Free Church Witness

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Eldership

Rev Maurice Roberts

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The Compassion of Christ

What is the one feature of Christ's ministry which stands out more clearly than any other? Surely it is His compassion. He had a heart full of love. Sometimes He was very angry, for example when He perceived hypocrisy. However, when He saw suffering His heart went out to those who were in pain. We sinned in Adam and fell from the perfect state in which we were created. We deserve nothing but the wrath and curse of Christ, yet He reaches out to filthy sinners in love. There is nothing beautiful or attractive in us but grace overflows from Him.

Two Blind Men

Blindness must be one of the hardest disabilities to bear. We are told of two blind men (Mt.20:30ff). These poor men lived in a world of darkness. Unable to work and with no Social Security or National Health Service the only way they had to earn money was to beg. They kept crying out for mercy. The multitude told them to be quiet and not disturb the peace, but Jesus stopped, called them and asked what they desired. They replied 'Lord, that our eyes may be opened'. Then we are told 'Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him' (vv31-34). Jesus' heart went out to them in love and He gave them their sight.

A Leper

Leprosy was a terrible disease and is sometimes taken in Scripture as symbolical of sin. Society shunned lepers. They were ceremonially unclean and had to keep themselves apart from other people. Mark writes of one who came to Jesus, 'beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean' (Mk.1:40). Then we are told that Jesus, as was typical of Him, 'moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean' (v41). He touched him.

Mourners

Many tears are shed over the dead. When Jesus approached the town of Nain a dead man was carried out for burial, the only son of his mother who was a widow. Again we are told: 'When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak' (Lk.7:11-15). On two occasions in the Gospels Jesus is recorded as having wept. One of these was at the grave of Lazarus (Jn.11:35). It caused the Jews to exclaim, 'Behold how he loved him!' (v36). There was no death in the world as it came from the hands of the Creator but now it seems that death reigns supreme over all and what grief it brings!

The Multitude

After a particularly stressful time, Jesus said to the disciples, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately' (Mk.6:31-32). However the people saw them departing, recognised Him, and ran to the place. What was Christ's response? Was it anger and frustration? No, rather the opposite: 'Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things' (v34). Later He provided them with food in case they would faint on the way home.

Jerusalem

Earlier we mentioned that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. The other occasion on which he wept was viewing Jerusalem: 'When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation' (Lk.19:41-44). He could see the coming judgment. Matthew records His lament: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Mt.23:37). He had a heart full of love and compassion but they rejected Him. 'Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life' (Jn.5:40).

Rich Young Ruler

The rich young ruler came to Jesus earnestly asking a vital question, 'What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'(Mk.10:17). Jesus told him to keep the commandments. He answered that he had observed all these from his youth. Then we notice something interesting: 'Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest' (v21). Jesus, it is said, loved him. Some argue from this that the ruler must have been one of the elect. However there is no hint here that a miraculous knowledge was involved. Rather Jesus beholds him, sees his earnestness and that he is what we would call a 'good-living person'. He sees common grace in his life to a heightened degree and admires that grace. The whole emphasis of the passage is that the man went away lost despite Jesus' loving admonition and that is where the Bible leaves him. That is where we should leave him too. 'He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions' (v22).

The Woman of Samaria

In the story of the woman of Samaria there is a hint of the divine decree in the words, 'He must needs go through Samaria' (Jn.4:4). Though this woman belongs to the despised Samaritans Christ's heart goes out to her. In His love He loses all interest in food,

though previously He had been tired, hungry and thirsty. 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work'. When she brings her fellow-citizens to hear Him, He is excited about multitudes being saved: 'There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal' (vv35-36).

Example

Our Lord Jesus had a heart full of compassion towards all who suffered. He healed the sick, bearing their infirmities. Oh that we too were moved with compassion for those in trouble. His motive in evangelism was love. Seeing the judgment that was coming on the impenitent He wept. His passion was the salvation of the lost and the gathering of a harvest to the glory of God. Let us follow His example and be inspired and constrained by the love of Christ (2Cor.5:14).

Islam
Part III

Rev John MacLeod (Tarbat)

Last month Rev John MacLeod asked, Do we understand why it matters that we should be concerned about Islam? He dealt with the threat of Islam.

III HAVE WE A GOD-HONOURING STRATEGY TO ADDRESS THE SITUATION?

We need to emphasise a Bible-based authority. That is where surely our addressing of the situation must start. Our problem with Mohammedans is not that they follow what they describe as *Islam* ñ our problem with them is that what they follow is contrary to the Bible.

This is not a question of our own personal likes or dislikes, itís a question of whatís right in terms of the Bible which is Godís Word to us. Islam rejects the authority of the Old Testament and it rejects the authority of the New Testament, yet thatís where *our* authority comes from, not from later writings like the Koran, not from the diktats of ayatollahs or rulings of lesser imams, but from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments themselves.

We must emphasise that the Bible is:

i. A reliable authority. We need to stress to ourselves and to the Mohammedan community around us alike, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments carry the authority of God Himself and that theyíre given to us to be our rule in matters of faith and our guide for daily life; that theyíre reliable and consistent, contrary to what those who follow Islam believe; that the text of the Bible is well-authenticated and that weíre dealing with a consistent message from beginning to end, not a series of disconnected jottings.

ii. Not the Koran. Now some people might point out that both the Bible and the Koran deal with principles and values. True. But we might say quite appropriately that surely the Bible message centres on the importance of a right personal relationship with God on a one-to-one basis. God is knowable! What we need on an individual basis is a right relationship with God ñ and the Bible makes it very clear how that is to be had: not on the basis of outward conformity to certain rules of behaviour or through the performance of specified outward acts, but rather on the basis of repentance and faith.

iii. Not the teaching of Imams. In Islamic culture the Imams have a very significant place. The word *Ayatollah* has entered into the general vocabulary and when you hear the word used, itís generally in the sense of a religious leader who is pressing his own extreme ideas home on the people over whom heís got a measure of influence. What we have to remember ourselves and what we have to bring home to those who come from an Islamic background is that the message of ***every*** religious teacher or preacher must be measured against the absolute standard of the Bible.

We need an emphasis on *believing* as a condition of belonging. Those who have been brought up within Islam generally reckon that the condition of belonging within their religion is that they should go through the rituals prescribed by their religion. To them, it is not so much a question of their relationship with God on a one-to-one basis as it is of their belonging to the community of their fellow-religionists. What we need to stress again and again is the vital importance of each individualís personal relationship with God and for that relationship to be right. We need to spell out clearly the Bibleís teaching on the provision that God has made to address the desperate needs of sinners who can never, no matter how much effort they put into it, earn a right relationship with God on the basis of their own merit. We need to stress that belonging to the true community of those who are faithful to God is something which follows on from a right relationship with God based on repentance and faith, rather than being the primary end in itself.

We need a clear proclamation of the nature and awfulness of sin. What we need to bring out very particularly is that the seriousness of sin is the effect it has on our relationship with ***God***, not simply on our relationship with those around us. Sin is rebellion against God, not simply against the rules of organised religion. Even what we might imagine to be the smallest and least significant of sins deserves eternal punishment. How can a sinner understand his or her need of a Saviour if he or she doesnít understand anything of the awfulness of sin?

We need an unashamed proclamation of the Christ of Scripture. It is not that those who follow the teaching of Mohammed donít know anything of the existence of Jesus. They know the name. The teaching they follow acknowledges Jesus as a prophet, but the awful thing is that they reject His rôle as the Messiah. They think of Him as a mere prophet, a sort of imam of His day. Certainly

to them He is a lesser individual than Mohammed, which is why what we have to make very clear is that He is ***the Messiah***. He is the One God promised would come, the Seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent, the Messiah ñ the Ultimate Prophet, the Ultimate Priest and the Ultimate King ñ the One through whom alone we can have a right relationship with God. He is the One who paid and paid in full the price due for the sins of His people, the One who is the great King and Head of His Church.

We need a clear presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Lucas de Graaff points out that Islamic understanding of a ëChristianí may be evangelical but is usually far from Reformed in its thinking. Mohammedans shout out *Allahu Akbar*? And what does it mean? They say it means *God is great!* ñ but it does not mean that exactly. It means *God is greater!* But the doctrine of the Trinity spells out the fact that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is greater than we can fully comprehend. Islam lacks the answer to that very statement which they ignorantly utter several times a day. Yet the doctrine of the Trinity gives the answer!

We need a clear emphasis on covenant theology. De Graaff also makes the point that Christians who are weak in covenant theology and reject the links between circumcision and baptism, Passover and the Lordís Supper, tend to support very strongly the idea that the current political state of Israel has a divine legitimacy. He argues that from a Reformed perspective, whatever promises there may be with regard to the future of the Jews, itís their *spiritual* future which is of central importance and there can be no automatic assumption that the present political establishment in the State of Israel has guaranteed divine legitimacy for its every action.

We need a clear understanding of the claim of God over every area of life. The third point which de Graaff makes with regard to our Reformed position is that we rightly emphasise the claim God makes over every area of life. Indeed the Scottish Church has given special attention to the fact that both the Church and the Civil Magistrate are answerable to God. God has given them distinct rôles. Now that distinction between the rôles of the Church and the Civil Magistrate is an important distinction that is foreign to Islamic thinking. The rôles of spiritual leadership and political leadership were kept separate in Israel, though in the heathen nations round about them the rôles were as often as not combined. When the two are combined unbiblically the result is cruel dictatorship, whether it be the Stuart monarchs in Scotland or the Taliban in Afghanistan.

We need a Bible-based approach to culture. If we believe that God has a claim over every area of life, itís vital that we work for a culture thatís honouring to God and if itís to be honouring to God, then itís got to be Bible-based. People from a Mohammedan background are very ready to point to what they see as the evil things in Western culture ñ and it is a fact that many of these things, measured against Biblical standards, are indeed evil. We have work to do in the wider community to bring Godís standards to bear on it, and we must ensure that our own personal and family life is organised in terms of Godís standards. We must use God-honouring cultural standards in our dealings with those from an Islamic background and insofar as the broader cultural standards in the community are honouring to God it is right that we should impress on those coming into our society the importance of observing those standards.

We need a God-honouring political structure. Look around you and what do you see in the political world? Hordes of confused politicians anxious not to antagonise any religious grouping ñ except Christians ñ and meanwhile making laws and implementing policies which are utterly contrary to the teaching of the Bible! Indeed, in some instances apparently attempting to limit our freedom to proclaim the teaching of the Bible. We need to have Godís standards brought to bear on the governments of our day and we should demand and expect that all those under the legitimate authority of a God-honouring government, Mohammedan or not, should be required equally to observe God-honouring legislation and regulations.

We need a discerning approach to the young. That is the very area in which Mohammedans are at their weakest. Many of them are more worried about the younger generation than about anything else. Many of their young people have been born in this country, gone to ordinary schools and had contact with their peers from other backgrounds in a way that their parents havenít and have absorbed a lot of the thinking of those around them in the wider community. Some of them are Westernised enough to resist and reject what they donít like of the culture of their parents -ñ to rebel. Some of them are almost completely Westernised at least in terms of culture. Many of our contacts are going to be with those younger people and we need wisdom and grace to present to them not simply decadent Western culture and values, but the Christian message within a God-honouring world view.

We need a firm approach to the adults. Mohammedanism is not a religion of compromise. So much of what passes in the wider world for Christianity, sadly, is. However, our approach must be on the solid basis of the uncompromising truth of Scripture and focussed where the Bible focusses our attention ñ on the central matter of our need for a right ***personal*** relationship with God and the basic need we have for our sin to be dealt with in the only way it can be effectively dealt with ñ through Christ.

We need a recognition that Mohammedanism or Islam isnít as monolithic as it claims or as it appears to be. To the outsider it can appear monolithic. There are many divisions and fault lines within it. There is the division between Sunni and Shiía. There are the differences between the different racial groups who describe themselves as Islamic. There is the distinction between those who think that they must follow the traditional approach and regard everywhere outside *daar al-islaam* as *daar al-harb* and those who take the line that they can regard some western countries and cultures as *daar al-daíwa* ñ the witness zone in which they can try to take over by peaceful means and persuasion. And again there are those who follow the line that they can have a religious co-existence without persecution. There was an interesting agreement signed in Norway to that effect, during 2007. There were vast differences in the past between the forms of Mohammedanism in, for example, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) and, for example, in the Indian sub-continent. There are still significant differences. We must know just what variant of the religion we are dealing with and bring the truth of Scripture to bear on the needs of the individual in the light of the background he or she is coming from.

We need confidence in the sovereign God. He is the One who is Lord of time and Lord of eternity. He is the One who orders the events of time for the ultimate good of His cause and His people. Mohammedans were sweeping up through Spain and into France in the 8th Century. But in the end of the day Charles Martel with his 20,000 or 30,000 troops was the victor and Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi and 10,000 of his 80,000 troops were dead and the Islamic threat to Europe was repulsed. They were repulsed from the gates of Vienna in 1529 and again in 1683. The God who was sovereign then is sovereign now, and He requires of us that we should be faithful in our witness for Him in the time and situation in which He has placed us.

Biblical Pictures of the Presence of God Part II - Dove

Rev Dewi Higham (Tabernacle Cardiff)

The choice of phrase in the Scriptures, when describing the presence of God, provides us with something of an insight into the nature of God. Fire conveys something of the overwhelming power of God, whilst the Dew and the Dove convey His wonderful gentleness. There are also a number of other pictures, which we could have noted, such as the Wind and the Anointing. The three selected pictures of Fire, Dove and Dew, will provide us with a view of God which is full of awe and grace. Such is the nature of God's presence that both awe and grace can be experienced in the same moment.

The picture of the presence of God, symbolised by the dove, contrasts greatly with the thought of the presence of God as fire. The fierceness of the burning is replaced with gentleness, peace and purity.

Biblical References to the Dove

To introduce this thought of God's presence having a gentleness, and even a softness, consider Elijah in the wilderness. There, God manifested Himself to him, not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but rather, in the still small voice. There is something of this still small voice in the picture of the dove.

The significance of the dove in Biblical imagery begins with the account of Noah and the ark. As Noah sent out the dove, which initially brought back the olive leaf, and then settled to find a nesting place, the dove became historically associated with the abatement of the waters of judgment, and a symbol of peace. This symbol of peace is carried over to another more significant event, which connects the dove to the presence of God. That significant event is the baptism of Christ, where the Spirit of God descended, in bodily form, as a dove. What a picture of God and His presence we see here, where the heavens opened and the Spirit descended, either in the actual appearance of a dove, or descended, in some way, resembling a dove!

The significance of this descent of the Spirit, or as we might call it, the filling of the Spirit, is further endorsed by the consequences that followed. For we see Christ in His humanity, filled with the Spirit for the purpose of ministry. The Scriptures that immediately follow the account of this event, show the impact of this gentle descent. Note the references to the Spirit and the power of the Spirit in the gospel of Luke: 'And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness' (Luke 4:1); 'And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about' (Luke 4:14), and 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised' (Luke 4:18).

It is no wonder, then, that the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales chose the dove as an emblem of their denomination. The complete emblem was a dove hovering over the open Word of God. It proved to be a most appropriate emblem for the two centuries of blessing that were enjoyed by this favoured denomination.

Gentleness, Peace and Purity

How true to our experience is this aspect of God's presence, pictured in the dove! There is a gentleness, a peace and a purity to the presence of our Lord.

The dove of the ark, symbolising the peace that followed judgment, is indeed a good picture of Gospel preaching. Gospel preaching will thunder out judgment, as Daniel Rowlands of Llangeitho did in his early years. The same Daniel Rowlands added to his thunder the balm of Gilead, the peace purchased by the blood of Christ. Gospel preaching is full of this peace.

The classic image of the dove, with its white plumage, has a powerful association with purity. The image of a dove, with its purity, is therefore a fitting image of the Holy Spirit. As we think of the purity of the Spirit, we might reflect on the fact that the term for the Holy Spirit in the Welsh language is 'The Clean Spirit' or 'The Pure Spirit' – 'Yr Ysbryd Glan'.

Is this not our experience, when we experience God? We experience the cleanness of God. A living illustration of this clean influence of God, is a simple event that took place while my father was in hospital, a number of years ago. My father had been taken to hospital a few days before Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was due to preach in our church. During that time Dr Lloyd-Jones visited my father in hospital. After the visit, one of the men in the ward asked, 'Who was that man that came to see you?' My father replied, 'Which man?', for a number of people had visited him that day. 'That clean man', was the response.

Gentleness is a telling description of the presence of God. We might even say that this experience of God's gentleness is the predominant experience of the Christian, who through Christ, has been moved from the place where God is his judge to God becoming his father.

The descent of the dove, in particular, affords us a wonderful picture of the approach of God to the human heart. The actual moment of landing, we might add, when the dove slows down its descent in order to land, pictures very well, how the Lord draws near. We sometimes experience this gentleness,

as the Lord quietly enters a service. The same happens in the individual experience, when the Lord rests upon our souls. Indeed, there is no gentleness like the gentleness of God, for it is the perfect gentleness. This is so, I am sure, because our Lord understands the sensitivity of the soul that He has created, and shows kindness and consideration to our human frailty.

Such a presence should never be thought of as weak, for men are known to tremble in this gentle presence. Behind the gentleness, is the very weight of God. This gentleness of God is known to break down hard hearts. Is it not the case with some people that, when challenged, they refuse to yield? Yet, if spoken to kindly, the same people are seen to melt in your presence. The Lord uses gentleness to move His people.

Yet another aspect of this gentleness is the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit. This is, essentially, the Biblical principle of grieving or quenching the Spirit. Perhaps the revival people had a better understanding of this, because, no doubt, they knew more of God's nearness and what it was that caused His nearness to cease. It has been said, that as a dove is frightened by a sudden noise, so the noise of discord and the harsh sound of sin, drives the Spirit away. There is, therefore, wisdom in responding to the approach of the Spirit, with a tenderness of heart.

Imagine a service, where God is present. The service has begun and the congregation is singing. At first, there is nothing out of the ordinary to report, but then, as a man slips in quietly, having arrived late, the Spirit enters the service. The change is, at first, almost imperceptible, but very soon, all are aware of the presence of God.

There are other times, when the Spirit is the first to arrive, and is present before the service begins. There is often an unusual hush to such a meeting, an added attentiveness, a deep stillness. You might even call it some kind of heavenly trance, as men are taken up with God. Such services remind us of Ezra, when the people wept as they listened to the Word, 'And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law' (Neh.8:3). 'And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law' (Neh.8:9).

The land of Wales, during two centuries of almost unbroken blessing, was a place where you would expect to see signs of this gentleness. The hymnology, and even the choice of tunes, provides us with historical evidence of the gentle presence. Here we find, what we might call, hallowed intimacy, where men speak to, and of, the Lord, in the language of friends, and even the language of betrothal. The same evidence of gentleness can be found in the writings and tunes produced in the Scottish visitations.

The thought of God's gentleness fills my heart with delight. This picture of the dove captures something which is essential to the being of God. I am sure you are in agreement with me, that this gentleness speaks of the God we know in our hearts.

The Office of Eldership
(Part II)

Rev Maurice Roberts

III. HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF ELDERSHIP

The New Testament makes it clear that presbyter (ie elder) and bishop, contrary to Episcopalian and Roman Catholic teaching, are the same office under different names. The New Testament evidence is as follows:

(1) Acts 20:17 with v28;

(2) Titus 1:5 with v7;

(3) 1Peter 5:1 with v2 (*episkopountes*).

The manner in which the term 'bishop' gradually became a distinct office above the 'presbyter' is put by Calvin in the *Institutes* like this:

'All, therefore, to whom the office of teaching was committed [ie in the early church], they called presbyters, and in each city these presbyters selected one of their number to whom they gave the special title of bishop, lest, as usually happens, from equality dissension should arise. The bishop, however, was not so superior in honour and dignity as to have dominion over his colleagues, but as it belongs to a president in an assembly to bring matters before them, collect their opinions, take precedence of others in consulting, advising, exhorting, guide the whole procedure by his authority, and execute what is decreed by common consent, a bishop held

the same office in a meeting of presbyters. And the ancients themselves confess that this practice was introduced by human arrangement, according to the exigency of the times. Thus Jerome, on the Epistle to Titus, says, "A bishop is the same as a presbyter. And (before dissensions were introduced into religion by the instigation of the devil, and it was said among the people, I am of Paul, and I of Cephas) churches were governed by a common council of presbyters"'.

The history of the church may be profitably looked at in three parts or periods:

(1) From Pentecost to AD600: Formation.
(2) From AD600 to the time of Luther: Deformation.
(3) From Luther to the present day: Reformation.

The Reformation movement involved all the Reforming churches in the task of purging out Roman Catholic error in doctrine and practice and in re-instituting biblical office-bearers. These were found to be elders (or presbyters/bishops) and deacons.

The background to this reforming movement in Scotland is worth remembering:

In the Middle Ages Scotland's Episcopal system divided the country into thirteen bishoprics. The oldest was set up at Dunkeld by Kenneth MacAlpine in 849. However in 906 the Church's principal diocese was settled in St. Andrews, which remained the centre of the pre-Reformation Church till the Reformation. At the Reformation the centre of spiritual power moved to Edinburgh under the influence of John Knox. Edinburgh has remained the seat of Presbyterian Scotland ever since.

The Scottish Reformed Church developed at first in two stages:

(1) 1560-1581 – The first General Assembly was held in December 1560. The *First Book of Discipline* drawn up then had to face a very difficult situation in which there was a great scarcity of preachers. In this position they appointed two temporary orders of men:

(a) *Superintendents* (only five): who looked after Districts;
(b) *Readers*: who were authorised to pray, read Scripture and homilies, but not compose sermons.

The *First Book of Discipline* recognised three permanent offices: minister, elder and deacon. It was not envisaged that these two above temporary offices would be continued for long. This was neither incipient nor residual Episcopacy. The consistory administered discipline over superintendents as well as over all other office-bearers. This temporary arrangement had in mind the urgent need to get the gospel out to the ignorant people of the land at that time. Have we something to learn from this?

(2) In 1578 the *Second Book of Discipline* was approved. It went further with the reform programme. It allowed only the offices of elder and deacon. Also it set up presbyteries in the land. So Andrew Melville's influence completed the great work begun with John Knox.

It is worth mentioning that the Scottish Reformers naturally did their good work in the knowledge of what Continental Reformed churches had done before them, as well as British Reformers of earlier years. It appears that they were aware of, and took account of the following movements: John Wycliffe and Lollardism; John Huss and the Hussites; Lutheranism; the Polish Reformer, John à Lasko, and his London congregation, called 'The Church of the Foreigners'. Also they were aware of the reforming work of the French Huguenots. Above all they studied Calvin's extremely important reforming work in Geneva.

At the first period of Reform in Scotland elders were elected annually. But this was changed at the later period. Eldership was made for life after 1574. In Holland and the USA elders are still voted in for a limited period of time in some churches.

The Scottish divines who went to London in the 1640s for the Westminster Assembly believed eldership to be appointed by God. But they were not successful in arguing that Scripture makes clear a difference in the eldership between those who RULE and those who TEACH. Discussion centred very much upon the meaning of 1Timothy 5:17: 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine'. The Westminster divines do not use this text to support the concept of ruling elders. The *Form of Church-Government* was of course drawn up at Westminster. Its section relating to elders bears the heading 'Other Church-Governors':

'As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in His church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call elders'.

They did not use 1Timothy 5:17 as a proof-text for ruling elders. The discussion over this verse centred on whether the Apostle here distinguishes two types of eldership or two degrees of diligence in fulfilling it.

Calvin had understood 1Timothy 5:17 to justify the concept of 'ruling elders'. However many in the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s were not convinced that this text supported the distinction into teaching/ruling elders which their Scottish brethren had become used to. This was felt on all sides to be an important issue since all believed that a biblical warrant was needed in all aspects of God's church and worship. In 1643 there were some twelve or thirteen sessions of several hours each devoted to this point. In the outcome the Assembly's 'Form of Church Government' gave no support to those who found a divine warrant for the office of ruling elder in 1Timothy 5:17.

This debate was renewed in American Presbyterian circles in the 1840s. It was stimulated by Professor Samuel Miller's book *The Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder*. Miller quoted 1Timothy 5:17 as biblical warrant for ruling elders. On the other hand, RJ Breckenridge and JH Thornwell argued for *one* office of eldership, ie that pastors and elders had parity. Charles Hodge however took the ground of the Westminster divines. He sent a copy of his article to William Cunningham who, in a letter dated July 1844, replied as follows:

'I received the pamphlet on the eldership, and am much obliged to you for it. I have never been able to make up my mind fully as to the precise grounds on which the office and functions of the ruling elder ought to be maintained and defended. For some time before I went to America I had come to lean pretty strongly to the view that all ecclesiastical office-bearers were presbyters, and that there were sufficiently clear indications in Scripture that there were two distinct classes of those presbyters, viz ministers and ruling elders; though not insensible to the difficulty attaching to this theory from the consideration that it fairly implies that wherever presbyters or bishops are spoken of in Scripture ruling elders are included. I have been a good deal shaken in my attachment to this theory by the views I have heard from you, but I have not yet been able to abandon it entirely'.

The subject is helpfully discussed in a chapter of the recent book, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* by Iain Murray. The matter at issue is whether there is a divine right for the office of ruling elder. That the ruling elders have done great good is agreed by Presbyterian theologians on both sides.

Of the four Scottish commissioners who were present at the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s none was more able than George Gillespie, whose *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* was published in 1641. It is one of the classic expositions of Presbyterianism.

Gillespie is concerned in this work to assert these two cardinal points: (1) the office of ruling elder, and (2) the authority of presbyteries and synods. To him these two points were seen as the essence of Presbyterianism. His own phrase was that these two issues are to Presbyterianism 'what his hair was to Samson'.

I quote the following words from a book review by Sherman Isbell in 1997. It is a brief summary of how he sees the way the debate about the ruling and preaching elder ought to be resolved. His judgment is firmly on the side of Gillespie and the older writers:

'The older position, represented for example by Gillespie's *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*, is that there is a biblical distinction between the rule committed to all presbyters, and certain executive functions carried out on behalf of the presbytery. The imposition of hands is an executive function, and such executive functions, like the administration of the sacraments, the preaching of God's Word to His people, and the pronouncement of admonition and censures on behalf of church courts, belong exclusively to the minister of the word, "for he is as messenger and herald between God and the people" (Second Book of Discipline)'.

It is of interest to note that some Reformed Baptist churches of late years have taken the view that *all* elders in a congregation have complete parity of status with the pastor. It is common among them to call all their elders, as well as the minister, 'Pastor X and Pastor Y'. (See for details *In Defence of Parity* by Samuel E. Waldron, Gregory G. Nichols, James A. Hufstetler and David J. Chanski).

IV. PRACTICAL CONCERNS

I think one of the clearest and fullest statements as to the duties of the ruling elder must be the following. It is from *A Handbook for Ruling Elders* published in 1895 by the Southern Presbyterian Church in the USA. The author is John S Watkins, who studied under such worthy teachers as RL Dabney and Thomas E Peck:

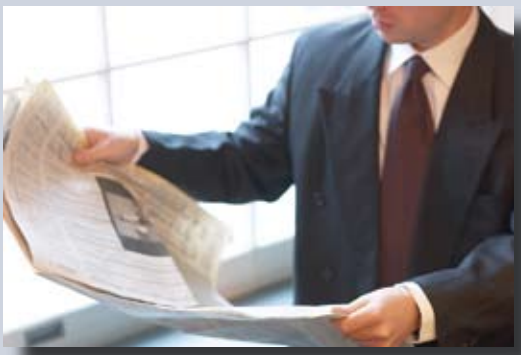
'Ruling elders, the immediate representatives of the people, are chosen by them, that, in conjunction with the pastor, or minister, they may exercise government and discipline, and take the oversight of the spiritual interests of the particular church, and also of the church generally, when called thereto. It appertains to this office, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick; they should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the church; and all those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of charity are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people; they should be careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached word among the flock; and should inform the pastor of cases of sickness, of affliction and awakening, and of all others which may need his special attention'.

To this fine general statement I should like to add some further practical points in conclusion. I have here in mind the special problems which we face at this time:

(1) Our supreme priority is to build up all our congregations. Ought we who are preachers not to try to delegate as much as possible to our ruling elders (and others too) so as to be able to concentrate on sermon preparation and secret prayer, as in Acts 6:2-4?

(2) I believe in our present circumstances it would be most wise to maximise the collective wisdom of our elders, both ruling and teaching elders, by joining small presbyteries together. 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety'.

(3) Finally, I would urge on us all that the pulpit work of the minister, or teaching elder, be looked on as supremely important. Preaching God's Word well is the great need of our people and of our time. In that connection I commend these words addressed to preachers which are written in the Westminster Directory of Public Worship of 1644. I have modernised the words a little for clarity today: '[The minister] is not to rest in general doctrine... but to bring it home to special use [or application] by application to his hearers...; in this he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner that his hearers may feel the Word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and if any that are unbelievers or ignorant persons be present he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God'.



News

Thornwood - New Church

Rev William Macleod

Thornwood congregation has been amazed at the Lord's provision for them of a suitable church building – the Gospel Hall, 361 Fulton Street, Knightswood Cross, G13 2SP. The congregation who worshipped there had become elderly and their leader felt he could not continue due to ill-health. The membership wish us to have the church as a gift. Services there begin with a prayer meeting on Tuesday 21st October. The church is of an ideal size for us (will seat up to 200 & hall 40) and is in excellent condition. What a wonderful God we have! We are calling ourselves Knightswood FCC though technically we will have to stick with the old name till we can get it changed.

Public Opening - Knightswood FCC
Friday November 26th 7.30pm
Rev Hugh Ferrier
All Welcome

Letter from Tasmania

Rev Iain & Mary Smith

Dear friends,

We often think about you here in Tasmania, Australia. We may be at the 'far ends of the earth' but we can still be close in the spirit of love and fellowship. We have regular contact with the brethren in a variety of ways. We look forward to the Witness and Explorer each month. Mind you, sometimes it gets hard to identify some of the photos! It is a sure indication that the years are moving on, hastening us all to appear in the great eternity.

We are now working through our sixth year in the Antipodes. Time has flown by but God has been so good to us. We are in a church that is virtually a carbon copy of our previous congregation at Partick. Our pulpit Bible is the KJV and we sing from the same metrical Psalms. We have two services on the Lord's Day (11am & 4pm) and also a midweek meeting. I carry out regular chaplaincy duties in a Christian school and also with the local Girls' Brigade. Our congregation has grown during the past few years. In fact, we have outgrown our little wooden church building which is presently for sale.

There are many Presbyterian churches in Tasmania but not many Psalm-singing ones. In fact, we are the only Psalm-singing church in South Tasmania. Over these years I have enjoyed fellowship with a Scottish minister originally from Balloch, and an Ulsterman from the FPs of N Ireland.

Australia is an unusual place in many ways. The Lord's Prayer is still read every day in Federal Parliament. There are numerous Christians in politics who do not hide their light under a bushel. The previous federal Government made a strong stand on a number of moral and ethical issues. TV programmes are generally much more sanitised than in the UK. On the flip side, however, swearing, even in public is quite frankly an embarrassment. It often mars serious media reporting. The homosexual lobby and radical Greens are also extremely strong.

Nevertheless, sinners are sinners and the Gospel is without change wherever one goes in the world. I bring nothing

Rev Iain & Mary Smith

Desk

to the congregation under my care but the 'old old story' I have been preaching since first called to the holy ministry. After all, the Gospel is like our blessed Saviour: the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Visit to Singapore

Rev David Blunt

In June my wife and I were privileged to visit Singapore at the request of Pilgrim Covenant Church (PCC). The reason was to speak at their annual church conference and to preach at three services. Our denomination has enjoyed informal links with the church over a number of years and some of our ministers have spoken at previous conferences. The church developed out of the Bible Presbyterian Church, a denomination which began in the U.S.A. and is fundamentalist in ethos and quite different from historic Presbyterianism in doctrine, worship and practice. The minister of PCC, Pastor J J Lim, did part of his ministerial training in Wales and England and there he came to understand and appreciate more fully the teaching of the Westminster Standards, particularly the Regulative Principle of Worship. When he returned to Singapore he helped to organise a church along the lines that are familiar to us. It was wonderful to be able to worship God with people from a quite different culture who use the Authorised Version of the Scriptures and the Scottish Metrical Psalter! Presently there are nearly 180 souls in the congregation and one is struck by the number of young families and children. Many of the members are first-generation Christians, having come out of the ancestor-worship which is common amongst the Chinese. There is one young man in training for the ministry.

The conference was held in Malaysia and about half of the congregation was able to attend. The theme was 'Enjoying Christ' and the subjects covered were: Enjoying Christ in the State of Grace; Enjoying Christ in the Word; Enjoying Christ in the Sacraments; Enjoying Christ in Prayer; Enjoying Christ in the State of Glory. A question time took place after each address and a separate programme was held for the younger children. A visitor we were interested to meet was Pastor Gao from mainland China who is zealously promoting the Reformed faith there. On the Sabbaths before and after the conference I preached on 'The Precious Name' (Mt.1:21), 'The True Believer' (Is.66:2) and 'The World Overcome' (Jn.16:33). The last sermon was preached at the evening service which is attended by a number of elderly people with little or no English and a member of the congregation translated the sermon

into Mandarin for them. An interesting feature of the worship at PCC is that following the morning service a class on Biblical doctrine is held, catering for all ages.

We were touched by the warmth and generosity of the Lord's people in PCC and admired their commitment to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." There are other Reformed believers in Singapore but these brethren do appreciate contact with the church in Scotland. If they can benefit from our goodly heritage then we can surely learn from their commitment to God's covenant, their love of sound doctrine and their general enthusiasm for spiritual things.

The addresses given at the conference are available on the Pilgrim Covenant Church page at: www.sermonaudio.com.

Apology to Homosexual

The Dutch Reformed Church in Moreleta Park, Pretoria, South Africa has sent a court-ordered unconditional letter of apology to a music teacher dismissed in July 2005 for being a practising homosexual. The dismissed teacher subsequently sued the church and was awarded R87,000 in damages. The church attempted to counsel the teacher when his homosexuality came to light, but the teacher refused, telling the church that his sexual orientation was a matter between him and God. The church contended that practising homosexuality was a sin, and that the teacher as a spiritual leader should lead by example. How sad to see a church persecuted for standing for biblical morality!

Persecution in India

Church leaders in India's Orissa state report mob violence in the wake of the murder of Swami Laxmananand Saraswati, a top leader of the World Hindu Council and an outspoken opponent of Christianity who was killed by what are believed to be Maoist rebels. Hindu radicals have seized upon the killing as an excuse to incite violence against the area's Christian community. At least twelve members of churches have been murdered, but no one knows the overall death toll. Many churches have been destroyed and hundreds of Christian families have been burned out of their homes. KP Yohannan said, 'I have never seen persecution so bad in my life, and I have seen a lot of opposition to the Gospel over the years'.

Google settlement in Abortion Ad Case

Colin Hart – Christian Institute

I am delighted to tell you that our legal proceedings against Google for blocking our abortion ad have been settled on amicable terms. As a result of the court action and other representations made to Google in recent months, Google has reviewed its AdWords policy to enable The Christian Institute and other religious associations to place ads on the subject of abortion in a factual and campaigning way. The new policy will apply world-wide with immediate effect. This is an important issue of free speech and religious liberty and we are very pleased with Google's constructive response to this matter. This is yet another success for our Legal Defence Fund. We thank God for this result and we thank you for your prayers and support.

Tabernacle Cardiff Summer Conference 2009 at Pembroke

Conference services will be held at Westgate Chapel, Pembroke, from Monday 27th July to Friday 31st July 2009. The main conference addresses are by Maurice Roberts, 'Christ is All' and Vernon Higham (Cardiff) 'The Presence of God'. There will be Gospel sermons by Hubert Clements (Tonypandy) and Dafydd Morris (Protestant Truth Society). Further details on www.summerconference.org.

Visit of Marjanne Hendriksen

Rev John J Murray

The Committee on Home and Foreign Missions is pleased to announce that Miss Marjannne Hendriksen, working with the Christian Community Schools in Zambia, is due to make a short visit to Scotland in early December. This follows the visit of Cees and Mirjam Molenaar last year. We are grateful to Mr Cammy Macleay for undertaking the practical arrangements and he and Mrs Macleay will accompany Marjanne during her visit. The meetings are arranged so that our folk in most congregations will be within reasonable reach of the chosen venue. Mr Macleay will speak and introduce Marjanne at the meetings. She will also meet with the Ladies Missionary Support Groups. Please give your support to the meetings and by your presence and interest encourage this lady who is doing such a vital work in Zambia.

Monday 8th - Edinburgh: Ladies Group in manse 8.00 pm
Tuesday 9th - Lewis: Stornoway Primary School 7.30 pm
Wednesday 10th - Skye: Snizort Church hall 7.30 pm
Thursday 11th - Highlands: Westhill Free Church 7.30 pm
Friday 12th - Glasgow: Partick Free Church 7.30 pm

Free Church School in Theology 2008

Rev John J Murray

The 56th Free Church School in Theology met in Larbert from 8th to 11th September. The organisers were encouraged to see a growth in numbers, the largest increase being from England. The papers were of a high standard and the times of prayer and fellowship were memorable.

The opening paper by Richard Brooks on the life and writings of Octavius Winslow was intended to mark the 200th anniversary of his birth. Not so much is known of Winslow's life except through his writings, which have witnessed a resurgence of interest in recent years. Mr Brooks demonstrated the Christ-centered nature of Winslow's ministry by heart-warming extracts from his many books.

David Silversides dealt exhaustively and helpfully with the exegesis of Hebrews 4:1-11, 'one Gospel, one Church, one Covenant and one Sabbath'. Robert Josey expounded on the mystery of our regeneration and its relation to conviction of sin. 'Worldliness in the Church' was the subject handled by John Thackway and he gave a penetrating analysis of the decline in spirituality in the church, outlining the symptoms, the causes and the remedies.

Two sessions were devoted to our obligation to the Jews. Maurice Roberts gave a masterly presentation of 'The Place of the Jews in the Purpose of God'. He argued from Romans

11 for God's future blessing for Israel as a people. This was augmented by an up to date report from Mike Moore of the work of Christian Witness to Israel and the encouraging number of conversions among Jews worldwide.

Humphrey Dobson, Deputy Director of the Christian Institute, gave an address on the 'Sanctity of Life' and demonstrated the Biblical view from the creation and fall of man and from the incarnation. He related this to the current Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill and the proposals on animal-human hybrids, cloning, 'saviour sibling', and abortion. He spoke of the silent holocaust and the fact that there have been 6.7 million abortions since 1967.

Iain Murray gave the final paper on 'What can we learn from the Puritans?' After an overview of the history and the meaning of the term 'Puritan' he announced that he was to give six lessons. After concentrating on the first two – the nature of saving conversion and the necessity of a methodical life, he mentioned three more and then rounded off with 'the power of the Word of God'.

Each of the three morning sessions began with a devotional time in which Jeremy Brooks spoke from the three occasions in Luke's Gospel on which Jesus repeated the name of a person or group of people: 'Martha, Martha' (10.38-42), the need for priorities: 'The good can sometimes be the enemy of the best'; 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem' (13.34), the need for repentance; and 'Simon, Simon' (22.31-32), the need for watchfulness'.

Talks available online, and on CDs which may be ordered from Rev Andrew Allan, 'Ardmhor', 43 Obsdale Road, Alness, Ross-shire IV17 0TU.

The 2009 Conference is due to take place at the same location from 14-17 September.

All Age Holiday 2008

Neil Smith (16), Inverness

Between the 21st and the 26th of July, 36 people attended the 8th All Age Holiday in Carronvale House, Larbert. It really was a superb holiday as people of all ages mixed well together and thought on the lessons from the Bible.

Each day ran to a similar pattern. A prayer-meeting was held for half an hour until breakfast at nine o'clock. The House and its grounds provided the peace and quiet rarely found even at the best of times. This was indeed helpful to everyone when concentrating on worship.

After breakfast the Rev John Keddie led the morning worship. Thereafter, a talk was given to the younger folk by Mr. David Keddie. Special attention was given to passages like 1Corinthians 9:24 and Hebrews 12:1, 'let us run the race'. This was the topic for the week. Rev Keddie gave a presentation on the life of Eric Liddell who was influential in his life. The younger folk learned Bible verses, and were presented with t-shirts – the result of the young children's handiwork. Gracing the front of the t-shirt was a cup, plus a banner which read: 'Running the race'. Other activities included table tennis, badminton, basketball and putting.

Afternoons were free time and many took advantage of this to visit the numerous attractions in the area. On Wednesday afternoon there was an organised trip starting from Bo'ness. Those who went were not disappointed because it allowed people to experience the sensations of travelling by steam train and the inside of a fireclay mine – things which were once common but rare today.

There was a chance to learn lessons from the book of Jonah after tea. Rev. Keddie dealt with all four chapters. There were so many lessons, and they were aimed at the converted and unconverted – God is present everywhere, as Jonah discovered when fleeing to Tarshish; God had a plan for Jonah and he saw that it was accomplished; God is merciful to unconverted people, those in Nineveh were given an opportunity to repent; Nineveh repented, though they were given no promise of God being merciful to them etc.

The All Age Holiday was a success once again, and we thank all who helped run it.

Books

A Handful of Pebbles

Theological liberalism and the church

Peter Barnes

Banner of Truth, pbk, 81pp, £5.50

The book discusses various forms of liberalism and explains why they are not true Christianity. It explains that liberalism gives people a 'handful of pebbles' rather than the bread of life. It is quite readable and if there's a fault it is its brevity which does not allow for a fuller discussion.

Colin Wilson

Terrified by Crows

and fifty-seven other stories for all ages

R Cameron-Smith

Southern Presbyterian Church, bklt, 72pp, $7.00 (Australian)

Terrified by crows: and fifty-seven other stories for all ages is a collection of true stories from all round the world. They have been collected by Rev R Cameron-Smith of the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia. He has written several other similar books. The stories are interesting and helpful for children and could also provide material for pulpit illustrations.

The God Reality

A Critique of
Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*

Rob Slane

DayOne, pbk, 80pp, £4.00

Dawkins' book is one of several increasingly hostile attacks on the Christian faith. Dawkins himself is probably the best known atheist in Britain today. A gifted writer and communicator he is able to present his case in a way which is convincing to the ignorant. However Rob Slane takes several of his leading arguments, calmly examines them, shows the illogicality of them and provides a biblical answer. The material in the book originally appeared in the *Messenger,* the magazine of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury and so is designed for the average reader. The author himself was an atheist before his conversion and so writes with understanding and passion. We strongly recommend this book for anyone concerned with these issues.

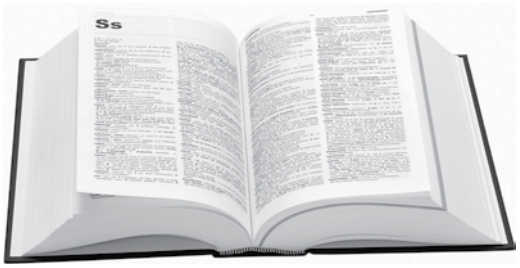
Redemption – Accomplished and Applied

John Murray

Banner of Truth, pbk, 192pp, £4.00

As a young science student in 1970 I remember reading this little book. It had a huge impact on my theological understanding. Recently I read it again and was impressed with its clarity, logic and particularly its biblical exegesis. Though small in size and unpretentious it must rank as one of the greatest theological books written in the last hundred years. It is not easy to read, especially the first two or three chapters. Unlike most books it may be best to start reading it in the middle – 'Part II Redemption Applied'. The chapters in this section originally appeared as articles in the *Presbyterian Guardian,* and so were written for the ordinary church member. Many have reckoned Murray the greatest theologian of the Twentieth Century. Murray's distinctive, unlike so many other theologians who tend to depend on philosophy and logic, is his careful exegesis of Scripture passages, so that his theological assertions come straight from the word of God with all the authority which that gives them. His treatment of the order of the application of redemption is masterly. He proceeds to unfold effectual calling, regeneration, justification etc in a most helpful, biblical and convincing way. Having read this second section and got used to Murray's style you can then return to the first

Books



section and read his totally powerful chapter on the extent of the atonement. Eventually you will work your way back to his first chapter which deals with the necessity of the atonement which is so relevant today when there are so many heretical views around. This is simply a reminder of a book which must be read by every budding theologian.

Lectures to my Students

C H Spurgeon

Banner of Truth, hbk, 928pp, £19.00

This book is a classic. It contains lectures given by Spurgeon to the divinity students in his college. Full of spiritual insight and spiced by wit it has been a favourite of students and ministers down through the years. It deals with vital matters such as the preacher's private prayers, his public prayers, his self-watch and his fainting fits. Posture, speech and illustration are helpfully covered. There is much biblical wisdom and useful common sense. Perhaps he goes a little too far in allowing spiritualising but it is difficult to find anything else to criticise in these lectures. Ministers should read at least one challenging book like this every year. Also bound with this volume is Spurgeon's *Commenting and Commentaries.* Here he deals with the various commentaries which were around in his day and gives advice on which are the most valuable. This is very helpful for the student who has a limited budget and wishes to build up a useful library to assist him in his preaching. The only disadvantage is that because both books are bound together the resultant volume has almost 1000 pages and so is rather heavy and cumbersome.

A Small Price to Pay

Harvey Yoder

TGS International, pbk, 251pp, $11.99

Some books, when you pick them up, you cannot put them down. Here we have one of these. It tells the story of a Christian growing up in the old Soviet Union, his godly parents, his conversion, his labours and sufferings for Christ and wonderful answers to prayer. He was brought up in Leningrad, but was orphaned at an early age because his persecuted father died in a labour camp. His mother's faith shone brightly during the privations caused by the German siege of the city during the Second World War. He eventually became a church leader and battled for liberty for the church and for freedom from state interference. Contending for the headship of Christ he had to spend many years in prison. Mikhail married a Moldavian and his godly wife brought up his family there while he was in prison or preaching all over Russia. Copies of the book can be obtained from Donald John Morrison (85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness, IV2 3HT) with the proceeds going to his Moldova Project Appeal for the building of a new house of prayer and associated projects. It is a moving and heart-warming read.

The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales

John Morgan Jones & William Morgan

Banner of Truth, hbk, volume 1 800pp, Volume 2 816pp, £40.00

Originally written in Welsh, this work has now been translated into English by John Aaron. It is a veritable treasure trove. Here are volumes to warm your heart and to stir you to

pray for new days of revival. We are told that they were among the favourite volumes of Dr Lloyd-Jones – a great commendation in itself. He, of course, could read them in his native Welsh. We have accounts of the life and labours of well-known Calvinistic Methodists such as Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands, but also of lesser known men such as Howell Davies and Griffith Jones. It is amazing to read of how much persecution these men suffered in the early days and yet how they were undaunted. They were covered in mud, stoned and beaten and yet by God's grace they continued to labour for the salvation of their fellow-countrymen. How wonderful it is to discover that in just a few years the whole face of Wales was changed. Oh God do it again, not just in Wales but in Scotland too!

Rev William Macleod

Holy Scripture

Rev Dr Wayne Pearce
Minister, Lairg & Rogart Associated Presbyterian Church

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2Tim 3:16-17).

I want us to consider the doctrine of Holy Scripture in this article. I do so for it is of great and vital importance and something of which we need to be reminded regularly. A solid understanding of the doctrine of Scripture is essential for a faithful and fruitful walk with God - individually and collectively for the church. Recently I read Mark Dever's little book *What is a Healthy Church?* The essential marks he notes are: expositional preaching; biblical theology; a biblical understanding of the good news; a biblical understanding of conversion; a biblical understanding of evangelism; a biblical understanding of membership; biblical church discipline; biblical discipleship and growth; biblical church leadership. In other words Pastor Dever correctly reminds us that the health of the church and those who comprise her is dependent on our right understanding and application of the word of God!

Most of the problems we experience individually and collectively in the church are the result of our foolish neglect of or disobedience to God's inspired, infallible and inerrant word. How often are we told today that doctrine and theology are the greatest barriers to health and harmony in the church! And yet Scripture says the opposite is the case! It is the absence of and disobedience to biblical doctrine and theology that is the cause of the deep-seated malaise and disharmony which mars the church's witness. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ or we are not His. He is both the subject and the object of Holy Scripture. We must 'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus' (2Tim.1:13).

Origin and Nature of Scripture

Let us therefore first of all consider the origin and nature of Holy Scripture: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All! Not just some Scripture but all, ie the 39 books that comprise the Old Testament plus the 27 that make up the New Testament. These 66 books that are contained in the Holy Bible, and these alone, are given by inspiration. This immediately provokes the question, are we reading, meditating upon and applying God's word in our lives? As a minister I am called upon to preach the whole counsel of God. Yes, there is such a thing as progressive revelation but we impoverish ourselves if we restrict our diet to the New Testament. Just as we require a balanced diet for good physical health so we also require a balanced diet of Old as well as New Testament Scripture to ensure a healthy walk with God.

Inspiration

Let us be aware that the Greek word *theopneustos* which is translated by the English word 'inspiration', could be misconstrued by some. We often say such and such a person was inspired to write a poem or song! We often claim to have found inspiration, when what we really mean is that we have had an idea! That is not what is meant by the word inspiration in Scripture. Instead the original Greek conveys the meaning that Scripture is God-given, it is out-breathed by God. The NIV captures the sense best when it says that 'All Scripture is God-breathed'. All Scripture is uniquely given by God - it is special revelation from the One who is infinitely wise and perfect in all His ways. 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2Pet.1:20-21). There is a common refrain running throughout Scripture - we read time after time: 'Thus saith the Lord!'

Let us acknowledge that without the light of God's word man must ever remain in darkness. That is why the Psalmist says: 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path' (Ps.119:105). There is no pilgrim's progress without it! We cannot walk in the light without it! We cannot walk by faith without it! We cannot walk in love without it! We cannot walk the narrow road without it! We cannot look unto Jesus without it! We cannot follow Him without it! Let us truly acknowledge that all Scripture is given by God and is therefore fully trustworthy and must be believed and obeyed.

The evidence of its God-given status is irrefutable. Both Old and New Testament writers understood it to be the word of the living God as did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Consider the pin-point accuracy of Scripture in the fulfilment of prophecy, particularly relating to the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus - the mathematical probabilities of these being mere coincidence are impossible. It alone reveals the way of salvation - a way which is beyond manís imagination and wherewithal. Consider the witness of the church - of countless lives transformed by believing and applying this word.

The Word of God, not tradition or what is expedient to the climate and culture of our day, must be our rule and guide.

The Authority of Scripture

Let us secondly recognise the authority of Holy Scripture: Because of its origins and nature it is wholly authoritative. It is the word of the one, true and living God: we are to read it and heed it. It is given by our Maker and Redeemer. We often refer to the canon of Scripture. The word canon means rule - it is a perfect rule in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says: 'The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God'. 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe' (1Thes.2:13).

The authority and truthfulness of Holy Scripture is therefore not dependent upon the church but instead the church is wholly dependent upon the word of God - the church is made up of all those who are begotten again by the word of truth. Moreover neither must we allow experience to take precedence over the word of God but our experiences must be measured and judged in the light of God's word. The word of God, not personal inclinations, feelings, ideas or notions must carry ultimate and supreme authority in our lives. The word of God, not tradition or what is expedient to the climate and culture of our day, must be our rule and guide. We can have 'churchianity' but we cannot have true Christianity without the faithful preaching, teaching and application of Scripture. It is only in and through the Scriptures that God reveals Himself and all that we need to know, believe and practice if we are to glorify Him. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' (Is.8:20). 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world' (1Jn.4:1).

Sufficiency of Scripture

Let us thirdly consider the sufficiency of Holy Scripture. The *Westminster Confession* again rightfully notes: 'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men'. Nothing is to be added; nothing is to be taken away! Many sadly would recognise the origin and nature of Holy Scripture but would refute its sufficiency. They add to the teaching of Scripture. They would teach Scripture PLUS tradition or new revelations or some such thing. Why? God's word not only makes us wise unto salvation which is through faith in Christ Jesus but it is given 'That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'. There are others of course who tragically claim to be Christians and yet they take away from the revelation of Scripture. They refuse to believe and practice the truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. They would have us discard anything that cannot be explained by so called natural means. Hence they refute the virgin birth, the nature of our Lordís atoning sacrifice, His physical, literal resurrection and ascension and so many other vital truths. They would have us believe that Scripture is not God-given but that men were inspired in their search for God to write these little stories! God has issued a grave warning to those who would add to or take away from Holy Scripture: 'For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book' (Rev.22:18-19). Let us rest assured in both the authority and the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

Purpose of Scripture

Let us finally consider the purpose of Holy Scripture: 'All scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'. We need to understand that God has given His word to His people, the church. It should not surprise us that the world often ridicules and scorns God's word. The Scriptures are foolishness to the natural man (1Cor.2:14). And yet the world desperately needs to hear the message of Scripture for unless fallen man believes and heeds Godís word he will be condemned by it. The Holy Spirit, however, must indwell man and cast His light upon Scripture before he can read and hear aright and act on it.

'The Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2Tim.3:15). That is why we read in John: 'These are written, that ye might believe

Congregational Remittances - September 2008

	2008 Sep	2008 Total	2007 Total
Presbytery of Inverness			
Aberdeen	0	6,631	5,867
Duthil-Dores	1,590	15,667	14,200
Inverness	4,000	20,000	24,000
Kilmorack & Strathglass	1,500	13,363	13,867
Total Inverness	**7,090**	**55,661**	**57,934**
Northern Presbytery			
Assynt & Scourie	0	2,570	6,952
Brora	1,300	13,968	14,312
Kiltearn	1,800	15,600	15,300
Tarbat	0	6,474	6,813
Total Northern	**3,100**	**38,612**	**43,377**
Southern Presbytery			
Arran	225	5,035	5,441
Ayr	0	2,460	1,657
Dumfries	0	0	85
Edinburgh	0	16,076	20,655
Glasgow - Partick	2,500	23,000	21,500
Glasgow - Shettleston	1,000	7,800	6,900
Glasgow - Thornwood	1,580	17,032	16,772
Rothesay	0	1,331	2,000
Total Southern	**5,305**	**72,734**	**75,010**
Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Cross	1,800	16,781	16,940
Harris - Leverburgh	1,200	9,884	8,817
Harris - Scalpay	0	13,297	14,921
Knock & Point	850	8,821	8,881
North Uist	800	8,659	7,554
Stornoway	4,370	44,624	53,973
Total Outer Hebrides	**9,020**	**102,066**	**111,087**
Presbytery of Skye & Lochalsh			
Bracadale	3,000	11,229	10,378
Duirinish (Waternish)	1,200	4,000	3,600
Glenelg & Arnisdale	126	1,445	1,297
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,300	12,775	13,061
Lochalsh & Glenshiel	1,472	11,385	10,520
Poolewe & Aultbea	683	9,314	9,885
Portree	1,200	14,806	10,340
Snizort	1,650	16,761	15,906
Strath	1,500	3,216	5,123
Total Skye & Lochalsh	**12,130**	**84,930**	**80,110**
Total Congregations	**36,645**	**354,003**	**367,518**
Other Donations	4,083	16,694	20,220
TOTAL	**40,728**	**370,697**	**387,738**
Including Gift Aid		38,359	48,417

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name' (Jn.20:31). It is through the preaching of the word that God has chosen to save them that believe. This is the way that God has chosen to save His people: 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth' (Jas.1:18). That is why we must always preach a crucified and risen Saviour and Lord. 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation' (Eph.1:13).

Moreover the Scriptures contain all things necessary for us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Thus they are profitable for doctrine: yes, theology. The early church gave themselves first and foremost to the apostlesí doctrine, for right thinking must precede and lead to right acting. The Scriptures reprove and correct us. They reveal our sin - not only our sins of commission but also our sins of omission. However they do not leave us there but they wonderfully correct. Our thoughts, words and deeds are to conform to God's standards. Hence we need to be constantly heeding and applying God's word. We are to be *semper reformanda* - always reforming in the light of the word of God. Just as a train cannot run without tracks, the Christian cannot function as God intends if he is not making faithful application of the word of truth. For this word provides instruction in righteousness - imputed and actual for we are being conformed to the image of Christ. We are to be holy as God is holy. We are not holy by nature but by grace and nurture on the basis of reading and heeding the word of the living God we are to show that we are truly members of the family of God; that we are new creatures, born from above and being prepared for glory. Let us read and heed the word of God.

Permit me to conclude by way of citing a quotation that was found printed inside a copy of the Geneva Bible published in post-Reformation Scotland. The Bible, it rightly reminds us, contains: 'the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here heaven is open, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is the grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its contents.' Will you say Amen to this?

Jan & Fransa van Straaten led the work at Covenant College Zambia for several years. They are now back in their native South Africa, still working for the Lord. The following letter gives an insight into this work. Remember them in your prayers.

Dear Friends,

This September has been quite a stormy (windy and rainy) month up to date. It seems that we had more 'Spring weather' during the months of July and August than this month! It was quite a challenge to a few of our ladies to begin the classes on a very cold and wet 1st September, after the school was closed for the three winter months. Whatever the seasons and the weather, the Lord our God is always the same and His Word stands firm, we can always trust Him – He keeps His promises and He is in control of the universe. When we draw near to Him, we are in the warm, peaceful presence of a loving Heavenly Father.

Writing newsletters which reveal something of our lives and ministry can sometimes become a real challenge. You see, it's not as if there are always exciting things happening. Often times, we just continue to follow a scheduled programme, day after day and week after week. We just realise more and more that to persevere is not always easy, but the Lord sustains us and through the working of His Spirit in our lives, we are able to continue faithfully.

Our monthly programme looks something like this:

* On the first two Saturdays of each month, we teach and minister in Villiersdorp, which is about 80 km from where we live. Jan teaches the Nehemiah Bible course in Afrikaans to lay preachers and church leaders, while Fransa does a Bible study with some ladies from the farms and other areas around Villiersdorp. They normally also bring their little children along – so we must have something to keep them occupied too. This is from 2-5pm with a half an hour tea/coffee break in between. Ladies from the Villiersdorp Community Church kindly supply and serve the refreshments.
* Every second Tuesday evening, Jan goes to Khayalitsha, about 60km from us, to teach at the Emmaus Bible School from 6.30-8.30pm. It is the same course but taught in English. This school has four lecturers and four hours of classes every week on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.
* Every Wednesday evening from 6-8pm Jan teaches at Kleinmond, a 20km drive away. Here the course is in Afrikaans.
* Every Thursday afternoon, from 2.30-3.00pm and 3.30-4.30pm, Fransa and some ladies from Pringlebay teach Bible lessons to two groups of children. One group is pre-primary and the other one primary school children, living in Mooiuitsig, Betty's Bay.
* Every Monday morning these ladies meet at our home for prayer and the planning of the week's programme.
* On the first Monday evening of each month we go to Monte Vista for a Missions' prayer-meeting and a study from the Bible and Larger Catechism. This prayer-meeting began more than ten years ago and still continues faithfully month after month.
* Every alternative Sunday evening we have a group at our home in Pringlebay, where Jan expounds the Word of God and we sing, pray and enjoy some refreshments and fellowship together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This keeps us quite busy, especially the preparation of the lessons, studying of God's Word and prayer for each appointment and meeting. The travelling also takes up much time. Pray that the seed sown might bear much fruit and that God's Word might dwell richly in us and those whom we teach. Also that we will all apply the truths in all our relationships.

We praise the Lord for the wonderful way in which He protects us, provides for us and guides us daily as we depend on Him for all. We praise Him also for the good health we have both enjoyed.

Apart from the set programme, we also have had occasional meetings in Somerset West, Cape Town and Wellington, visits and meals with colleagues, supporters, family and friends.

The highlights of this term were:

* The blessed Herderskool Conference at Villiersdorp on the 12th July (photo included).
* The birth of our first grandchild, little Jakob Stuart Brooks, on the 20th July in the UK.
* We were welcomed and received as members of the Kleinmond Fellowship Church on the 14th of September.
* Many Bibles, Christian books and tracts distributed amongst the needy.

'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it' (1Thess.5:23-24)

In Matthew 24:46-47 the Lord Jesus said that when He returns and finds His servant busy with the work He gave him, He will reward him. May He find us all busy with whatever He has called us to do, at this specific time of our lives.

We love you and appreciate your prayers, friendship and support.

In His service,
Jan & Fransa

Below: The Henderskool Conference, July 2008

Front Row (*Left to Right*)
Revs Richard Brooks, John Thackway, David Silversides, Robert Josey, Jeremy Brooks, Mr Humphey Dobson.

Back Row
Revs John J Murray, John Sherwood, Harry Woods, Trevor Kirkland, Mr David Lachman, Dr Andrew Naylor, Messrs S.N. Partheepan, J.K. Thayananth, Revs William Macleod, Arthur Bentley-Taylor, Iain Murray, Messrs Donald Robertson, Matthew Fraser, Sam Semmens, Charlie Webster, Dr David Chen, Rev Gavin Beers, Mr Lindsay McCallum, Rev Kenneth MacDonald, Mr Donald John Morrison, Rev Richard Knodel, Mr Davide Ratti, Dr Donald Boyd, Messrs Raymond Kemp, Gavin Chow, Revs Andrew Rowell, Andrew Quigley, Gearoid Marley, Anthony Dallison, Mr Bill McQueer, RP friend, Rev Gavino Fioretti, Mr James MacInnes.

"But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me".
Psalm 86:15-16

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