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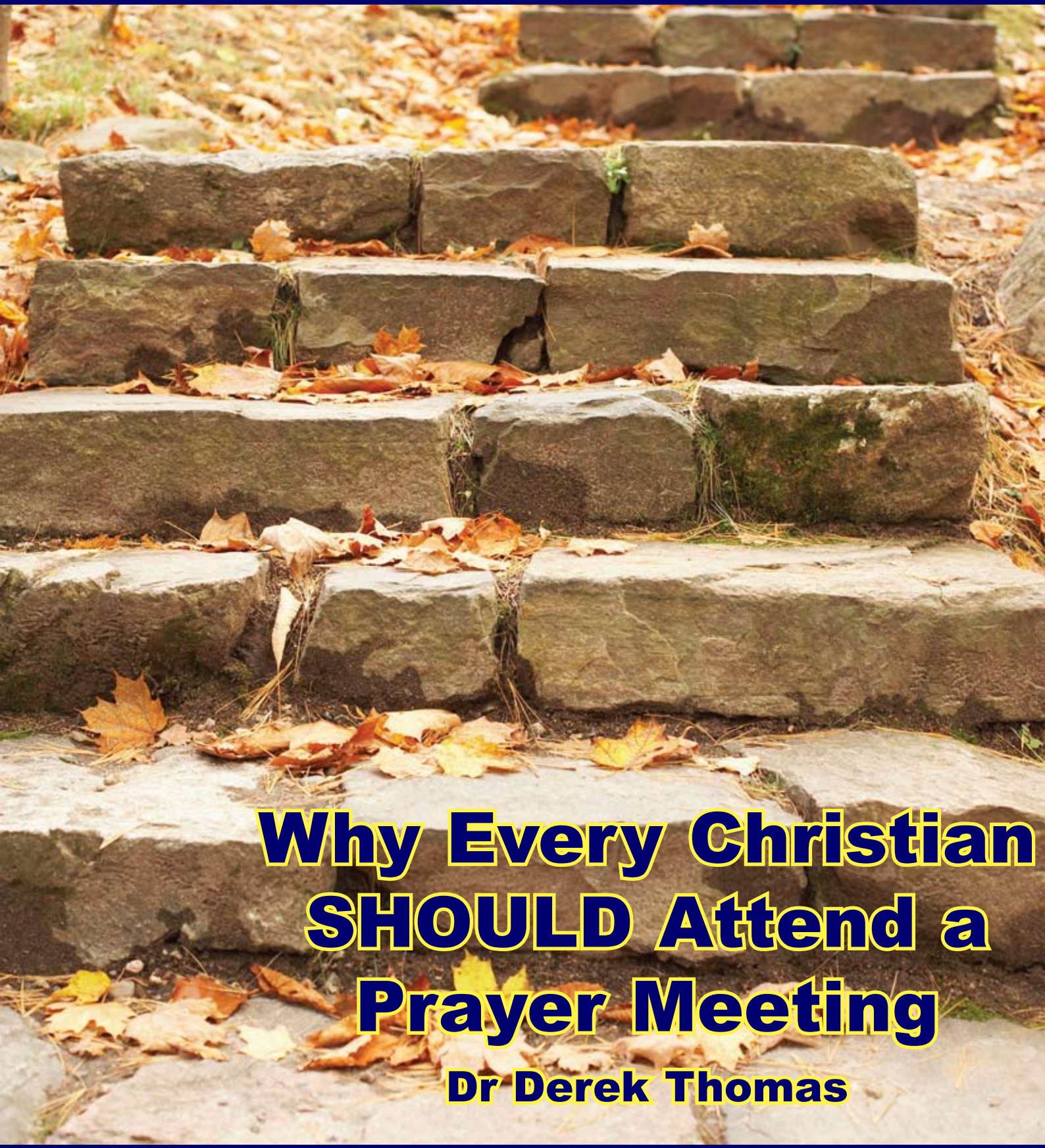

Why Every Christian SHOULD Attend a Prayer Meeting

Dr Derek Thomas

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The Lord's Supper

In the Old Testament there were two sacraments. Circumcision took place when a child was eight days old. It was the sacrament of initiation into the covenant community and marked out the individual as an Israelite, ie outwardly one of the people of God. Yet many were circumcised who were not true spiritual Israelites. Ishmael and Esau are early examples. Later in the Scriptures we come across many 'sons of Belial', circumcised but not regenerate. For you to be truly saved it was required that God circumcise your heart (Deut.30:6). Similarly, many today are only outwardly baptised. They are members of the visible church but not of the invisible and true church. Jesus said 'By their fruits ye shall know them' (Mt.7:20), ie who are born again and who are not. Passover, the other Old Testament sacrament, could also be eaten in an outward, carnal way – simply as a tradition. Others celebrated Passover by faith in a spiritual manner and to them it was a real means of grace. Too many people today take communion as a mere custom, tradition or ritual and receive no spiritual benefit but rather the contrary.

Symbolism

Sacraments teach truth through symbols. Jesus, instituting the Supper, took the bread and said, 'This is my body'. Roman Catholics foolishly interpret His teaching literally and understand the bread to be the actual body of Christ. They say, 'It may look, feel, taste and smell like bread but it is in reality His flesh'. With the intact body of Jesus there handling the bread it is obvious that He was using symbolical language. At the Passover a lamb was killed as a type of Christ dying for our sins. Its blood was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the home. God in His judgment would pass through the land, but said, 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt' (Ex.12:13). The lamb was eaten behind the protection of the blood. Now that Christ has died there are to be no more blood sacrifices. The Lord's Supper was instituted at the end of the Passover to show that it took over from that Old Testament sacrament. The bread is broken as Christ's body was broken on the cross. It is eaten and so becomes part of us. The physical eating is to encourage us by faith to feed on Christ. The cup contains wine and represents the blood of Christ shed for us. Jesus said, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you' (Lk.22:20). We drink the wine and so we by faith benefit from the death of Christ.

Remembrance

Jesus said 'This do in remembrance of me' (Lk.22:19). It is an important reminder of what Christ has done for us. Our minds are encouraged to focus on Him and His finished work. We are not told how often to celebrate this sacrament, but 'as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me' (1Cor.11:25). Passover, which was the Old Testament equivalent, was celebrated once a year and so year after year the Israelites remembered how the Lord delivered them from the oppression which they suffered in the land of Egypt. How could we forget what Christ did for us on the cross? And yet we can become so absorbed with the day-to-day cares of life that if it were not for this sacrament we would be in grave danger of forgetting what we owe to Christ.

Thanksgiving

The term 'Eucharist' has been used for Communion in some churches. It means thanksgiving. There is a joy in coming to the Supper. We do not normally celebrate the death of anyone and certainly not of a good person, but when it comes to Christ we give thanks for His death. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree (1Pet.2:24). He suffered the penalty due to us for our sins. He drank the cup of curses so that we might have a cup of blessings to drink. How we ought to praise Him! The sacrament should fill our hearts with thanksgiving, rejoicing in Him and praising 'him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood' (Rev.1:5).

Proclamation

The Lord's Supper is a kind of sermon in actions: 'For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come' (1Cor.11:26). It is properly observed only in connection with the preaching of the Word and yet the symbols of the broken body and shed blood, and the action of eating, present these great truths of the Gospel in gripping fashion. We are proclaiming and showing forth to all who look on what the Saviour did at Calvary. Though we do not think of the sacrament as a converting ordinance there are those who have been impressed by the truths of the Gospel through witnessing the sacrament.

Profession

One normally thinks of the sacrament of Baptism as being the one through which we make a profession of our faith. However, for those brought up as covenant children within the bosom of the church, partaking of the Lord's Supper is

usually the way they profess their faith. Unlike the Passover which was eaten by the whole covenant household we have an injunction with regard to the Lord's Supper which specifically states, 'Let a man examine himself and so let him eat (1Cor.11:28). Only those who have come to an age of discernment and are able to understand the significance of the sacrament and to critically examine themselves with regard to their relationship to Christ should partake. By coming to the Table individuals are professing that Christ is their Saviour, that they trust in His broken body and shed blood, that His death is their life, and that they from now on declare that they will follow Him as Lord and Master.

Division

The preaching of the Gospel is for everyone but the sacrament is only for the Lord's people. All are called to repent and believe, to forsake their sins and trust in Christ but only those who have repented are to come to the Lord's Table. It is for those and only those who trust in the broken body and shed blood. Christ fed the five thousand with bread and fish but he gave the sacrament only to the twelve. A division is made in the congregation and this is a very solemn event. It reminds us of the Day of Judgment – those on the right hand and those on the left. Some sit at the Table and others are excluded. How many times this has been blessed to individuals! I remember in my childhood longing to be at the Table with the people of God.

Communion

The Lord's Table involves having communion one with another and of course with Christ too. 'Drink ye all of it' (Mt.26:27). There is a sharing together. We are the people of God and by sitting at the Table and eating the common loaf and drinking the common cup we give expression to our unity. The Saviour loved us and died for us and we must also put away our disagreements, be reconciled to one another and love one another. None should sit at the Table harbouring grudges against their fellow-Christians. We belong to the same family, are vitally united to one another by the one Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts and we are destined to spend eternity together. Christ Himself is present. It involves deep fellowship with Him and with each other.

Anticipation

In Communion there is not only a looking back to Calvary and what happened two thousand years ago but also a looking forward: 'ye do show the Lord's death till he come' (1Cor.11:26). The Lord who came and died for us has risen again and ascended up to heaven. There He makes continual intercession for us and prepares a place for us. Soon He will return again to take us to be with Himself in that house of many mansions. The Supper looks forward to that second coming where the sacrament will be unnecessary as sin will not distract us from remembering His death and our communion with Him will be perfect. He will abide with us forever.

Means of grace

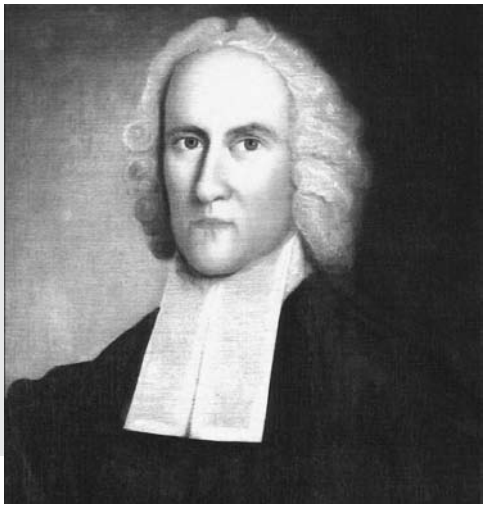
Many blessings have come to the Lord's people through Communion. Their souls have been fed, their faith strengthened, their love increased, and their hope assured by this wonderful means of grace. Jesus said, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (Lk.22:15), because He knew what a great blessing the sacrament would be for Christians in generations yet unborn. Let us come with expectancy to the Lord's Table knowing that as we approach it by faith we will get real benefit for our souls.

"Many blessings have come to the Lord's people through Communion. Their souls have been fed, their faith strengthened, their love increased, and their hope assured by this wonderful means of grace. Let us come with expectancy to the Lord's Table knowing that as we approach it by faith we will get real benefit for our souls."

Jonathan Edwards

A Mind on Fire for Christ and America's Greatest Theologian (Part I)

Dr Peter Hammond (South Africa)



Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) played a leading role in the Great Evangelical Awakening (1735-1744) and in defending the Reformed Faith against the attacks of Deists and Arminians. Edwards has been recognised, even by secular historians, as one of the most original thinkers and influential intellectuals in the history of New England and of American theology. He has also been described as 'America's greatest theologian'. Certainly the writings of Jonathan Edwards have attracted more attention than any other American theologian over the last two and a half centuries.

The Making of a Genius

Jonathan was born on 5th October, 1703, the fifth child of Timothy and Esther Edwards. Jonathan was their only son out of eleven children. He had ten sisters! Jonathan's father, Timothy Edwards, was a third generation New Englander, a pastor who served his East Windsor parish faithfully. He also served as a chaplain during an Indian war. Jonathan's grandfather, from his mother's side, was Solomon Stoddard, a famous Puritan minister who served as a pastor for over 55 years. Jonathan's mother, Esther Stoddard, grew up in a home filled with books and frequented by New England's elite. She was described as 'highly educated' and she instilled in her young son Jonathan her own great love for books.

Even before he was a teenager, Jonathan was fluent in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. From an early age he was very methodical and showed astonishing maturity both in making scientific observations and philosophical speculations. As a young boy, Jonathan built little forts in the woods to hold prayer meetings with his friends. He entered the Collegiate School of Connecticut (which later became Yale University) at thirteen and graduated at seventeen years old at the top of his class.

Converted to Christ

Shortly before his graduation he was soundly converted. As he was reading 'Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen' (1Tim.1:17), he says 'There came into my soul … a sense of the glory of the Divine Being, a new sense, quite different from anything I'd experienced before … from about that time I began to have a new kind of apprehension and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by Him'.

The doctrines of God's sovereignty, which had previously appeared 'repugnant' to him, suddenly became 'exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet' to his soul. He rejoiced in God's sovereignty, glory and majesty. From this point Edwards noted that he continually saw in nature 'God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity and love … in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds and blue skies; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature' and this greatly fixed his mind. The next time he experienced a thunderstorm he was captivated to see the spectacular lightning and 'hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder … my great and glorious God … it always seemed natural for me to sing'.

A Puritan Faith

From the beginning Jonathan Edwards bucked the trend among the students away from the Puritan faith of the College's founders. Jonathan went against the spirit of his time and began to devour the writings of the Reformers and the Puritans. The glory and majesty of God became Edwards' compelling passion in life.

Called to the Ministry

After studying Divinity for two years, Edwards was called to be an assistant pastor to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in Northampton, Massachusetts. He was mentored by his grandfather in the pastorate for two years. Upon the death of Stoddard at 85 years (after being a powerful preaching influence in Massachusetts for over 55 years), the church in Northampton called Jonathan Edwards to become its pastor. By all accounts, Edwards was a dedicated and dutiful pastor. He spent an average of 13 hours a day in study and sermon preparation. Edwards described the minister's calling as 'To rescue lost souls and bring them to eternal happiness'.

He was distressed by the wickedness and worldliness of the society he was called to reach. This spiritually-minded pastor preached harsh and scathing sermons which cut to the heart of many. He saw the people of his congregation as immersed in immorality. 'The Gospel seemed to me the richest treasure; the treasure that I have most desired … the way of salvation by Christ … glorious and excellent, most pleasant and beautiful'. Holiness was described by him as

'a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm … inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness and ravishment to the soul'. The preaching of Jonathan Edwards was described as 'arresting', 'awakening', 'remarkable' and 'instructive'. He employed no 'theatrics' in his preaching, but convinced 'with overwhelming weight of argument and with much intenseness of feeling'. He preached against sin as an affront to the sovereign majesty of God. He proclaimed the need for divine grace through Christ Jesus. At an ordination sermon Jonathan Edwards proclaimed: 'Ministers are only sent on His errand. They are to preach the preaching that He bids them. He has put into their hands a Book containing a summary of doctrine and bids them go and preach that Word'.

An Uncommon Marriage

When he was 20 he met Sarah Pierrepont. After four years of often agonizing courtship Jonathan Edwards married Sarah and thus began what was described as an 'uncommon union'. Jonathan and Sarah were blessed with eleven children. (In 1900, a study tracked down the 1,400 descendants of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards and revealed that this one marriage had produced 66 physicians, 30 judges, 65 professors, 13 college presidents, 100 lawyers, 1 dean of the top law school, 1 dean of a medical school, 3 US senators, 3 mayors of large cities, 3 state governors, 1 controller of the US Treasury, and 1 Vice-President of the USA who the very next year became President of the USA – Theodore Roosevelt. In addition, members of the family had written 135 books and edited 18 journals. They had entered the ministry 'in platoons' and sent out over 100 missionaries overseas.)

George Whitefield wrote of his time in the Edwards' home as having been a tremendous blessing and inspiration. Of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards he wrote: 'a sweeter couple I have not yet seen'. He described their children as 'examples of Christian simplicity'. He described Sarah Edwards as, 'Adorned with a meek and quiet spirit. She talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet of her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers … that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife'.

Sarah saw it as her spiritual duty to keep her home peaceful and pleasant so that Jonathan could devote the maximum amount of time to his studies and ministry. How she was able to do this with eleven children whom she home schooled is a wonder. At the end of each day, Jonathan and Sarah would ride on their horses through the nearby woods and they would encourage one another with the spiritual riches they had discovered that day.

Revival

In 1734 Jonathan Edwards' preaching on justification by faith was accompanied by a spiritual revival in his parish. In December there were six sudden conversions. By Spring there were about thirty per week. 'The town seemed to be full of the presence of God; it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy … there were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house … God's Day was a delight … everyone earnestly intent on public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister'.

This work of the Holy Spirit spread throughout the Connecticut River Valley, across the whole of North America, and then across the Atlantic to the British Isles. Edwards' careful account of this Revival, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,* was published in 1737. George Whitefield read Edwards' book and made it a point to visit him when he came on his preaching tour to America.

When Whitefield preached at Edwards' church it was reported: 'The congregation was extraordinarily melted … almost the whole assembly being in tears a great part of the time'. Through the itinerant preaching of Whitefield the Great Awakening spread throughout the English colonies in North America and further abroad.

The Most Famous Sermon

It was shortly after Whitefield's visit that Jonathan Edwards preached his most famous sermon, possibly one of the most famous sermons in history, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. It was 1741. The style was similar to the sermons preached to a condemned criminal just before execution. The minister would be expected to stress their imminent encounter with the Judgment Seat of God and he would exhort them to repent. As these sermons were often publicised, most would have recognised the style.

In a most shocking move, Edwards applied this form of sermon to the 'respectable' church-going people and relentlessly hammered home the instability of their position before a Holy God. The total depravity of man, the holiness and wrath of God and the only way of salvation through Christ were most powerfully presented in this devastatingly effective sermon. Lives were transformed, previously lukewarm and worldly church members abandoned questionable practices and communities were dramatically transformed.

Many of Edwards' Bible studies and sermons were later published. This included *Justification By Faith* (1737), *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Thoughts on the Revival* (1742) and *Religious Affections* (1746).

David Brainerd

In 1749 Jonathan Edwards published the diaries of missionary David Brainerd (1718-1747). In Brainerd, the young dedicated missionary who brought the Gospel with great impact to the Indians, Jonathan Edwards found a living example of all that he had preached and written concerning a Christian's transformed life of holiness. Brainerd was engaged to be married to Jerusha Edwards, but contracted tuberculosis and died in the Edwards' home aged 29. Shortly afterwards Jonathan Edwards' daughter, Jerusha, died from the same tuberculosis that she had contracted while caring for her fiancé. Edwards' book, *The Life and Diary of Rev. David Brainerd,* was mightily used to inspire the 19th century missionary movement. It galvanised countless missionaries, including the father of the modern missionary movement, William Carey, into foreign fields.

(*to be continued*)

- Obituary -

John C Sutherland

Elder, Brora

It was with profound sadness and a great sense of loss that we received the news of the death of our beloved elder, John Sutherland. John died extremely suddenly, and, as we say, in full harness. He died at the wheel of his tractor as he helped his cousin, who had the neighbouring croft. There was no warning: in a moment he was taken from this scene of time into the presence of his Lord. The shock to his loved ones, to the congregation in Brora, and to the wider community was immense. The extent of the esteem in which he was held was evident in the large number who attended his funeral. He was seventy-five years of age.

John had worked on the croft at Balvraid, Dornoch all his life, although he also trained and worked as a plasterer; he was meticulous in everything to which he turned his hand, whether crofting, plastering, or church work. He worked non-stop. He was the fifth generation of the family working the croft at Balvraid. He leaves behind his wife, Margaret, one son, two daughters and four grandchildren. We extend to them our deepest sympathy and prayers in their sudden loss.

The Lord's work in John began during the ministries of Rev William Macleod and Rev Hector Cameron in Dornoch Free Church. Interest in the things of God grew, and he became friendly with Rev Allan Maciver, then minister in Golspie. Mr Maciver remembers vividly the great interest that John had in the gospel at that time and the many questions he asked. This eventually bore fruit in John being enabled to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Mr Maciver looks back on these days as happy days for him as a minister. In due time John became a member in Dornoch Free Church. It was fitting that Mr Maciver assisted at the funeral service.

At the time of the division in January 2000, John was an elder in Dornoch Free church. He was one of the leaders in the movement to start a Free Church Continuing congregation in Brora. Very quickly there was a lively congregation there, which still continues in good heart. He became the Treasurer, and looked after many of the practical affairs of the congregation. He always had a cheerful smile as the people arrived for the church services. He was utterly faithful and dependable, and his loss is a great blow to the congregation. It is hard for us to get used to it.

One of our abiding memories of John is his ministry in public prayer; he was deeply exercised, humble and fervent in prayer. He had a good grasp of Christian doctrine, and was a steadying influence on our fellowships and on the development of the Brora congregation. His legacy to us is summed up in the words of 1Corinthians 15:58: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'.

Rev A. Murray

Why Every Christian SHOULD Attend a Prayer Meeting

Dr Derek Thomas (Jackson, Mississippi, USA)

John Angell James wrote, 'The advantages of a well conducted prayer-meeting are great and numerous'. But what might these advantages be?

1. The church was conceived at a prayer meeting. Having been expressly told to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8), the disciples, the Lord's brothers, and the women met together in an upper room and 'continued with one accord in prayer and supplication' (Acts 1:14). As a result, the New Testament church was born! Luke employs two significant words to describe their activity: *homothymadon*, which suggests they were of the same mind (cf 4:24; 15:25), and *proskartereo*, which suggests their persistence. Paul echoed the latter idea by using the same word in exhorting the Romans to continue 'instant (ie steadfastly) in prayer' (Rom. 12:12).

2. The New Testament church continued as it had begun. Immediately after Pentecost the church is described as continuing 'steadfastly ... in prayers' (Acts 2:42). Later, when

"The prayer meeting is the power by which God's kingdom advances."

the Sanhedrin arrested Peter and John and warned them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, it appears that the rest of the church was attending a prayer meeting elsewhere in the city (possibly the same upper room as in Acts 1). After the two apostles were released, they went and joined the rest of the disciples and 'raised their voice to God with one accord' (Acts 4:24). Before Peter and John resumed their preaching work again, they held a time of prayer (Acts 4:31). When Peter was eventually imprisoned for preaching the gospel, the church responded with yet another prayer meeting (Acts 12:5, 12). Before the outset of the first missionary journey, the church set aside time for a prayer meeting (Acts 13:3). In appointing church elders and other workers, prayer meetings were held (Acts 6:4-6; 14:23). Paul and Silas continued the practice, holding a midnight prayer meeting in a prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25). And before saying farewell to the Ephesian elders on the shores of Miletus, Paul knelt down and prayed with them (Acts 20:36). When Paul was returning to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, the ship in which he sailed stopped at Tyre to load cargo. Paul spent the night in the company of the church there and before parting the next day, men, women, and children held a prayer meeting on the beach next to the ship (Acts 21:5). And in a storm on another ship which ran aground, Paul organized yet another prayer meeting (Acts 27:29). The lesson of the early church seems to be prayer, prayer, and more prayer!

3. The prayer meeting is the power by which God's kingdom advances. When Jesus saw the multitudes, 'he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd'. Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest' (Mt.9:36-38). The kingdom of God advances by the activity of prayer meetings in which the blessing of God is called for. Souls are won by prayer.

4. Our Lord Jesus felt the need for prayer meetings. It is surely an amazing fact that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when our Lord was facing the consequences of His Father's will, that He should die as the sinner's substitute, that He should have expected the prayer support of His closest disciples (Mt.26:40-41). As the unfolding revelation of what lay before Him became clearer, He felt a desire for the prayers of sinners to uphold Him. How much more do we need the support of one another in prayer meetings as we struggle against 'principalities and powers' set to destroy us.

5. Prayer meetings demonstrate our corporate union as the body of Christ. In a sermon on 2 Samuel, John Calvin reminded his Genevan congregation that every time we say the Lord's Prayer, repeating those words 'Our Father', we are reminded of our obligation to pray together. 'When we pray to Him, although we do so individually, we say: "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts" (Mt.6:11-12). This does not teach us to say: "Lord provide for me, and let me be sustained". But rather we pray in common with others'. Few things demonstrate the unity of the body of Christ more than corporate prayer.

6. Prayer meetings have been God's way of bringing about revival. Before the revival in America in 1857, Jeremiah Lanphier called a prayer meeting in Fulton Street in downtown New York. Within six months, ten thousand businessmen were praying for revival. Within two years, it is estimated that some two million people had been added to the church. At the same time in Ballymena, Ireland, a certain Mrs Colville had been used by God in the conversion of a young man called James McQuilkin. He in turn led three of his friends to Christ. The four met together in an old schoolhouse during the winter of 1857 and 1858 in order to pray for revival. By the end of 1858, the numbers had grown to fifty. In 1859, it is estimated that some 100,000 were converted throughout Ireland. God speaks of setting 'watchmen' on the walls of Jerusalem who 'shall never hold their peace day nor night', and 'give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth' (Is.62:6-7).

7. Prayer meetings change history. In time of national strife, our prayer meetings ought to be full! In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, the Spanish were planning to invade and among other things, enforce Roman Catholicism on the newly reformed Protestant Church. As the Spanish admirals gathered hundreds of ships in preparation, God's praying people prepared another task force to meet them. In congregations all over England, they fell to their knees in urgent prayer. The Armada set out in the spring of 1588, but never landed in England. After several skirmishes in the English Channel, terrific storms came up which scattered the Spanish fleet, driving many of the ships so far off course that they returned home by sailing around the north of Scotland!

8. Prayer meetings deal death blows to the enemy. In the time of good king Jehoshaphat, a large number of enemies had come against Judea (2Chron.20:1-2). Although God's people were outnumbered, they were still trusting Him

and had decided to go out and fight for all that they were worth. Jehoshaphat mobilised the army, but he also asked the people of Israel to fast and pray before they took action (2Chron.20:3-4). Assembling the people for battle, he ordered the women and children to come out and stand in front of the army (made up of their husbands and fathers). Next, he had the priests and the temple choir come out and lead the congregation in praise. As they began to sing and to praise God, the soldiers in the enemy army began to destroy one another. Satan was defeated by the prayers and praises of women and children! God inhabits the praises of Israel (Ps.22:3).

9. Prayer meetings release blessings already in store. If God is sovereign, what is the point of prayer? Speaking words of reassurance to God's people in captivity, the Lord promises that they will return to their land again. It is a promise made by One who is sovereign. The matter is certain and yet, He says to them: 'I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them' (Ezek.36:37). Again, the clear implication seems to be that God expects His people to gather for collective prayers of intercession. Zechariah illustrates a similar situation, assuring his listeners of God's blessing, and at the same time informing them that God will hear their prayers (Zech.10:6). God has promised us many things, but He still wants to hear us ask Him for them. We should not disappoint Him by our neglect of the prayer meeting.

10. Prayer meetings are the best means of encouraging ministers of the gospel. Ask any preacher what he desires most of God's people and he will tell you that it is the prayers of the congregation. Paul requested prayer-support from the Roman Christians immediately after telling them of his travel plans: 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed' (Rom.15:30-32). Several things are worth noting about this passage. Note that Paul exhorts employing a compound verb, *sunagonisthai* ('strive together'), emphasising the fact that it was the corporate prayers of God's people that the apostle desired. Every preacher would echo these sentiments. Preachers are powerless and ineffective without the blessing of God upon their ministries – and prayer meetings are God's appointed means of obtaining these much needed blessings.

For these reasons, every Christian should make every effort to attend his local church's prayer meeting, and if possible, other prayer meetings as well.

The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth (Nov 08)

Remittances - September 2009

	2009 Sep	2009 Total	2008 Total to Sept
Presbytery of Inverness			
Aberdeen	800	7,932	6,631
Duthil-Dores	1,328	17,374	15,667
Inverness	5,000	23,000	20,000
Kilmorack & Strathglass	1,300	12,556	13,363
Total Inverness	**8,428**	**60,861**	**55,661**
Northern Presbytery			
Assynt & Scourie	0	2,325	2,570
Brora	2,700	13,253	13,968
Kiltearn	1,800	16,200	15,600
Tarbat	800	8,022	6,474
Total Northern	**5,300**	**39,800**	**38,612**
Southern Presbytery			
Arran	171	4,814	5,035
Ayr	0	613	2,460
Dumfries	0	0	0
Edinburgh	0	23,079	16,076
Glasgow - Partick	2,000	22,000	23,000
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	7,400	7,800
Glasgow - Thornwood	2,565	18,424	17,032
Rothesay	0	73	1,331
Total Southern	**4,736**	**76,403**	**72,734**

Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Cross	2,000	17,667	16,781
Harris - Leverburgh	1,000	9,774	9,884
Harris - Scalpay	1,700	14,821	13,297
Knock & Point	950	8,200	8,821
North Uist	1,000	8,641	8,659
Stornoway	5,745	52,871	44,624
Total Outer Hebrides	**12,395**	**111,975**	**102,066**
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron			
Bracadale	2,000	9,688	11,229
Duirinish (Waternish)	800	3,600	4,000
Glenelg & Arnisdale	0	1,448	1,445
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,350	12,562	12,775
Lochalsh & Glenshiel	0	4,889	11,385
Poolewe & Aultbea	415	6,972	9,314
Portree	1,200	10,800	14,806
Snizort	1,200	11,033	16,761
Strath	1,000	4,074	3,216
Total Skye & Lochcarron	**7,965**	**65,066**	**84,930**
Total Congregations	**38,824**	**354,106**	**354,003**
Other Donations	2,662	20,738	16,694
TOTAL	**41,486**	**374,844**	**370,697**
Including Gift Aid		22,121	38,359

News

Shettleston Centenary

Above: The Current Shettleston Kirk Session (Left to Right): *Alan Wilson, Ewan Wilson, Rev David Fraser, Andries Theunissen, Colin Wilson, David Lachman*

Shettleston congregation have recently celebrated the passing of 100 years since the building of their church. For most of that century the congregation has been small, yet, by the grace of God, it still exists today and continues to reach out and witness in the neighbourhood. To mark that occasion the Rev John Keddie gave a lecture on the 25th of September on the 1859 Revival in Glasgow. Around 100 attended including the local MP John Mason who is a Christian. Much interesting information was conveyed and many churches mentioned which once were thriving centres of Gospel blessing. It was encouraging to remember what God did in the past and it should make us long to see this again. Various presentations were given – one to Mr Andrew Taylor who since his retirement has been working tirelessly in renovating the church. The redecoration of the building and the new lights have transformed it into a beautiful place of worship and it is a credit to all concerned. May the Lord now grant that it be filled with earnest worshippers seeking and finding Him and praising His name. A book on the history of the congregation has been produced by elders Ewan and Colin Wilson.

Scottish Bible Society 200 years

Recently the 200th anniversary of the Scottish Bible Society (SBS) was celebrated. A Member's Debate was held in the Scottish Parliament followed by an expansive celebration in the Parliament's Garden Lobby. Good work has been done over the years and the Scriptures have been taken into many parts of the world. Much charitable work has also been done. This year, for example, the SBS of Brazil will be converting a bus into an on-the-spot medical and dental treatment centre that will also provide a sheltered Scripture learning space. The SBS are also the body that publish the Scriptures in Gaelic.

Christians face Trial for Criticising Islam

Christian Institute

The Christian Institute is backing a new and significant religious liberty case. A Christian couple from Liverpool are being prosecuted for a criminal offence because they defended their faith and criticised Islam. A criminal trial has been set for 8th and 9th December at Liverpool Magistrates' Court. Police arrested Ben and Sharon Vogelenzang, who run the Bounty House Hotel in Liverpool, after a Muslim guest complained that she was offended by comments made on 20th March. According to newspaper reports, the debate involved discussion of whether Jesus is the Son of God or just a minor prophet of Islam. It is also alleged the debate included comments that Mohammed was a warlord and Muslim dress for women is a form of bondage. However, the facts of the case are disputed. A major client of the couple's hotel has ceased referring guests because of the incident. This has led to an 80 per cent drop in the hotel's income, leaving the couple in financial

Desk

difficulty.

Can you imagine someone in Saudi Arabia being tried for criticising Christianity? Here in Britain, a 'Christian' country, it is truly shocking that you can be brought to court for asserting your Christian faith and pointing to the defects in Islam.

Kirk faces Defiance on Gay Ministers

Christian Observer

New divisions have emerged within the Church of Scotland over the appointment of openly gay ministers after it emerged that the Presbytery of Hamilton voted to nominate a gay man for ministerial training. This was in spite of a two-year moratorium placed on any 'ordinations or inductions' of any openly gay ministers by the General Assembly in May. The moratorium was imposed after the controversial appointment of the openly gay Rev Scott Rennie to Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen and was intended to give a special commission time to compile a report on the implications of the appointment of openly gay ministers. Before making the decision, Hamilton Presbytery had taken advice from the Kirk's ministries council, which oversees admission and training. The council replied in a letter that its assessment processes prior to the report's findings 'have not been affected by the Assembly's decisions, and no-one should suffer any prejudice in any direction as a result'. It said this was on the grounds that nobody could predict what the implications of the report will be for candidates when it is received in 2011. However, Kirk members claim that allowing openly gay people to take up training makes a nonsense of the moratorium.

Writing in his blog, the Rev Ian Wilson said: 'They are, in effect, saying that being a practising homosexual is not a bar to training for the ministry. One must ask the question: 'What kind of decisions relating to human sexuality are prohibited if nominating is not?' He added that allowing openly gay people to take up training rendered the consultation effectively redundant. If practising homosexuals are being accepted to train for the ministry, with all the investment of time and money that this entails for the Church as well as for the candidate, then it seems to me that those responsible for training are quite certain that the ordination of practising gays is just around the corner'.

Ten-year-old Bride

Christian Observer

The ten-year-old bride of an eighty-year-old Saudi Arabian man was forced, after hiding at the girl's aunt's house for ten days, to return to her eighty-year-old husband. The husband defended his actions, saying: 'My marriage is not against Sharia. It included the elements of acceptance and response by the father of the bride'. The Islamic prophet Muhammed is said to have married his wife A'isha when she was six years old, and consummated the marriage when A'isha was only nine years old.

Longest Marriage ends as Husband dies at 101

Christian Institute

Frank Milford, whose 81-year marriage to his wife Anita was the longest in Britain, has died aged 101, holding her hand. The couple were married in 1928, and had two children, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. They said the secret of their marriage was 'a little argument every day' but also 'sharing a kiss every night before bed'.

What a blessing a happy marriage is and let us remember the Scripture which says 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath' (Eph.4:26).

UK's Teenage Girls are World's Worst Drunks

Christian Institute

The UK's teenage girls get drunk more than those in any other developed country, a new international report has found. A third of all 13 and 15-year-olds in the UK have been drunk at least twice and 15-year-old girls in the UK are more likely to have been drunk than boys, according to the study.

We're Born to Believe in God

Christian Institute

Humans are 'programmed' to believe in God and the supernatural, scientific researchers have found. A study into the way children's brains develop suggests that beliefs in the supernatural are present from birth. The findings of Bruce Hood, professor of developmental psychology at Bristol University, challenge the claims of atheists such as Richard Dawkins. Professor Dawkins' assertion that religious belief is a result of poor education and 'indoctrination' is well known. Professor Hood said: 'Our research shows children have a natural, intuitive way of reasoning that leads them to all kinds of supernatural beliefs about how the world works'.

Horrific Attack on two Doncaster Children

Christian Institute

Following an attack by two Doncaster children on two of their peers, commentators have called for an open recognition of the social problems caused by family dysfunction. It has emerged that the ten and eleven-year-olds accused of the attack were abused by their father, while their mother has a total of seven children by three different fathers.

Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith warned against dismissing the episode with the usual calls for an inquiry and a tighter system, which he said would fail to tackle the root problem. He said: 'The inconvenient reality is that, in Britain today, there are a growing number of dysfunctional families with multiple children who will, in turn, go on to breed even more dysfunctional children'. Writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, Mr Duncan Smith pointed to a long-term New Zealand study following 'at risk' children from their birth in 1972. By 21, the boys were far more likely to have criminal convictions and to have abused their partners; all the teenage pregnancies in the study were among the 'at risk' girls, and many of those were in abusive relationships.

When will Britain wake up to the importance of encouraging Christian marriage, Christian families and Christian morality?

Young Mother Watches Her Baby Die

Christian Institute

A young mother watched her baby son die in her arms after doctors refused to help because he was born two days too soon and was therefore 'just a foetus'. Sarah Capewell gave birth to Jayden after 21 weeks and five days of pregnancy. But doctors refused her desperate pleas to place him in intensive care because medical guidelines state that under 22 weeks a baby is a foetus and does not qualify for intensive care treatment. Doctors refused to even see Jayden, who lived without support for almost two hours before passing away.*What a barbaric society we live in! How arbitrary are our laws which decide that a child under the age of 22 weeks has no right to life!*

Growing Mosques and Dwindling Churches in Scotland

Christian Observer

Foreign Correspondent Colin Randall of the Abu Dhabi newspaper *The National* in a 26th September 2009 article entitled 'Empty Churches, Full Mosques', describes how churches in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland are being converted into mosques as Christian congregations dwindle in numbers while the growing Muslim population desire places of worship, illustrated by the growth in Glasgow from one mosque in 1984 to fourteen in 2009, currently serving a city population of 33,000 Muslims.

What need we have to be on our knees and also busily evangelising those whom God has placed on our door step!

Relics exhibited at York Cathedral

Christian Observer

The relics of St Therese of Lisieux, the Roman Catholic patron saint of flowers, were exhibited for veneration at York Minster Cathedral (Church of England). The Dean of York, the Rev Keith James, said '[St. Therese] is a gift of God to us all, and this is a chance for Christians of different traditions to pray for unity, and renew our faith and love'. The relics arrived at York Minster on 1 October 2009 and were displayed for pilgrims and others to visit until the following day at noon. The cathedral remained open all night.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the renowned Reformed Baptist preacher of 19th-century England, preached a sermon on Sunday, 15 August 1875, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London on 1John 5:10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself', which Spurgeon concluded with the prayer: 'O, God Almighty, thou God of Latimer and Ridley, God of the martyrs, whose ashes are still among us, wilt thou suffer this people to go back again to false gods and saints and saintesses, and virgins, and crucifixes, relics, and cast clouts and rotten rags ; for to this also will they come if thy grace prevent not. Oh, my hearers, Jesus is the only Saviour of the sons of men. Believe in him and live. This is the only gospel: at your peril reject it. I pray you receive it for Christ's sake'.

The Teachers We Need

Rev David Blunt

The Marquis of Halifax once said that 'Education is what remains when we have forgotten all that we have been taught'. From personal experience we know that this observation on the feebleness of our memories is only too true of pupils but it is also rather humbling for teachers. It suggests that in one sense their work is likely to be unsuccessful. A conscientious teacher will spend much time and effort in the preparation and delivery of lessons but it is not the facts he (or she) conveys, or the examples and illustrations he employs, that are the ultimate thing. More important by far is that a philosophy with its underlying principles is being communicated to the children: this is what will remain with them to accompany them through adult life when the various individual pieces of information have been forgotten.

The Teacher's Philosophy

Every teacher has a personal philosophy which he imparts, wittingly or unwittingly, to the children under his instruction

and care. What do we mean by a 'philosophy'? We mean a belief-system, a set of ideas and values regarding our existence, conduct and relation to the universe and to God.

Perhaps a teacher will respond, 'I do not believe in God!' This is the bold (and foolish) profession of the atheist. But this view is in reality a definite creed and it is the foundation of a distinct belief-system which is bound to shape the teacher's whole outlook on life and which will be fed into the minds of his pupils.

Perhaps another teacher will maintain: 'I believe in God but I do not bring my religion into my work'. This is the attitude of many within the church. The result however is to suggest to the children under the teacher's care that God is not relevant to learning and to ordinary, everyday, life. In many schools today the staff will hardly be encouraged to confess Christ in the classroom.

Whatever the teacher may or may not say to his class with his lips the character of his life is speaking to his pupils the whole school week. So the outlook of that life does matter, and the philosophy that underlies it.

The Reformers

Our Reformers had clear views in this area. After the Popish Church crumbled in Scotland in 1560 six ministers, with John Knox at the helm, produced the Scots Confession, covering doctrine and the First Book of Discipline covering worship and church government. This latter document is remarkable for the attention it also gives to education. What was the policy of the Reformers and the Reformed Kirk?

In addressing the Parliament on 'The Necessity of Schools' the six Reformers first emphasised the strategic importance of training the young in godliness: 'Seeing that God has determined that His church here in earth shall be taught not by angels but by men; and seeing that men are born ignorant of all godliness; and seeing, also, God now ceases to illuminate men miraculously, suddenly changing them, as that He did His apostles and others in the primitive church: of necessity it is that your honours be most careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm, if either ye now thirst unfeignedly [for] the advancement of Christ's glory, or yet desire the continuance of His benefits to the generation following. For as the youth must succeed to us, so we ought to be careful that they have the knowledge and erudition to profit and comfort that which ought to be most dear to us – to wit, the church and spouse of the Lord Jesus'.

In order to fulfil this end the Reformers recommended that schools in which teaching of a Christian character was to be given should be set up across the whole of Scotland, a school being attached to each congregation. Schoolmasters would serve in those schools which were situated in towns, and ministers would perform the role in country parishes. In each case the aim was to train children in 'virtue' and to keep them from many 'inconveniences', meaning troubles and sins: 'Of necessity therefore we judge it, that every several church have a schoolmaster appointed, such a one as is able, at least, to teach grammar and the Latin tongue, if the town is of any reputation. If it is upland, where the people convene to doctrine but once in the week, then must either the reader or the minister there appointed, take care over the children and youth of the parish, to instruct them in their first rudiments, and especially in the catechism [ie Calvin's Catechism], as we have it now translated in the book of our common order, called the Order of Geneva… The fruit and commodity hereof shall suddenly appear. For, first, the youth and tender children shall be nourished and brought up in virtue, in presence of their friends; by whose good attendance many inconveniences may be avoided, in the which the youth commonly fall, either by too much liberty, which they have in strange and unknown places, while they cannot rule themselves; or else for lack of good attendance, and of such necessities as their tender age requires. Secondly, the exercise of the children in every church shall be great instruction to the aged'.

The Catechism

As regards the curriculum the Reformers stressed that at the heart of it was to be the catechism, for without a knowledge of the truth a child was not deemed ready to go further in life: 'A certain time must be appointed to reading, and to learning of the catechism; a certain time to the grammar, and to the Latin tongue; a certain time to the arts, philosophy, and to the tongues; and a certain (time) to that study in which they intend chiefly to travail for the profit of the commonwealth. Which time being expired, we mean in every course, the children must either proceed to further knowledge, or else they must be sent to some handicraft, or to some other profitable exercise; provided always, that first they have the form of knowledge of Christian religion: to wit, the knowledge of God's law and commandments; the use and office of the same; the chief articles of our belief; the right form to pray unto God, the number, use, and effect of the sacraments; the true knowledge of Christ Jesus, of His office and natures, and such other [points] as without the knowledge whereof, neither deserves [any] man to be named Christian, neither ought any to be admitted to the participation of the Lord's Table. And therefore, these principles ought and must be learned in the youth'.

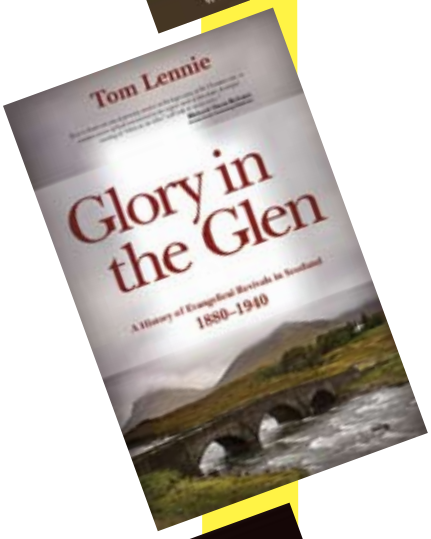
Christian Teachers

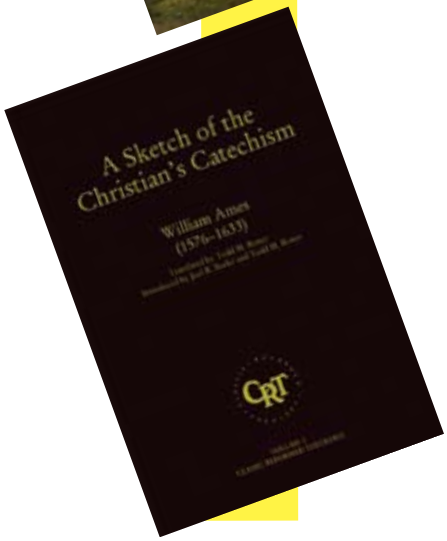
We may see that without a personal commitment to the teachings of the Word of God a man would not be able to serve in the schools proposed, for his philosophy would be out of step with their central aim – to help raise an upright generation able to serve the noblest of all causes, the cause of Christ. Is it not desperately sad that Knox's vision has almost departed from our land and that the children in our schools are no longer guided in godliness?

The influence of Christian teaching in the schools of Scotland was of incalculable importance over the years which followed the Reformation. Regrettably the churches, for the most part, gave up their schools to the state after 1872. Today the Christian influence in our schools is very feeble. We need to recapture the vision of Knox, enshrined in the statements we have quoted. Such words are a reminder to us that if we cannot presently secure a Christian school system right across the land then at least we should have some Christian schools set up in which the children of the church may be taught in a thorough and consistent way how they may glorify God in the various callings He is pleased to give them.

We need teachers today who will practise what our Reformers preached. The work of teachers is second only to that of gospel ministers in importance for they too are vital instruments in the hand of God for the great task of building His kingdom.

Books





The Church's Book of Comfort

Edited by Willem van't Spijker

Reformation Heritage Books, hbk, 291pp, $23.00

This book is a symposium on the history, theology and influence of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is an English translation of a work first published in Dutch in 2005. The Editor is an Emeritus Professor of Church History and there are five other contributors.

The book is well produced and, given that it is a translation, very readable. There are useful biographical sketches of those involved in the production of the Catechism, together with chapters on its theology, its influence in Holland, its use in preaching and teaching and its continued relevance. These are all well written and informative, and are accompanied by contemporary woodcuts and other illustrations.

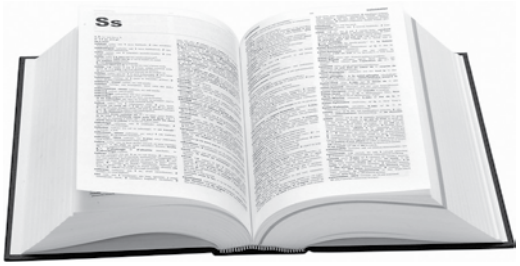
The book helpfully traces the origin of the Catechism and places it in the context of the Reformation in Germany and Switzerland. The driving force behind the Catechism was the Elector Frederick III, who was initially a Lutheran but later adopted a position close to Calvinism. He appointed Calvinist sympathisers to influential positions and it was to one of them, Zacharias Ursinus, that he entrusted the main work of preparing the Catechism. Ursinus did not work alone, and the Catechism owed its final form to the contributions of prominent theologians, university professors and others. Once published, it gained widespread appeal. It remains to this day a principal doctrinal standard of the German and Dutch churches and of others throughout the world, principally in North America, who look to these churches for their roots.

The core of the book is the chapter on the Theology of the Catechism, written by the Editor. Despite their broadly Calvinist background the compilers of the Catechism represented a fairly wide spectrum of Reformed thought. It has been suggested that the Elector wanted a document which would commend itself to the various shades of Reformed opinion and act as a unifying influence. If that indeed was the remit, it left little scope for an explicit Calvinism. Predestination is certainly implied (Question 54) but the doctrine itself is not formally stated.

The Catechism's basic standpoint is the experience of the believer in the life of faith. This theme is developed in three main sections, characterised as misery, deliverance and gratitude. 'These three elements', says the Editor, 'are interwoven with the entire content of the Catechism. They should be viewed as interdependent aspects of the comfort of the Christian life that together describe its richness. The Catechism presents these three elements in everything that is said about faith, commandment and prayer'.

For ourselves, with our greater familiarity with the Westminster standards, a natural question is how the Heidelberg Catechism relates to these standards and particularly to the Westminster Shorter Catechism. In each, the keynote is struck at the beginning. In the Heidelberg Catechism, the first question is: 'What is thy only comfort in life and death?' In its Westminster counterpart, the first question is 'What is the chief end of man?' As an earlier writer has put it: 'If the twin themes brought to the fore and then pursued in the Heidelberg Catechism are the comfort and joy of the Christian, then in the Westminster Shorter Catechism they are the glorification and enjoyment of God in the life of the Christian and in the world. This is not to suggest that the former Catechism is centred on man and the latter exclusively focused on God, but there is a difference in emphasis that is maintained

Books



throughout both documents'. That is a perceptive assessment which is reinforced by this book.

Maurice Grant

Glory in the Glen

A History of Evangelical Revivals in Scotland 1880-1940

Tom Lennie

Christian Focus, 512 pp, pbk, £11.99

It is quite often claimed that there have been no major revivals in Scotland since the 1859-60 Awakening and the movement of the Spirit at the time of D L Moody's visit in 1873-75. Exceptions are made for the series of local revivals in the Hebrides. This fine new work by Tom Lennie brings to light facts which will go some way to correct that view. He contends that religious awakenings were relatively common throughout Scotland until as recently as the late 1920s.

The content of this volume is the result of painstaking research, with literally hundreds of source materials being consulted, as well as numerous personal interviews recorded. Mr Lennie has scanned newspapers and journals, church minute records and denominational reports. Much of the material collected has never before been in the public domain.

The work has an invaluable Introduction in which the author seeks to establish a theory of revival and deal with historical revival traditions. The rest of the book is divided into five parts:

1. Recounting the evangelical revivals in the closing years of the 19th century and early years of the 20th. Some of these are documented for the first time and it is impressive how many have occurred.
2. Focusing on the revivals in the fishing villages and towns of the North-East coast of Scotland, including the Fishermen's Revival of 1919-23.
3. Covering revivals in the Outer Hebrides during this period and giving the first comprehensive account of the 1930s 'Layman's Revival' in Lewis, which was more powerful than the later, more-famed, 1949-53 Revival.
4. Dealing with work among children and students and with the Pentecostal Movement, which commenced in Scotland at the beginning of the 20th century
5. Seeking to make an Appraisal and dealing with the characteristics of revival.

Mr Lennie shows a lot of discernment in dealing with the revivals in the Isle of Lewis, giving place to views on the revivals of such men as the Rev Kenneth A MacRae. He justifies the inclusion of the early Pentecostal Movement because it was 'marked by a genuine move of the Spirit accompanied by the conversion of a significant number of people'. As the author acknowledges in the Introduction, with such a wealth of material it is not always easy to make a distinction between revival as the spontaneous sovereign work of God and revivalism, connected with men like Finney and Moody.

Whatever minor differences one may have occasionally with the author on his assessments, that does not in any way detract from the positive worth of this volume in bringing us face to face with the mighty acts of God in our land. If it helps to awaken us to the present deadness and dearth and give us a new hunger for God this will be the best outcome. May a reading of it bring us to the conclusion expressed by Dr Douglas Kelly: 'It has encouraged me to pray with new expectancy for God to revive his work among us'. And there is more of the same to be eagerly awaited. Mr Lennie is working on two further volumes: *Scotland Land of Revivals:Evangelical Awakenings in Scotland 1557-1880* and *Fire on the Heather: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Scotland 1945-2000.*

John J Murray

A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism

William Ames

Reformation Heritage Books, hbk, 253pp, $30.00

Reformation Heritage Books are to be congratulated in putting this book back into circulation after a lapse of 350 years. The work forms Volume 1 of a series to be known as 'Classic Reformed Theology' in which the publishers hope to produce English translations of some of the most important but generally neglected texts of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

William Ames (1576-1633) was an influential English Puritan who spent much of his life in Holland to avoid the harassment of the Puritans in England under James I. This book was published posthumously in Latin in 1635 and in English translation in 1659, when it appeared under the title *The Substance of Christian Religion*. It is based on a series of lectures given by Ames to his students when he was Professor of Divinity in Franeker University in Friesland between 1622 and 1633.

The book is essentially a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, which was first published in 1563 and was adopted as a confessional standard by the Dutch and German churches. The Catechism consists of 129 questions, grouped into 52 sections to correspond to each Lord's Day of the year. It was

the intention that ministers should preach each week consecutively through the Catechism – a practice still continued in some Dutch churches. Ames does not relate his comments to the Catechism as such, but selects a Scripture text to support the teaching of the Catechism for each Lord's Day.

The work has a valuable biographical and historical introduction which discusses Ames' place among his contemporaries and his contribution to Reformed thought. Ames was notable for his emphasis on the Covenant, which he regarded as the overarching principle and framework of all theology. Within that framework he stressed the importance of holy living and covenant obedience to a covenant God. The blending of the doctrinal and the practical is prominent in all his published writings, and not least in this work.

Ames structures the work carefully and follows a consistent and logical plan throughout. Each chapter consists of general remarks on the supporting text, followed by 'Lessons' ('Doctrines' in the 1659 edition) and then 'Reasons' and 'Uses'. It is interesting to note that this approach came to characterise much of 17th century preaching including that of the field-preachers of the persecution times in Scotland.

A particular interest of the book is that it represents an exposition by an English Puritan of what became one of the principal regulative documents of the Dutch churches. Its early translation into English reflected the interest in Continental theology among the Puritans and the mutual affinity and respect which existed between them and the Dutch. The effects of this can also be seen later in the 17th century when many Scottish ministers found refuge in Holland and several of them (such as John Brown of Wamphray) spent their enforced exile in producing works of international repute.

The work is faithfully translated from the original Latin. (The 1659 translation is perhaps more readable, but tends to take liberties with the original text.) There are plentiful footnotes, but these are by no means overdone. All in all the book is an excellent start to the publishers' new series.

Maurice Grant

Five Recent Errors in Theology
(Part III)

Rev Maurice Roberts

The Open View of God

Some professed evangelicals have taught this view, notably Clark Pinnock, Robert Brow and Greg Boyd. It is a challenge to the biblical view of God as transcendent and omnipotent. It has a low view of God's absolute sovereignty. It therefore represents God as having certain problems, which are difficult for Him.

It revives a question which Old Liberal theologians used to ask: 'If God is infinitely good, wise and powerful, why does he allow so much evil and suffering in the world?'

This view of God asks the question, Does God really know all things, even future things?

1. David F Wells , an orthodox writer, states: 'The Openness of God theory presents a 'God' who is genuinely baffled about the future, cannot see its outcomes, is limited in power, but is nevertheless struggling mightily in the adverse circumstances of life' (*Whatever Happened to the Reformation?*, David Wells).
2. This Open View of God finds support in the biblical expression that God 'repents'. They insist that this expression must be interpreted literally and not analogically. That is to say, repentance, in the view of these writers, when used of God ought to be interpreted just as it would be if it were referring to human beings. God, they argue, repents as we do and in the same sense that we do. In other words, this teaching says that God needs to change His mind and His purpose to adapt to changing circumstances, just as human beings have to do. So the doctrine of God's immutability is looked on as an outdated concept.
3. We need here to remember the old Puritan teaching about the meaning of repentance on God's part. They put it neatly in this way: 'Repentance in man is a changing of His will; repentance in God is His willing of a change'. In other words, when God is said in the Bible to repent, it means that He takes steps to bring about an alteration in man.
4. It is in this sense that we are to understand such passages as Jeremiah 18:8 and 10. 'If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them' (v8). The term 'repent' when used of God here means that He will bring to pass what He had before foreordained, but in a manner consistent with His own holiness. So, when sinners turn from their wicked way they will receive mercy. And the reverse is also true. 'If it [the nation] do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of

the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them' (v.10).

But in all such things, as has just been declared in this very chapter, God is the 'Potter' and men are the 'clay'. This makes clear that the repentance of men and nations is itself the fruit of God's grace. Our impenitence is the consequence of God's withholding of His grace.

It is a grave misinterpretation of the Bible to think that God ever repents as men do, by altering His mind or His purpose. This is clear from the following famous words of Balaam: 'God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent' (Numbers 23:19).

This Open View of God teaches an unworthy view of God and one far removed from the Bible. The blessed character of God, as sovereign in every way and as Lord over all things, is made clear over and over again in God's word: 'He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph.1:11). He is a God so above all things that he tells us of Himself: 'Of him, and through him, and to him are all things' (Rom.11:36).

A Good Book to Study

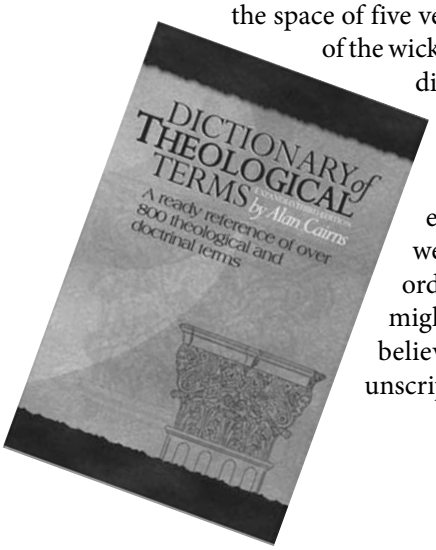
Dictionary of Theological Terms, Alan Cairns, Ambassador.

Conditional Immortality

This is the view that God confers the gift of immortality on believers but annihilates, that is to say, puts out of existence, all unbelievers after death. But there are very many texts in the Bible which show that there is a place of eternal punishment after death for all who die in their sins. It is hard to understand how anyone who takes the Bible as God's infallible word could adopt this view.

Christ many times speaks of eternal, or everlasting, punishment.

In one place Jesus declares no less than three times in the space of five verses that the punishment of the wicked is eternal: 'Their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9: 44, 46, 48).



All the above modern errors are serious and we mention them here in order that the Lord's people might keep themselves from believing what is false and unscriptural.

Ecumenism And The Reformation
(Part I)

Rev Dr Wayne Pearce
(Associated Presbyterian Church, Lairg)

It is not very often that the two words 'ecumenism' and 'Reformation' are spoken of in the same sentence and indeed it will be my contention here that the modern day ecumenical movement is in many ways an attempt to undermine, negate and nullify the Reformation and the fruits thereof. For this reason I suspect that the very word 'ecumenism' conjures up a whole host of negative connotations among all Reformed Bible-believing Christians but it need not.

Definition

The ecumenical movement has reference to a movement whose raison d'être is to promote and foster church unity. The foundational text for the supporters of ecumenism is to be found in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who prayed to His heavenly Father: 'That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (Jn.17:21). There is nothing wrong with ecumenism *per se* and indeed it should be the aspiration, conviction and determination of all true believers to promote biblical ecumenism thereby giving true expression to the unity and oneness that Christians have as members together in the body of Christ, the household and family of God. God's people have been called out of the world: they are in the world but no longer of the world but they do have a mission to the world.

The objective or goal then is not to create some sort of monolithic organisational superstructure stretching to all four points of the compass but instead that God's children might give true expression to that unity and oneness that is already a spiritual reality for all those who are born again from on high, who are made new creatures in Christ Jesus having been saved by grace alone, though faith alone in Jesus Christ, who are thus incorporated into the church of Christ and who therefore must abide in the doctrine of Christ. 'Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son' (2Jn.9).

The Modern Ecumenical Movement: Its Origins And Purpose

The origins of the modern ecumenical movement are ostensibly to be traced to a meeting of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Under the chairmanship and guidance of the American Methodist, John R Mott, the conference closed with a new determination to pursue church unity in the interests of reaching the world with the gospel. A reporter who was present at the conference wrote: 'The theme of Christian unity is running through the whole conference like a subterranean stream. It breaks through the ground of any subject the conference may be considering, and bubbles on the surface for a time. It is almost the exception for a speaker to sit down without deploring our divisions. The missionaries are literally plaintive in their appeal that the church of Christ re-establish her long lost unity'. As a result in 1921, after the dust of the First World War had settled, the World Missionary Council met again in New York and resolved to bring about greater collaboration between various Protestant missionary agencies.

Evangelistic Campaigns

There are two strands to modern ecumenism. The first is evangelistic campaigns and events like those associated with Billy Graham and Luis Palau which have united evangelicals and non-evangelicals together and therefore have only helped to blur the distinction between truth and error. That is not to say however that the desire and plea of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference was not a worthy one. And it is one which is increasingly heard among evangelicals today throughout our land. Nevertheless the question must be asked, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' In order to answer this question we must ask ourselves: Is it enough and is it right to unite and work around the common label evangelical? What does the term mean today? Even among professing evangelicals there appears to be little consensus. Thus we must ask ourselves, what constitutes the true biblical gospel? Should Calvinists labour with Arminians, Pelagians and others in seeking to win souls to Christ? We cannot all be preaching the same gospel! Is salvation all of sovereign grace or is it the fruit of God and man cooperating together, with man ultimately choosing his own destiny? Does it matter? Moreover is it right that the church should delegate her Christ-given responsibility to preach the gospel to various para-church organisations, which has been the norm now since the 19th century? For it is not merely conversions that we are to be seeking but we are to be making disciples, and this is brought about within the context and confines of the church where new and old Christians alike are fed, nurtured, supported and cared for! We are specifically taught at Acts 2:42 that those who repented, believed and were baptised in response to the preaching of Christ were incorporated into the church. 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. This rarely happens in modern evangelism where so many make a so-called decision for Christ and are rarely ever seen again crossing the thresholds of church buildings after professing faith in Him!

Additionally we must ask, are modern day evangelical methodologies biblical? They are increasingly entertainment-driven and orientated. Charles Spurgeon warned the church in the 19th century that she was entertaining goats rather than feeding sheep! What the prince of preachers would make of the situation in our land today one can but conjecture. We have moved into the era of the so-called seeker-friendly approach but the Bible says there are none that seek after God – that is, of their own volition! While in the New Testament the church turned the world upside down, today the world is turning the church upside down! The church is foolishly ever chasing after the latest fad or fashion in order to appear relevant and modern to those whom God's word declares to be spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins.

When I was called to my first pastorate in Dundee I was invited by the city-centre evangelical church leaders to take part in an outdoor evangelistic event in Dundee city centre on an Easter Sunday. One minister present said that if they were to have any preaching it should be limited to 10 minutes maximum as people today cannot abide to listen to preachers; another said that a praise-band would be essential to the success of the enterprise and yet another suggested contacting a Christian clown from the largest charismatic church in the city in order to grab and keep the people's attention! Is this what evangelicalism has degenerated into? Does this glorify God and honour His holy name? Moreover what are we to make of popular, itinerant evangelists who nowadays rarely preach on the heinousness of sin and its grave consequences and of the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Is it acceptable that certain evangelical leaders and preachers court fellowship with liberal unbelievers and the Church of Rome instead of seeking their conversion? What does God's Word say about evangelism? Is God glorified by our willingness to compromise and prostitute the truth for appearance's sake? Are results and success more important than faithfulness to the Lord and His Word? These are just some of the questions that need to be raised when assessing modern evangelical ecumenism. While many, possibly a majority, of evangelicals today believe expediency must be our guide our Reformed forebears said otherwise.

Life and Work Movement

The 1920s saw the establishment of two organisations whose goal it was to promote greater church unity through co-operation in various spheres of activity. And these developments led to the second and most influential strand and model for contemporary ecumenism. In 1925, the Life and Work Movement was inaugurated in Stockholm, Sweden, whose motto would come to encapsulate the modern ecumenical movement's disdain and disinterest in sound doctrine. It simply stated: 'not credo but amo' – meaning of course 'not doctrine but love'. And thus we must note that from its very inception the modern ecumenical

"Evangelistic campaigns like those associated with Billy Graham and Luis Palau have united evangelicals and non-evangelicals and therefore have helped to blur the distinction between truth and error."

movement was determined to promote and pursue church unity on the basis of pragmatism and perceived needs rather than on the solid foundation of the Word of God. This is disobedience and rebellion against the Lord and cannot bear the type of fruit that is pleasing to God.

God's Word makes crystal clear that beliefs and practice are not antithetical but instead they are integral to the church's spiritual welfare, work and witness. The Lord Jesus says, If you love Me keep my commandments. The Word of God is unequivocal in teaching that truth and love must always be together. Christians are begotten by the word of truth and must ever remain faithful to it if they are to grow thereby and show forth their love to God and the brethren. We must hear it and heed it in order to love the Lord our God and our neighbour. We are to speak the truth in love (Eph.4:15). The apostle Peter writes: 'Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently' (1Pt.1:22). The apostle John says: 'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth' (1Jn.3:18). Truth and love are inseparable. Like certain Siamese twins they cannot survive apart. Truth without love becomes cold, critical and heartless and churches lacking this chief grace are as warm and inviting as a mortuary slab. However love without truth is mere sentimentality and emotionalism. It is devoid of substance and tragically today there are far too many churches which fall into this category. The Bible says: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Heb.11:1). Such churches have not only lost their first love but they have degenerated into synagogues of Satan! Christ has removed the candlestick and they are no longer churches in the biblical sense!

Therefore let us note that the Life and Work Movement started out on the wrong footing by attempting to steer clear of doctrine and theology. Like so many in our day they started out from the false premise that because doctrine is often a source of contention, division and strife in the churches it is better ignored and put aside. Doctrine however is not the cause of the church's problems and deep-seated spiritual malaise. Instead it is disobedience to and wilful rejection of sound doctrine (of the biblical revelation) that is the true cause of animosity, division and strife within the visible church. It is man's sinful disobedience to special revelation that lies at the root of all our problems! Since the beginning man has been ever ready to listen to the Evil One who constantly is ready to whisper in our ears, 'hath God said?' (Gen.3:1). Instead of looking to God and His Word, the Life and Work Movement sought to bring the churches together on the basis of making common cause in economic, social and political matters of mutual concern and interest. It was of course the era of the social gospel. Higher criticism, it was claimed and foolishly believed, had discredited the Bible by articulating the view that it was merely the work of gullible and superstitious men. Accordingly it was full of error and was an unreliable guide for the church in the modern age. Empiricism and human reason were elevated above the word and infinite wisdom of God in the search for an ecclesiastical and worldly utopia. And this view is still the prevailing one among contemporary ecumenicists.

A few years back I attended an annual lecture in Dundee University given by a professor of theology from the University of St Andrews. His job was to teach theology to prospective ministers. He described Christianity as a religion by way of a Powerpoint presentation in which he had God up there and man down here and an arrow pointing from man to God – this he said was religion. He was half right, for this is the religion that man has been pursuing since the Fall in his disobedience, rebellion and hostility to the one, true and living God. This is the type of Christianity that is represented among the enthusiasts of the modern ecumenical movement but this is not true Christianity. In order to understand true Christianity the professor would have had to turn the arrow the other way around – because Christianity is founded and grounded in revelation which God has graciously given in His Word. As John Calvin made clear at the outset of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, fallen man can never truly come to know himself until he comes to know God, and this can only come about by God revealing Himself to man. Man in his natural state is at enmity with God. He is dead to God and the things of God – 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1Cor.2:14). Man must be born again; he must receive the Spirit of illumination that he might see, hear and comprehend aright.

(To be continued)

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils:
ye cannot be partaker of the Lord's table and the table of devils."

1 Corinthians 10:21

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