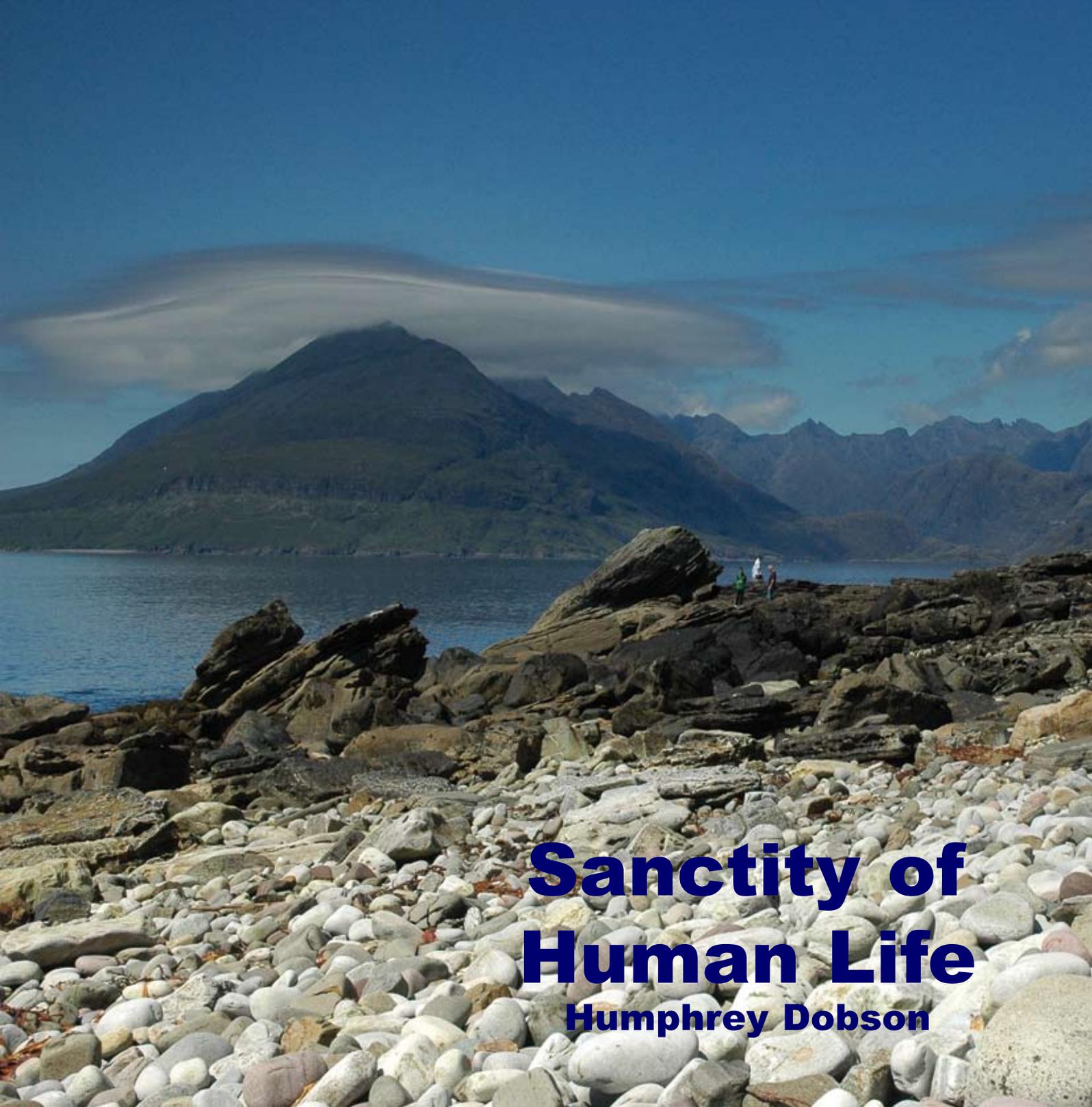


Free Church

Witness



JANUARY 2009 ISSUE



Sanctity of Human Life

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Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock!

At a recent meeting a gifted speaker authoritatively asserted that the text, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock' is about sanctification and has nothing to do with conversion. Having over the years preached several times from these words I wondered whether I was mistaken. I had taken them to refer to the call of the gospel. Let us look at the context and the actual words in order to see their true meaning.

Addressed to a Church

These words are addressed to the church of the Laodiceans. Does that not immediately prove the point? The words were addressed to Christians. Yes, but there is a difference between professing Christians and true Christians. Not all members of the church are born again. Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel but knew nothing of regeneration in his own experience. Jesus' parables of the kingdom speak of foolish as well as wise virgins, of bad fish which are cast away as well as the good fish that are gathered in vessels and of tares that grow along with the wheat. Jesus warned: 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Mt.7:22-23). Not all members or even ministers are born again. Many in the church need the gospel call addressed to them.

I will Spue thee Out

Christ wrote to the church at Laodicea: 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' (Rev.3:15-16). These frightening words demonstrate a serious problem in Laodicea. There are two possibilities: either these professing Christians were seriously backslidden and are receiving a warning or they were hypocrites who merely professed faith while still unconverted.

I am Rich

The Laodiceans said: 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' (v17). Surely nothing could demonstrate the unregenerate state of these professing Christians as this verse does. They were 'rich' but Christ says blessed are the 'poor in spirit' (Mt.5:3). They felt no need, but the true Christian is poor and needy (Ps.70:5). Then we have Christ's description of their state – wretched and miserable. Where does the Scripture describe the true Christian in such terms? Rather, 'Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O

people saved by the Lord' (Deut.33:29). The 'Christians' at Laodicea are described as 'poor' and lacking heavenly gold. Will anyone get to heaven without laying up for themselves treasures there? These Laodiceans are said to be 'blind' but every true child of God can say, 'one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see' (Jn.9:25). The Laodiceans were proud of their beautiful clothes but Jesus said that they were naked. No real Christian is naked but rather is clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Chastisement

The situation in the church at Laodicea was very bad. From what we noticed there were obviously many unconverted people in the church. No doubt there were still a few who were in a love relationship with Christ, a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom.11:5). Christ warned the regenerate backsliders: 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent' (Rev.3:19).

Christ at the Door

The Lord said: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me' (v20). He stands outside the door. Viewed collectively, Christ was outside the church. We often quote the words: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt.18:20). The Lord is present in the church when His people gather to discipline or to worship. The fact that He was not present in the Laodicean church raises a question over whether they are still a true church. At one time they had great zeal for the Lord but it's changed days (Col.4:16).

If any Man

This verse is personal and is addressed challengingly to the individual. The promise is that if any individual opens the door He will come, not into the church collectively, but into the individual and sup with him. Could the one spoken to be a Christian in a backslidden condition? Does Christ leave Christians – even when they are backslidden? Can a person be a true Christian and not have Christ in their heart? Can a person be regenerate and then become unregenerate? Never! Paul made this crystal clear when he said, 'Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his' (Rom.8:9). The Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in the Christian's heart when they are born again and will never leave them. They may lose assurance and may lack much of the peace and comfort of the Spirit through grieving Him by backsliding but He is always there in their hearts. The man referred to in this verse is not a Christian.

Arminianism

This verse has often been used by Arminians to justify their false teaching that man is sovereign in salvation and that saving grace is resistible. Holman Hunt drew a famous picture of the human heart with a knocking Christ on the outside. The door is overgrown and has no handle on the outside. The idea is that Christ is helpless to save you and that you must save yourself. Many passages of Scripture prove this teaching false, eg 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy' (Rom.9:16). Even Revelation 3:20 makes plain that we cannot save ourselves. Through the preaching of the word, the Gospel call goes out to all. There is a knocking at the door of every heart. However many do not hear. The natural man is deaf, indeed he is dead. But when God chooses to save, then an effectual call is issued by Him and the soul is made willing. Jesus told of this: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live' (Jn.5:25). None will hear the knocking but those who are spiritually resurrected and all who hear immediately open the door.

Gospel knocking

Here we have a great verse for preaching the gospel and pleading with sinners to repent. It most certainly is addressed to an individual – one who is Christless. Though the sinner can't open to Christ, yet the sinner must. Let me close by quoting from Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest Calvinistic theologian. It is amazing how far he goes in pleading with sinners: 'Christ is represented in Scripture, as wooing the souls of sinners... He stands at the door and knocks; and ceases not though sinners for a long time refused Him. He bears repeated repulses from them, and yet mercifully continues knocking, saying, "Open to me, that I may come in and sup with you, and you with me". At the doors of many sinners He stands thus knocking for many years together. Christ is the most importunate suitor to sinners, that He may become their sovereign'. In another sermon Edwards writes that Christ 'might send an officer and seize you as a rebel and vile malefactor; but instead of that, He comes and knocks at your door, and seeks that you would receive Him into your house, as your Friend and Saviour'.



Lamentations

Part II

Rev Gavin Beers

In these articles we are looking at the much-neglected book of Lamentations to stimulate and help our study of this book. Each chapter in our English Bible marks one of five individual laments, which means the structure of the book is straightforward. The main difficulty we face arises from the repetitive nature of the book's content which may give an impression that it is too monotonous to reward close study. The best way to overcome this is to look at the book thematically, identifying the main themes that are focused on. We will consider five key themes in this article.

I. Sin: The Reason for Jerusalem's Fall

Sin is identified as the reason for Jerusalem's fall throughout the whole of Lamentations and this is stressed from the first chapter where we learn that Jerusalem's sins were many and for her many sins she fell! 'For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions' (Lam.1:5).

Her sins were also grievous: 'Jerusalem hath grievously sinned' (1:8). Judah's sins were worse than the sins of other nations because she sinned against so much privilege. Every section of society was guilty but this guilt increased according to the position of responsibility one held in the

covenant nation. Therefore prophets and priests are singled out for particular condemnation (2:14; 4:13).

The sinfulness of Jerusalem's sin is presented figuratively. In 1:8 she is a harlot who has uncovered her nakedness to all. In 1:9 she is unclean like a menstruous woman. But whereas this would ordinarily be something private, such was the magnitude of Judah's sin that her shame was public. 'Her filthiness is in her skirts', ie her menstrual blood had stained her skirts so that her shame appeared to all. Now for her sin God has brought her down terribly. Sin was the reason of Jerusalem's fall and this testifies how serious a thing the sins of God's covenant people are.

II. Judgment: The Reality of Jerusalem's Fall

Nebuchadnezzar's armies besieged and destroyed Jerusalem and reference is naturally made to this in Lamentations. Yet in many passages the human agents disappear from view as Jehovah is seen as the God of history and providence who used these agents to His own righteous ends. 'The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath' (Lam.2:2), see also vv4-5. In short, as Dillard & Longman state, 'the power behind this

"Here the church in her sorrow is directed to God's mercy, compassion, faithfulness and goodness. Each time God is mentioned it is by His covenant name Jehovah to remind His desolate people that He is still the God of covenant mercy."



carnage was God's.

The reality of Jerusalem's fall is that God has judged and this was the chief cause of her pain. While He will yet judge the nations, he has already judged Judah. Lamentations therefore describes covenant judgment and this means it is very closely related to Deuteronomy. Lamentations 2:17 in fact refers back to Deuteronomy 28: 'He hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old'. In Deuteronomy 28 God revealed curses for unfaithfulness to His covenant. These have now fallen on Jerusalem and as the city sings her destruction she informs us of something very striking: 'For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her' (4:6).

While this contrasts the sudden judgment of Sodom against the prolonged destruction of Jerusalem, it also tells us something about the covenant judgment that was proclaimed by Christ on Capernaum where He had done many wonderful works: 'It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee' (Mt.11:24). Lamentations therefore gives us an insight to what God will do to an unfaithful church, and to an individual who rejects the blessings of the Gospel or apostatises from the faith. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the judgment than for him!

III. Sorrow: The Result of Jerusalem's Fall

Together with Job, Lamentations deals with the reality of suffering in the experience of God's people but while there are obvious similarities, there are also distinct differences between the two books. One of these differences is that whereas Job describes the experience of an afflicted individual, Lamentations presents the outpoured grief of the corporate body of the Old Testament church.

Corporate Sorrow

It is the grief of a remnant of Jews who witnessed God destroying their civil and religious institutions that is on display here and we are principally instructed by their grief to lament the sins and afflictions of the church. This requires emphasis because we have lost sight of this corporate sorrow in the midst of our modern individualism. Even many sermons and most commentaries on Lamentations fail to move beyond the individual in application and we are not

helped to know how to lament the sin and afflictions of the body of Christ.

Deep Sorrow

The poetic nature of the book supplies us with many rich metaphors describing the depth of grief and intense spiritual and emotional pain. There is speechless astonishment; broken-hearted mourning and sore weeping: 'Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people' (Lam.2:11). This is not something superficial or manufactured, it is the natural product of a shattered heart. It is not mere talk of sorrow, but real sorrow because sin has sacked Jerusalem and now 'Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation' (Is.64:10).

IV. Comfort: The Reassurance in Jerusalem's Fall

God's wrath is more frequently spoken of in Lamentations than His mercy yet His mercy occupies the central place in the book. According to the laws of Hebrew poetry, the most important truths are frequently contained in the centre of a composition which explains why these poems frequently have a pyramidal structure. Walter Kaiser recognises this structure even in the arrangement of the five laments of Lamentations. It is therefore in chapter 3 that the book reaches its climax, where in the central section Jeremiah reveals the mercy of God for Jerusalem's comfort: 'This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness... The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him' (Lam.3:21-23, 25).

Here the church in her sorrow is directed to God's mercy, compassion, faithfulness and goodness. Each time God is mentioned it is by His covenant name Jehovah to remind His desolate people that He is still the God of covenant mercy. Yes, He has destroyed Zion and interrupted the Davidic dynasty, but He has not made void his promise. 'My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips' (Ps.89:34) It is because of this covenant mercy that Judah was not utterly consumed and their situation now, while very serious, was not hopeless. This will always be true of God's people in all their afflictions; there remains mercy and forgiveness with Him.

V. Repentance: The Recovery of Jerusalem's Fall

Jerusalem is lamenting in this book but she is also repenting and Lamentations is designed to aid the reader in this. Consider the themes we have just looked at: sin, judgment, sorrow and mercy – they are all in fact motives to, and marks of, repentance.

A sense of sin teaches us our need of repentance; the rod of God acts as a spur. Godly sorrow is the true emotion of repentance while mercy is that loving cord with which God draws us, encouraging us to come to Him for forgiveness. So even to the end of the book repentance is in view where the final lament ends with the prayer, God grant us repentance! 5:21 'Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old' (5:21).

The Shorter Catechism asks in question 87, What is repentance unto life? The answer supplied is: 'Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience.' This

evangelical doctrine is illustrated throughout the whole of Lamentations with chapter 3 providing a notable summary. 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath' (3:1).

'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not... (3:22ff).

'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord' (3:39-40).

The exhortation to the devastated nation in the light of God's justice and mercy is to consider and, rather than complain, to confess their sins, putting their mouth in the dust, and turn to the Lord. So throughout the five painful poems of Lamentations, even to the last words Judah is learning, we are to learn with her the bitter-sweet experience of repentance.

These then are some of the themes to look for when reading and studying the book of Lamentations: sin, judgment, sorrow, comfort and repentance. Next time we will look at Christ in Lamentations.

The Sanctity and Dignity of Human Life Part II

Humphrey Dobson, Deputy Director of the Christian Institute

Last month we considered how we alone out of all creation are made in the image of God and our lives begin at conception. This month we will consider how these truths relate to the specific issues raised by the Embryology Bill.

3. Modern Attacks on Human Life

(i) Animal-human Embryos

Scientists seeking permission for this research say their aim is to bring about medical treatments for all sorts of conditions. There is a shortage of human eggs for embryonic stem cell research and so they want to use animal eggs instead, creating animal-human embryos using cloning technology. Following the debates earlier this year, our Parliament became the only one on earth to vote to explicitly legalise these experiments. (The Bill stipulates that all animal-human embryos must be destroyed by the fourteenth day of their development.)

Although the science behind this technology can be complex, the ethical issues are very clear. Think back to the doctrine of the image of God. Theologian Herman Bavinck once wrote: 'Man does not simply bear or have the image of God; he is the image of God'. Anthony Hoekema, in his book *Created in God's Image*, develops that theme: 'In the creation of man God revealed himself in a unique way, by making someone

who was a kind of mirror image of himself. No higher honour could have been given to man than the privilege of being an image of the God who made him.'

Surely it denigrates the image of God in man to cross-breed mankind with animals. This technology fundamentally undermines man's dignity as made in the image of God and so constitutes a direct and evil attack on God Himself. That is why as His people we react with horror. Indeed, most people, even in our hardened society, have an instinctive revulsion to these experiments; their reaction bears witness to the foundational and timeless truth that man is the image of God. (It is probably unnecessary to seek to identify which particular aspect of the image of God in man is most offended by these experiments; after all, man in his entirety is made in God's image.)

God created human beings alone in the likeness of Himself. Mankind's status as the 'crown of creation' sets him above the animals; there is an intrinsic difference between man and animals. This is shown by the Genesis account and attested to throughout the Bible in different ways, see for example Luke 12:7 where Jesus reassures his disciples: 'But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.'

"The claim is made that the research is needed to provide medical cures, but as Christians we reject the argument that the end can justify the means. "



There is a related theological objection to such research. God has created living beings 'each after their kind' and those boundaries must never be crossed. It would be wrong to seek to create, for example, a half-fish, half-bird creature in a laboratory. Furthermore, whatever the moral status of an animal-human embryo, the embryo is being created simply to be destroyed up to 14 days later. That, too, must be wrong.

The claim is made that the research is needed to provide medical cures, but as Christians we reject the argument that the end can justify the means. And powerful practical objections can be made to the demands for animal-human embryos. The truth is that after a decade of research no successful treatments have yet been developed using embryonic stem cells. In contrast, adult stem cell research (which is non-controversial) has proven far more successful, with over 70 treatments already developed combating cancers, degenerative diseases and spinal injuries. Adult stem cells are readily obtainable from sources such as the umbilical cord, teeth and the nose; they are also available from bone marrow. New treatments are being announced rapidly. Moreover, cloned *human* embryos develop abnormally – how much more abnormal *animal-human* embryos will be. Animal-human embryo research may reveal very little about human embryonic development.

(ii) Cloning Humans

Cloning involves the creation of an embryo which is almost an identical genetic copy of another embryo. In the UK it has been legal since 2001 to clone a human embryo and use its cells to create organs and other cells. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill continues this regime. Embryos can be cloned to obtain stem cells for medical research provided that the embryos are destroyed before they are 14 days old. This is sometimes described as 'therapeutic cloning', though it is not therapeutic for the embryos since they are destroyed in the process.

The cloning technique that is often used is called somatic cell nuclear transfer (often abbreviated to SCNT) and this is the technique that created Dolly the sheep. What exactly does the procedure involve? Remember, first, that most of a cell's genetic information is contained within its nucleus. (There is also some genetic material in the area surrounding the

nucleus.) Under SCNT the nucleus of one cell is placed into an egg which has had its own nucleus removed. When an electric current is passed through this egg it begins to divide – creating the cloned embryo, who has the same DNA as the donor of the nucleus. The cloned embryo also inherits some DNA from the egg which has had its own nucleus removed. The embryo may be a clone of a man or a woman.

Under the Embryology Bill it will continue to be illegal to clone an embryo and permit it to develop into a foetus (so called 'reproductive cloning'). Cloned human embryos are not permitted to live beyond 14 days. After this time they must be destroyed. It is a criminal offence not to destroy these human embryos. Once a new life has been created through cloning there is no moral distinction between it and any other embryo. All embryos deserve our protection. Why, then, is cloning wrong?

Again, we go back to the Genesis creation account. It demonstrates that human relationships are based on relations between a husband and wife, their children and the wider family. God's creation of the marriage relationship, and its central place in the procreation of the next generation, is for our benefit. It is via procreation that human beings are to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen.1:28; 2:24 and also Gen.9:7).

The use of cloning is an attempt to *create*, rather than to *procreate*. It involves mankind taking upon itself a responsibility which properly belongs to God alone. Just as the builders at Babel strove to reach to the heavens and become gods, advocates of cloning are seeking a control over fellow men that goes far beyond the created order. By seeking to become like God, mankind will become increasingly alienated from God.

In procreation, as in every aspect of life, God is sovereign. He does the choosing. But human cloning puts the choices about a new life in the hands of a human rather than God. It is left to the scientist to decide. The clinician assesses which embryo appears fit for implantation and discards the rest. Human cloning usurps God's position as the Almighty Creator. Job acknowledged, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away' (Job 1:21).

This technology means that man, and not God, chooses the desired characteristics of any resultant children. Cloning gives man control over the next generation. Thus man exerts

a tyranny over future generations. As C S Lewis wrote in *The Abolition of Man*: 'In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them'. Specifically, 'therapeutic cloning' is morally repugnant because it creates life with the specific aim of experimentation and destruction. The stem cells are extracted for research and the embryo dies. Pro-lifers have called this practice 'technological cannibalism'.

Experiments on Embryos

Since embryo experiments were legalised in 1990, the UK has been at the forefront of science which involves destructive experiments on human embryos. What a shameful legacy! Having established that life begins at conception and so is worthy of full protection, it is self-evident that all such experiments are wrong.

To those who say: 'Surely you are not asking me to give the early embryo equal status to a more developed baby', the testimony of the Bible is this: even from day one an embryo is made in the image of God – with all the profound implications which flow from that. Consider this passage from Calvin's *Institutes*: 'Whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him... [You may] say, "He is contemptible and worthless"; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image'.

God has deigned to give every human embryo 'the beauty of His own image'; we cannot, indeed must not, gainsay Him. Experiments on embryos violate the Sixth Commandment – 'Thou shalt not kill'.

(iii) 'Saviour Siblings'

Under this procedure embryos are created in a laboratory and then selected to be compatible with an older brother or sister who is ill. If a chosen embryo – a 'saviour sibling' – is successfully born, their tissue is available to treat the brother or sister. Even Lord Winston, fertility treatment pioneer and the strongest supporter of the Bill in the Lords, has pointed out that the procedure is rarely successful.

Some have tried to argue that because the child has been specially chosen, it will be more valued than a normal child. But many others are concerned that there may be grave psychological consequences for a child who knows they were not created for their own intrinsic value, but as 'spare parts' for someone else.

Every person has an intrinsic value because they are made in God's image. That value is not dependent on any external consideration. However, the 'saviour sibling' process selects and creates certain children by the criteria of their potential usefulness to someone else. This devalues them as human beings. It is underlined by the fact that all unwanted embryos, which fail to meet the criteria, are destroyed – yet another part of the procedure which is inherently wrong.

As a child, the 'saviour sibling' is clearly denied a choice over how his or her body is used. The fact is that no-one should

be rendered the unconsenting instrument of someone else. That was the moral problem at the heart of slavery. Moreover, we need to think about the application of the eighth commandment to this situation, which says we may not take something from another person without their consent – 'thou shalt not steal'. How then can we create someone in order to do that very thing? Ultimately, as in cloning, it is the manufacturing of people by design. We wrench from God's hands what properly belongs to Him.

(iv) Abortion

Before looking at the present day situation, it is helpful to look back at the historic Christian opposition to abortion. It is not difficult to show that Christians have generally always been opposed to abortion. The early Church was relentless in its opposition to abortion. These early Christians only had the Bible to form their views. There was no Church tradition.

Infanticide was very common in the Greco-Roman world. Abortion was also widely practised. But the opposition of the early church to abortion and infanticide was so strong that historians believe that it was responsible for eliminating abortion from the Roman Empire. W E H Lecky, the 19th Century Irish historian, commented that: 'The practice of abortion was one to which few persons in antiquity attached any deep feeling of condemnation... [Yet] With unwavering consistency and with the strongest emphasis, [Christians] denounced the practice, not simply as inhuman, but as definitely murder'.

The *Didache*, a teaching manual in the early church written around the end of the first century, explained the implications of the sixth commandment against murder. It stated bluntly: 'You shall not commit infanticide, nor procure abortion'.

In the Greco-Roman world there was certainly an awareness of drugs which cause abortion ('abortifacients'). When contrasting the 'Way of Life' with 'The Way of Death' the *Didache* denounced those who practice 'medicine' and are 'killers of the child, who abort the mold [plasma] of God'.

Tertullian, the early African Christian thinker, writing at the end of the second century [c. 160- c.225 AD], explained the difference between the pagan and Christian view of abortion: 'For us murder is once for all forbidden; so even the child in the womb, while yet the mother's blood is being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful for us to destroy. To forbid birth is only quicker murder. It makes no difference whether one take away the life once born or destroy it as it comes to birth. He is a man, who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed'.

His contemporary Clement of Alexandria [c. 150 – c.215 AD] protested against those who hide fornication by abortion. He taught that Christians must not 'take away human nature, which is generated from the providence of God, by hastening abortions and applying abortifacient drugs to destroy utterly the embryo and, with it, the love of man'.

Over the centuries Christians have boldly and resolutely opposed abortion. How much more that is needed today. Under our present law in Britain abortion is permitted up to 24 weeks gestation and up to birth where the child is thought

"About 1 in 5 British pregnancies now end in abortion – which makes a mother's womb the most dangerous place in Britain."



to be handicapped. (Several votes in the Commons to reduce this limit were lost in May.) About 1 in 5 British pregnancies now end in abortion – which makes a mother's womb the most dangerous place in Britain.

The 1967 Abortion Act made it legal to have an abortion on a number of specified grounds. After the Act was introduced the numbers of abortions rose rapidly. By 1973 111,000 were performed on women resident in England and Wales. Today the specified conditions are applied in a very relaxed way. Abortion has become commonplace. The latest figures available show that in Great Britain in 2007 there were over 210,000 abortions. The increasing use of the morning-after pill, under the guise of contraception, has also led to very early abortions becoming routine.

Abortion is the deliberate killing of an unborn baby. On the Bible's terms it must therefore constitute the murder of a human being made in the image of God. Our present laws permit the mass murder of the most vulnerable members of society – the unborn. In the 16th Century Calvin wrote: 'the foetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being... If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light'. It is right to say that a silent holocaust is occurring all around us.

Some people say: 'It can't be as simple as denouncing abortion as the destruction of life. Doesn't compassion compel us to allow abortion sometimes? What about the 'hard cases' where the mother's life is at risk or where the pregnancy results from rape? What if the child is badly handicapped?'

It's helpful to put these doubts into perspective. There have been 6.7 million abortions in Great Britain since the 1967 Abortion Act. Of the abortions performed on residents of England and Wales, only 0.4 per cent were because of risk to the mother's life. The percentage performed on the grounds of foetal handicap was 1.3% (although that 'handicap' was sometimes something as minor as a cleft palate). In 2006, over 98% of abortions were carried out for social reasons.

As Christians we must be consistent in our recognition of the sanctity of *all* human life from conception. This is true even if a child might be born with a disability. An unborn child who is handicapped has no less right to life than any

other child. If we were to go down the road, as some do, of saying that we are not human until we reach a certain point in our development, how can we decide at what stage the embryo becomes a human? What is there to stop people suggesting that human life doesn't begin until a few weeks *after* birth? A baby whose fragile life is entirely dependent upon others for survival could be argued to be less than a full human being. Indeed Peter Singer, the Professor of Ethics at Princeton University, has already suggested this. We must stand against any attempt to redefine the point at which human life begins.

It has been very encouraging to read reports that fewer and fewer doctors are willing to perform abortions. It has also been fascinating to see new technology, '4D' imaging, which can show us amazing images of unborn babies in the earliest stages of life. We can now see what David describes in Psalm 139!

The Scriptures make clear that there is forgiveness through Christ's death on the Cross for any and every sin, and that certainly includes those who have had, or participated in, abortions. It also applies to women who have taken particular contraceptives only later to find out that they can act to destroy an embryo. As 1 John 1:7 makes very clear, the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses from *all* sin.

Yet at the same time as we care for women affected by abortion, we must also pray that Christians will be stirred to stand against this great evil. I have no doubt that abortion is the modern equivalent of slavery and that the great William Wilberforce, if he were alive today, would be leading the campaign to restore protection to the unborn child.



John Burn, Christian Institute Chairman, with Mr Dobson



News



Rev Andrew & Mrs Debbie Allan (Colin Robertson)

Induction in Aultbea

Rev Graeme Craig

A congregation of over 230 packed into Gairloch Community Centre on 31st October 2008 for the ordination and induction of Rev Andrew R Allan to the pastoral charge of Poolewe & Aultbea. Rev John Morrison preached from Romans 10:15 noting that the gospel minister is a herald who has been appointed by God to deliver His message of salvation. God has called him, not only furnishing him with the necessary gifts, but also implanting within him a burning desire to preach the Gospel with a view to the ingathering of sinners and the upbuilding of saints. The biblical

message he brings is Christ-centred, for all doctrine is full of Christ. All are responsible to receive the message. God's people love the word of God for God has opened their ears to hear.

After the appointed questions were duly answered and the Formula signed, Mr Allan was set aside for the work of the holy ministry and admitted to the charge of Poolewe & Aultbea. He was then addressed by Rev John Keddie who exhorted him to be a studious, pastoral, prayerful, holy, persevering faithful minister of the Word. Thereafter Rev Graeme Craig addressed the congregation reminding

them they would benefit from the preaching of the Word and pastoral visitation as they recognised that ministers are a blood-bought gift of Christ to His church. They are sent as His ambassadors to speak in His name. However, ministers are also a part of the body of Christ, and thus it is the duty of the congregation to support the ministry through prayer and other practical means.

Following the service, the gathering adjourned to the Poolewe Hall where a beautiful spread was provided by members and friends of the congregation. Presentations were made to Mr and Mrs Allan and their five children, welcoming them into the congregation. Mr Donald Robertson was thanked for his diligent labours over recent months as Resident Lay Agent, and Mr Craig was thanked for his labours over the past eight years as Interim Moderator. The two Aultbea elders and their wives were thanked for their help in preaching, pastoral work and hospitality over the long years of vacancy and the contribution of Mr & Mrs Hardie, Poolewe, was also recognised.

After the presentations, Mr Allan addressed the gathering, thanking many people for all their help and kindness. He mentioned that whilst working as a young photographer his mother, complaining about his work cluttering the family home, had once asked when he was going to get a proper job. With great delight he was now able to inform her that he now had a proper job, the best in the world, serving the best of masters. After various friends had spoken at Mr Allan's invitation, the evening concluded with worship.

Desk



At times the congregation wondered if the Lord would ever provide them with a Minister. He has answered their prayer and we should continue to pray that the Lord would richly bless Mr Allan as he settles into his ministry there.

New Church for Waternish

Rev J Keddie

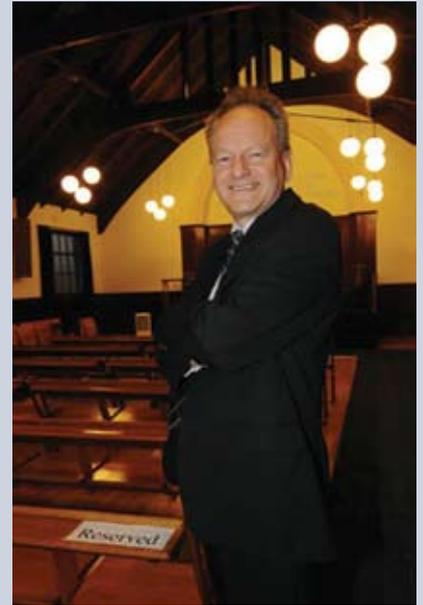
By the kindness of our Free Presbyterian brethren the Continuing congregation in Waternish recently moved to the Free Presbyterian building at Hallin, Waternish. The building had not been used for a couple of years. Quite a bit of decorative work was required to make it suitable for holding services. We are thankful to the Lord that services did commence with a prayer meeting on 21st November. The building is bright and comfortable, with a very good under-pew electric heating system. There is seating capacity for perhaps 100/120 souls, though the building is not a

large one. Thanks are expressed to the Lord for this provision, and of course to the Free Presbyterian Church. May the Lord give blessing in the meetings held there, filling the place with the sweet fragrance of His presence as the word of the gospel continues to be heard there.

Public Opening

Rev William Macleod

On Friday 21st November almost 200 folk gathered in Knightswood (Thornwood) Free Church (Continuing) to celebrate the opening of the church at 361 Fulton Street. The building comfortably accommodated everyone and the ladies of the congregation laid on a lovely tea. The Rev Hugh Ferrier preached an appropriate sermon on the words: 'For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1Cor.1:18). There was a great sense of joy at the generosity of our friends in the Brethren assembly



who gave us the building. It will be some time before we can be sure that all the legal snags can be overcome but meanwhile we are enjoying the comfort of our own excellent church building.

Presentations

Rev William Macleod

At the close of the Inverness prayer-meeting on Thursday 13th November a presentation from the Church at large was made by the Rev Robert Josey (Convener of the Training of the Ministry Committee) to the Rev Ronald MacKenzie who has recently retired as lecturer in Church History and Principles from the Free Church Seminary. The sterling work that Mr MacKenzie has done in preparing from scratch a suitable course for our ministerial candidates was acknowledged. His love and devotion to the students and diligence in helping them any way he could was noted.

At the same meeting presentations were made to Kerey Thayananth who has



In the new Church: Rev J. Keddie & Peter Matheson, the Waternish Elder

just completed his Seminary course and is now returning to his native Sri Lanka to marry and to begin his pastoral work. Kerey brought a blessing to the Seminary. He was a good and godly influence and the prayers of the Church go with him as he begins his ministry in a needy land, ravaged by war. When he arrived in Scotland his English was not good but by hard work he was enabled to graduate with a Diploma.

Visit to the USA

In October 2008 the Rev Maurice Roberts paid a three-week visit to the city of Grand Rapids in Michigan, USA. He had a number of duties to attend to while over there: to conduct a Service of Marriage, to give a course of Lectures on the Gospel of John to a class of students in the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS), to give three Lectures at a Ministerial Conference organised by the Free Reformed Church of America, and also to preach in two of the pulpits of the Reformed churches in that city. It was a pleasure, says Mr Roberts, to renew the bond of Christian fellowship with esteemed brethren in the Lord in Grand Rapids. Among these faithful preachers were Dr David Murray, formerly FCC Minister in Stornoway, Mr Sherman Isbell of Washington (DC), Mr Warren Gardner, Dr Laurence Bilkes, of the Free Reformed Church in Ball Avenue, and Dr Joel Beeke, President of PRTS and Minister of the local Heritage Reformed congregation. The experience of attending the Seminary and Conference gave opportunity to share fellowship with a wide number of preachers and students from the USA, Canada, and from lands as far afield as Brazil, Africa, and the Philippines. It is good to be able to report that the Rev David Murray and his family are settled well over there and are held in very high regard by the American and Canadian brethren from a Dutch Calvinistic background. As the Convener of our denominational Ecumenical Relations Committee Mr Roberts routinely conveys the good wishes of the FCC to all whom he meets in conference. He is happy to be able to bring back warm greetings from representatives of these churches in the USA and elsewhere.



Iris Robinson MP MLA

Christians Vilified as Bigots

Christian Institute

Two Christian women have been singled out and vilified as 'bigots' by a homosexual charity because of their

Christian beliefs. Christian MP Iris Robinson was voted 'Bigot of the Year' after Stonewall – a registered charity – encouraged supporters to choose from a list of nominees. Stonewall's Chief Executive Ben Summerskill is an Equality and Human Rights Commissioner, with responsibility for championing 'equality and human rights for all, working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society'. Earlier this year, Mrs Robinson came under fire for using the biblical term 'abomination' to describe the practice of homosexuality. 'I was very careful in saying that I have nothing against any homosexual', she said at the time. 'I love them; that is what the Lord tells me, to love the sinner and not the sin'. She later added: 'Anything I say is out of love. I am not hate-mongering. I cannot leave my Christian values hanging at the door when I go into politics'.

Assisted Suicide

Christian Institute

Allowing assisted suicide for a few individuals would put the great majority of vulnerable people at risk of harm, warns a top barrister and Peer. Lord Carlile of Berriew QC says Parliament must consider the subject carefully without being 'stampeded by highly emotional campaigns mounted by single-issue pressure groups'. His comments come in a letter to *The Times*, written in response to news that Lord Joffe intends to make another attempt to legalise assisted suicide.

Dame Joan Bakewell, the Government's new tsar for the elderly, says she supports assisted suicide and thinks the elderly should not be kept alive once they lose their 'identity'. Dame Joan was appointed as the Government's independent Voice of Older People recently, with the task of raising the profile of age equality issues.

Persecution in Orissa, India

Barnabas Fund

Hindu extremist violence against the Christian community in Orissa State, India, which started on 24th August has been continuing unabated for months now. There have been numerous cases of forced conversions to Hinduism as Hindu extremists try to turn Orissa into a Hindu state. Christians who want to return to their homes are told by the Hindu extremists: 'Come back as Hindu or don't come back at all'. In some cases the Hindu extremists poured petrol over the Christians and then asked them to convert; if they refused they were burnt. Ashish Digal, a Christian leader, was told by the extremists that if he did not convert to Hinduism, they would burn his house and kill him. A young Hindu woman was gang-raped by her grandparents' neighbours because her uncle refused to renounce his Christian faith. Jaspina, a 32-year-old Christian woman, was warned by her neighbours, 'If you go on being Christians, we will burn your houses and your children in front of you, so make up your minds quickly'. She was forced to attend a conversion ceremony together with her husband and three children, during which they had to eat cow dung

to 'purify' themselves. Jaspina says: 'I'm totally broken. I've always been a Christian. Inside I'm still praying for Jesus to give me peace and to take me out of this situation.'

Pray for Christians in Orissa that the violence and forced conversions will stop and that God will bring His healing and peace to the many victims of the attacks. Pray that help will reach the affected Christians quickly.

China – Beatings

Barnabas Fund

Zhang Jian, the elder son of Pastor 'Bike' Zhang Mingxuan, President of the Chinese House Church Alliance, was brutally beaten by Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials while at home with his mother Xie Fenglan in Beijing. Around noon on 16th October fifteen PSB officers entered their home, shutting off all the exits, and beat Zhang Jian with iron bars for 25 minutes. His younger brother Zhang Chuang tried to help Zhang Jian, but he was beaten by the PSB officials as well. When Xie Fenglan tried to call an ambulance, the receptionist told her that she had orders from a higher government authority not to send anyone to help Zhang Jian because he was related to Pastor Bike Zhang. Finally Zhang Jian was taken to hospital by a friend of the family. Zhang Jian has now regained consciousness, but the doctors fear that he might lose sight in his right eye, which was badly damaged during the beating. Soon after her son was taken to hospital, Xie Fenglan was told to leave her home, and the family's furniture was thrown into the streets. Government authorities ordered all hotels in Beijing not to offer her a room. She is now staying with Dr Fan Yafeng, another house church leader in Beijing. Her husband Bike Zhang was arrested by PSB officials on 16th October and has been in detention since then. During the past 22 years Bike Zhang has been arrested 26 times, and beaten or evicted from his home on several occasions.

Nadine Dorries MP wins Award

The LifeLeague

Nadine Dorries, MP for Mid Bedfordshire has won *Spectator Magazine's* Readers' Representative Award in the Parliamentarian of the Year Awards. Nominations for the award came directly from the public rather than from a panel of political experts, and Nadine was chosen in recognition of her work in Parliament to prevent the further liberalisation of the UK's abortion laws.

The LifeLeague says: 'It is heartening to realise that the public took this opportunity to show support for a person who is popularly understood to be one of the most pro-life

MPs in the House of Commons. This is something pro-life campaigners can build on.'

Palestinian Muslim Columnist Speaks up for Christians

Christians in the Middle East have been facing much discrimination, harassment and persecution in recent years, and very often the perpetrators are members of the Muslim majority. The number of Christians in the Middle East has been declining continually over past decades, and there is fear that in some countries, such as Iraq, there is a real push to drive out the whole Christian community. On 25th October the Palestinian columnist, 'Abd Al-Nasser Al-Najjar, wrote a column for the Palestinian daily *Al-Ayyam*, focussing on this persecution of Christians in Arab countries. 'Abd Al-Nasser Al-Najjar, himself a Muslim, warned that the expulsion of Christians and the attempt to denounce them as 'infidels' was causing great damage to the Arab culture, of which Christians are an essential and original part. In his article he criticised the fact that no one dared to come to the help of persecuted Christian minorities in the Middle East and he condemned the unwillingness of Arab intellectuals, the elite, non-government organisations and leaders of the private sector to act on behalf of Christians.

Aid for the Democratic Republic of Congo

Barnabas Fund

Fighting between Congolese government troops and rebels under the renegade General Laurent Nkunda in the province of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo is continuing. In Goma and its surrounding areas alone, around 610,000 people have been recently displaced, and an unknown number, estimated to be in the thousands, are still without access to emergency aid as they continue to wander from one place to another, trying to escape the ongoing violence. Several cases of cholera have now been confirmed, and living conditions in the refugee camps are dire. Barnabas Fund is working with one of its local partners to get emergency aid to over 3,000 people, including many Christians, who have been displaced in the violent clashes, and to improve hygiene, living and sanitation conditions.

Methadone for Addicts

Christian Institute

The amount of Scottish taxpayers' money spent on methadone for addicts has soared in the last year, despite Government promises to move away from failed 'harm reduction' policies. Figures show a 19% rise in one year with over £25m of Scottish Government spending going to methadone treatments to keep addicts hooked on the drug as a substitute for heroin. There are also reports that the Government is thinking about giving addicts 'injection rooms' and anti-overdose medication, together with counselling for 'stressed' junkies.

Scottish Tory Justice Spokesman, Bill Aitken said, 'The idea of safe injecting rooms sends out the wrong message. We should be discouraging people from taking drugs ... Anything that makes drug-taking more comfortable really is not in the best of interests.'





Books

Study Guide to John Owen's The Mortification of Sin

Rob Edwards

Banner of Truth, bklt, 44pp, £2.50

This booklet is useful as an introduction to Owen and is based on the larger volume of the same name. The focus is on the doctrine of sanctification, the 'negative' side of which is mortification. The booklet gives a very brief summary of each chapter of the larger volume and has a number of questions relating to each chapter.

Some of the quotes from Owen are challenging: 'Always be killing sin or it will be killing you', 'You set yourself against a particular sin, and do not realize that you are nothing but sin', 'As long as your conscience is able to justify your failure, your soul will never vigorously attempt the mortification of sin'. A thought-provoking little booklet, challenging us to consider a subject which we often, to our detriment, are more comfortable ignoring.

Rev. K MacDonald

John Murray and the Godly Life

John J Murray

**Northern Reformed Fellowship
bklt, 20pp, £1.00 (includes postage)**

On 16th June 2008 the Rev John J Murray addressed a meeting of the Northern Reformed Fellowship in the Dornoch Academy on the life of a theologian whom he greatly admired and whose name he shares. All who knew Professor Murray recognised him as a true man of God. This booklet is the substance of his address and is heart-warming and challenging. Sadly too often scholarly theologians of the last century or two have been men who are more noted for their scholarly character than for their godliness. John Murray was an exception. The fear of God characterised him. He

was a great exegete of Scripture and bowed before the word of God. Rev John J Murray rightly states that the great need of the churches today is a holier ministry.

Banner in the West A Spiritual History of Lewis and Harris

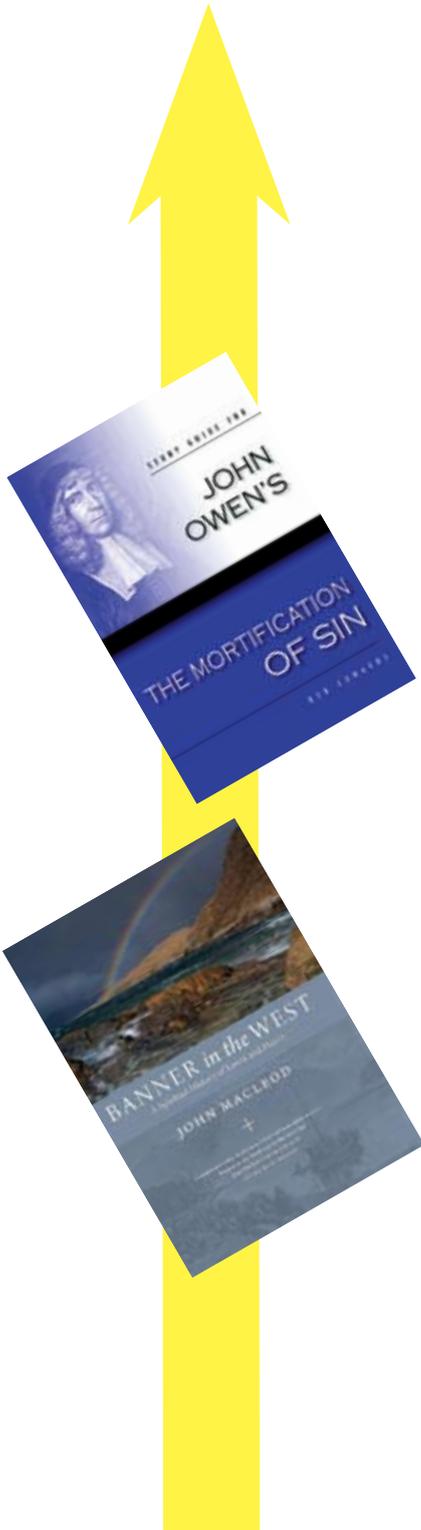
John MacLeod

Birlinn, hbk, 398pp, £25.00

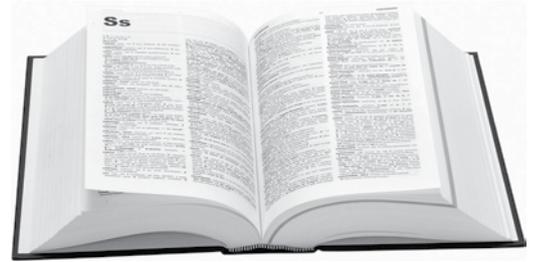
An immense amount of research has gone into the production of this large and useful volume. It begins with the Callanish stones and pre-Christian history and proceeds through the coming of Christianity, Columba and others, to the Reformation, to the moving of God's Spirit in the 1820s and on through various divisions to the present day. John MacLeod has gathered material from many different sources and it is useful to have this now in one volume. The style of writing is easy to read, the account being lightened by anecdotes and personal allusions, perhaps more the work of a journalist than an academic historian. It is wonderful to read accounts of revival in the Western Isles.

John MacLeod himself is an unusual man. Strangely he both greatly admires the conservative Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and at the same time the more liberal side of the Free Church. Speaking as a Free Churchman I believe his account is more reliable pre-1890 and after that is given more from a Free Presbyterian perspective though he goes much further and writes more coarsely than any of our esteemed FP brethren would write. I give three examples of individuals who are seen harshly through MacLeod's eyes.

Hector Cameron (Back) is described as a 'pompous, noisy, really rather stupid man ... an insufferable boor'. I grew up in a Lewis which highly respected Cameron, but then in MacLeod's words Cameron was



Books



the one 'who denied Lewis to the Free Presbyterians'. If he was such a stupid 'wind-bag' why did the church in Lewis follow his leadership rather than that of the Free Presbyterian men? MacLeod seems to have difficulty understanding the force of the constitutionalist argument of the 1900 Free Church.

MacLeod tells the story of Rev Roderick MacInnes, my wife's grandfather. MacInnes formed the Free Presbyterian congregation in Uig, Lewis by leading the majority of Balnacille folk out of the Church of Scotland in 1930. In 1936 he resigned from the FP Church. MacLeod quotes an old Uig lady who remembers MacInnes's 'erratic pulpit behaviour.' She is alleged to have said that it was better understood after he left Balnacille manse. 'Dozens and dozens of empty whisky bottles were

later found in every conceivable recess.' This is simple slander. MacInnes, while certainly eccentric, never showed any fondness for alcohol. But he was hated by certain folk in the community who hurled clods of earth at him as he walked through the village and, it seems, still continue to throw dirt at him. This was a new accusation to his family with whom he lived till a ripe old age.

Another sad example is the treatment doled out to A W Pink who for a time attended the FP Church. Pink is described as 'an early harbinger in Highland Christian circles of a breed now dubbed, with rather less patience, as the "English nutter"'. His reputation is supposed to have been 'puffed by the Banner of Truth Trust'. Actually far more of his works were published by

Baker and Moody Press than have ever been published by the Banner. MacLeod sneeringly says, 'most Christians have never even heard of Pink'. The reality is that right across the world millions of Pink's books are read. Few books have led more Arminians to the Reformed faith than Pink's *Sovereignty of God*. Yes it appears that he was an eccentric man and possibly not suited to the pastoral ministry, but God has mightily used his writings for the teaching of His people and is still doing so.

MacLeod goes on to deal with what he calls 'the Bebo Generation'. He tells of spiritual interest among children in the last few years. We rejoice to hear of young folk attending communion services. May it prove to be a solid work of God's Spirit!

Rev William Macleod

The Windows of the Soul

C H Spurgeon

'I will make thy windows of agates' (Is.54:12)

The church is most instructively symbolised by a building erected by heavenly power, and designed by divine skill. Such a spiritual house must not be dark, for the Israelites had light in their dwellings; there must therefore be windows to let the light in and to allow the inhabitants to gaze abroad. These windows are precious as agates: the ways in which the church beholds her Lord and heaven, and spiritual truth in general, are to be had in the highest esteem. Agates are not the most transparent of gems, they are but semi-pellucid at the best:

Our knowledge of that life is small,
Our eye of faith is dim.

Faith is one of these precious agate windows, but alas, it is often so misty and beclouded, that we see but darkly, and mistake much that we do see. Yet if we cannot gaze through windows of diamonds and know even as we are known, it is a glorious thing to behold the altogether lovely One, even though the glass be hazy as the agate.

Experience is another of these dim but precious windows, yielding to us a subdued religious light, in which we see the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, through our own afflictions. Our weak eyes could not endure windows of transparent glass to let in the Master's glory, but when they are dimmed

with weeping, the beams of the Sun of Righteousness are tempered, and shine through the windows of agate with a soft radiance inexpressibly soothing to tempted souls.

Sanctification, as it conforms us to our Lord, is another agate window. Only as we become heavenly can we comprehend heavenly things. The pure in heart see a pure God. Those who are like Jesus see Him as He is. Because we are so little like Him, the window is but agate; because we are somewhat like Him, it is agate. We thank God for what we have, and long for more. When shall we see God and Jesus, and heaven and truth, face to face?

A Protestant Nation?

Rev John W Keddie

It came as a great shock to see the headline in my paper some months ago: “Zloty zealots” see Catholic Church surpass the Kirk. This coincided with the Kirk’s General Assembly. The article made reference to the influx of immigrants from Poland to Scotland in recent times. Apparently this has been largely responsible for the attendances at Sunday services in the Roman Catholic Church surpassing the attendances in the Church of Scotland. It seems that according to the latest statistics 215,000 attend weekly mass in Scotland, whereas only 208,400 attend weekly services in the National Kirk.

At the time of the Union of the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland in 1929 there were around 1.3 million church members in the united Church, plus half a million or so pupils in Bible Classes and Sabbath Schools. The weekly attendances would be over 1 million – in the Church of Scotland alone! And now it is just over 200,000, assuming these figures are accurate. Now, there are many reasons that might be suggested for this ‘implosion’.

(1) *Decline in the status and authority of the Bible in the Church.* Even a liberal theologian was inclined to write a book a number of years ago entitled, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*. Does the Church really expect the blessing of the Lord on religious life when the Bible is largely set aside?

(2) *Loss in doctrinal integrity in the Church.* Towards the end of the 19th century and into the 20th doctrinal standards were undermined by the mainline churches moving from strict adherence to the *Confession of Faith*. It is not that the *Confession of Faith* is perfect and inspired, yet it does represent a high-watermark in the understanding of biblical truth. To move away from it so decidedly was a move away from doctrinal strength and integrity. Does the Church really expect God to bless such doctrinal uncertainty and ambiguity?

(3) *The acceptance of the confusion of broad churchism.* This really has arisen because of the departure from a high view

of the origin and authority of the Bible as the perfect Word of God and the consequent weakening of doctrinal standards. Where these things prevail a church will inevitably become ‘broad’, so that evangelical faith will become simply a tolerated option along with more liberal views of God and truth. But broad churchism will destroy the church as a power because it conveys the idea of the church as a ‘mix and match’ sort of thing – sowing confusion and uncertainty.

But is it fair to make such judgments on another church? In a way it is inevitable. For when you consider the religious life of Scotland you cannot avoid it, because the Church of Scotland is the single most important element, and if things are wrong with it then this will affect us all.

However, two things might be said:

(1) Are the smaller Presbyterian churches justified in being content with their own position and church life? Have we not declined too? Do we see conversions in our churches and consequent blessing? Oh, we believe ourselves to be faithful to the Word of God and we are not ‘broad churches’. There is truth in that. But are we full of life – the life of the Spirit? No! Then we must look to our own faithfulness and search our hearts before the Lord.

(2) What are we to do then? Well, it is clear that prayer must be made to the Lord urgently and persistently, like the persistent widow of Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:1-8. For what will we pray? For a divine recovery of Reformed Protestant religion in our national Church and among ourselves, lest the Lord remove His candlestick from our fair land and we fall farther into a spiritually lifeless barrenness.

We need the Spirit’s power – on every branch of the church. As for ourselves, we can but ask that the Lord would make us bright lights in our day. As such we will be marked not by any self-importance, but by being a body humbled and reliant upon Him and His grace, by which our nation may yet be raised to a renewed usefulness and blessedness.

May the Lord be pleased so to move among us in these days!



**"For what will we pray?
For a divine recovery of Reformed
Protestant religion in our national Church
and among ourselves, lest the Lord
remove His candlestick from our fair
land and we fall farther into a spiritually
lifeless barrenness."**

Rev Hector M'Phail

From *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*

Rev John Kennedy D.D.

On his deathbed, his hope of heaven was for a season sorely tried. Falling asleep in a dejected state of mind, he dreamt that he was waiting, lonely and despairing, outside the walls of the New Jerusalem. Seeing the gate closed, and none near to help him, and none in sight to cry to for help, he had just lain down to die, when he heard sounds as of a company approaching the city. Venturing to look up from the dust where he lay, he recognised Noah, Abraham, and all the patriarchs. As they drew near, the gate flew open, a glorious company from within came forth to meet them, and, in the midst of shouts of triumph, they entered. The gate again closes, and again he is left alone and hopeless. But soon he hears the noise of another company approaching. As they pass, he recognises Moses, Aaron, Samuel, David, and all the prophets, a glorious and a numerous band. Again the gate is thrown open, 'an abundant entrance' given, and again he is left outside, and feels more desolate than ever. A third company is heard approaching composed of the Apostles and all the earliest Christians. They enter the city amidst rejoicing like the rest, and he, with less hope than ever, is still outside the gate. A fourth company now appears. Luther and Knox are at the head of those who form it. They pass him by like those who went before, are

admitted into the city, and leave him alone and despairing without. Quite close to him now comes a fifth company. He recognises in it some of his friends and acquaintances, who had died in the Lord: but though their shining skirts touch him as they pass, he could not venture to arise and join them. Again he sees the gate open and close; and now, at last, he lays himself quite down to die. But he hears the footstep of a solitary pilgrim, coming exactly to the place where he lies – looking up, he recognises Manasseh. Summoning all his strength, he takes hold of his skirt, as he moves slowly toward the city, and, creeping on behind him, he knows the gate has opened, by the light of the city's glory shining on his face; and just as he thought he heard the sound of the gate closing behind him, he suddenly awoke. The lesson of this dream was presented to him thereafter in the sweet words of Paul – 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief'.

His tombstone in the churchyard of Cullicudden bears the following inscription: 'Here lies the body of the holy man of God and faithful minister of Jesus Christ, Mr Hector M'Phail, minister of the Gospel in this parish, who died 23rd January, 1774, aged fifty-eight years.'

Look to Jesus in Your Weakness

Octavius Winslow

*'And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and receive you unto myself;
that where I am, there ye may be also'*

(Jn.14:3)

When heart and flesh are fast failing, and the trembling feet descend into the dark valley of the shadow of death, to whom shall we then look but unto Jesus? The world is now receding, and all creatures are fading upon the sight; one object alone remains, arresting and fixing the believer's eye: it is Jesus, the Saviour. It is Immanuel, the Incarnate and now-present God. It is the Captain of our salvation, the Conqueror of death, and the Spoiler of the grave. It is our friend, our brother, our Joseph, our Joshua, loving and faithful, and present to the last. Jesus is there to confront death again, and vanquish it with his own weapons. Jesus is there to remind His departing one that the grave can wear no gloom, and can boast of no victory, since He Himself passed through its portal, rose and revived, and lives for evermore.

Sick one, in your languishing, look to Jesus! Departing one, in your death-struggles, look to Jesus! Are you guilty? Jesus is righteous. Are you a sinner? Jesus is a Saviour. Are you fearful, and do you tremble? The Shepherd of the flock is with you, and no one shall pluck His sheep out of His hands. How fully, how suitably, does the Gospel now meet your case! In your bodily weakness and mental confusion, two truths are, perhaps, all that you can now dwell upon: your sinfulness and Christ's redemption; your emptiness and Christ's sufficiency. Enough! You need no more; God requires no more. In your felt weakness, in your conscious unworthiness, in the middle of the swelling of the cold waters, raise your eye and fix it upon Jesus, and all will be well. Do you not hear the words of your Saviour calling you from the bright world of glory to which He bids you come, 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away' (Song of Sol.2:10)? Believer, look to Him, lean upon Him, cleave to Him, labour for Him, suffer for Him, and, if need be, die for Him. Thus, love and trust, live and die, for 'Jesus only'.

Congregational Remittances - November 2008

	2008 Nov	2008 Total	2007 Total Nov				
Presbytery of Inverness				Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Aberdeen	800	8,781	5,867	Cross	1,988	21,283	21,345
Duthil-Dores	1,806	25,051	17,656	Harris - Leverburgh	1,000	11,884	10,817
Inverness	2,000	26,000	28,000	Harris - Scalpay	0	16,377	18,001
Kilmorack & Strathglass	1,300	15,163	16,467	Knock & Point	850	10,521	10,481
Total Inverness Presbytery	5,906	74,995	67,990	North Uist	800	10,259	9,154
				Stornoway	6,614	55,410	62,035
				Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	11,252	125,735	131,834
Northern Presbytery				Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron			
Assynt & Scourie	0	2,570	9,052	Bracadale	1,000	13,229	12,378
Brora	1,700	17,268	17,512	Duirinish (Waternish)	400	4,800	4,400
Kiltearn	0	17,400	18,700	Glanelg & Arnisdale	112	1,748	1,562
Tarbat	0	7,974	8,313	Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,500	15,575	15,661
Total Northern Presbytery	1,700	45,212	53,577	Lochalsh & Glenshiel	1,404	14,196	12,899
				Poolewe & Aultbea	1,743	11,535	11,654
Southern Presbytery				Portree	1,200	17,206	13,421
Arran	200	5,809	6,261	Snizort	1,650	20,061	19,206
Ayr	0	2,460	2,012	Strath	1,000	5,016	6,123
Dumfries	0	0	85	Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	10,009	103,365	97,304
Edinburgh	0	23,761	26,655				
Glasgow - Partick	1,000	26,000	26,200	Total From Congregations	32,306	440,809	444,890
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	10,740	10,300	Other Donations	930	19,369	22,863
Glasgow - Thornwood	2,240	21,402	20,672				
Rothsay	0	1,331	2,000	TOTAL	33,236	460,178	467,753
Total Southern Presbytery	3,440	91,502	94,185	Including Gift Aid Declarations	41,983		48,417

Letter from Zambia

Dear Friends,

We have just concluded the academic year at Covenant College. In this letter we wish to update you on the graduation, the Pastors' Conference and the new building project. We also bring our financial needs to your attention. Phil Bailey shares news about the continued ministry of the Farm and particularly the blessings of teaching Farming God's Way.

Our Village

The mission has been a busy place. Early each morning you will find many workers on their way to Covenant College – farm employees, piece-workers, brick-makers and builders – they all make their living from the mission's business. Students lodged here from February to October, filling the station with their singing each morning. Three workers' families have their own small compound at the mission, bringing more liveliness to this place. None of the missionaries or workers has been seriously ill, for which we are very thankful. All the work, on the side of the College, the Farm, and the Christian Education Fund, has continued with the help of the Lord. As the rainy season is at hand, we all leave the mission for some months. We will be busy presenting the ministries to the supporting churches, raising funds to carry on next year, preparing lectures and trying to get some rest as well.

Training Pastors

The College offers training to men who are already serving in the church, who are thus recognised by their church as called from the Lord and who have proved for some years to be dedicated to the ministry. This is what binds our students together, despite the great variety in formal education, age, social standing, and experience. It is a tremendous opportunity and privilege to be involved in the training of Zambian church leaders; to help them grow and advance in leading their churches in the Word of God and in a worship and life that glorifies Him.

Graduation

The graduation was again a beautiful conclusion of this year's training. Seven students completed their three years at the College. Many bicycle miles and months of disciplined studying were rewarded with a Diploma or Certificate (one of the seven) in Theology. Six men are already pastoring a church; one is involved in pastoral work and hopes to become a full-time pastor soon. The Petauke District Commissioner, a government official, who spoke at the graduation, encouraged us by taking note of the development of the College and the good reputation it has in the area. He also acknowledged the supporting churches which enabled the College to progress. The 2008 graduates bring the total number to 40 students who have completed their studies

at Covenant College from its beginning in 2001. Eleven students hope to continue next year.

Teaching

In the last term, we were assisted in teaching by Pastor Oswald Sichula from Kabwata (Reformed) Baptist Church, Lusaka, who explored with the students the area of pastoral counselling. We are grateful to him and the Church that supported him to serve at Covenant College. Pastor Zwemstra lectured the last two terms on the Pentateuch, Reformation history, and NT Epistles. I have taught Christology and Soteriology. Some students faithfully carried on their Greek language study with the help of Jacomien Zwemstra.

Conference

We had the pleasure of meeting many College graduates at the Pastors' Conference in October. They were invited along with our current students and pastors from surrounding churches. For the graduates, the Conference served as a refresher course and an encouragement to persevere in their often lonely ministries. For neighbouring pastors, the Conference is intended to introduce them to Covenant College and invite them to come and train for their ministry. Many pastors are interested in the College, and we expect a number of new men to join our ranks in February. Rev Gerrit Kruger from the Centurion Reformed Church of South Africa provided most of the teaching on the theme of 'Biblical Church Leadership'. The lectures were much appreciated and we look back at a blessed conference.

Farming God's Way (Phil Bailey)

During September we had several opportunities to teach Farming God's Way (FGW). We continued with 10 hours of agricultural teaching to the students, going over various applications of FGW and bringing in a new subject 'Planet Wise' which looks at Christians' responsibility of caring for God's Planet as His stewards. A local farmers' group called Chambale came to the College one Monday for a full day's teaching both in the classroom and out in the fields. They were encouraging as they joined together to form the group with the intent of seeking ways to make their small farms self-sufficient. This is the only way out of poverty for Africans – waiting for 'hand-outs' does not make them faithful in the talents God has given them in the form of land, rain, sunshine and the ability to work.

This is one of the main teachings within FGW so it's encouraging when we are asked to come and teach these principles. During the Pastors' Training International Chipata Conference in August I was asked to come back and teach FGW to the pastors. So on September 20th, 60 people gathered at Chipata Day School to hear the message and method. FGW combines conservation farming, long-term sustainability of the land and environmental awareness, all with many Biblical applications. We thank God for leading us to learn of this teaching and for helping us to apply it in the fields of Covenant College and we pray that He will continue to provide opportunities to teach the Gospel in this way.

Projects

In October we started with the construction of a new classroom/conference hall building. The current hall does not allow all-year-round teaching as it is wet in the rainy season and cold when the strong winds come. Neither does it cater for conferences, combined women's and pastors' meetings, and other functions such as the graduation. The new building, all under one roof, will have space for a middle-sized and a small classroom, a conference hall and a small storeroom/office. The funds for this project have come in largely from the Heritage Reformed Congregations where we held presentations in January and a church in Vlissingen, in the Netherlands. Right now we can finish only the classrooms; the conference hall will only be added when more funds become available. To complete our classroom/conference hall project we still need \$6,000.

Shortfall 2008

We are very grateful for all the support we have received during this year. We do however have a slight shortfall in 2008.

The operational fund of the College is short by about \$3,000; this fund covers all the regular expenses of the College, upkeep of the buildings and vehicle, students' food and College supplies. For the support of the Pastors' wives meetings we still need \$1,500. Please consider these needs.

Please give thanks with us for:

- the completion of the house for the Zwemstras
- good rains early in the season allowing the sowing to start
- the dedicated studies of our students
- the unity and health of team members
- peaceful elections

We covet your prayers for:

- successful furloughs, rest and good meetings with the churches;
- the CEF, that teachers will see education as one of the means to lead children to Jesus
- a good harvest to provide for next year
- God's wisdom in the preparation of next year's teaching

We appreciate your support.

In Christ,

Cees Molenaar (Principal)



**“Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to
the sons of man.
O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools,
be ye of an understanding heart.”**

Proverbs 8:4-5