

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Volume 83

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Number 1

Submitting to the Best King

The people of Israel wanted to have a king set over them like all the other nations. (You can read about it in 1 Samuel 8.) At that time they had Samuel as a judge looking after the country, and God was their king. But the Israelites wanted to be like the other nations, who had a king ruling over them. Yet these other nations were heathens. It is never a good idea to want to imitate people who are not Christians, who live in a worldly way.

Samuel warned the people about the disadvantages of having a king over them; for instance, the king would take the tenth of their seed, and of their vineyards, to give to his officers and his servants. And he would take the best of their young men and their asses and use them to work for him. Yet the people would not listen Samuel's warning. They still wanted to have a king although, by so doing, they were rejecting God. They were making a foolish choice. How like people everywhere, who think that they know better, even when they are given good advice by someone godly, on the basis of what God says in the Bible!

It may be your parents who tell you to seek "first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness"(Matthew 6:33). Instead you may think of many things that seem so much more attractive than seeking God and a place in His kingdom. But what does it mean to seek a place in God's kingdom? It means to seek to be among those who submit to King Jesus, who obey the command, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"(Acts 16:31), and seek to obey all His other commands and to do so prayerfully.

You may not feel it attractive to become one of the subjects of God's kingdom. You may wish instead to enjoy yourself with your ungodly friends in worldly ways, for you have no love for God and for the laws of His kingdom. Indeed the enjoyment you wish to have may be completely opposed to the laws of that kingdom – the kingdom of which Christ is King.

But remember, if we are to be among the citizens of the kingdom – and if we wish to reach heaven at last – we must want to be holy in everything that we do and think and say. And it is God, working by the Holy Spirit, that is able to give us such desires. So we should be asking that the Spirit would

work in our hearts in such a way, applying the Word of God, that we would begin to seek the Lord – if that has not already happened.

If we have begun to seek the Lord, we should ask Him to make us able and willing to seek Him more earnestly. Not least, we should pray to God that we would find Him: we should pray that we would be given grace to trust in Him with all our heart.

But someone may ask, How can I be happy if I enter the kingdom of God and am not allowed to take part in the various worldly entertainments which I enjoy, but which the people in the kingdom of God frown on? The answer to that difficulty is that God, when He brings a sinner into His kingdom, gives that person a new heart. He begins to take away worldly desires; He makes the sinner lose their interest in what is ungodly and instead start to enjoy what is spiritual.

This means that the sinner, now born again, will begin to enjoy reading the Bible, for instance, listening to biblical preaching, and hearing experienced Christians speaking about the things of God. That person's great desire now will be for holiness – and not only in ways that other people can see. Such people will also want to have holy thoughts, holy desires and holy motives, which only God can see.

Matthew 6:33 was quoted earlier, but only part of it. This verse follows on from a warning about being over concerned about what we shall eat, what we shall drink and how we shall be clothed. But if we are born again and are among God's children, we can be sure, as Jesus points out, that our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things – the food and drink and clothes. So Jesus adds, "All these things shall be added unto you". None of our real needs will be left unsatisfied if we seek the Lord. He will provide. But we ought to be willing to leave it to Him to decide whether we truly need something or not; He knows best, no matter what circumstances we are in.

In this New Testament age, we must have a civil government, under a king or queen, under a president or a prime minister – or whatever the chief ruler is called. But our first responsibility must be to God, and to Jesus Christ as *the* King He has appointed over everything. This is the King we must always obey – whatever a government may say. But if a government is acting properly, its laws will not clash with the commands God has given us in the Bible.

We must follow King Jesus, whatever those who study with us or work with us think about us and about how we live. We should be willing to be different from other people around us when that proves necessary. We should work honestly and well, for instance, whether others do or not. When we speak, our language should be pure. And we should dress decently. We

should always remember that God's commandments are good (see Romans 7:12) – that is, it is good for us to keep them.

The Israelites did not want God to rule over them; they thought they would be better off if they had a human king, just like the other nations. We today should take Samuel's attitude; we should want God to be our King; we should be willing to submit to Him in everything – rather than submitting to public opinion or peer pressure if that goes against what God commands us to do. We should want to be kept from worldliness of every kind. May God give us grace to do so!

The First Animal to Speak

Rev K M Watkins

The woman should have known immediately that something was wrong. Seriously wrong. Never before had an animal talked. But she talked. Her husband talked. She and her husband often talked together. But animals did not talk. The garden where she lived with her husband was full of wonderful creatures, and many of them made sounds of one kind or another. Birds sang and chirped; insects buzzed; others neighed, bleated, croaked, clucked or squeaked. But none of the animals spoke with words, the way the woman and her husband did. Until now.

It was the serpent – the snake – that spoke. It spoke with words. It spoke the same human language that the woman and her husband used. A snake really was speaking to her! That should have started alarm bells ringing in her mind. Something was out of order. Animals had never spoken before. But now an animal was speaking.

It was not just that the serpent spoke, but what it spoke about. It asked the woman: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" There is a sense in which our pets communicate with us – we see how they beg for food, for example. But their communications are very limited. They never use human language, and they certainly never enter into discussions with us about the meaning of God's Word or about the differences between right and wrong. If they did start doing that, we would be most alarmed!

Eve – for that was the woman's name – should have gone straight to Adam, her husband. Under his leadership, this was something that they should have handled together. But Eve did not do that. Instead she entered into conversation with the serpent.

Had Eve forgotten what Adam had previously told her about their own creation? After the Lord God had created everything else, including all the

animals, he created human beings on the sixth day. The man was created before the woman. Adam was completely different to animals, for he was created in the image of God. When God had created Adam's body from the dust of the ground, He breathed into him, and he became a living soul. Having a spirit – another word for a soul – is part of God's image, for "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). God never gave a soul to any animal. But now a serpent was speaking to Eve as if it had a spirit just like her, and speaking to her about something that concerned the soul – what God had said.

Had Eve forgotten what Adam had told her about how he had given names to all the animals? Of all the creatures on earth, only he could give a suitable name to each animal, wisely summarising its different features. Animals did not name themselves. They could not do it. They did not have the wisdom. And they could not use names, for they did not speak. They had never spoken. Until the serpent spoke to Eve.

Had Eve forgotten what Adam had told her about her own creation? Her very existence arose from the difference between human beings and animals. Of all the animals which Adam named, not one was a suitable companion for him. None of them had a soul like Adam, none had the understanding Adam had, and none of them could speak with Adam. So God created a woman to be Adam's companion. That woman was not like the animals. She was like Adam – she had a soul, she had understanding, and she could speak. She was exceptional. None of the animals were like her, created to be man's companion. So when one of the animals spoke as only she and Adam spoke, she should have realised that something was wrong.

Eve's mistake proved fatal, for really it was Satan that was speaking to her, using the serpent to do so. Satan, created as a glorious angel, had already sinned against God. For that he had been rejected, along with many other angels who had joined his rebellion. Now he was using deceit and lies, to tempt Eve, so that human beings would also sin. That is why the Bible calls him "the great dragon . . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

Eve tried to answer, but "the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (Genesis 3:1). Eve did not know what a deceitful liar the devil was. She was drawn in more and more until she took the forbidden fruit, ate it, and gave it to her husband, and he ate it too. Adam was representing us all, as head of the covenant of works. So when he sinned, we all sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. All the sin and death that exist in the world come from that time – when an animal first spoke.

We should learn from this. Animals do not speak to us. But people do.

They speak to us when we meet with them. They speak to us when we do things with them. They speak to us through what we read or see, whether in books, or on the internet, or through social media. We need to understand that often the devil is using them just as much as he used the serpent. How can we tell? Four things mark out the way of the serpent.

Firstly, from the outset the serpent questioned the truth of God's Word: "Yea, *hath God said*, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). Eve was being asked: Did God really say what Adam told you He said? Today there are many who question the truth of the Bible and cast doubt on it. For example, they say that other religions have their "holy" books as well. They suggest that the Koran of the Muslims might equally be a revelation from God, as well as the Bible. They question the truth of God's Word in the classroom when they teach evolution instead of six-day creation. When they do this, we should realise that the devil is using them as he used the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Secondly, the serpent twisted what God had said, to make it sound strict and harsh. Eve was asked: Has God forbidden you to "eat of *every* tree"? In fact, God had given permission to eat freely of all the trees, except for just one. Satan still uses this method to turn people away from God. When people criticise Christians for being too strict – when they say that Christians cannot enjoy themselves and are missing out on so much "fun" – that is the devil speaking. Christians freely feast on all the good things of the gospel, which brings the best joy of all. It is only sin that is forbidden. And that is for our good, not for our harm. Satan hides this truth.

Thirdly, the serpent went on to deny outright the truth of God's Word. God had said that the very day they ate the forbidden fruit they would certainly die – meaning that, among other things, they would die spiritually. But the serpent flatly contradicted this, telling Eve that they would come to no harm: "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Satan does this all the time. When worldly companions encourage you to join them in some sinful thing, they will tell you that there is no harm in it. Who is really telling you that? It is Satan! If you go on in sin, you will surely die – you will perish in hell's eternal death.

Fourthly, the serpent lied to Eve about the benefits of eating the fruit: "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). The world is still making many false promises to those who sin. You are promised pleasure, riches, popularity, happiness. All you have to do is sin a little and you will enjoy great benefits. But the devil is behind these promises, and he is a liar from the beginning.

Before we leave the third chapter of Genesis, we should see that it contains

another first. It has the first promise of salvation through Christ. The Lord told the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (verse 15). The Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head so severely that it would be crushed. When Christ came, He did not do that to any animal. He did it to Satan, who had used the serpent.

Christ was bruised Himself when He was bruised for the iniquities of His people in the death of the cross. His blood obtained the forgiveness of sin – sin which Satan had brought into the world. So "through death" Christ "destroy[ed] him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

Do you wish to be set free from the devil and his lies? Then put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

God Is My Salvation

5. Justified by Faith

Eily grew as a Roman Catholic up in Dublin, the Irish capital, and was now 17. Her friend found the truth in the New Testament. Soon he sent Eily a copy and she read it very seriously. Under very strong pressure from her family she agreed to go again to confession in a Roman Catholic church. She told the priest how her mind had changed. He was amazed that someone as young as Eily should be so early "led astray" by reading a Protestant Bible, but she knew that the words of Scripture were truth. This is the last article in the series.

Eily was first of all, the priest told her, to give up reading the New Testament. She was to go to mass often and pay no attention to any doubts she might have. She was also to come to the priest's house some evening to speak with him. She agreed to this as she believed she should give him every opportunity to help her or convince her. That was not wise, but she had only recently come to know anything about the teachings of the Bible and to understand anything about the errors of Roman Catholicism.

For some weeks Eily went regularly to the priest's house. She was taken into a bare little room, where he talked with her. Sometimes he had a Douay Bible, a Roman Catholic translation (not a satisfactory version). She found him friendly; he would gently point out what he claimed to be the awful danger of her position, and spoke much of what he called the "security and consolations" of his Church.

If anyone could have persuaded Eily to remain in that Church, it was this priest. He seemed so willing to sacrifice everything that could have made his life more comfortable and was so zealous in his attachment to the Church.

“But alas,” Eily recognised, “the one great thing was lacking, one essential thing: simple trust in the saving merits of Christ alone for salvation.”

The core of the gospel flashed into Eily’s mind one evening as she discussed justification by faith with the priest. Contrary to what the priest was telling her, she saw that salvation was by faith, not by works, for “it is God which worketh in you”. She remembered the words: “By grace are ye *saved* through *faith*; and that not of yourselves: it is *the gift of God*: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Shortly after this she stood up and said goodnight. Looking back she wrote, “I knew now that my course lay clear and plain before me. I must follow it. The time of wondering, doubting and wavering was past. The time for decision was come. When I made known my decision at home I was given one week by my father to change my mind. At the end of the week I was to be given into the hands of the parish priest – unless I came to my senses!

“My mother’s attitude is difficult to describe. Sometimes she was tearful and pleading, sometimes wrathful beyond words. My sister was indignant, cold and troubled in her own intense way. She was worried by the upset and disturbance. ‘Why couldn’t you keep all this to yourself?’ she would ask again and again. ‘Why bring such misery upon everyone?’

“It was all very hard. My prayer was that I might be given strength to go through and not break down. I had one week in which to get away. But how? Seventeen years of age, with no money, no friends and no experience. What was I to do?

“However, I prayed earnestly, believing that the way would open up if I trusted in God. All around were young friends and companions, but not one to whom I dare go now. I knew no Protestant people. I had never been inside a Protestant Church.”

One day during the week she decided to go to a service in a mission hall in Dublin. Her teacher friend had told her about it in a letter. She recalled, “Those letters from him – full of counsel, prayer and steadfast loyalty – meant much to me that week. He was overjoyed that I had found the way of life, and said in one letter, ‘I prayed so much and so often for this that I am not surprised, because I knew it would come’.

“One night I made my way to the mission hall, and was brought to a seat in the brightly lit, warm room. . . . The minister entered shortly afterwards and the little service commenced. The New Testament truths shone out clearer than ever, comforting my heart. It was all so simple and so helpful that I went away with a great peace in my soul.

“As I knelt in prayer by my bedside that night, joy and peace flooded my being. Away went all the heartbreak and loneliness at the thought of leaving

home and loved ones. Away went all the gloom, and instead I was . . . joyful with a gladness I had never known before. 'And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song: He also is become my salvation' (Isaiah 12:1,2). Being 'justified by faith', as Paul said, I had peace with God at last.

"Before the end of the week a letter came for me bearing a strange signature and postmark. It was from a lady living in London, a complete stranger to me, who said that she had heard all about me from the teacher, and would I look upon her as a very true friend, and her home as my own, if I were in difficulties? Would I let her know at any time if I thought of crossing [the Irish Sea] and she would meet me at Euston Station? This then was my answer to constant prayer for deliverance during that week."

No one in Eily's family had any idea that she was about to leave; no one realised what bitter tears she shed on the last day. But, she believed, she had an unseen Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ who gave her strength to take up her cross and follow Him. With a few necessary items in a small case, a very little money in her pocket, and just the clothes she was wearing, she walked out of the door of her home for the last time. Clearly she saw that she had no other option but to leave home without telling any of her family, if she was to be free to follow the religion of the Bible.

The teacher had returned to Dublin for a short while. He met Eily on the day she left home and brought her to some Protestant friends of his, who showed her great kindness. Soon she was away on a night ferry to Britain, and then on to London. She did not know what was ahead of her but she said, "I did know that Christ Jesus, who had delivered me from darkness and brought me into the great light of His gospel, would be with me always – 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever'".

After spending some months in London with Lou, the lady who invited her there, she eventually found work as a clerk. Then one evening, after coming back from work, there was a sharp knock on the door. A detective stood outside wanting to speak to her. She had, no doubt, been reported missing in Dublin and the detective had come to check on her. For a moment, her heart raced; then she trusted that God would protect her. After all, she was old enough to decide what religion to follow and where she would live. The interview ended; the detective went away satisfied; and both Lou and Eily felt very thankful to God for His care.

Later Eily moved to Belfast. Some time afterwards she married her teacher friend. He became a minister and they settled down together. Eily

wrote, “Every day we thank God for His unfailing mercies, and count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord”. She acknowledged that the way was not always easy, but she had found that God – as He reveals Himself in Scripture – was her salvation.

Paul – a Character Study

4. The Final Scene

Rev J R Tallach

Last month’s article continued to describe “Some Characteristics of Paul”, which was the second section of a paper given at last year’s Youth Conference. This is the third section and the final article in the series.

In Acts 28:30,31 we read that “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”.

He was still a prisoner, for he speaks of being bound with “this chain” – that is, he was constantly bound to a Roman soldier. The Jews in Rome came to see him and some of them rejected the gospel as he spoke to them. Paul applied Isaiah 6:9 to them: “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not”. The rejection of the gospel by the Jews followed him to the end, but the blessing followed him also. Paul was bound, but God’s Word was not bound. He still had work to do.

On the Damascus road he was called to do a work and he was specially fitted to do it by the anointing of the Spirit in the house in the street called Straight, and that work continued to the very end. He writes to the Philippians: “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear” (1:12-14).

As it was with the Master so it was with His faithful servant: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”. Paul made no difference whether his hearers were Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, bond or free. He received all and had a word in season for all. He made that meeting profitable by speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is reported of that good man, James Ussher, that in visiting his flock he would speak freely of the events of the day, but before leaving he would say, “Now, before I go, let us speak a little of the Master”. That was Paul’s mind too. Years of preaching, suffering and teaching had

not diminished his interest in “those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ”, nor had he exhausted the riches of them.

Again he sought no personal glory, or any following, from man. In Corinth they had fallen into the snare of parties within the church, saying, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12). But Paul forcefully refutes this error of parties and of following individuals, however eminent they might be. He asks, “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” In this last scene, he is founding no personal sect but “teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ”.

No man had a better understanding of the hardness, deceitfulness and willful darkness of the fallen heart of man. He knew this from the experience of his own heart and also from the way in which the preaching of the gospel had been despised and rejected during his ministry. He never lost faith in the “foolishness of preaching” as God’s appointed way of establishing and furthering the gospel in a lost and dying world.

In the capture of Jericho, the trumpets of the priests sounded; then the people shouted and the walls of Jericho fell down (Joshua 6:20). In his final scene, Paul was still preaching the kingdom of God with all confidence. The frank dislike of the Jews and the indifference of the people of Athens (Acts 17) did not shake that confidence. Preaching is the power of God, and he writes to Timothy at this time: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Timothy 4:6).

The three young men in the face of the burning fiery furnace spoke with all confidence: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Daniel 3:17). So Paul could say, with all confidence: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

What may we learn from Paul? Chrysostom, one of the best-known ministers in the early Christian Church, called Paul “an insatiable server of Christ”. We cannot follow him as an apostle, since that office has now passed into history; the apostles used their gifts faithfully to do their work and they fulfilled their calling as the foundation builders of the New Testament Church.

We are called to live a life above reproach. Paul said, In this “do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16). We are to make our calling and election sure and work out our own salvation, knowing that it is God that works in us to will and to do His own pleasure. Be under the faithful preaching of the Word, and search the Scriptures like the Bereans, to find confirmation of the truths preached (Acts 17:11).

Like Paul, let your religion be a religion of hope. Psalm 55:22 reads, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved”. A boat at anchor will have plenty freedom to move, but if the anchor holds it will never drift out to sea or be wrecked on the shore. Paul says, “Which hope we have as an anchor for the soul”. He was tossed about many a time, both in his circumstances and in his spirit. He knew great joy and great sorrow.

He knew harshness of spirit and the kindness of the jailor’s house and family. He knew the love of the elders at Ephesus, who wept at his departure. He knew the hatred of his own brethren, who went about to kill him. But the anchor of his hope held. So will yours if, like Paul, it is within the veil, where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Hebrews 6:19).

For Junior Readers

A Sweet Smell

Have you heard of Havdalah? It is a Jewish religious ceremony that marks the end of their Sabbath.

One part of it involves passing round a decorated spice box, perhaps a pretty silver container such as you might see on display in a Jewish Museum. Everybody sniffs the aroma of the spices. To do so is supposed to act as a reminder of the blessings they had enjoyed that day and as a way to help them carry these memories into the week ahead.

Now we do not follow the Jewish religion. The most important reason is that it rejects Jesus as the One whom God foretold in the Old Testament, the One who was to come as the Saviour of the world.

But do you ever think what a blessing it is to have the Christian Sabbath, which every week reminds you of Christ’s resurrection? As *The Shorter Catechism* tells you, the Sabbath is to be kept “by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship”. Is it not a blessing from God to be able to put aside our worldly cares and concentrate for one day in seven on the needs of our souls?

Our souls are going to live for ever, so surely care for them is of the greatest importance. So on the Lord’s Day you can give more time to reading the Bible and books that are profitable for your souls. You will also be able to attend church and benefit from hearing the preaching of the Word, the good news of the gospel.

At the end of the Sabbath do you ever think back over the things you have

heard or have learned that day? Do you try to carry them in your memory into the week ahead, perhaps by learning one of the texts you heard or a verse of a Psalm from which you sang? Paul talks about the “sweet savour of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15). Do you have anything of this sweet savour, or smell, at the end of a Sabbath day?

And what about the end of last year? You can look back, at the beginning of a new year, on the privileges you have had over the past 12 months – all the sermons you have heard, all the chapters of the Bible you have read, all the Psalms you have sung.

As you do so, ask yourself: Has your soul benefited from them? Was there anything of the sweet savour of Christ about you at the close of this year? Or was it the smell of the world? Was it worldly friendships and worldly influences that had the greatest effect on you?

Will you not pray at the start of this year: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. . . . O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” *J van Kralingen*

Religion Makes People Gloomy?

Religion makes people gloomy. If that is what you think, one might ask, Who told you so?

Suppose you reply, My own heart. Then the answer should be: Have you not read, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”? And will you believe that heart?

Perhaps you reply, My light-hearted companions. The answer then should be, But what do they know about religion? They never tasted any of its joys and sorrows; they know nothing about either of them. Would you ask a blind man his opinion of colours, or a deaf man his opinion of sounds, and form your judgement by what they say? Go to other sources of information before you pronounce religion gloomy. Ask those who have felt its power, who have known all the joys of sin and many of the joys of religion. Ask them if religion has made them gloomy.

Go to Solomon, the wise King of Israel. Ask him: Does religion make people gloomy? He had drunk from every cup of earthly joy that wealth or influence could bring him. He says, “I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever

mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy” (Ecclesiastes 2:8-10). But was he happy as a result? He goes on to say, “Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun”.

But when Solomon turned to religion and came under its influence, he exclaimed, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17).

Does religion make people gloomy? Did it make Paul and Silas gloomy, as they sang praises to God in the prison? Did it make the first martyr, Stephen, gloomy as he breathed out his soul in peace and, as those around him looked at his face, it seemed like the face of an angel?

But go higher for your answers. Which is the happiest place in the universe? Is it not heaven? Which is the most miserable place in the universe? Is it not hell?

Which is the most religious place? Heaven is; it is all religion there. Which is the most irreligious? Hell is; there is no religion there. Let the joys of heaven and the agonies of hell give the answer: No, religion never makes people gloomy. On the contrary, it has smoothed the path of many a tried and afflicted soul through life and it has proved the greatest comfort in the hour of death. And the more I feel its influence and live under its power, the nearer I will come to the joys of heaven and to the life and love and happiness that reign around God’s throne. Adapted from *The Christian Treasury*

Challenges in a Godless World

2. A Continual Challenge

Matthew Vogan

The first part, last month, of this Youth Conference paper provided an introduction to the subject.

The overall challenge the Church faces from godlessness today is not new; it is not unique to our generation. It is simply the same type of challenge that the Church has experienced in all generations. The Apostle Peter wrote: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

The roots of the challenge we face go back beyond New Testament times. They go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and Genesis chapter 3. As soon as God had established a people for Himself on the earth, there was a challenge from the evil one. The challenge offered by the serpent was one of questioning and unbelief: “Yea, hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1).

In this challenge we encounter a form of atheism. It is not the so-called New Atheism with its abusive language and inflated claims. This is much more calm and subtle in its tone. Neither is it the old atheism with its questioning on the basis of rationalism – the idea that human thinking can provide all the answers. Notice how the serpent's words actually assume that God exists.

It is in fact, the oldest atheism of all – practical atheism. What do we mean by that? Practical atheism does not deny God's being; rather it denies God's claims on our lives. It involves believing that God exists but living as though He does not. There is no shortage of churches full of practical atheists; indeed many churches appear to instruct people in this soul-destroying lifestyle.

The devil's temptation took a very subtle form. He was challenging Eve: Is God really for you? Does He intend your full happiness? Does He know what is best for you? Here is the original expression of the old lie that God is an oppressor, holding us back and taking away our freedom. It is true that God denies man the so-called "right" (which is no lawful right at all) to be the absolute standard of what is right. Logically and morally there can, of course, only be one absolute standard of what is right and wrong. Also God has not given man the ability to be the standard of what is right independently from God. This would be contradictory and even involve God denying Himself.

Here is the true question: Can a God who is infinitely wise, loving, holy and good guarantee our freedom and also determine what is best for us? Logically and morally, the answer must be: Of course. But sinful unbelief and rebellion will not submit to this.

Ultimately we must be either God-centred or man-centred. The devil knew how to push all the man-centred buttons to tempt Eve to covetousness, discontent and pride. Adam and Eve bartered true freedom for oppression. They entered into slavery to sin, self and Satan. This is what still happens through the deceitfulness of sin, with the god of this world blinding "the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The same lie continues to be peddled and to be believed.

When Adam and Eve fell they discovered the reality of this deceit. Their eyes were "opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen 3:7). This does not simply refer to the shame of physical nakedness. It means that they were stripped of all their former glory, their spiritual and moral blessings. The deceptions of sin and the world are intended to draw us away from the beauty of holiness and from being conformed to the image of God in Christ by grace.

The judgement God pronounced on the evil one was: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen

3:15). In every generation there would be constant enmity. For the woman and her descendants it would mean facing continual challenge from the seed of the serpent. The outward aspect of this changes, but it is essentially the same challenge repeated in every age.

There is the challenge of *secularism*. The word secular comes from the Latin word *seculum*, which means age, lifetime or generation. To be secular therefore implies what is purely temporal and related to this world. It has come to mean that which is opposed to the sacred, that which is without God.

The overall challenge may change and develop in every generation, but we also need to understand that it has deep roots. There are historic influences that have shaped the forces that we face today. One of the key influences is the Enlightenment, a movement in the eighteenth century that elevated man-centred rationalism. It refused to submit to the authority of God's revelation. Instead, it declared that ultimate knowledge can only be derived from what one can observe or reason on. Another movement, known as *Romanticism*, developed these man-centred ideas in a slightly different way in the early nineteenth century. It said that ultimate knowledge can only be derived from what one can feel.

Later in the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx developed the idea of *materialism*, claiming that everything can be reduced to biology and economics. This strong anti-supernaturalism has fed the belief among philosophers and other thinkers that morality and truth are not given by God; they are merely tools of power.

Marx believed in trying to bring greater freedom through political revolution. Yet during the twentieth century his followers realised that society could be turned upside down even more effectively by turning its morals and principles upside down. Thus the permissive society was created where the values inherited from Christian influence were systematically undermined.

One Marxist philosopher who influenced the cultural revolution of the 1960s was the German, Herbert Marcuse. He advocated a moral revolution in which there would be no restraints and everything would be tolerated. Everything would be tolerated with one exception. There would be a "repressive tolerance" towards those who wish to restrain moral transgression. It would be a repressive tolerance towards those who would not tolerate everything and anything.

This is why Christians, and those with Christian values, have been the target of the revolutionaries. A cultural revolution has overtaken most Western nations since the 1960s that has involved the breakdown and full-scale turning upside down of moral values and established standards which derive from Christian influence.

For Younger Readers

The Sailor Who Went on Praying

A young sailor used always to kneel in prayer to God where he slept on his ship in the navy. But none of the other sailors prayed.

These other sailors decided to make the young sailor stop praying. They watched him till he went on his knees and then they threw their caps and shoes at him. It was a very bad thing to do.

Did the young sailor stop praying? No. Every evening he kept going on his knees to pray to God. And every evening the others threw their caps and shoes at him.

The captain of the ship heard about what was going on. So he called all the sailors in front of him. He told the young praying sailor to tell him what he had to complain about. But the young sailor told the captain that he had no complaint to make. He was obviously a patient lad.

The captain made clear that he knew the young sailor had good reason to complain. He warned the others not to annoy him again.

That night all these other sailors came to kneel in prayer too. We can be sure that the young sailor had been praying for them.

A Gracious Delay

A poor woman stood at a gate looking into a vineyard. "Would you like some grapes?" asked the owner.

"I should be very grateful," replied the woman.

"Then give me your basket."

Quickly the basket was handed over. The owner took it and was gone a long time among the vines, till the woman became discouraged, thinking that he was not coming again.

At last he returned with the basket heaped full. "I have made you wait a good while," he said, "but, you know, the longer you have to wait the more grapes you receive!"

So sometimes it is in prayer. We bring our empty basket to God and pass it over the gate of prayer to Him. He seems to be delaying a long time, and sometimes faith gets weary with waiting. But at last He comes, and our basket is heaped full with blessings. He waited longer that He might bring us a better and fuller measure, an even more gracious answer to our deepest needs. Think, for example, of the waiting sisters, Martha and Mary, but then Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

from Cheering Words

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2017-18

UK Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section: *Cheadle:* Henry Johnson. *Dingwall:* Matthew Ross. *Llanelli:* Angharad Cran. *Edinburgh:* Bradley Morrison. *Inverness:* Daniel and Jessica Maton. *Tonbridge:* Joseph and Katie Playfoot.

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Looking Around Us

The Only Safe Guide for Life

Emmanuel Macron has turned French politics upside down. He formed a new political party and, little more than 12 months later, he swept to power, with himself as president, in elections held last year. He became the youngest president ever in the history of France.

What are his principles? When he was quite young, he decided on his own what he considered good and fair. Not on the basis of his parents' teaching, it would seem, and certainly not on the basis of what the Bible says.

He followed his own principles "even when the current convention was not consistent with my choice". He was referring particularly to his marriage: to a woman 24 years older than he was. Now there is nothing wrong with that in itself. But when Macron fell in love with one of his teachers, she was already married to someone else.

What Macron did was wrong. Yet people might ask, Does it matter, as they both loved each other? But we must consider the position of Brigitte Macron's first husband. Do his feelings not matter? Their vows to each other when they married, do they not matter? Of course they do. It was thoroughly selfish. And before he could marry her, Brigitte had to detach herself from the man who loved her first.

Now if both Macron and the woman who is now his wife had followed the Bible, they would have noticed a number of pointers as to how they should have reacted to their growing friendship. They would then have backed off. They would not have become too involved with each other.

First, in the words of Jesus (He was quoting from the Old Testament), "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:31). It was Brigitte's duty to continue to love her husband, someone who was a very close "neighbour". And a *neighbour*, in this sense, is just someone with whom one comes into contact.

Second, while divorce is allowed in the Bible, the reasons for which it is permitted are limited. It is only allowed because of adultery or desertion, and there is no suggestion that Brigitte's husband either committed adultery or deserted her.

Third, the Tenth Commandment states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife". This Commandment tells us that it is wrong to desire what is not ours, and we cannot obtain by lawful means. Especially we must not desire someone else's husband or wife

For these reasons we must assume that for Brigitte to divorce her husband and marry another was wrong, and it was also wrong for Macron to have married someone who had divorced her husband in an unscriptural way.

The Bible is the only safe guide for life. If we ignore its teachings, we will go wrong – not only for this life but, more seriously, for eternity. We should pray, "Order my steps in Thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psalm 119:133).

2018 Youth Conference

This year's Youth Conference will be held, God willing, at Carronvale House, Carronvale Road, Larbert, FK5 3LH, from Tuesday, April 3, to Thursday, April 5. Further details should appear in next month's *Young People's Magazine*.

Price £1.00