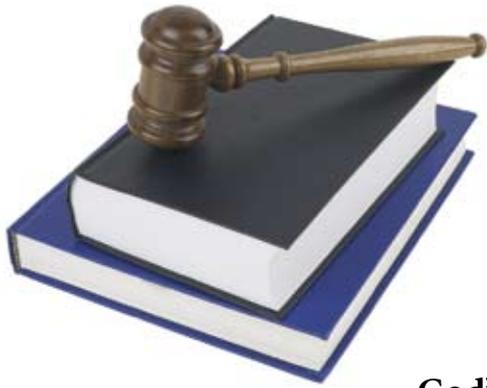
If the above principles necessitate separate Christian schools or homeschooling then so be it: we must be subject to the will of God. It is significant that Scripture says effectively that education should be 'in the Lord' (Eph.6:4). As we know, Scripture requires that another vital aspect of life, marriage, should also be 'in the Lord' (1Cor.7:39). The same standard applies to both. Now, if disobedience to God in the matter of marriage is unthinkable then should it not also be in the matter of education?

It is a sad feature of modern society that the freedom to spend our money on homes, holidays and a host of unimportant trivia is readily acknowledged but there is continual interference in the rights of parents to bring up their children as they wish, including the vital work of education. This is surely a perverse state of affairs.

We surely wish to see every child attending a school where Jesus is honoured as Lord, just as we desire to see every child (and adult) attending a church where Christ is acknowledged as the only Saviour. After all, this is nothing but part of man's duty under the first and great commandment – the commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Mt.22:37,38). The fact that all men do not obey God means that biblical Christianity is viewed as 'divisive' or 'exclusive' by many today, particularly when faithfulness to the Scriptures means separation from apostate churches. This does not mean that true religion lacks divine approval however – neither Christian schooling.

Who will have the pre-eminence in the education of our covenant children in the future (Col.1:18)? Will it be Christ or will it be the current secular consensus? We can only say that in education 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed' (Josh.13:1).

Let us endeavour to gain the ground for Christ.



Books

God's Light on Dark Clouds

Theodore L Cuyler

Banner of Truth Trust

pbk, 144pp, £5.00

The Undercover Revolution

How Fiction Changed Britain

Iain H Murray

Banner of Truth Trust

pbk, 104pp, £4.50

This book was first published in 1882, written by a man who lost a 22-year-old beloved daughter fourteen years after losing two of his children in infancy and out of that pain comes this helpful and profitable book. It consists of twenty-three brief but poignant and heart-rending chapters where the pain of the author is often sensed, but yet his hope, faith and trust in the Lord is always to the fore.

In the chapter, 'Word for the Weary', he asserts that 'the most common cause of weariness is the attempt to carry an overload of care', but he goes on to say, 'My big load is not a feather to him'.

In 'A Constant Salvation', addressing the need for perseverance and the need to 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' he emphasises that 'we may be in the lifeboat but the lifeboat is not heaven' and in 'Our Two Homes' there is the lovely thought that 'Heaven will have no moving day. No longer shall we dread to be pulled away from associations which we love ... There is a delightful permanence in that word, "Forever with the Lord"'. He states that 'Dr Guthrie is not the only parent who has felt assured that his little Johnnie would meet him inside the gate'.

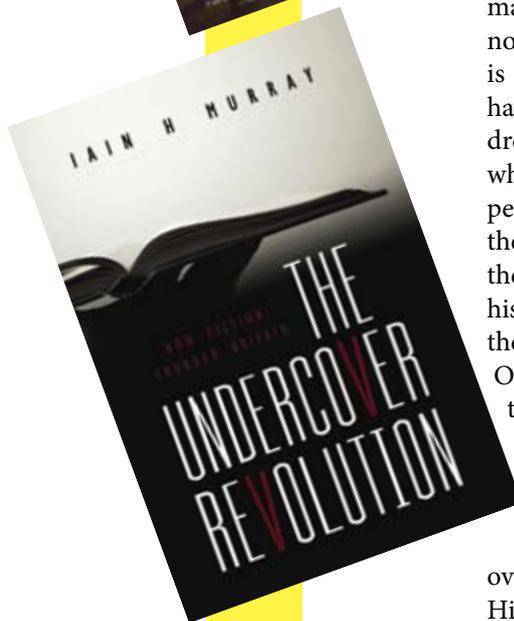
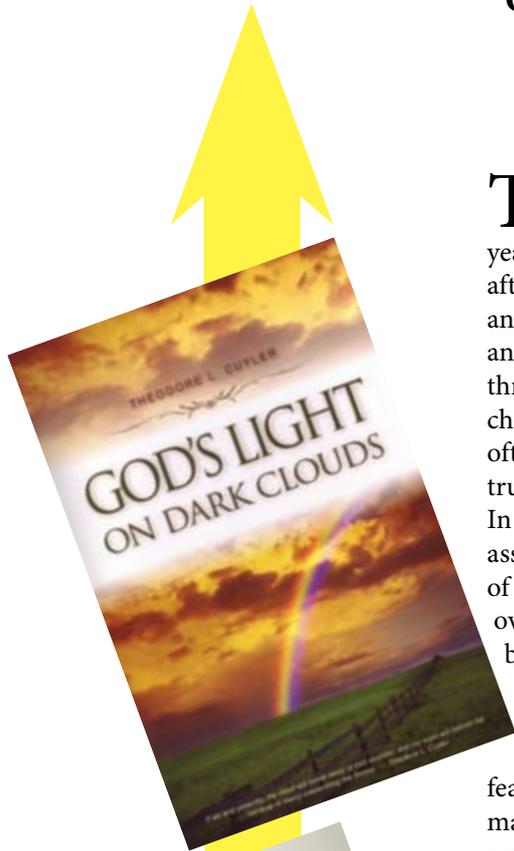
On the front cover of the book there are these words which sum up well this good man's God-honouring perspective: 'If we wait patiently, the cloud will break away or part asunder, and our eyes will behold the rainbow of mercy overarching the throne'.

Highly recommended.

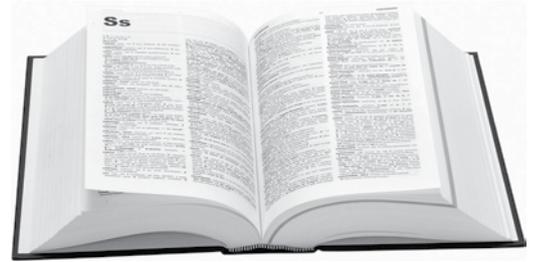
Rev K MacDonald

We are aware of the impact which Darwin had upon the religious life of Britain. His *Origin of Species* in 1859, though it did not make that claim for itself, yet in the eyes of many provided an alternative explanation of the origin of the universe. No longer was it necessary to regard God as the Creator to whom we must all give account. Along with the detrimental effect which the theory of evolution had was the undermining of orthodoxy and the authority of Scripture in the church. Without realising the danger and proudly seeking a name for scholarship, the ablest young divinity students were selected and sent to Germany to complete their theological training. There they imbibed higher criticism and returned home excited at the latest liberal theories and doubting many passages of Scripture. No longer confident in the Gospel, the church which had lost its way could not give the strong leadership required. Britain was rapidly becoming a secular nation.

Iain Murray however raises another influence – that of fiction. It is fascinating to note that in 1870 the largest group of new books published was religious. Fiction came fifth on the list of kinds of popular books. However by 1886 a great change had taken place and fiction was now top of the list. Further the books produced were not just stories – they were conveying a message and a philosophy of life. Murray considers Robert Louis Stevenson's evangelical upbringing. His first book, written when he was sixteen, *The Pentland Rising*, dealt sympathetically with the Covenanters' failed attempt to



Books



defeat the forces of Charles II. Sadly however when he went to university he made friends with those who led him in another direction. Rejecting God, drinking and immorality became a way of life for him. Thomas Hardy had a similar background and professed to 'love a crucified Saviour'. He thought at one time of being a parson but later became an agnostic. Edmund Gosse belonged to the same circle and was a great sorrow to his godly father. Murray proceeds to consider such men as George Bernard Shaw, H G Wells and Bertrand Russell. Their philosophy of life was simple: forget God and wallow in the pleasures of life – hedonism. Murray quotes W R Inge on the effect

of Russell's philosophy on Britain: 'No God. No country. No Family. Refusal to serve in war. Free love. More play. Less work. No punishments. Go as you please. It is difficult to imagine any programme which, if carried out, would be more ruinous'. As Murray himself says: 'Love for all the world was a maxim they taught as a way to world peace. But love for individuals, and peace in their lives were conspicuously absent. The moral code to be found in "self-realisation" was in reality no more than the love of self: the "good" was whatever the heart desired'. For all their immoral liaisons they were sad and lonely people. Russell often took happiness as a subject for his lectures

but as one of his mistresses said, he was a man 'passing from person to person, never giving any real happiness – or finding any'.

This is an unusual book for Iain Murray to write. In some ways he is not at home, but at the same time he makes a valuable contribution and it is a book well worth reading. The second section of the book is a brief apologetic for Christianity. The impression I was left with is the emptiness and futility of the pursuit of pleasure as an end in itself. Our nation has turned its back on God and is miserable. God has made us and it is only in His Law and Gospel that we can find true happiness.

Rev William Macleod

Heavenly Salt

C H Spurgeon

'Salt without prescribing how much' (Ezra 7:22)

Salt was used in every offering made by fire unto the Lord, and from its preserving and purifying properties it was the grateful emblem of divine grace in the soul. It is worthy of our attentive regard that, when Artaxerxes gave salt to Ezra the priest, he set no limit to the quantity, and we may be quite certain that when the King of kings distributes grace among His royal priesthood, the supply is not cut short by Him. Often are we straitened in ourselves, but never in the Lord. He who chooses to gather much manna will find that he may have as much as he desires. There is no such famine in Jerusalem

that the citizens should eat their bread by weight and drink their water by measure. Some things in the economy of grace are measured; for instance our vinegar and gall are given us with such exactness that we never have a single drop too much, but of the salt of grace no stint is made, 'Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given unto thee'. Parents need to lock up the fruit cupboard, and the sweet jars, but there is no need to keep the salt-box under lock and key, for few children will eat too greedily from that. A man may have too much money, or too much honour, but he cannot have too much grace. When Jeshurun waxed

fat in the flesh, he kicked against God, but there is no fear of a man's becoming too full of grace: A plethora of grace is impossible. More wealth brings more care, but more grace brings more joy. Increased wisdom is increased sorrow, but abundance of the Spirit is fullness of joy. Believer, go to the throne for a large supply of heavenly salt. It will season thine afflictions, which are unsavoury without salt; it will preserve thy heart which corrupts if salt be absent, and it will kill thy sins even as salt kills reptiles. Thou needest much; seek much, and have much.





Godliness Necessary For the Knowledge of God

The Challenge of Calvin's Institutes

Rev John J Murray

To many in the evangelical world today theology is regarded as a matter for academics. It is considered rather dry and uninteresting and not very practical. But it all depends on what we mean by theology. In the modern world theology is often used in a comprehensive sense, embracing all the disciplines involved in a university course or in the training of men for the church ministry. It is an academic discipline no longer necessarily located within the Christian community. In fact it may not have any connection with godliness.

When we go back to the roots of our Reformed heritage we find a difference. For John Calvin, to divorce theology from godliness or piety was unthinkable. He was, in the estimation of Philip Melancthon, *the theologian*. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is unrivalled as a theological textbook but it is much more than that. The root meaning of 'theology', derived from the Greek *theologia*, is 'speaking about God'. But Calvin's view was that this 'speaking about God' is not discoursing about Him as the object of speculative thought but as the object of religious reverence. He could agree with Aquinas that 'theology is taught by God, teaches of God, and leads to God'. Calvin's Christian life and theology can be summed up under devotion, doctrine and doxology.

Devotion

In his 1964 Evangelical Library lecture on John Calvin, Professor John Murray declared: 'Any theologian is unfitted for his task unless he knows the power of the redemption of which Holy Scripture is the revelation'. The Genevan Reformer was fitted for the task by a definite conversion experience. He was brought up a Roman Catholic, and set out to train for the Church. His father redirected him to the study of law. It was during this period of legal training that he underwent a spiritual transformation. Although throughout his life he was very reticent to speak about himself, there is a rare reference to his conversion in the Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*: 'And first, since I was obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not

altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour'.

We can gather from this account that his pre-conversion condition was marked by a hardened and resistant mind and, by implication, a distaste for true godliness. He was later to speak of the fallen human mind as 'a perpetual factory of idols'. What he experienced was in effect a conversion from idolatry. It meant a transition from ignorance of the Divine being to a personal knowledge of the only true God. His mind was softened and thus brought 'to a teachable frame'. God subdued his heart and made it docile. Calvin became, in the words of a biographer, Jean Cadier, 'the man God mastered'.

In this mastering Calvin was left with no choice but to offer his heart to the Lord. His life's prayer – 'I offer my heart to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely' – was an unwavering declaration of surrender to the Lord, whom he sought to love with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. Calvin was converted from the excesses of the medieval Catholic Church of his day and received 'a taste and knowledge of true godliness'. He identified himself with the emerging Reforming and evangelical wing of the church in France. As a result of the persecution that arose in France, the young Calvin fled to Basel, a centre of the Reformation. There he began writing what was to be the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It started as a modestly-sized *apologia* for the evangelical faith that was based on Luther's *Catechism*. The work was designed both as a compendium of the doctrines of the Christian religion and as a confession offered to the persecuting French King on behalf of the author's fellow believers. It became more elaborate as Calvin's own thought matured through times of conflict, and his desire for order in Reformed theology increased. The *Institutes* went through several editions, reaching its definitive shape in 1559.

Doctrine

It should not surprise us that the *Institutes* takes its characteristic form from Calvin's own experience. Ford Lewis Battles, the translator of the *Institutes*, in addressing a class of students said: 'You are about to share in one of the classic experiences of Christian history ... on the deceptively orderly and seemingly dispassionate pages that follow are imprinted one man's passionate responses to the call of Christ. If you keep ever before you that autobiographical character of the

book, the whole man will speak to you in every truth'. The original title of the work gives us an indication of what Calvin intended: *The Institute of the Christian Religion, containing almost the whole sum of piety and whatever it is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation. A work very well worth reading by all persons zealous for piety and lately published. A preface to the most Christian King of France, in which this book is presented to him as a Confession of Faith.* John T McNeill, editor of the Battles' translation, makes this claim about Calvin: 'The secret of his mental energy lies in his piety; its product is his theology, which is his piety described at length'. His book therefore is not a *summa theologiae* but a *summa pietatis*.

In the preface to the last Latin edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin affirms that in the labour of preparing it his sole object had been 'to benefit the church by maintaining the pure doctrine of godliness'. It has affinities with Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The two theologians who had the greatest influence on Calvin were Augustine and Luther. Both had conversion experiences related to texts in Romans – Augustine with chapter 13:13 and Luther with chapter 1:17. There are indications that Calvin was affected by Romans 1:18-25 and especially v21: 'Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened'. This should not surprise us when we discover that the central themes of Calvin's piety are the honouring of God and being thankful to him. It was the intolerable contrast between God's absolute perfection and man's fallenness that initiated Calvin's religious quest. Book 1 of the *Institutes* deals with 'The Knowledge of God the Creator' and opens with the words 'Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves'.

What does Calvin mean by the knowledge of God? It is not rationalistic speculations about the existence or the nature of God: 'For our understanding is not capable of understanding His essence'. It is a knowledge of what God is in relation to ourselves, the knowledge that brings us to love and fear God and render Him thanks for His benefits. 'For, correctly speaking, we cannot say that God is known where there is no religion nor piety'. How does one attain this knowledge of God? 'No one can have the least taste of sound doctrine and know that it is of God, unless he has been to this school, to be taught by the Holy Scripture'. What should we really be looking for in the Scriptures? It was to give an answer to that question that Calvin wrote his *Institutes*. 'The Scriptures must be read with this intention, that in them we find Christ'.

Books 2 and 3 deal with the outworking of redemption in 'The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ' and

'The Way in which we receive the Grace of Christ'. In the outworking of his soteriology it can be said that Calvin was the first 1) to relate the whole work of the Trinity so closely to salvation; 2) to classify it in terms of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king; and 3) to give the Holy Spirit his proper place in salvation. In Book 3, in the course of five chapters, he gives a brief directory of the Christian life that is balanced, penetrating and practical. It has been published separately as the *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life*. In Book 4 he deals with the doctrine of the church, how it is to be governed, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and finally with civil government.

Doxology

We have looked at Calvin's teaching that begins with God and teaches about God. The aim is to direct our hearts and minds back to God according to the way He deserves and demands. Godliness is responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. The eternal Gospel is summarised by the angel in Revelation 14.7 as 'Fear God and give glory to him ... and worship him'. The central focus of Reformed teaching has been the vision of God in His glory. Man's chief purpose is to glorify and worship God. For Calvin it was the issue of worship that necessitated the Reformation: 'The worship of God is to be preferred to the safety of men and angels'. The true knowledge of God leads to right worship, which leads to right living. The Reformation divines preached *solī deo gloria* in every sphere of life because they first sought it in worship. Religion is not merely a set of doctrines but rather a way of worship and a way of living.

In the teaching of Calvin the whole of personal and corporate life is to be subjected to God and to His will. This is a most basic fundamental principle that ought to govern all of our living: 'The divine will is the perpetual rule to which true religion must be conformed'. Reformed theology has consistently sought to order the whole of life according to the requirements of God in Scripture. It has always sought to do justice to the corporate dimension of the glory of God. Strong efforts were made to model civic as well as ecclesiastical life in this way. Calvinism has a comprehensive world-view. As Abraham Kuyper was to declare three centuries after Calvin: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ who is sovereign over all does not cry "Mine"'. The translator of the *Institutes*, F L Battles, maintained that 'it is a living, challenging book that makes personal claims upon the reader'. Let us pray and seek for that vision of God that leads to religious reverence and godly living. When evangelical theology loses sight of that vision it loses its way, but when it keeps it in sight it stays on the right path and fulfils its purpose.

"Let us pray and seek for that vision of God that leads to religious reverence and godly living."

The Grace of God in Central Africa - Malawi

Rev Levi N Nyondo

David Livingstone visited Malawi (Nyasaland) on 17th September, 1859. His short historical visit to the Northern Region of Malawi, specifically Bandawe where he first met Chief Malenga Mzoma, and the arrival of the first Scottish missionaries at Cape Maclear in 1875, sixteen years later, is still remembered. The Bible arrived in the hands of missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland led by Rev Robert Laws (though he himself wasn't a Free Church member back in Aberdeen).

Biblically the word "grace" means the undeserved mercy of God or literally it may refer to favour or friendship. In 1875 the first church and school were opened at Cape Maclear, known as the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland. In 1881 the mission shifted to Bandawe because many of the white missionaries died as a result mainly of malaria. At Bandawe the mission developed mainly in schools, health, commerce and evangelisation. But the site was actually worse than Cape Maclear. Following further Free Church missionaries' deaths Dr Robert Laws shifted the mission to Khondowe, now called Livingstonia Plateau. This was in 1894. From 1875 these missionaries evangelised the whole area of Northern Malawi including some parts of Tanzania and Zambia. Was this not God's grace at work?

In 1924, the name 'Free Church of Scotland in Nyasaland' was changed to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and in 1926 the Dutch Church joined (Nkhoma Synod). In 1956, the missionaries left and handed over church leadership to Africans. Therefore Livingstonia Synod traces its origins to the Free Church of Scotland and forgetting our history (where we have come from) would be ignoring God's grace upon all Northerners in Malawi from 1859 to now (150 years).

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia is one of the largest churches in Malawi. God's

grace is still at work in the entire Synod's catchment area. The 2009 statistics show that the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia has:-

- (a) 600,000 church members
- (b) 21 Presbyteries
- (c) 150 congregations
- (d) 150 serving Ministers
- (e) 564 primary schools
- (f) 3 hospitals
- (g) 8 health centres
- (h) 7 secondary schools
- (i) 1 University (5 colleges)
- (j) 15 departments
- (k) 1 Teacher Training Centre

All these above are the fruits of the Free Church of Scotland since 1875 when the Church first camped in Malawi. Is this not God's grace? The Church continues to grow very much regardless of the challenges we face and, through prayers, every day we are able to taste and see God's hand upon the church.

Finally assist us to pray for:-

- Continuity of peace and love in CCAP as a family
- Our plan to build the church office for the Synod
- Relationships with the Free Church of Scotland
- Evangelism

As a Synod, we sincerely appreciate your effort to evangelise the dark area of Central Africa (Malawi, Zambia & Zimbabwe). The realisation of this fact should cause our hearts in CCAP Synod of Livingstonia to swell with thanksgiving to God. It is all of grace.

How did the Lord lead you to Zambia?

Marjanne Hendriksen

This was one of the questions I was asked during the week that I was invited to Scotland to do some presentations about the mission work in Zambia. It is a long story.

The Beginning

I grew up in a Christian family. From childhood on I had two desires. One was to become a child of the Lord and the

other was to be a pre-school teacher. By the grace of God both desires are fulfilled.

I was a pre-school teacher for 13 years when a period of restlessness began. It seemed that the Lord was directing me in another way, but I couldn't see which way. I still wanted to be a pre-school teacher. I liked my job so much! I had a nice house in a beautiful village with my family and friends around me.

It took me three months of praying and waiting for the answer. Every time I thought that I really didn't want to do something else it was as if the peace inside was going away. And so, every time I said again to the Lord, 'You have promised to instruct me and to teach me the way which I should go and to guide me with Your eye' (Ps.32:8).

It was merciful of the Lord to make me humble in that period and to teach me to say, 'Even when You don't want me to be a teacher any more, it doesn't matter any more. I just want Your peace back in my life. I want to hear Your voice and to obey You.'

A Challenge

Then I met a missionary, who asked me why I was not a missionary. Immediately I answered, 'Not for me!' I was always so scared of anything unknown. When the missionary asked me, 'Why not?' I said: 'You can only be a missionary when the Lord calls you for such a task.' Then she took a Bible and read from the last three verses of Matthew 28. 'This is the desire of the Lord', she said. Overwhelmed and silent, I went home. But light had started shining! Was this the answer of the Lord after all my prayers?

When I phoned my parents, my mother said, 'I have prayed so much for you. If this is what the Lord asks you to do, you have to do it.' My father agreed and asked: 'Does this mean you will go to another country?' 'No, I don't think so. Our country also needs missionaries.' The idea of going to another country made me afraid already!

I had one wish for the following Sunday: to hear an encouragement from the Lord Himself. And what do you think? The first Psalm that we had to sing was Psalm 32:8: 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye.' I knew enough.

The next day I went to school. One of my colleagues opened the week with Bible reading and prayer. She read Psalm 32. I was trembling when she said after praying: 'The Lord will direct us the way that we have to go in our life.' No more doubt. I had to follow!

Bible School

The next months were months with a lot of changes. In consultation with my pastor I applied for a missionary course. I gave up my job and my house and lived as an intern at the Bible school. Yes, one in The Netherlands and not in a foreign country!

But surprise: we had to do an internship for two months – in our own country or somewhere else. Three times the Lord sent people on my path to tell me that I had to go to Botswana if I would like to learn things about missionary work.



Marjanne Hendriksen

Again a period of fears and prayers! Again the Lord took His time to make me humble and to teach me to say: 'Yes Lord, if this is Your voice, I want to follow', instead of, 'No Lord, I am so afraid!' The Lord opened every door so smoothly and I had a very blessed time in Botswana.

I went back home to finish the course. In between I had several counselling talks with my pastor. After the year in the Bible school I told him: 'I don't think I have to go to a mission field in another country. I am still afraid. And in the Bible the Lord never sent one person to a field. Always two by two.' 'That's right', my pastor said, 'but I read in the Bible that the Lord also uses single people to be the third in a team. Look back. What is the Lord trying to teach you? I think you have to look around for a place on the mission field, worldwide.'

Covenant College

Soon after this I met someone who told me about Covenant College in Zambia. They were looking for a teacher to train teachers from community schools and to help with the ministries for children and women.

The end of my story is no longer in doubt. The Lord opened every door again and within six months all things were arranged. In a special service, my home congregation sent me out as their missionary to Zambia. The pastor preached from Psalm 32:8.

After the privilege of being in Zambia for almost two years, now I am sure: The Lord instructs me and teaches me the way which I should go. He guides me with His eye.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.

Hebrews 13:7-9