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The Christian in Contemporary Society

[This paper, which was delivered by Mr Alexander Gillies, Glasgow, at the Theological Conference in Edinburgh, on 10th September, 1969, has been adapted for publication.]

The title of this paper — **The Christian in Contemporary Society** — embraces much. The subject has so many facets that a study of it entails extensive research and observation. I feel, therefore, that it is incumbent upon me at the outset to acknowledge my indebtedness to the following books, which have been so useful to me, and on which I have drawn freely in the composition of my paper:

Escape From Reason by Francis A. Schaeffer.
The God Who Is There by Francis A. Schaeffer.
The New Morality by Arnold Lunn and Garth Lean.
Set Forth Your Case by Clark H. Pinnock.
The Abolition of Religion by Leon Morris.
The Cult of Softness by Arnold Lunn and Garth Lean.
The Christian in Industrial Society by H. F. R. Catherwood.
Runaway World by Michael Green.
Perilous Times by Paul B. Smith.
The Christian and the World by H. M. Carson.

As has been indicated, the title is of such a comprehensive nature that volumes could be written on it; it is, therefore, essential that both the form of the paper and the limits prescribed should be clearly outlined. I propose to divide the subject into four sections as follows:

1. First of all, it is my purpose to anticipate and refute objections that might be raised against relating the position and conduct of the Christian to any particular society during any given period of history.

2. The second section will consist of an exposition of the ethos, that is, the prevailing spirit, of contemporary society and of the thinking which is so insidiously permeating this society.

3. The third section will consist of a description of the symptoms of the disease as these manifest themselves in contemporary society.

4. The fourth section will take the form of a prescription for the Christian whose lot is cast in contemporary society. This will deal with questions such as: how should the Christian be exercised, and what should his response be with regard to the society in which he lives and works?

1. A study of the position of the Christian in a specific society could, quite conceivably, be misinterpreted by some as countenancing the modernist trend of adapting the Christian faith in order to make it, as the catch-phrase goes, "relevant to the age in which we live". This modernist trend could be summed up as follows: "The Christians of the apostolic era belonged to a primitive age; so the Christian in contemporary society must conform to the theological, philosophical, scientific, psychological and social outlook of his day." This is a concept utterly at odds with the teaching of the word of God, and, I trust, with the spirit and content of this paper.

It may be argued that the world is the world, whether the date be 1969 or 1569 or 69 A.D., that sin is sin now as then, that the gospel is the gospel now as then. This is undeniable; but the spirit of the world manifests itself in a variety of ways, and certain sins are more prevalent in some ages than in others. Society changes in manifold ways.

We are not living in the society in which the Saviour lived. It is not necessary to expatiate here on His ecclesiastical, political and social environment, but it was manifestly different from ours. Careful perusal of the Gospels makes it abundantly clear that He dealt with religious hypocrisy, spiritual ignorance, formal traditionalism, inordinate worldliness, heretical doctrines, etc., as these manifested themselves in the society which was contemporary to Him. Moreover, He dealt with different classes of people in different ways; in other words He adapted His methods to His audience.

In the apostolic era we find the truth applied to people in forms suitable to their religious, political and cultural background. Examples are numerous: Peter on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius; Paul addressing the Jews at Antioch and the Greeks in Athens; Paul "disputing daily at the school of one Tyrannus"; Paul's epistles to the various churches; Paul's advice to Titus in connection with the Cretians.

Precept and example in the Bible are clear! Therefore the Christian's duty is clear: he must take cognizance of the society in which he lives if he is to be a faithful witness on the side of his Master.

2. In every society since the Fall human nature has exercised itself in various ways, that is, certain human characteristics are more obvious in some periods of history than in others. In order to attain to an intelligent understanding of the present, one must explore the past; for it is certain that the cancer of permissiveness has been working insidiously for many years. One could, of course, in one's research reach far into the past, but, for practical purposes, I shall confine myself to the 19th and 20th centuries.

If one looks back to the 19th century, and, indeed, to as recent a period as the one preceding the First World War, one finds that in Western society Christians and non-Christians had this in common: they accepted certain presuppositions, the fundamental presupposition being that there were such things as absolutes — absolute truth, absolute knowledge, absolute goodness, etc. People did disagree as to what these absolutes were, but the existence of absolutes was not denied. Both Christians and non-Christians reasoned in this way: if something is true, its opposite is false; if something is right, its opposite is wrong. Even a generation ago, if you said, "This is right" or "This is wrong", everyone would understand what you meant. This way of thinking has been called the methodology of antithesis. It was a way of thinking which permeated man's entire mental outlook.

In contemporary society there is a new methodology. The concept of truth and moral rightness has changed. There is no longer in general currency an antithesis like TRUTH v. ERROR or an antithesis like RIGHTNESS v. WRONGNESS. Absolutes have been cast overboard. The new methodology which underlies the prevailing spirit, or ethos, of contemporary society has three basic characteristics:

- (i) **Subjectivism:** religion and morality are not fixed; they depend on individual attitudes.
- (ii) **Relativism:** knowledge can never be absolute; it is limited by man's perceptive faculties.
- (iii) **Agnosticism:** no one knows the right answer.

This is the situation that confronts us. The ethos, the prevailing spirit, of our age is dictated by a way of thinking completely foreign to previous generations, and to real Christians in our own time. It is not surprising that so many are baffled by contemporary trends, particularly among the young. Young people think that by throwing off the shackles of "outmoded" religious and moral concepts they will enjoy real freedom. This is an awful delusion. What

has happened, and is happening, is that they are the victims of a policy of brainwashing, pursued in the interests of the new methodology. The absolute standards of the Moral Law are ridiculed; men create their own standards as they go along.

Obviously this change did not occur overnight. As I have stated, it is an insidious disease. One can trace its spread westwards from Germany to Britain, and then to America. Its social progress can be traced from the "highbrow" intellectuals to the more educationally privileged strata of society, to the working class, and then to the upper middle class. However, for our purposes it will be more profitable to follow the progress of the disease, the new methodology, through the disciplines — from philosophy to art, then to music, then to general culture, then to theology.

Before embarking on this exposition it is necessary to make a general statement with regard to all non-Christian thought. There was, and is, in all non-Christian thought a unifying factor — rationalism, or humanism in its wider sense. Humanism, in this sense, is the system whereby man, beginning absolutely with himself, tries with the use of his reason to find a meaning and purpose in life. In one sense, of course, rationalism is the same in every age — man trying to build out from himself. In another sense, humanism is constantly shifting, and so the Christian must be careful to study the form rationalism is **currently** taking.

If we follow the trend in the disciplines already mentioned we discover that men failed in their rationalistic efforts to find a unified meaning to life on the basis of the methodology of antithesis. So, rather than abandon the rationalism which had failed them, they changed the whole concept of truth. If we are to understand the ethos of contemporary society we must follow the conception and birth of modern man through the disciplines — from philosophy to theology.

In the realm of philosophy it was Hegel, the German, who discarded the methodology of antithesis and propounded the methodology of synthesis in the hope of finding a unified meaning to life. However, it is Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian, who holds the doubtful distinction of being the father of modern secular thinking and the new theological thinking. The really significant feature of his philosophy and theology is that he gave up the task of finding a unified meaning to life by the exercise of reason. He stipulated that in order to deal with the purpose and significance of life one must abandon rational thinking about them and make a gigantic "leap of faith". Existentialist philosophers, then, have abandoned the hope of a **rational** answer to questions like "What is man? Why is he here? What is his destiny?" Their answer is that, if one concerned oneself with the rational and the logical, that is, historical and scientific truth, life

is meaningless and purposeless. Therefore, one must by a "leap of faith", or mystical experience, fly into the realm of the non-rational and the non-logical, the realm of intuition and imagination and of what cannot be verified or proved in any way. According to this school of thought, here lies the only hope of finding a meaning to life.

This "leap of faith", which is quite irrational, has been called a "first order experience", and it is surely not without significance that Aldous Huxley advocated drug-taking in order to attain to a first-order experience. In fact, the sensitive person today does not usually take drugs in order to escape reality. He fondly hopes that by taking them he will attain to a first-order experience which will give some meaning to life.

Just as philosophers tried to find a humanistic answer to life, so did artists. The Dutchman, Van Gogh, and the Frenchman, Gauguin, collaborated to found a new religion based on humanistic principles, but they quarrelled (How very human!), and Van Gogh, two years later, in a fit of disillusionment, committed suicide. Gauguin created a painting with the pathetic caption "What? Whence? Whither?" and then failed in his subsequent suicide attempt. Dada, a modern art movement originating in Zurich, proclaims in paintings and poems that everything is chance — life is meaningless.

From the world of music one example will suffice. The *Musique Concrète*, developed by Pierre Schaeffer in Paris, proclaims the same message: all is relative; there is no truth; nothing is fixed.

In the realm of literature Henry Miller is an anti-law writer, a wrecker of conventions. Since life is believed to be meaningless, laws and time-honoured conventions are there to be smashed. It is, however, in the "theatre of the absurd" that the abject despair of the philosophy of meaninglessness is given its fullest expression. The avowed aim of this group of dramatists, including Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter and Jean Genet, is to depict the absolute emptiness of life. Francis Bacon, one of Britain's leading painters, goes even further: the main theme of his work is the sheer horror of existence. What is considered his best work Bacon is said to have done in a drunken state.

In John Osborne's play "Martin Luther" an old man, the head of Luther's old monastery, visits Luther and asks, "Martin, do you **know** you are right?" In the teeth of historical fact, but consistently with the contemporary way of thinking, Osborne puts this reply into Luther's mouth: "Let's hope so." Notice the thread running through contemporary culture: life is meaningless, and there are no such things as absolute truth and absolute morality.

In the modern cinema the same message is conveyed. "The Silence", produced by the Swede, Bergman, is a series of snapshots

with immoral and pornographic themes. There is no commentary, for this is supposed to represent life — devoid of meaning and devoid of morals. "Blow-up", a film produced by Antonioni of Italy, was advertised by posters announcing "Murder Without Guilt" and "Love Without Meaning".

This concept of life has permeated society with alarming rapidity through television, radio, magazines, newspapers, novels, "pop" music, the theatre and the cinema.

The same ethos is evident in modern theology. Modern existentialist theology is the child of Kierkegaard. The whole system pivots on the "leap of faith" which I have already mentioned. One of the most remarkable features of modern theology is the close affinity between its development and the development of modern existentialist philosophy. It has already been noted that philosophers had to abandon the humanistic, rationalistic method and embraced Kierkegaard's leap of faith. Theology has been through the same process.

The rationalistic liberal theologians of Germany rejected everything miraculous and supernatural. They discarded the miraculous and the supernatural in the life of the Saviour and attempted in a rational, objective way to find the "historical Jesus", as they put it. They found it impossible, however, to separate the supernatural aspects of the life of Jesus from what they condescendingly called "the true history". If they removed the supernatural, no historical Jesus remained. Two courses were then open to them: they could have renounced their rationalism and returned to Biblical theology, or they could have taken their rationalistic discoveries to their logical conclusion — nihilism (a belief that all existence is basically senseless and useless) — the religion of despair. They chose neither course. Like the philosophers they chose Kierkegaard's way — the two-storey division of knowledge and truth. The "leap of faith" is their magic wand. In essence, this is the theology of Barth, Niebuhr, Tillich, Robinson, Richardson, and all the new theologians. They have separated religious truth, which to them is non-rational and non-logical, from scientific and historical truth, which is both rational and logical. The gap is bridged by the "leap of faith". In fact, the faith of modern theology is faith in faith; and the more irrational the leap, the greater the faith.

The new theology is extremely influential in the majority of the churches of our day. It takes the old Christian doctrines and turns them into symbols by emptying them of all definable content. To take a few examples of this:

- (i) **The Person of Christ:** In the lower storey of historical criticism He is a human prophet; by a "leap of faith" He can be raised to divine significance.
- (ii) **The Bible:** In the lower storey of scientific criticism it is a

human document, full of errors; but you can elevate it into being a medium of revelation. Then it is inspired like the Koran and Shakespeare.

- (iii) **Miracles:** According to the new theology, miracles are not facts of history. They are really interpretations which believing people gave to events which touched them deeply.
- (iv) **The Resurrection:** There is no way of knowing whether it happened or not, according to the pundits of the new theology, but one can believe that it happened by a "leap of faith".
- (v) **The Cross:** This is a very popular theme, but is treated as a symbol. The blood is ignored or ridiculed. They say that you can still be a Christian even if you do not understand the Cross. "It is the contemporary Christ who saves," they say.
- (vi) **The Trinity:** This, as expounded by the new theology, is merely a metaphorical description of God by men who saw the scheme of redemption in that way. If we attempt to take it as literally true, it is a mathematical absurdity.

All these doctrines are part and parcel of the new theology. That makes it more dangerous than 19th century liberalism. It looks so like the gospel, it sounds so like the gospel — when not investigated. The truth is that in the new theology these doctrines are really symbols which cannot be proved right or wrong and whose content is not fixed. The person who has "faith" merely loads these symbols with the meaning he chooses according to the consensus of the age in which he lives.

What emerges from this study of the ethos of contemporary society is that absolutes have been abandoned, and the old methodology of TRUTH v. ERROR and RIGHT v. WRONG, which is the methodology of the Bible, has been rejected. People are being conditioned to a new way of thinking: there are no such things as absolutes, and all convictions are relative. Since this is what is believed, all discriminatory legislation and prohibitions must be removed. "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" are the imperatives of a morality which modern man rejects. The naiveté of the champions of the cause of permissiveness is such that they fail to understand that that way lies anarchy — the greatest of all human tyrannies. The key words of contemporary society are "revolution" and "freedom". All revealed law must be destroyed and be replaced by a fluid set of humanly appointed rules. Whatever is, is right.

Across the realms of theology, philosophy, science, psychology, sociology, the arts, literature, the mass-media, government, education, communal and family life, and personal morality, the words of Jeremiah are writ large:

"Lo they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?" (Jeremiah 8 : 9).

3. The religion of contemporary society both inside most of the professing churches and outside their influence is humanism. Biblical Christianity is being pushed from every section of life. Man is the ultimate standard by which all must be measured. It is man who sits in judgment on all questions of religion and morals. If you believe in absolute standards and cherish strong convictions you are condemned as a bigot. According to the standards of contemporary society all the creeds are equally grand, but none is absolutely true. Ecclesiastical leaders speak of our Protestant-Catholic-Jewish heritage.

Ecumenicism, which is as dangerous an "ism" as ever reared its head in this world, is the natural offspring of the ethos of contemporary society. Once the antithesis of TRUTH v. ERROR is abandoned, dialogue, accommodation, and compromise are quite logical.

When we enter the realm of so-called "religious experience", the influence of the mentality of the "leap of faith" theology is widespread. Zen Buddhism and the cult of transcendental meditation are becoming popular, because in the lower storey of the rational and logical people can see nothing but meaningless and purposelessness. Rationalism has failed to find a meaning and purpose in life, and so there must be a flight from reason into the upper-storey of mystical experience. This partly explains the popularity of LSD and its family of hallucogenic drugs. It is a characteristic of these drugs that they create a heightened self-awareness and a mystical sensation. The aim is to detach oneself from reality and commune with the beyond. One professor has claimed that by going on a "trip" under the influence of a drug one could enjoy a conversion like the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. At Boston University divinity students "tuned in" to deeper meditation on "Good Friday" with the aid of the "sacrament" — LSD. This flight from rational control is a feature of contemporary society.

The ethos of contemporary society makes itself evident in the realm of politics. The Executive and the Legislature do not concern themselves with the law of God. Why should they, if there are no such things as absolutes? It is the politics of consensus now. It is not "What saith the Lord?" but "What does man desire?" The aims of contemporary politics could be expressed thus: let us appeal to man's covetous and self-indulgent spirit and let us create opportunities for shameless and God-dishonouring self-indulgence with legislation like the Sunday Entertainments Bill, Divorce Law, Abortion Law, Sexual Offences Law and the abolition of capital

punishment. There is now a movement afoot to amend or repeal the Obscene Publications Act; the result would be licence to publish and sell pornography. Two statements made on radio by Mr Brian Forbes, film producer and director, are revealing. He was discussing with others, one of whom was Mr Malcolm Muggeridge, the subject of censorship. If censorship were removed, Mr Forbes maintained, "human nature being what it is, we should get nothing but boring and unadulterated filth." This sounds rather obvious to us, but his other comment was alarming, especially when it came from such an authentic source: "There is a conspiracy to exploit the basest instincts of human nature." Satan does not lack human agents in the prosecution of one of his stock activities.

In the **Cult of Softness** by Lunn & Lean, the authors maintain "that there is today a brilliant, concerted and partially successful attempt to take over the mind and culture of the country for secularism." Within the ambit of this conspiracy are universities and schools. A Christian student or a student with a Christian background can be prepared on coming to a University for an all-out attempt to wipe his mind clean of inherited ideas and implant within it the idea that there are no absolutes. In textbooks, in educational radio and TV programmes evolution is presented "as it happened". Charts and illustrations of life's progress over millions of years are shown. This, despite the fact that it is a travesty of the scientific method, besides being morally indefensible, to delude students into believing that evolution is a demonstrated fact or even a secure hypothesis.

The form and content of religious education in schools is a matter of grave concern to all who have the moral and spiritual welfare of the young at heart. Pupils learn that "values" are important for life, but also that no way exists of knowing which values. The absolute values of God's Word are largely ignored.

In the field of literature and the arts, to quote Mr Quintin Hogg, "our country is being destroyed before our eyes by intellectuals without faith." John Calder, the publisher, is inspired by an avowed urge "to break through the British public's backward puritanical attitude to sex." Alexander Trocchi, author of **Cain's Book**, a Calder publication on drug-taking, said in Edinburgh in 1963, "In the days of Charles II there was right, wrong and God. Now that we are not sure what's right and what's wrong, it's dangerous to limit forms of expression. We must allow all manner of opinions to go into the atmosphere for children." In 1962 the Writers' Conference in Edinburgh was preoccupied with homosexuality and drug-taking. At the Edinburgh Drama Conference of 1963 the monarchy, patriotism, moral values, law and order and religion were attacked. Also in Edinburgh, in 1964, Miss Joan

Littlewood, Artistic Director of the Theatre Workshop, told the Press, "We believe we are breaking through the Puritanism of the world, leaving pre-history. The theatre can be a marvellous world, since God is dead, and religion is dead." Lord Harewood, one-time Director of the Edinburgh Festival, stated in the "Daily Record" of 28th August, 1963: "My greatest enemy is still that old Presbyterian, John Knox."

Contemporary society also has its sacred cow — science, and the cultural myth of our age is "evolution". This is not believed and taught as a fact because there is evidence for it, but because the humanistic religion of our society needs it. If there is a transcendent God Who is Creator and Lawgiver, the whole fabric of humanism collapses. Such a God must be excluded so that man can be autonomous and free. One need only read extracts from the papers and discussions in the official record — **Man and his Future** — of the conference sponsored by the C.I.B.A. Foundation in London, to be alarmed by the trend of scientific thought:

Sir Julian Huxley: "Genetic improvement should be brought about by multiple artificial insemination by preferred donors of high genetic quality."

Dr G. Pincus: "This could be done by the Government's putting a chemical in our food or water which made everybody sterile, and then providing a second chemical capable of reversing the effect of the first for those whom it licensed to bear children."

Professor Bronowski: "My values come from as objective and definitive a source as any god, namely the nature of the human being."

Notice how unmistakably clear the spirit of the permissive society is among these intellectual giants of the scientific world — the abolition of an objective or absolute morality and the setting up of a variable morality where the reference point is some supposed good to human society.

A prominent feature of contemporary society is what has been called the cult of softness, one of the forms of permissiveness. In their introduction to the book of this title the authors write: "The great periods in a nation's history, the age of Elizabeth and the Victorian age in our own, are always distinguished by the uncritical acceptance, at least by the ruling class, of an exacting code, the validity of which is unquestioned even by those who fail to practise what they might be ready to preach." They go on to state: "In our country, the cult of softness has certainly been responsible for a weakening of the moral fibre not only in sex but also in the erosion of Christian dogma, in education, art and letters, in the increasing tendency to side with the criminal against the police, and in the repudiation of personal responsibility." Many of the men dedicated to the secularizing of our

society and to the elimination of all effective Christian influence are entrenched in influential positions in publishing, broadcasting and centres of learning.

Dr Leach dismisses the value of the family; Dr James Henning and his like advocate promiscuity. Dr Alex. Comfort in a television broadcast stated, "A chivalrous boy is one who takes contraceptives with him when he goes to meet his girl friend." In his book, *Sex in Society*, he states, "It is highly probable that adultery today maintains more marriages than it destroys."

The cult of softness is most evident in the current attitude to crime. The Bishop of Southwark could tell the House of Lords that "most of those in prison were there because society or their families had failed them," and the ex-Bishop of Woolwich described suicide as "a sin of society against the individual rather than the sin of the individual against society." Yet within 20 years of the end of the Second World War burglaries had increased by over 250%, crimes against women by over 400% and crimes of violence by over 500%.

The breakdown of discipline defaces our society and is one of the symptoms of permissiveness. Mr Donald Hughes, the Headmaster of Rydal School, summed up the state of affairs prevailing in the educational sphere as follows: "It is not our job to tell the young what to do, but to give them their heads, to leave them free from directions and stand by to pick up the pieces." After the pitched battle between Mods and Rockers at Clacton, in March, 1964, Mr Donald MacLachlan asked, "Are we certain that our schools have the right basic theory of education and discipline? For forty years now the reaction has been going on against hard learning, strictness in class, deterrent punishments, and the role of fear and habit in character formation Perhaps the strongest grievance that teenagers will have against us may be a feeling that we did not give them the secret of the self-control we expect of them, and that we did not give them firm purposes in life."

It is among the young in particular that we see the fruits of the philosophy of meaninglessness and the denial of absolutes. The mess the world is in, the mess society is in, the apparent purposelessness of the life of the individual drive many to take refuge in a fantasy world. They are assured by persuaders on every hand, "Sex satisfies; sex is the way to fulfilment." Another form of escapism is drug-taking, which is assuming alarming proportions. "Pop" music provides yet another avenue by which the young can escape into the world of the erotic and fantastic. Further, if there are no absolutes, conventions and deference to properly constituted authority must go. Extremism, whether it be in behaviour or in dress, is symptomatic of the cancer of permissiveness.

There must, however, be no compromising with modernistic evangelism which seeks "to make the gospel relevant to the age in which we live." The gimmickry, the mania for tabulated results, the false charity of ecumenicism must be shunned like the plague. The Christian must also shun the "social gospel", which applies to the generality of sinners the words of Christ to His disciples, as if there were no need for personal repentance and forgiveness.

Nevertheless, in seeking to adhere to the old paths, the Christian must avoid the pitfalls of superstitious and idolatrous traditionalism.

Finally (in his relations with, and attitude to, his fellow-sinners) he must never lose sight of the claims of God's glory.

(ii) In seeking to be equipped to be a living witness, the Christian must live a life of much prayer and personal holiness. He must live the faith he professes. Fighting the good fight of faith requires the whole armour of God. The Saviour's words, "Without me ye can do nothing," must be one of the watchwords of the Christian's life.

He must, moreover, attain to that knowledge which is needed to communicate the gospel. A clear and intelligent grasp of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" is indispensable. A heavy weight rests on the shoulders of the educated Christian, and the importance of a teaching ministry cannot be too strongly emphasised.

There is also a lack of Christians who understand the broad sweep of the contemporary intellectual climate. The Christian is duty bound to seek to attain to a clear and thorough understanding of contemporary society — its thinking and its trends.

(iii) However circumscribed his opportunities, the Christian must in word and life be a witness for Christ. The defence of the faith is essential. Sects, cults, heresies and specific declensions must be understood and exposed. Young people, in particular, must be instructed and prepared for facing the monolithic culture of contemporary society by being taught the source and nature of attacks on the faith in our generation.

The Holy Spirit is sovereign, but the Bible does not separate His work from knowledge; nor does the prerogative of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners relieve us of our responsibilities as parents, pastors, missionaries or teachers, or, indeed, as citizens in our own communities. The human side to evangelism in the spoken word and in the dissemination of the Scriptures and Christian literature is absolutely vital.

Moreover, if we wish to communicate the gospel, we have a duty to learn our hearers' or readers' use of language, so that they

understand what we mean to convey. Further, we must treat them as rational beings, for true faith is not a vague thing which replaces understanding. The Christian's part is to present the claims of God in law and gospel as intelligently and intelligibly as possible and wait for the blessing.

There is one pitfall in particular that the Christian must beware of in the communication of the gospel, and that is an exclusive appeal to experience. An inward personal experience there must be, but when religious consciousness becomes the central part of our teaching doctrines recede into the background. Furthermore, this plays into the hands of the new theology which lays so much stress on faith as a kind of magic wand and on comfortable feelings dependent on some kind of experience. In any case, an experience can be physiological, psychological, theological, or even demonic. Religious experiences not subject to testing can, and are, used, as one put it, "to prove anything from Zen Buddhism to Mormonism". Two of the pillars of the Christian faith are the veracity of God's actions in history and the reliability of God's Word in the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. These must not be relegated to a position of relative unimportance. We all know that experience is essential in personal verification, but it cannot stand alone.

With regard to the responsibility of the Christian in the society in which he lives and works two quotations from **The Christian in Industrial Society** will suffice to indicate principles of conduct:

- (a) "The voice of Christians should be heard in political matters, and they should influence legislation."
- (b) "The Christian must be concerned that, as far as he is able to accomplish it, righteousness shall prevail in those spheres in which he is involved, whether it is a school, faculty, local community, a business, a hospital, or what you will. To leave our fellows to secularism or humanism would be a complete abdication of our responsibility as Christian citizens."

The absolute necessity for importunity in prayer, and our absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit, have, I trust, been implicit and explicit in what has been said in this paper. I have, however, reserved to the end the words of Rev. Thomas Boston, who, in the closing passage of a sermon, so eloquently sums up the duty of Christians with regard to these great indispensables:

"Yet despair not of the reformation of the land or of particular persons, but pray, pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. O wrestle with God and lift up a cry for it. That is a sovereign remedy that would cure all our diseases at once. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.' The

work of reformation hath long been like corn in a great drought, yellow at the root; a shower of the Spirit would make all green again, and grow fast. As much as we are divided this would unite us. As bold-faced as wickedness and profanity are, this would stop their mouths. As little good as the gospel does, this would make convincing, converting, and confirming work more frequent, and give ministers of the gospel as much to do with broken hearts, as they have now with hard and impenitent ones. As great lifelessness and untenderness as are among ministers and people, this would purify the sons of Levi, and make the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem pleasant to the Lord as in former years. It would restore our judges as at the first, and our counsellors as at the beginning; and make nobles and gentry cease from building of Babel, and pulling down of the church and of religion; put holiness to the Lord on the bells of their horses, and willingly set their shoulder to the work of the Lord, O! pray, pray for this. And let not your hopelessness and uncharitableness, as to any ranks of people in the Land, whether because of their profanity, apostacy, formality, deadness, enmity to religion and hurtfulness to the church, shuffle them out of your prayers for good. But cry mightily for the outpouring of the Spirit that the whole land may mourn."

Thoughts on the Psalms

by Rev. Alex. McPherson

(continued from page 235)

PSALM FIFTY-THREE

Verse 1. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good."

This Psalm is almost a repetition of Ps. 14, and perhaps Paul's weighty passage in Rom. 3, v. 10-18 supplies the reason. There writing in the most forthright manner concerning the universality of human depravity, the apostle quotes the trenchant denunciation of the natural man with which both Psalms commence. The repetition is a way of emphasising the sad but important truth that all men without exception are wicked at heart in their natural state.

But the fool is mentioned first. In Scripture the fool is not merely the stupid, unwise person, but the man who is obstinately and perversely wicked. The atheist is a fool, whether his atheism be of the speculative or practical sort, he is wicked who deliberately leaves God out of all his calculations. Some say openly, "No

God!" and embrace a materialistic philosophy. Others on occasions say, "Lord, Lord," but do not the things which God commands. They live as if no eye was upon them, and as if there were to be no reckoning for sin that they have done.

See now the sort of people which atheism makes them; "Corrupt are they, etc." Masquerading as agnostics and humanists, atheists infest every department of our national life. They have been active in pushing all those iniquitous bills on matters like homosexuality, abortion, divorce, Sunday entertainments, etc., which have brought deep-dyed stains of guilt on the career of the present parliament. The aim of these people is to destroy the Christian character of the nation; their activity amounts to a determined serving of ungodly lusts and Satan. The verse emphasises the fact that sooner or later atheistical principles work themselves out in iniquitous behaviour.

Verse 2. "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God."

From the height of divine omniscience and holiness God has constantly surveyed men on earth with the invariable result that He saw none who by nature understood the truth about God and themselves so as to set them seeking His mercy in the way He Himself has appointed. The entire history of heathenism shows men in their millions troubled by their sin and their misery, but so far out in their understanding of their case that God's way of salvation found no favour with them; rather the opposite. The same is true of those in Christian lands who have rejected the Scriptures with their full revelation of divine grace. The result of all their thinking about their defects and ills has been the application of medicinal, economic, social and psychiatric treatment, with no success. The seeking of pardon, reconciliation and spiritual renewal through Christ does not occur to them. They rank Biblical Christianity as foolishness.

Verse 3. "Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Instead of seeking God, they depart further from Him, becoming morally filthy in the process. No-one need look beyond Britain in our own time to see the absolute truth of this. Every retrograde step in religion is matched by advances in immorality.

Verse 4. "Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God."

Here it becomes apparent that David has been thinking especially about the heathen in describing the wickedness of man's

nature. Certainly the Israelites were no better naturally, but their religion taught them this, restrained them to a great extent, and presented God to their minds as at once holy and sin-pardoning. The heathen, on the other hand, were so ignorant of spiritual matters that they did not even know that God hates iniquity. In what a lurid light does sin appear as shown in the behaviour of the heathen nations in David's day! Philistia, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Syria, etc., what lives they lived! what atrocities they committed! and what incurable hatred they bore to God's chosen people among whom He dwelt! Repeatedly they attempted to destroy them, yet had no success. What hindered them? They did not seek God's help, did not call upon the God concerning whom they said, "No God!"

We have brought before us here the secret of the ultimate failure of every wicked project formed in atheistical hearts. They treat God as non-existent and therefore do not pray to Him whose power alone would enable them to achieve their ends. But then His power is not exerted contrary to His will, and therefore can never be exerted against His own Israel. By His servant Moses He said, "The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Had the heathen known God they would not have sought to destroy His people. Anyone who knows God cannot pray for evil to be done. It is a characteristic of true prayer that it seeks true good, making its discoveries of what that is from God's holy Word.

Let us be in no doubt as to the evil tendency of all atheism, within and beyond the borders of our land, by whatever name it may be called. It is against God and all that is His — people, Word, worship, law, Church and Sabbath. But it is a hopeless task which this evil-minded body of men are engaged in. "They have not called upon God." They do not because they disbelieve in Him. On the other hand, God's people pray, as we see in the last verse. They pray and He hears them.

Verse 5. "There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them."

In prophecy David sees the outcomes of these attacks upon God's people. Fear will invade men's hearts. They will run when no man pursueth, but when God does assert his might, they shall die and their bones shall bear mute witness to their folly in opposing God. One hundred and eighty-five thousand of one of the cruellest, most wicked nations of antiquity died outside the walls of Jerusalem. (2 Kings 19 : 35).

Verse 6. "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall

rejoice, and Israel shall sing."

Here is a longing for Zion's God and King to bring to an end the long persecution of His people. It will be a great day when the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. Is this one of your prayers? Do you know what inward corruption and a continual tendency to evil-doing is, so that the salvation of God in Christ is your only hope, and your look is constantly to the blood which cleanseth from all sin, and to the Holy Spirit whose power alone can quicken and sanctify?

Have you any experience of the world's enmity to yourself because of Christ and the Gospel? Have you confidence in God's will and ability to plead His own cause? Do you look forward to the rest that remaineth for the people of God, and to the final triumph of Christ over all adversaries?

Dugald Buchanan— the Rannoch Bard

by Rev. John Colquhoun, Glendale, Skye

For many generations after the Reformation sacred poetry did not figure among the poems of the Highlands of Scotland. There were occasionally pieces of indifferent merit but none fit to captivate the attention of any generation to such an extent as to be handed down from one generation to another. From this we may conclude that there were few religious poets or that the Highlanders, almost as a whole, being under the power of a dead and formal religion, had no appetite for anything that savoured of vital religion. We are told that "even the verse-producing Bishop Carswell, who represented the earliest fruits of the Reformation there, has not left among his quaint effusions one sacred song." About the year 1758 there was published in Glasgow the first religious poem of real merit, known as David MacKellar's hymn. Of its author little is known except that he belonged to Glendaruel in Argyllshire. MacKellar's poem was the precursor of many religious poems from many parts of the Highlands.

The best known of the religious poets who followed MacKellar was Dugald Buchanan, who was born at Ardoch, Strathyre, Perthshire, in 1716. In his Diary he tells us that his parents were God-fearing, especially his mother, who did all she could to bring him up in the fear of the Lord. We really have no sympathy with those who maintain that her system of teaching was not the best adapted to the needs of her child, on the grounds that it laid too much stress on what they are pleased to call "the more gloomy

doctrines", and made what would have been otherwise a happy childhood and youth, the saddest apology for such. The truth is that the Holy Spirit began to strive with him early, and he saw the holiness of that God with whom he had to do, and felt his natural corruption rising against that strictness of life, in thought, word, and action, which that holiness required, and which he could not render. His experiences were a long drawn-out period of endeavouring to be justified by the works of the law, by which no flesh can be justified in the sight of God, and when this failed it brought him to the verge of despair, so that for periods he gave up religion altogether. The work was slow in the case of Buchanan, but the Spirit which began the good work brought it forward to the day of Jesus Christ. But we are anticipating.

The subject of our sketch suffered a great loss in having his mother removed by death when he was only six years of age, for in that severe providence he lost the guardian of his most tender years. His father, who was the tenant of the Mill and also farmed Ardoch, and who was perhaps in easier circumstances than his neighbours, designed to give his son the best education that could be procured, and so sent him to the local school of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. The profit which he derived in this school is demonstrated by the fact that at the age of twelve years he was engaged as tutor in a neighbouring family. It is sad to say that this family were notoriously wicked, with the exception of the mistress of the house, and that their young tutor was soon the ring-leader in all their forms of wickedness. For five months he remained in this house, growing more notorious in sin, and leading others in the way of sin, till he returned to his father's house, where he had to be more restrained in his language, especially in his father's presence. Here he had a narrow escape from drowning which, at the time, seemed to have no beneficial effect on him.

After this he went to Stirling, where he remained for two years, ever increasing in sin, and always experiencing much of the Lord's merciful forbearance and sparing mercy. From Stirling he went to Edinburgh, where his companions were the wild and dissolute youth of the city, of his own age, who found in him a leader in their vicious ways. At last his father insisted that he should make choice of a trade, and, on the advice of friends, he became apprenticed to a house carpenter in Kippen. At Kippen he had companions of a different kind from those he had in Stirling and Edinburgh. The church being near, he attended regularly, and Mr Potter, the minister at that time, seemed to be truly preaching the Gospel. After two years he quarrelled with his master, left his service, and came to Dumbarton, where he engaged with another. Here he entered into a life of dissipation for a considerable time

but could not get rid of the fact that there is a God, and he had a painful knowledge of the existence of his own conscience. Though being brought to the verge of despair he, for considerable periods, neglected the means of grace as means that were of no use to him, for he found nothing in them but condemnation. However, he got a measure of relief in May, 1742, in the twenty-sixth year of his age.

When he obtained this relief he makes a few reflections on his exercises during the previous fourteen years in which he adores the Lord's goodness and long-suffering, is humbled for his own rebellion and unworthiness, and, from his own experience, brings forward the many false rests to which awakened sinners betake themselves, emphasizing the utter uselessness of these rests, and the fact that neither good education, good example, reproofs, warnings, nor any thing else but the almighty power of God can draw the heart to God. He says, "I used many means and self-endeavours to effect this but all was in vain, till the quickening Spirit of God came and wrought in me effectually." On the 2nd January, 1743, which he calls "the Sabbath on which the Lord opened my eyes to see the Mediator in all His offices," he called for his former unbelief, to see if it could object anything against this complete Saviour, but at this time unbelief durst not appear.

After this he went on sorrowing and rejoicing until after the Rebellion of 1745, when he was in an unexpected manner plunged into the miry clay. In that year the greater part of his relations were involved in the Rebellion, and, although the subject of our sketch was not among them, yet some of his relations, who were innocent, were put to death on the evidence of false witnesses. This heartily grieved him, and he could not forgive the perpetrators of these dastardly deeds, but harboured a spirit of revenge. Thus he lost the light of God's gracious countenance and was plunged in darkness. It was years afterwards that he again basked in the light of God's gracious countenance. This shows the grave danger of harbouring thoughts of revenge against any of our fellow-creatures, for such thoughts are sinful and will be followed by dire consequences. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalm 66: 18.) This continued with Dugald Buchanan till 1750 when his bonds were loosed under a sermon on 2 Cor. 4: 8, in which he attained to a fuller assurance of being in Christ. Shortly afterwards he turned to teaching, and travelled in Strathyre, the Braes of Balquidder, and Lochearnhead. He proved a successful teacher, and, through the influence of the manager of the confiscated estates, he was settled as a school-master in Drumcastle, near Kinloch Rannoch, where, along with his work as a teacher, he addressed himself to the religious needs of the people, with the result that many were called effectually

out of a state of nature into a state of grace, and the whole of the district, which had been notorious for its lawlessness, became the abode of a law-abiding and peaceful people. It is said of Buchanan that he was "elegant in address, evangelical in doctrine, and full of zeal for the salvation of souls." Such were the abilities and usefulness of Buchanan that the Presbytery of Dunkeld were approached to license him as a preacher and pastor in Rannoch, an office for which he was well qualified, more so than some members of the Presbytery to which the approach was made; but owing to technical difficulties, real or imaginary, the proposal fell through.

For the last eighteen years of his life he left no written account of his life, but carried out his duties faithfully as a teacher and preacher. One notable event of this period of his life was the seeing through the press of the first edition of the Gaelic New Testament, translated by the Rev. James Stewart of Killin in 1767. It was at this time also that he published, for the first time, his own Gaelic spiritual poems. He continued his useful and pious labours till he was struck down by a fever, and entered into the rest that remains for the people of God on 2nd June, 1768, in the fifty-second year of his age. A monument has been erected to his memory, but his spiritual poems are his real and lasting monument.

When we come to assess the value of his poems, the number of which are eight, it would seem that he was well accustomed to English poetry and other literature which he found suggestive in composing his own. The longest of these is 'The Day of Judgment.' In this poem his description of eternity is unsurpassed by any other poet:

"If I should count each glimmering star,
Each leaf and blade that ever grew,
All drops in ocean's store that are,
And sands that ocean's shore bestrew,
And if for each I counted so
A thousand years had passed away,
Eternity would be as though
It had begun but yesterday."

In all his poems his aim was not to tickle the fancy of the thoughtless but to awaken the careless and the indifferent out of their thoughtlessness and spiritual sloth, and he succeeded well. His labours, through his poems, were greatly blessed to many, not only when they first appeared but throughout the world to many generations who came after him. Even at the beginning of the present century his name was a household word wherever there were Protestant Highlanders who understood the language in which his poems were originally written.

As to the popularity of the poems we may here quote the words of one well-qualified to judge:— “As a poet, Buchanan ranks in the highest class. Endowed with great power of imagination, and full of moral and religious enthusiasm, his poetry is at once fervid, lofty, and animated; and invariably calculated to promote the cause of religion and virtue. Those distinguishing qualities have rendered him the most popular poet in the language; and we may safely assert that his popularity will endure as long as the language in which he has written is understood.” It is of these poems that Dr Duff, the celebrated missionary to India, when writing late in life, says, “As a youth I remember hearing large portions of his two most celebrated poems, ‘The Skull’ and ‘The Day of Judgment’, often read and repeated by good people in the parish of Moulin. Some of the sentiments and even expressions have even now stuck to my memory.” These poems went through several editions and were well-known not only in the Gaelic-speaking districts of Scotland but in foreign lands, in Australia, Nova Scotia, and among Highland colonies in Canada. In Sutherlandshire as well as in his native Perthshire they were read and recited, and thus the flame of fervent piety was kindled and kept burning. Professor Magnus MacLean says, “With the exception of the Bible and Shorter Catechism, no other book has exercised such a commanding influence over the religious imagination of the Highlanders or been printed so frequently as his **Spiritual Songs**. What the sublime conceptions of Milton and John Bunyan were to the devout thought of England those of the sacred bard of Rannoch have been to that of Gaelic Scotland. They have woven themselves into the warp and woof of Highland religion and coloured all its contents.” **Literature of the Highlands**, p. 114. With regard to the last sentence we might be inclined to substitute that evangelical religion had entered into the warp and woof of Dugald Buchanan’s soul, and thereby coloured all the contents of Highland religion. An excellent translation of Dugald Buchanan’s Poems into English, by Lachlan MacBean, appeared in 1919. It is not an easy matter to translate from one language to another, especially when poetry is involved, but the translator, in this case, has done his work well.

Posadh an Anama ri Criosd

Leis an Urr. Eidard Pearce (A.D. 1672)

(Air a leantuinn bho t.d. 277)

Le so tha sinn, ann an suspainn, ag ràdh, gu’m bheil daoine air a’ mealladh ann an Criosd, gu’m bheil focal Dhé a toirt fianuis bhreige mu thimchioll, nach eil E’n a Shlànuighear cho mòr.

agus nach eil a shlàinte cho mòr, 's a tha iad air an cumail a mach a bhi. Oh ciod e'n tàmailt a tha'n so a tha air a thilgeadh air Criosd! Mar is aithne dhuibh tha e air a ràdh mu Esau gu'n d'rinn e dìmeas air a chòir-bhreith. Agus cia mar? le bhi roghnachadh tràth de pheasair na greim bidh a roghainn air, Gen. xxi. 34. Ach oh cia mòr is motha tha sinne a deanamh dìmeas air Criosd agus a ghràdh, le bhi deanamh roghainn de ana-miann iosal, salach, air thoiseach orra le cheile! 'S cinnteach nach gabh dìmeas is motha na so air Criosd a bhi air fhaotainn. Agus cia mòr, uime sin, a dh'fheumas peacadh diùltaidh air Criosd a bhi, agus cia mór a bu chòr dha so toirt oirne criothnachadh.

4. Thugaibh fa'n ear, gur e th'ann a bhi deanamh dìmeas Air agus a bhi diùltadh Chrìosd ach peacadh, a tha ann an dòigh ro-fhoillaiseach a dorchachadh agus a cur an aghaidh glòir Dhé, agus a tilgeadh an eas-urram is àirde Air na peacadh air bith eile; agus uime sin 'n a pheacadh mòr. Mar is motha tha peacadh air bith a dorchachadh agus a seasamh a mach an aghaidh glòir Dhé, is ann is motha tha cionta a pheacaidh sin. Oir, an toiseach, mar is motha tha peacadh air bith a seasamh a mach an aghaidh glòir Dhé, agus a tilgeadh eas-urram Air, is ann is motha tha e calg-dhireach an aghaidh a mhaith is àirde; agus mar is motha tha peacadh air bith an aghaidh a mhaith is àirde feumaidh gu'r ann is motha tha'n cionta. Agus, anns an dara h-àite, mar is motha tha peacadh air bith an aghaidh glòir Dhé agus a tilgeadh eas-urran Air, is ann is motha a tha e bacadh agus a seasamh a mach an aghaidh crìoch is àirde an duine: agus mar is motha tha peacadh air bith a bacadh agus a seasamh a mach an aghaidh crìoch is àirde an duine is ann is motha tha cionta a pheacaidh sin.

Nis 's e bhi deanamh dìmeas Air agus a diùltadh Chrìosd nì a tha 's an t-seadh is àirde a dol an aghaidh glòir Dhé, agus a tilgeadh eas-urran Air; tha bhi gabhail Ris agus a toirt uidheachd do Criosd a cur urram air an Athair. Gu dearbh tha gach uile ghnìomh creidimh a cur urram air Dia (Rom. iv. 20), agus gu h-àraidh an ghnìomh mòr agus bunaiteach so a chreidimh, ann a bhi gabhail ri Criosd. Mar so, air an laimh eile, tha bhi deanamh tàir agus a diùltadh Chrìosd na nì a tha tilgeadh eas-urram air Dia, agus a tilgeadh a ghlòir anns an duslaich; agus bh'uaithes so tha e gu'm bheil am peacadh so cho mòr dha bhrosnachadh, mar a tha e anns na Sgriobtuirean, air mhodh sonraichte. Ann an so tha e gabhail dà nì a stigh.

(1) 'S e 'm peacadh so a bhi diùltadh Chrìosd an nì a tha deanamh tarcuis agus a meas suarach uile òirdheircean glòrmhor agus iomlanachdan Dhé uile gu leir; agus mar sin nach urrain ach a bhi tilgeadh eas-urran Air, agus a'nì a tha calg-dhireach an aghaidh na glòir a tha ann an Criosd. A

mhuinntir mo ghràidh, Ann-san tha uile òirdheirceasan agus iomlanachdan glòrmhor Dhé gu sònraichte air am foillseachadh agus air an sgaoladh a mach: Ann-san tha uile chomhairlean glòrmhor a ghràis agus a ghràidh a coinneachadh, agus ann a bhi dha dhiùltadh tha sinn a deanamh dimeas agus a tilgeadh tarcuis air na h-uile. Ann-san tha a ghràdh gu soilleir a dealradh a mach, agus tha a lànachd a gabhail tàmh, I. Eoin iv. 9, 10. Ann-san tha ceartas, fireantachd, agus naomhachd, gu soilleir air am foillseachadh agus air an sgaoileadh a mach (Rom. iii. 25, 26). Ann-san tha a ghliocas, seadh a ghliocas do-rannsaichte, ga nochdadh agus ga fhoillseachadh fein. Ann am focal, tha Dia slàn air fhoillseachadh agus air a sgaoileadh a mach, agus mar an ceudna air a thairgse do ghlacabh ar creidimh agus ar gràidh. Anns na h-uile tairgse air Criosd a tha air a dheanamh dhùinn anns an t-soisgeul, tha Dia, ann an suspainn, ag ràdh rùinn, Ciod air bith a thà mi, na is urrain dhomh a dheanamh mar Dhia, mar sin bithidh mi, agus nì mi air bhur son, air son a bhi dha'r deanamh sona gu bràth. A reir sin, feumaidh a bhi diùltadh Chriosd a bhi tilgeadh tarcuis air na h-uile. Tha e cur an suarachas agus a dòrtadh tarcuis air gràs Dhé, gliocas Dhé, cumhachd Dhé, ceartas Dhé, naomhachd Dhé, lànachd, agus uile-fhoghainteachd Dhé, agus uile choimhairlean glòrmhor bho shean a ghràidh a thaobh anamaibh. 'S e th'ann a bhi diùltadh Chriosd ach a bhi, ann an suspainn, ag ràdh, nach gràs idir gràs Dhé, co dhiubh, nach airidh e air gabhail Ris leinn, nach eil suim r'a ghabhail do cheartas agus da naomhachd, agus nach eil sinn a cur luach orra; gu'r e th'ann an gliocas ach aimeadachd, agus 'n a chumhachd anmhuinneachd; gu'r e beagan a tha'n a lànachd agus nach eil E ann an dòigh air bith comasach air ar sàsachadh, agus ar deanamh toilichte; gu'm bheil slochd eudionach cho maith ris an tobar de uisgeachan beo sin: agus mar sin tha sinn gu soilleir ag àicheadh a dhìlseachd, agus a cur na breige Air (I Eoin v. 10). Tha sinn, ann an suspainn, ag ràdh gu'm bheil Dia na firinn 'n a bhreugaire, nach eil fhianuis agus a reachd ri bhì air an creidsinn, gu'r e th'ann am focal a gheallaidh ach fìor mhealladh, agus nach eil feum eile ann ach gu bhi mealladh anamaibh. Oh ciod e'n tarcuis, ciod e'n t-eas urram a dh'fheumas so a thilgeadh air an Dia bheannaichte, agus ciod e'n aingidheachd uamhasach a dh'fheumas a bhì'n so? " 'S e th'ann a bhi deanamh breugaire do Dhia," tha duine fòghlumaichte ag ràdh, "ach aingidheachd uamhasach agus ghràineil: agus le so tha sinn a toirt bh'uaihte a nì sin a bhuineas da-rìreadh Dhà agus a tha gràdhach 'n a shealladh." Oh criothnaich, anam, criothnaich aig cho dubh agus ifrinneil agus a tha'm peacadh so!

(R'a leantuinn)

Letter From Canada

(Dr Macdonald writes about the beginning of the F.P. Church in Canada)

Vancouver, 14/11/69.

Dear Friends,

How has it come about that there is a Free Presbyterian Church in Canada? Some might be inclined to find fault, as if this were an unwarrantable intrusion into another country where there is already a Presbyterian Church; an unseemly competition with another branch of the Visible Church. For the answer we must turn back to the latter part of the last century and the beginning of this one.

The 19th Century saw the growth of the modernising and rationalising Movement in the Protestant Churches, the consequences of which are now clear to all who have eyes to see. Essentially this Movement was a denigrating of the authority of the Word of God in the Church, and in Scotland led to the passing of the notorious Declaratory Act by the Free Church. This again led to the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church by those who, grieved by the general declension, were resolved in this way to maintain the principles and practice of the Reformed Church of Scotland. In Canada also at that time there were those, notably in Southern Ontario, who, grieved because of the things that were going on in the Presbyterian Church in that country, and noting the development of events in Scotland, approached the Free Presbyterian Church with a view to joining it. Thus the first Free Presbyterian congregation was formed in Ontario. It will be seen that it was begun on the initiative of Canadians. The Church at home responded by sending Ministers as Deputies to them until, later on, they had their own Free Presbyterian and Canadian Minister inducted over them.

As the great North West was opened up for settlement and people from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland settled there, our Deputies to Canada began to extend their visits to the West. A Congregation was formed in Winnipeg, and for a time it looked as if this could also be done in Saskatoon and Calgary. Humanly speaking, the Congregation in Vancouver was formed through the initiative and faithful ministrations of the late elder, Hugh Mackay.

Today there are only Vancouver and Winnipeg remaining as formed Congregations. Furthermore, the "religious" atmosphere is so changed, with Evangelical Christianity itself fast becoming a minority religion, that it would be very easy to be very pessimistic about the prospects for the future of the Free Presbyterian Church in Canada. Defeatists, however, we dare not be. We know that

the Lord will build up Sion again, that His Word will again be authoritative in His Church, and that His dominion will indeed be "from sea to sea".

In glory then and majesty
to men appear shall He. (Ps. 102, 16. Met. Ver.)

Yours sincerely,
R. MACDONALD.

Book Reviews

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit by C. H. Spurgeon. Vols. 32-37. Banner of Truth Trust. Price 25/- per volume. (Also available in leather binding at 42/- per volume.)

The Banner of Truth Trust, which republished the first six volumes of Spurgeon's Sermons in 1963/4 under the title of "New Park Street Pulpit", have now embarked on a more ambitious project — the republishing of the volumes of the "Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit". They begin with the last six volumes of Spurgeon's lifetime as they consider that these contain some of his finest work.

We would say of Spurgeon what Spurgeon himself says of Luther — "He needs no trumpeter." His sermons have been issued and re-issued so often that the total number of copies can be estimated not in tens or hundreds of thousands, but in millions. Their popularity, in this instance, is an indication of their quality and usefulness. They have an abiding usefulness which a century of use has by no means exhausted.

The volume sent to us for review (Vol. 32) is a sizeable book of over 700 pages and contains excellent sermons on a great variety of topics. Titles such as — The Dying Thief in a New Light (Luke 23 : 40-42) — The problem of the Age (Mark 8 : 4) — The Three Hours' Darkness (Matt. 27 : 45) — Zealous, but Wrong (Rom. 10 : 1-3) — The Great Sin of Doing Nothing (Num. 32 : 23) — Our Sympathizing High Priest (Heb. 5 : 7-10) — may give an indication of what one may expect to find in this volume. The sermons are awakening, searching, edifying and eminently practical. There is much here for both the saint and the sinner. We gladly recommend this volume and also the other five volumes, which we understand to be of a similar quality.

Volumes 32 and 33 were issued in November 1969; Volumes 34 and 35 are to be issued in February 1970; and Volumes 36 and 37 in April 1970 (D.V.).

**Galatians by Dr William Hendriksen. Banner of Truth Trust.
Price 21/-.**

We are deeply indebted to Dr William Hendriksen for this very well written Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. The name of William Hendriksen should now be sufficient to secure for any of his works a favourable reception in evangelical circles.

Here is a book especially for those who, while fully recognising the need for scholarly and erudite productions of this kind, are so often disturbed and disappointed with the irrelevant and irreverent speculations of the majority of contemporary pseudo-commentators. In this Commentary, real scholarship and untainted orthodoxy equip the writer for the task of expounding the contents of this great Epistle, in a reverent, lively, and devotional manner. The way in which the author faces, and explains, the difficulties of language, criticism and exposition, manifests his skill and ability in these fields.

The actual verse by verse commentary is preceded by a most thorough, informative and interesting Introduction, written in a refreshing and up-to-date manner. As well as dealing with such questions as the importance — theme — date — and authorship, it includes a condensed but lucid statement of the main theme of the Epistle. This in turn is followed by an attractive and well-divided summary of the content of the Letter.

The writer's own translation of the Greek text indicates an extensive knowledge of that language, and enables him to bring out the original nuances and emphases otherwise veiled to the ordinary reader. His erudition is evident, but never obtrusive.

We think that there are three features which call for special mention.

- (1) Dr Hendriksen's peculiar ability to anticipate, propound and answer the kind of questions likely to occur to the thoughtful reader. This he accomplishes, without pandering to idle curiosity and conjecture.
- (2) The gift of applying the Apostolic teaching and its lessons to present day circumstances in the church and in the world. This he does in a most helpful, and elucidating way.
- (3) The author's uninhibited use of simple and happy illustrations, suggestions, and contrasts.

These are merits which at once serve to facilitate the reading of the Commentary, and greatly enhance its value.

The prayerful and proper use of the Commentary should, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, enable ministers and interested laymen to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of Scripture, and share with the author the precious treasures of the Lively Oracles.

FRASER MACDONALD.

Commenting and Commentaries by C. H. Spurgeon. Banner of Truth Trust. Price 15/-.

This useful reference book, like other Banner of Truth publications, is well produced. The first 32 pages contain two lectures by Spurgeon, one on Commentaries and the other on Commenting. The main body of the book, consisting of 165 pages, gives a catalogue of Biblical Commentaries and Expositions, while the remainder of the book is taken up with a complete textual index to Spurgeon's sermons.

The catalogue is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the Commentaries available in Spurgeon's day, but a sufficiently comprehensive one to meet the needs of the average minister of the Gospel. The selection of books on which Spurgeon gives his judgment amounts in all to a total of 1,437 volumes. The books most heartily commended are printed in large dark type, second quality works in medium size light type and third quality in small light type, so rendering it possible to read off at a glance which commentaries are the best. It is heartening to notice that Scottish commentators, in general, have fared very well at Spurgeon's hands.

We warmly recommend this reference book to ministers, divinity students and all Bible students as a worthwhile purchase.

Notes and Comments

Permanent Abolition of Death Penalty

The Government of the day must bear full responsibility for all legislation enacted during its term of office. What that responsibility implies in connection with the abolition of the death penalty is eloquently summed up in the following statement by Mr Quintin Hogg, M.P. — "I believe there are people dead today who might have been alive if the law had been different." The Government has the power, if it has the will, to reject any legislation of which it does not approve. It clearly did not have the will to restore the death penalty, as is reflected in the fact that 282 Labour M.P.s voted in favour of abolition and only 2 against. This vote in defiance of the will of the people — Mr Duncan Sandys, M.P., presented a petition containing over one million signatures appealing for restoration of the death penalty — is a distinct challenge to democracy. The Government, it would appear, is determined that from now on government is to be for the people but not by the people. But far more serious

is the challenge to the Divine law. The law of man is now exalted in the place of the law of God and in this way God's authority in the nation is called into question. We cannot share the complacency of the Archbishop of Canterbury that the decision to abolish capital punishment permanently "will redound in very many ways to the advantage and honour of the nation."

It is regrettable, at a time when the moral standards of the nation are under attack from every quarter, that the Government should be taking a leading part in challenging, undermining and abolishing these standards. We cannot but ask the question — Whither is the Government leading the nation? — and we cannot escape the conclusion that it is to moral and national ruin, unless God, in His mercy, prevent it.

British Troops in Northern Ireland

The Protestant Telegraph, a newspaper issued in Belfast in support of Rev. Ian Paisley, makes serious allegations in its issue of 22nd November, 1969, with regard to the role of British troops in Northern Ireland. It is alleged that the troops have gone far beyond their legitimate peace-keeping role and have taken part in intimidating action against certain sections of the Protestant population. In the light of these allegations it is plainly the duty of the British Government to investigate them and, if they are substantiated, to take action against the responsible parties. It would serve a useful purpose, too, if the role of the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Northern Ireland in the recent disturbances in that country received more close scrutiny. This might very quickly reveal the true cause of dispeace in Ulster.

Sex Education for Schools

Modern education presents many problems for adolescents. This is due particularly to its lack of religious and moral content. The latest hazard is the presentation on radio and television of programmes on sex education for use in schools. A subject which was once handled only with the utmost delicacy is now to be thrust upon the minds of young impressionable children with the greatest indelicacy, and totally unrelated to religious or moral teaching, if the Press accounts of the content of these programmes is accurate. In our view it is just another aspect of the attack made in recent times on Christian moral teaching, and is an attempt to abolish the reserve and modesty which is becoming in these matters and which Christianity does its utmost to inculcate.

Corrections to January Issue

We apologise to our readers for the following errors in the last issue of the Magazine. (1) The word 'not' should not have appeared in the title of the second article (page 260). (2) The word 'useful' was omitted after the word 'however' on page 279, line 2. (3) The first line of the Scourie Church Appeal (page 286) should have read — The Scourie Church is the original wood and iron structure — in place of the existing line. —Editor.

Scourie Church Appeal

Donations to Scourie Church Appeal should be sent to Mr Chris. Munro, Scourie, by Lairg, Sutherland.

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