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An Open Door for the Gospel

A further visit to Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe has made it very clear that there is at present an open door for the Gospel in these and other countries in Africa. In Scotland and other Western European countries it may be difficult in our day to gather a few people together to hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The large scale rejection of the gospel of God's grace is a marked feature of life in the 'advanced' countries of the world, and in particular in our own land. Men do not want to hear of the glory of the divine Redeemer and of the salvation that is to be found in Him for the chief of sinners. Our age has in a large measure lost any sense of sin and so have no need of the remedy for sin. Consequently Christ is to this generation largely as "a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness". By its rejection of Jesus Christ it is an age ripening for the judgments of God.

In Africa, on the other hand, it is not difficult to gather many people together to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether or not they have had prior intimation of a service, a ringing on the church bell will bring many near at hand to the hearing of the Word. Neither does it matter in that warm climate whether or not there is a church building made of mud bricks and thatch or other material. The shade of a large tree to give shelter from the heat of the sun is sufficient. Nor do they say when the service is over that they have had enough. On more than one occasion when visiting stations to have a service there, we were constrained by the people to hold another service almost immediately afterwards. It is not so in Scotland.

How evident it is then that the harvest is plenteous but the labourers are few. Neither in Kenya or Malawi, nor in Zimbabwe can our Church meet the demands that are made on it for the preaching of the Word of God. As the harvest is plenteous, so is it true that the labourers are few. But who is to answer the call? Many centuries ago a message sounded

out from Europe, 'Come over into Macedonia, and help us.' Paul in a vision saw a man of Macedonia pleading in this way, and he tells, "immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." What then of the call from Africa? — from Zimbabwe — from Kenya — from Malawi, yes, and from Mozambique and other lands too, 'Come over into Africa and help us.' Is the call to fall on deaf ears in Scotland and elsewhere? If so, it is very different from the Apostle Paul's day, and very different from the prophet Isaiah's day when the sound went out "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then the lips touched with the live coal from the altar answered: "Here am I; send me." What need there is that men would be raised up by the Lord, divinely called, and endued with all the necessary gifts and graces of the Spirit to go forth into the great harvest field. The field is the world. Unlimited opportunities stretch before those whom the Lord sends. And as it was when the Saviour was in the world, so it is today. He sends His servants into those places where He Himself is to come.

We trust that the Lord will, in His gracious providence, send forth into His vineyard many faithful ambassadors to proclaim His truth. But He says to His church: "I will yet be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He may send forth labourers into His harvest."

Christ and Him Crucified

Notes of a Farewell Sermon by the late Rev. Lachlan M'Pherson, East Williams, Ontario, Canada.

Preached August 5, 1883

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." — 1 Cor., 2: 1-2.

It was a difficult task the Apostle had to perform when he was sent among the wise men of Greece and Corinth, men whose fame had spread over the whole world, and whose writings have come down to the present day, with such a kind of message he had to bring — a message that would awaken their surprise and contempt, a message too, that would be beyond their comprehension. Now, if he were a weak-minded man and tried to gain their esteem — for it was counted an honour in their estimation to any man who gained their favour and approbation — he would likely try to mould his speech and doctrine too, to their taste. But oh! the Apostle

knew the unspeakable and matchless excellency of the message he had to proclaim. He knew too, the value of immortal souls and the treacherous part he would be acting by trying to make his speech look like theirs. He knew also the tremendous consequences both to his own soul and to the souls of those who heard him, and so strong was he in the love of Jesus Christ that neither sufferings on the one hand nor honour to be expected on the other hand could make him deviate from the only line of conduct he had marked out by which he could be faithful to his trust. He knew well the nature of his mission, and he says — “I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” This was no hasty resolution on the part of the Apostle, no rash, unwise purpose. He knew well what he was saying, for he had made up his mind that he would not come unto them with excellency of speech declaring the testimony of God. But he would speak unto them in the customary way without any attempt at flowery eloquence or graceful oratory, which often draws the mind away from the truth to the person who is speaking. So he was determined not to come with excellency of speech. But he would declare his message in the simplest and most easily understood way that he could. This is the right way to deliver the Gospel message, and people do wrong in laying a stumbling block in the way of their ministers by expecting any style of eloquence that would draw attention away from the object in view, for it will do harm to them and bring guilt upon the minister’s soul. To care for nothing, to follow nothing, to aim at nothing, to preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified, to accept on my own part the persons of none, however great, nor to ask for myself any place of honour among you, has ever been my purpose since I came among you. I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let us now proceed to look into the subject a little and examine or inquire into the thing that is here brought before us as the only thing the Apostle purposes to know.

In the first place, what is that thing? In the second place, what is implied in our knowing that? And in the third place, we may, as time permits, bring forward reasons why it is to be regarded of such importance as to become the study of one’s whole lifetime.

“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” You see it was one object or thing he had to mind, and that was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. First of all, let us notice the person of Christ Jesus; next, the relation in which He stands to us and the offices He performs; and thirdly, His death. You see that is specified here — “Him crucified.”

Let us then look at Christ's person. Who is he? What saith the Scriptures? How is he described in the Word of God? He has two names there — the Son of God and the Son of Man. Son of God! That declaration is specially glorious. As to His being God, I suppose you all remember it was because of that He was crucified. They passed sentence of death upon Him because He claimed to be the Son of God — that is to say, making Himself equal with God. You will find that name meeting you very often in the Word of God. When the man who was cast out met Him Christ said — “Dost thou believe in the Son of God?” “Who is he, Lord?” said the man. Jesus answered — “Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he worshipped him.” Ah, friends, keep the truth out of your creed and heart and you will keep the Christ of God out of your hearts altogether! You will have no Saviour. No matter what Christ you make to yourselves, you cannot make a Christ that will save you. So Paul determined not to come down from the determination he had formed when he went there. Many would laugh at him. But, friends, it were well that none who profess Christ would come down from that determination. Yet there are thousands who bear the Christian name who will not admit him into their hearts except in an inferior subordinate sense — a sense that raises Him no higher than any saint. That is one way of putting Christ out of the scheme of salvation. And, oh! friends, if you take Him in this sense, such a Christ never could satisfy Divine Justice — unless He were God as well as man, and His death no matter how glorious, if it were death of a mere creature, could have no virtue in it to save souls. Yes, friends, we must take care not to welcome wrong ideas about Christ. He is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. This is the name Jesus Christ delights to take. He often speaks of Himself by that name, for His delights were with the sons of men, and so much was this so, that He did not think it too much to die for them. He is God-man and died as God-man. “Thou hast prepared a body for me.” He *was* before that body was made at all. He was the Son of God, and He came down and united Himself with the body which came not by ordinary generation, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost had to do with the formation of the body of Christ, and He holds an important place in connection with the redemption of men. So, Christ is God-man, or Immanuel — God with us. Thus it was God, it may be said, that died. Not the Godhead but a Divine Person in human nature. We shall not wait now to speak of the glory, excellency, and power of that Person. No person who knows Him will have any hesitation in saying “I determine not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

It is written — “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The disciples had a view of it. It was revealed unto them by the Father. Every renewed soul has such a view of it as makes all other things insignificant and unworthy to be compared with it. Is that the view you have of Christ? My hearers, that is the view you must have of Him if you are to be saved by Him. For, naturally to us, “he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.” The men of the world plainly manifest that by the way they treat Him. They regard Him as if He were of no consequence at all, and their minds run after the merest trifles as if these were their all in all.

But Jesus Christ stands in certain relations to His people as Mediator — a most essential capacity if men are to be saved. There is but one Mediator. Some would have more than one, but the Scriptures says there is but one — “the Man Christ Jesus”. He sustains certain offices. They are very clearly set forth in our Shorter Catechism, but the Catechism gets its authority from the Bible. He performs three offices — Prophet, Priest and King, and you cannot separate them from Christ. If you do you have no Christ at all. They are essential to a Christ for you and for me.

The office of a prophet is essential, “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?” Who could ever know that which ear hath not heard? Who could ever reveal that mystery? When the world was made every thing was there visible to the eye, but who could ever search it out to the full? So if God had not made known the plan of salvation man would never have known anything about it. God was manifest in the flesh. There would be no way of finding it out, no matter how long or how seriously men would engage in the pursuit of it. He that dwells in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. Man or angels could never find out the plan of salvation. It was therefore necessary that one should be appointed for the purpose of revealing it, and God appointed Christ Jesus, and He came down and revealed the purposes of love which were in the Divine mind. And all the things that He revealed were secrets which the world never knew except by hints or intimations that were given before He appeared in the flesh. He was the Prophet who appeared in the Garden of Eden. It was He that gave revelations to Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and all the Prophets. He was the Prince of the Prophets. He endowed them with the Holy Spirit and sent them forth, and what was said was not said by themselves, but they spoke as they were moved, by the Holy Ghost. He handed it over to those lower Prophets, and they declared His will. We must shut our ears to any one that would take that office from Him.

Moses foreseeing His day said unto ancient Israel that God would raise up a Prophet like unto Him. That prophet is Jesus Christ. The passage is quoted in the New Testament and applied to Him.

He is also a Priest to atone for the sins of His people — to answer to God for us, to offer a sacrifice and obtain favour for us, and you know how He executed that office by making a sacrifice of Himself. So that He is our sacrifice, and all other sacrifices were put out of the way. He is this day looking down from heaven, the Great High Priest who is entered into the presence of God for us. Now, we need a Priest or we can never be saved, and there is but one that will do — that is Jesus Christ, who is a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.

He also performs the office of a King. We need a King to deliver us from our enemies; we need a King, too, strong enough to make us willing to become his subjects. We are never willing until Christ puts forth His power to make us willing and to subdue us. We need a King to govern us, to make laws for us, and to keep us in order, as well as a King to rule over our souls. The Scripture saith — “The Lord hath anointed Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” He is King of the nations of the earth, although that is disputed by some. But the time is coming when it will go hard with those who dispute this truth. He is King, and reigns in glory. He has all the affairs of this world in His own hands, whether we acknowledge it or not. He reigns over us, and will not ask whether we are willing or not to accept of His reign. He has the distribution of the kingdoms of this world, and He raises up one and puts another down. He is also King of His Church. Alas, that the Church has no time to think of this! He is King of the Church, and our minds should ever be alive to His rights, as He is ever alive to His own rights. Nothing short of the determination of the Apostle will be of any avail — “I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The Apostle insisted upon Christ being all and in all. He is the Head, Prophet, King and Priest of His people. It is important that we should be clear on this matter.

You and I must have a whole Christ if we are to be saved at all. Some, yea, not a few, say they believe in the Bible, in conversion, in Christ, and many such things, but they will not go the next step with you — “Christ and Him crucified.” He will be of no use to you unless He be to you “Christ and Him crucified.” This and this only is the conclusion of the Apostle. Christ crucified is the only Christ that will do you or me any good. His blood alone can atone for sins. Oh, it is a terrible blow that is aimed at Christ to say His death happened by chance and from which

a certain kind of benefit comes although not necessary to salvation. Ah, shut your ears to such doctrine. Though we or an angel from Heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you let him be accursed. Oh, friends, it is no light offence. Christ's death involves the salvation of the elect and God's glory. You and I would be lost only for that death. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Christ is my Saviour by dying for me, by standing in my stead and becoming my surety. That is the only way by which we can hope to be saved, and such must be the language of every soul that knows his own state as a lost sinner and the preciousness of a Saviour suitable for him. "Christ and him crucified." Such is an epitome of the Gospel, for it is all about Him and Him only. But, dear friends, we must pass from this point, although it is so important. It would not be too much to spend months on it, for it is that which gladdens the hearts of the elect, and gladdens them, too, throughout eternity.

(2) What is implied in knowing it? I notice first we must have an intelligent view of the letter of the law of God. We must make ourselves acquainted with what the great Apostle delivered unto us. Oh, what a shame that this Book should not be read in every house; although the knowledge of the letter of the law will not change our hearts. We must have that knowledge, for faith comes by hearing. Oh, how necessary that people should attend to it, and, oh, how many inducements for that! Oh, the greatness and excellency of that Word! being the excellency of Divine wisdom sent down from heaven to us. Oh let me impress upon you, my hearers, the importance of being acquainted with the Word of God, for if you neglect that there can be no hope for you at your death. How often in my experience did I meet with persons of the greatest ignorance that could not but end in eternal ruin. If God does not put His Word into your hearts the Devil will put something else there. For there can be no empty space there, and your hearts will be full of darkness, and that means simply that you will be lost for ever. Let me repeat. The certainty of your salvation depends upon your knowledge of the Word of God. Any one who has a Bible — a book more precious than silver or gold — is shamefully to blame if he be without a knowledge of that book, the highest of all learning. Again, there must not only be that literal knowledge of the Word of God, but we must go far higher than that. You and I must, if we be saved, say Amen to all that is in the Word. Our hearts must go after it. We must give it that approval that will for ever after make it our all in all — our lamp from which we expect light. We may know the letter of the Scripture and be called quite learned in it, and yet our hearts not in

sympathy with Christ, the object presented in the Gospel. There must then be an approval in a far higher sense. Everything in our nature and mind would quarrel with the Gospel, unless the Spirit of God bring our hearts to an approval of the Gospel. There must then be a knowledge and approval of heart and mind before we can truly say "I determine not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified." You must believe that He is such a one as the Gospel says of Him before it can be said of you — You know Him and have faith in Him. What is the use of what you know unless you embrace Him and place your hope in Him for salvation and repudiate everything else and say — None but Christ, none but Christ. Ah, that would be the way of knowing Him! Do you know Him in that way? Your conscience may approve of Him, and you may be lost after all. Flee then to the hope set before you in the Gospel. That hope is Christ and Him crucified.

I don't know but that I should stop, but I said at the beginning there were reasons why this matter should be regarded of such importance as to become the study of our whole life. Well, I will mention these reasons — (1) In the first place then, it is the one thing needful. This is one reason why you should study it all your lifetime. You cannot be saved without it. There is no other way to escape from the wrath of God. O sinner, if you have not Christ, you must perish. He is the only way by which you can be saved. That is a reason why other things should hold but a very low place. Christ meant Himself when he said to Martha that Mary had chosen the one thing needful. (2) Again, it is the only thing that will ever awaken a sinner and comfort him. You can try everything else in the world and find no safety in it. You can never be awakened but by the power of Christ. It is not only the wisdom of God but the power of God, by which the sinner is put in possession of the new birth, and that is a good reason why the truth of Christ should be regarded of such importance as to become the study of our whole life. (3) Another reason: Did you ever see a poor soul that had come to a full sense of his own condition, but was in deepest distress and was like one ready to die with fear and distress about his soul? He sees God, but He is a consuming fire and himself as stubble before the fire. God is holy and himself impure, a transgressor and justly condemned. Did you ever see a sinner in that condition?

Were you ever in that condition? Let me put it home to you. Would you quiet him down? What balm would you put to his wounds? In what way would you cheer him? Ah! you must go to the gospel of Christ Jesus. In other words, to Christ and Him crucified. There is no other comfort in such a state as that. That is the only thing for that poor creature. It

is only when he gets a look at that, that the first dawn of light enters his soul. Is that not a good reason why the apostle and every one should say, "I determine to know nothing but Christ"? (4) Oh! there is one thing without which we shall never see the Lord, and that is holiness. No man can make himself holy. Every one will find this out sooner or later. It is well it should be found out in time to have it rectified. How did Luther find it out? Oh, what despair seized upon his soul. He had recourse to many ways for finding it out. This is what made him enter a convent, and he is only one of tens of thousands who try to find it out in this way. But there is only one way of finding how to be made holy, and that is by faith in Christ and Him crucified, and by making Him the great study and aim of life. Would it not be a blessed thing to be free from that law that will curse you and send you to hell? Unless you flee to the Saviour, that is your doom, Satan has a hold on many, and is determined to let none go so long as he can detain them. How are we going to become conquerors? Only by faith in the gospel.

But I must stop, my own strength is expended, and I must not dwell on the text any longer.

Now, friends, this is the last time I am likely to meet you in this way, and, as we have to part today, there should be some remarks suitable to the occasion. I thought of no better way than to preach the gospel to you, the way I attempted to begin with you. I have come here today to bid you farewell. Oh! it is a long time since we met, and since I received your welcome as your pastor. Where is my congregation? There is one here in this corner, and one there, and another there. There are only a few of my first congregation that remain. It is the children of my congregation that are now before me. Some of them were not born when I came here, and others were quite young at that time. But, oh, we come to the point at which we must part, and I would, without any formal method, lay before you a few thoughts.

First the gospel I preached before you is that upon which I depend for my own safety. I wish upon that to lay down to my own head on my death bed. This is the mind in which I leave you, and I wish you to know it. Another thing I must mention, and I hope no one will think anything improper in it. You know my position in the Church of God. For a great many years my duty pressed me into a position that was in opposition to many others; that happened more than once. Well, it would be not at all like a faithful witness for Christ, if I left without saying a word about it. I am not going to discuss the matter, but simply say "I am just where I was, and I leave you in that mind." I press upon you all not to make

light of the matter. You know the position you took up with me on the last occasion. We went forth as a body in that attitude. And my own wish is that no mind should change, but that you retain the same views you now hold. And in whatever circumstances the Lord may place you, let your minds be ever the same. Let you all hold the same views twenty years from this as you now hold. And, whatever circumstances may compel you to do, it is not necessary that you should then approve of what you now disapprove. This is the last time I will speak to you, and I wish you to be faithful to the Master. And whatever you may feel yourselves compelled to do, let not that affect your principles. Always carry about with you a clear conscience, in a way in which it would be safe to meet Christ. I was going to state my position, not to discuss it. It is advisable to leave nobody in doubt about my position. I would lift up a word of warning to my congregation, but there is more than my own congregation here — I have no congregation, the tie is dissolved — yet, you will allow me to use the term while I am with you. I wish to warn my congregation not to meddle with those given to change.

There is a great revolution going on in the church and I warn you not to meddle with it, but just keep away from it. And let me warn you against those things that are established in the house of God as if they were ordinances. By this I mean all and sundry things that come under the head of soirees and merry-making parties, that turn religion into jest, and bring sacred things down to the level of the world, and in that way destroy all reverence for divine things. I warn you against ever bringing such things into the house of God. I would lock my pulpit against any man who would pervert or defile the house of God with things that have no authority in the word of God. How has my heart bled to think of the minds of young people being turned away from reverence for the house of God, by laughing at the antics even of ministers at these meetings! Oh, what will God think of it? And what will souls think of it when they come to die? It is the duty of ministers to awaken people and make them flee from the wrath to come; not to make them think there is no danger, which helps them on in the way to destruction.

Again, do not substitute hymns for the psalms. The difference in the effect will be just the difference between things human and things divine. They will just make you like man. And what is of God will make you like God. How the church should throw out the psalms to make room for trash of hymns made by man, for what is the work of man but trash compared with the work of God. In any church in which they are in use, they will put the psalms out. I witnessed it myself along with others. When

we entered the house of God every desk was full of hymn books and not a psalm book to be seen. God's book was put out, and man's book taken in. Then I warn you against letting these in, for so sure as they come in, God's book will go out. A little time will be given, and, for decency's sake, one of the psalms will be used once in awhile, but bye and bye none of them will be used at all. I lift up my voice to warn you against using that carnal thing called an organ, or any musical instrument in the worship of God. God has given us the best kind of organ, our lips, and it is a shame we do not use them more in singing his praises. It is to sing God's praise we come to church, not to hear a fine tune. It should ever be in your mind that God is the object of your song, the instrument your mouth and heart. "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." I know for certain that you will have to face such things, and that you will have to do with such things. Oh, I entreat you to stand upon safe ground. Do not make a choice of such things simply as a matter of taste. There are many who have an itching for change, and for getting into any new fashion. O, I beseech you to beware of them.

Now, in conclusion, I have been long with you, trying to lead you to Christ. That has been my object. Alas, it has been done but feebly; and now, how am I to leave you? Oh, my young friends, will you not this day give yourselves to Christ? Will you not put your hand into His hand and say "I have been too long in the hands of the Devil, and now I'll surrender myself to Christ." The devil will soon have you for ever unless you give yourself to Christ. "Now is the accepted time." My young friends, let me impress upon you the necessity of reading the Word of God privately and prayerfully. Now that I am going to be with you no longer, I may tell you it was by the secret reading of the Word of God that my own mind was awakened to a sense of the danger of a sinful life. It was by an incident in our Bible lessons in school that I was induced to read it privately, and the Lord brought home to my soul the truth from the secret reading. This should be a warning to all not to vote for putting the Bible out of the schools. Parents who vote for putting the Bible out of school are just giving their vote to the devil. There is nothing he would like better than to have the Bible banished out of the schools and other places. Parents, think of the responsibility that lies upon you in reference to your children.

Let me entreat you to set a good example in your homes. Do not neglect family worship morning and evening. If any neglect this duty let me affectionately beg of you to begin this very day. How can any one who neglects to worship God in his house call himself a Christian?

Oh, friends, where do you stand? Are you on safe ground? Have you accepted Christ or have you not? Have you fled for salvation to the hope set before you in the Gospel or have you not? Oh, how can I think of leaving you out of Christ, the very condition in which I got you! Are there not some persons halting and never getting the length of coming to a decision? Your case is a dangerous one. And are there not some back-sliders — some who went a certain length but are now turned back to the world, and are not so likely to be saved as they once were. Will you not this day stop and turn back? It is a serious thing when one has been awakened to some sense of danger and has made something like an attempt to get away from sin, to stop and turn further back than ever. And are there some careless ones here — some who have never thought anything at all about their condition? Oh, careless sinner, I warn you, God's patience will run out, and that perhaps sooner than you think Oh, may the Lord turn your attention to your danger and bring home to your hearts the truth as it is in Jesus, for His own name sake! Amen.

Letter

by Rev. Wm. Romaine*

It may be of some use to you to be informed how I was brought into this way of believing. God's dealings with me have been wonderful, not only for the royal sovereignty of His richest grace, but also for the manner of His teaching.

I. When I was in trouble and soul concern, He would not let me learn of man.

I went everywhere to hear, but nobody was suffered to speak to my case. The reason of this I could not tell then, but I know it now. The Arminian Methodists flocked about me, and courted my acquaintance, which became a great snare unto me. By their means I was brought into a difficulty, which distressed me several years. I was made to believe that part of my title to salvation was to be inherent — something called holiness in myself, which the grace of God was to help me to. And I was to get it by watchfulness, prayer, fasting, hearing, reading, sacraments, etc.; so that after much and long attendance in these means, I might be able to look inward and be pleased with my own improvement, finding I was

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grown in grace a great deal holier, and more deserving of heaven than I had been. I do not wonder now that I received this doctrine. It was sweet food to a proud heart. I feasted on it and to work I went. It was hard labour and sad bondage, but the hopes of having something to glory in of my own, kept up my spirits. I went on day by day "striving" (as they called it), but still I found myself not a bit better. I thought this was the fault, or that, which being amended I should certainly succeed. No guilty slave worked harder or to less purpose. Sometimes I was quite discouraged, and ready to give all up, but the discovery of some supposed hindrance set me to work again. Then I would redouble my diligence and exert all my strength. Still I got no ground. This made me wonder. And still more when I found, at last, that I was going backward! Methought I grew worse. I saw more sin in myself instead of more holiness, which made my bondage very hard and my heart very heavy. The thing I wanted, the more I pursued it, flew farther and farther from me.

II. I had no notion that this was divine teaching, and that God was delivering me from my mistake in this way.

The discoveries of my growing worse were dreadful arguments against myself, until now and then a little light would break in and shew me something of the glory of Jesus. But it was a glimpse only, gone in a moment. As I saw more of my heart, and began to feel more of my corrupt nature, I got clearer views of gospel grace, and in proportion as I came to know myself, I advanced in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. But this was very slow work. The old leaven of self-righteousness stuck close to me still, and made me a very dull scholar in the school of Christ. But I kept on making a little progress, and I was forced to give up one thing and another, on which I had some dependence.

III. I was left at last stripped of all, and neither had, nor could see where I could have, ought to rest my hopes that I could call my own.

This made way for blessed views of Jesus. Being now led to very deep discoveries of my own legal heart, of the dishonour which I had put upon the Saviour, of the despite I had done to the Spirit of His grace, by resisting and perverting the workings of His love, these things humbled me. I became very vile in my own eyes, I gave over striving; the pride of free will, the boast of mine own works, were laid low.

IV. And as self was debased, the Scriptures became an open book.

And every page presented the Saviour in new glory. Then were explained to me these truths, which are now the very joy and life of my soul. Such as (a) The plan of salvation, contrived by the wisdom of Jehovah, fulfilled in the Divine Person and work of Jesus and applied by the Spirit. The

whole was so ordered from first to last that all the glory of it might be secured to the Persons in the Godhead. The devil fell by pride. He tempted and seduced man into pride. Therefore the Lord, to hide pride from man, has so contrived His salvation that he who glorieth should have nothing to glory in but the Lord. (b) The benefits of salvation are all the free gifts of free grace, conferred without any regard to what the receiver of them is. Therefore the receivers are the ungodly, the worst of them, the unworthy, the chief of sinners. Such are saved freely by grace through faith, and that not of themselves, it (namely, salvation by faith) is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. (c) When I considered these benefits, one by one, it was the very death of self-righteousness and self-complacency, for when I looked at the empty hand which faith puts forth to receive them, whence was the hand emptied? Whence came faith? Whence the power to put forth the empty hand? And whence the benefits received upon putting it forth? All is of God. He humbles us that we may be willing to receive Christ. He keeps us humble that we may be willing to live by faith upon Christ received. And as it is a great benefit to have this faith, so (d) It is a great, inestimably great benefit to live by faith, for this is a life, in every act of it dependent upon another. Self is renounced, so far as Christ is lived upon. And faith is the most emptying, pulling down grace. Most emptying, because it says (and proves it too) that "in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." And therefore, it will not let a man see aught good in himself, but pulls down every high thought, and lays it low in subjection to Jesus. It is called the faith of the Son of God, because He is the author and finisher of it. He gives it. He gives to live by it. He gives the benefits received by it. He gives the glory laid up for it. So that, if I live to God, and in any act have living communion with God, it is by nothing in myself, but wholly by the faith of the Son of God. When I wanted to do anything commanded (what they call duties), I found a continual matter of humiliation. I was forced to be dependent for the will and for the power, and having done my best, I could not present it to God but upon the golden altar that sanctifieth the gifts. Not the worthiness, not the goodness of the gifts, but the sanctifying grace of the great High Priest alone can make holy and acceptable. And so (e) I learned to eye Him in all my works and duties, the Alpha the Omega of them, the life and spirit of all my prayers and sermons and hearing and reading and ordinances. They are all dead works unless done in and by faith in the Son of God. Against this blessed truth of which I am as certain as that I am alive, I find my nature kick. To this hour a legal heart will be creeping into duties, to get between me and my dear Jesus, whom

I go to meet in them. But He soon recovers me from the temptations, makes me loathe myself for it, and gets fresh glory for His sovereign grace. And as all the great and good things ever done in the world were done by faith, so all the crosses ever endured with patience were from the same cause, which is another humbling lesson. For (f) I find to this moment so much unbelief and impatience in myself that if God were to leave me to be tried with anything that crossed my will, if it were but a feather, it would break my back. Nothing tends to keep me vile in my own eyes, like this fretting and murmuring and heart burning, when the will of God thwarts my will. I read: "The trial of your faith worketh patience." The trial of mine, the direct contrary. Instead of patient submission I want to have my own way, to take very little physic, and that very sweet. So the flesh lusteth. But the Physician knows better. He knows when and what to prescribe. May every potion purge out this impatient, proud, unbelieving temper, so that faith may render healthful to the soul what is painful to the flesh. And as no cross can be endured without the faith of the Son of God so (g) There is no comfortable view of leaving the world but by the same faith. "These all," who had obtained a good report in every age, "died in faith" On their death-bed they did not look for present peace and future glory, but to the Lamb of God. Their great works, their eminent services, their various sufferings, all were cast behind their backs. They died as they lived, "looking unto Jesus." He was their antidote against the fear and against the power of death. They feared not the cold death-sweat. Jesus' blood was their dependence. This life through death Jesus entered on, and we enter on it now by faith; and when our breath is stopped we have this life, as He has it, pure, spiritual and divine. Yes, my dear friend, we, you and I, after we have lived a little longer, to empty us more, to bring us more out of ourselves, that we may be humbled and Jesus exalted more, we shall fall asleep in Jesus, not die, but sleep; not see, not taste death, so He promises, us, but sweetly go to rest in our weary bodies, when our souls shall be with the Lord. And then we shall be perfect in that lesson which we learn so very slowly in this world, namely, that from Him and of Him and to Him are all things, to whom be all the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

These are the things which God Himself has taught me. Man had no hand in it at all. No person in the world. Not I myself, for I fought against them as long as I could; so that my present possession of them, with all the rich blessings which they contain, is from my heavenly Teacher alone. And I have not learned them as we do mathematics, to keep them in memory and to make use of them when I please. No, I find in me to

this moment an opposition to every gospel truth, both to the belief of it in my head, and to the comfort of it in my heart. I am still a poor dependent creature sitting very low at the feet of my dear Teacher, and learning to admire that love of His, which brought me down and keeps me down at His feet. There be my seat till I learn my lesson perfectly. That will soon be. There is nothing in His presence but what is like Himself. In heaven all is perfection. The saints are as humble as they are happy. Clothed with glory and clothed with humility, with one heart and one voice they cry: "Worthy is the Lamb." In a measure I now feel what they do. My heart is in tune and I can join in the blessed hymn. I can take the crown, most gladly, from the head of all my graces, as they do from the head of their glory, and cast it down at His loving feet. "Worthy is the Lamb." He is — He is — blessings on Him for ever and ever!

Ought I not to say so, indebted as I am to the precious Lamb of God? You see how He has dealt with me — the kindness, the gentleness of His ways, His royal bounty, the magnificence of His love. Adore and praise Him, with me and for me. And learn, my dear friend, from what I have here related, to trust Him more. When He shews you your vile heart, your poor works, when dreadful corruptions stir and are ready to break out, go to Him freely, boldly. Stop not a moment to reason with your own proud spirit, but fall down at His footstool. Tell Him just what you feel. He loves to hear our complaints poured with confidence into His bosom. And never, never on earth, will you get such fellowship with Him, so close, so blessed as when you converse with Him in this poverty of spirit. Let nothing keep you from Him — whatever you meet with, let it drive you to Him, for all good is from Him, and all evil is turned into good by Him. Oh wondrous Saviour! To Him I commend you and yours. Believe me very truly yours, in that most lovely Lord Christ, most precious Jesus.

Bereavements and Trials

A LETTER BY EDWARD BLACKSTOCK

Leicester, June 1840.

. . . Our friends who are fallen asleep are not dead; they still live in our fond remembrance, and appear in and flit before our imagination.

You and I often have the bereaved parent's heartache; we do not wonder at good old Jacob's pathetic exclamation — "Me ye have bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." Gen. 17: 36. You and I are melancholy companions of the halting patriarch, and too often feel as rebellious

under our sad bereavements as he did under his. What a sad three years you and I have passed through! God has blighted our gourds, and laid us low . . .

My deceased children* appear to me to be good company; they wean me from this jading world, and I long for another and better state of existence. Though dead they yet live, and yet speak to me! They often chide, and sometimes counsel me. I sincerely wish never to forget them. There shall always be in my mind and in my affections, a place sacred to their memory. I view them as being my instructors and my monitors. I will not ask you if these thoughts accord with yours — we are both wounded in the same place. Let those censure us who have never felt as we do. On this subject I often try to think as a Christian, whilst I feel as a man. Well, after all, we do not wish them back, but we wish to be with them.

I often think of those Christian friends with whom I have taken sweet counsel, having walked with them to the house of God. In this sense I am almost a broken merchant — I have had many and great losses. In Christian friendship I have become a poor man; many of my best friends have left me to join “the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.” They are better employed than in conversing with me — a poor, distrustful, dissatisfied, grumbling mortal. I think of them, and they appear to me like angels now! How happy the spirits of the just! “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours and their works do follow them.” May we ultimately rest among them. But I must now draw the curtain.

You will say — “If I had as good a hope as you have, I think I should hardly grumble as you do, but say with Job, ‘All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my charge come’.” So I have said, and so I would say again, but full often guilt and fear drag me down far below my blessed privileges. I am only one of little faith. I am often in bondage — a helpless captive sold under sin — an alien from my mother’s children — a captive exile — a child of liberty in chains and fetters. I groan, being burdened. I have found those words of Erskine true.

“Before he’ll suffer pride that swells,
He’ll drag thee through the mire
Of sins, temptations, little hells;
Thy husband saves by fire.”

*There was evidence that they died in the Lord. — Ed.

"But," you will say, "You are not without hope." No, blessed be the God of hope, I do not know what I should do were that the case. To tell you the truth I nursed that brat unbelief, until I durst nurse it no longer. I would fain leave Satan to nurse his own children himself, or let them pine away and die. I think he is the father of a true believer's fears.

You tell me you know you are a sinner, whilst afraid you have never been rightly convinced of sin. You think you are not truly humbled, that you do not rightly repent, that your heart is as hard as the flinty rock, and your soul — if it feels anything — feels nothing but death; that you have desired Christ, yet fear you shall not obtain Him, because — as you think — your desires are not right.

Perhaps you will say, "All these things are true: this is in part my case." But let me tell you, I believe many are now in glory who had these fears when in the wilderness; they were all their lifetime subject to bondage, yet Christ died to deliver them. Heb. 2: 14-15. "Yes," you will say, "but that is not the worst of my case; for I sometimes seem to think it would have seemed better if God had chosen all men to life eternal, or if he had never suffered man to fall, or if he had never created man at all." But now I hope you look upon these thoughts as blasphemous.

Again, have you not sometimes thought that grace is not so full and free as ministers in their zeal represent? Have you not sometimes doubted, whether Christ is as compassionate to sinners as our ministers represent Him to be? Do you not sometimes entertain hard thoughts of Christ, because He does not graciously reveal Himself to you? Do you not feel out of temper with yourself, the Bible, the Almighty, because you feel so hard, so unhappy, so miserable? Are you not ready to wish you had been a dog, a stone, or anything that had no soul?

Remember that unbelief, like a spider, can suck poison from the sweetest flowers. Christ never shows so much grief at any sin as the sin of unbelief. "And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." Never does He show such dislike to unbelief in any, as in His own children. As Caesar, when he fell, said to one "And you too, Brutus!" so Christ may say to you and me "And you too!" Lord, save us from this deadening, soul-damning sin!

Lord, save us from hard thoughts of thee! Christ is the sensible sinner's best and only friend. When we harbour hard thoughts of Him, it is to trifle with His sufferings, His wounds, His groans, His cries, His blood, His death, His intercession, His promises, His invitations, His Spirit, since He hath savingly wrought in us. O for a true, strong, living faith, that

we might glorify God and enjoy Him for ever. "He is able, he is willing. Doubt no more."

May the Lord work in you and me all the pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with mighty power! Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus.

ED. BLACKSTOCK.

The Divinely Taught Negro

Every day's observation convinces me that the children of God are made so by His own special grace and power, and that all means, whether more or less, are effectual with Him, whenever He is pleased to employ them for conversion. In one of my excursions, while I was in the province of New York, I was walking by myself over a considerable plantation, amused with its husbandry, and comparing it with that of my own country, till I came within a little distance of a middle-aged negro who was tilling the ground. I felt a strong inclination, unusual with me, to converse with him. After asking him some little questions about his work, which he answered very sensibly, I wished him to tell me whether his state of slavery was not disagreeable to him, and whether he would not gladly exchange it for his liberty. "Massa," said he, looking seriously upon me, "I have a wife and children. My Massa takes care of them, and I have no care to provide anything; I have a good Massa, who teach me to read; and I read good Book, and makes me happy."

"I am glad," replied I, "to hear you say so; and pray what is the good book you read?" "The Bible, Massa, God's own good Book." "Do you understand, friend, as well as read this Book? For many read the words well, who cannot get hold of the true and good sense." "Oh, Massa," says he, "I read the book much before I understand; but at last I felt pain in my heart. I found things in the book that cut me to pieces." "Aye," I says, "and what things were they?" "Why, Massa, I found that I had a bad heart; a very bad heart indeed: I felt pain that God would destroy me, because I was wicked, and done nothing as I should do. God was so holy, and I was very vile and naughty; so I could have nothing from Him but fire and brimstone in Hell."

I asked him what ministry or means he made use of, and found that his master was a Quaker, a plain sort of man, who taught his slaves to read, but who had not, however, even conversed with this negro upon the state of his soul. I then enquired of him how he got comfort under all this trial. "Oh, Massa, it was Christ gave me comfort by His dear word.

He bade me come to Him, and He would give me rest, for I was very weary and heavy laden." And here he went through a line of most precious texts in the Bible, showing me, by his artless comment upon them as he went along, what great things God had done in the course of some years for his soul.

I then asked him several questions about the merit of works, the justification of a sinner, the power of grace, and the like. I own I was as much astonished at, as I admired, the sweet spirit and simplicity of his answers, with the heavenly wisdom that God had put into the mind of this negro. His discourse flowing merely from the riches of grace, with a tenderness and expression far beyond the reach of art, perfectly charmed me. On the other hand, my entering into all his feelings, together with an account to him which he had never heard before, that thus and thus the Lord in His mercy dealt with all His children, and had dealt with me, drew streams of joyous tears down his black face, that we looked upon each other, and talked with that inexpressible glow of Christian affection, that made me more than ever believe what I have often too thoughtlessly professed to believe — the communion of saints. I shall never forget how the poor, excellent creature seemed to hang upon my lips, and to eat my very words when I enlarged upon the love of Christ to poor sinners, the free bounty, and tender mercy of God, the frequent and delightful sense He gives of His presence, the faith He bestows in His promises, the victories this faith is enabled to get over trials and temptations, the joy and peace in believing, the hope in life and death, and the glorious expectation of immortality. To have taken off his eager, delighted, animated air and manners would have been a masterpiece for a Reynolds. He had never heard such a discourse nor found the opportunity of hearing it before. He seemed like a man who had been thrown into a new world, and at length had found company. Though my conversation lasted at least two or three hours, I scarcely ever enjoyed the happy swiftness of time so sweetly in all my life. We knew not how to part. He would accompany me as far as he might; and I felt on my side such a delight in the artless, savoury, solid, unaffected experience of this dear soul, that I could have been glad to see him often there, or to see his like at any time now. But my situation rendered this impossible. I, therefore, took an affectionate adieu, with an ardour equal to the warmest and the most ancient friendship, telling him that neither the colour of his body nor the condition of his present life could prevent him from being my dear brother in our dear Saviour; and that though we must part now, never to see each other any more in this world, I had no doubt of our having another joyful meeting in our

Father's home, where we should live together and love one another throughout a long and happy eternity. "Amen, amen, my dear Massa; God bless you, and poor me too, for ever and ever." If I had been an angel from Heaven, he could not have received me with more evident delight than he did; nor could I have considered him with a more sympathetic regard if he had been a long-known Christian of the good old sort, grown up into my affections in the course of many years. Happy world, if all were Christians, or, at least, happy Christians, if they showed more of this fraternal affection to each other in the world! None can deny that so it ought to be. O that every one who names the name of Christ, and believes himself to be a member of this undivided body, would pray for faith and charity to put the whole thing into being.

Blessed Lord, Fountain of life and love, send forth the Spirit of thy Son into my heart, and into the hearts of all my brethren; that waiving all mean and selfish distinctions, we may first love thee above all things, and then each other with a pure heart fervently. Subdue animosities, and all the separating corruptions of the flesh, and let us consider ourselves as brethren, fellowheirs of the grace of life, persons who shall pass an eternity together, yea, as parts of each other, and members, Holy Jesus, of thy body, flesh and thy bones. Even so let it be, for thy glory and for our present and eternal consolation through thy grace. Amen.

— *Ambrose Serle.*

The Church and Her Creed

by Rev. K. D. MacLeod, South Harris

Why was it that The Free Church of Scotland, apparently so safely moored to Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith, should within fifty years effectively have cut the mooring ropes and allowed herself to drift almost anywhere on the sea of religious heresy? Doubtless many contributory factors may be cited, but the fact still remains that the drift from religious orthodoxy took place with almost inexplicable speed.

Substantial light is shed on the course of that declension in a book published in 1988, *Church and Creed in Scotland* by Kenneth R. Ross, with the subtitle, *The Free Church Case 1900-1904 and its Origins* (Rutherford House Books, 424 pages). The book is a by-product of a PhD thesis by the author, who at the time of the book's publication was a Church of Scotland missionary teaching theology in Malawi.

The *Case* referred to in the title is the law-suit brought by the remain-

ing Free Church of Scotland, that part of the original Free Church which did not enter the union in 1900 with the United Presbyterian Church which resulted in the formation of the United Free Church of Scotland. After losing the case at each stage in the Scottish Courts the Free Church won the final appeal in the House of Lords; the Free Church was declared to be the rightful owner of all the churches, manses, colleges and all the other assets of the original Free Church. However, by an Act of Parliament a Royal Commission was set up to redistribute the property. This resulted in the vast bulk of the property being reassigned to the United Free Church.

All this is chronicled in this well-presented, but expensive, book, together with a summary of the arguments used by each side in the case. But the really valuable part of the book is his account of the changes that took place within the Free church between 1843 and 1900. While the author does not share the position of the Constitutional party within the Free Church, the party which upheld its original constitution, he does show a clear understanding of its point of view. He quotes from a wide variety of original sources — from the writings of men such as John Kennedy, Hugh Martin and James Begg — to show how the Constitutionalists defended the scriptural positions which were being increasingly undermined as the years went by, at the same time showing with equal clarity the arguments of the other side.

In such an account as this it is necessary to devote considerable attention to the Voluntary controversy — the question being whether or not it is proper for a Christian Church to be an Established Church. Thomas Chalmers, easily the most prominent of the Disruption ministers, made it plain that in leaving the Established Church in Scotland they had not become Voluntaries. In his Moderator's Address to the 1843 General Assembly he declared, "We hold by the duty of Government to give of their resources and of their means for the maintenance of a gospel ministry in the land. . . . We are advocates for a national recognition and a national support of religion." The United Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, gave no support to this doctrine. And when union negotiations between the Free and United Presbyterian Churches were broken off in 1873, having lasted for ten years, this, along with uneasiness about the United Presbyterian view of the extent of the Atonement, was the rock on which these negotiations foundered.

The position of the Establishment Principle as a basic part of the Free Church constitution came to have a disproportionate place in the argument before the civil courts, at the expense of discussion of the wider

declension from the Free Church's original Scriptural position. It was doubtless in the interests of lawyers, to some extent out of their depth in understanding Biblical doctrine, to attempt to simplify the matter by focusing overly narrowly on this one doctrine. (It is probable that there is nothing in print today that gives a better idea of its Scriptural basis than Dr Ross's quotations from the mass of pamphlets, speeches and magazine articles on the Establishment Principle, which flowed from the pens of such able men as Alexander Moody Stuart and James Begg, among many others).

It is perfectly true that the period under consideration in this book was an era of massive change, both in society in general and in the church in particular. Given that the spirit of change pervaded the whole of society to the extent that it did, the Free church could not escape unscathed. It would seem that at least some of the Free Church leaders were largely motivated by a desire to avoid losing the attachment of the rising generation when they allowed their Church to change as it did. No doubt such a policy was reasonably successful at the time, but the passing years have made clear how disastrous it actually was. And it is clear that only a lack of spiritual ballast could have made such a policy possible.

This spirit of change affected the whole realm of Christian doctrine, but hardest hit was the doctrine of Scripture. And when the authority of the Bible on the minds of men, even outwardly, lost the firm hold that it once had, the authority of every other doctrine was equally definitely lost. It was a consequence of the widespread influence of the theory of Evolution, especially following the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, that these ideas came to be applied to the Bible. If the position of the Creator more and more faded into the background with the increasing acceptance that the whole creation, and man in particular, had come into being through purely natural forces, it was only natural that the idea of the Bible as a revelation from God should also be replaced by the theory that the Bible only records the development of man's conceptions of religion.

This theory was the basis of the destructive force of Higher Criticism, of which the Free Church was, sadly, to become one of the greatest strongholds in the nineteenth century. A. B. Davidson, Professor of Hebrew at New College, Edinburgh, and one of the earliest teachers of the new approach to the Bible, expressed his belief that the Bible must be treated in very much the same way as other books when looking into its origins. This meant, for instance, that no one need take the Bible's word for it, as to who wrote particular books within Scripture, even if Christ

Himself put His authority behind it. So careless were most of the leading men in the Church by the 1890's about the doctrine of the absolute accuracy of Scripture that someone like James Denney — and others went farther than he did — could say, with the irreverence that follows naturally from such views, that he cared not one straw for mere verbal infallibility.

It was not a long step from saying that we cannot trust what the Bible says about itself to doubting what the Bible says about everything else, even what it says about the Person of Christ. The elevation of Marcus Dods to his professorship, after his years of retreat from Scriptural teaching, brought once more to the surface acute concern about the quality of theological training in the Free Church. He could only say about the One who is the Son of God in our nature, "Very often, I may say commonly, I cannot get further than the conviction that in Christ we see the best that our nature is capable of, and must make our own."

What had such men to offer to their hearers? Certainly nothing that could satisfy a soul conscious of its need of a substitute who could bear the full weight of the punishment of his or her sins before an all-holy God, and nothing that would feed a living soul, especially one that could think back to the powerful and spiritual teaching of a race of preachers who were fast passing away. The sad thing is that those men — Dr Ross calls them *the New Evangelists* — thought that they alone could give the Church what could preserve it from extinction. They were willing to listen to the advancing unbelieving thought of their times, to read the Scriptures in its light and tell their generation just what they thought it would be prepared to listen to. Anything else could be safely jettisoned. The ship would sail all the better for being lighter. But they forgot to ask if the passengers on the ship, which was now being blown about by the winds of new doctrine, could possibly reach the expected destination of heaven — or else they simply blinded themselves to the consequences of their actions.

It was in this climate that the Declaratory Act was passed in the Free Church in 1892. Its effect was to alter completely the relationship of the Church to the Confession of Faith. A further result was the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland as a separate body when the General Assembly of 1893 refused to repeal the Act. Dr Ross makes it clear that the New Evangelists were not aiming merely at the revision of matters of doctrinal detail, but aiming to alter the whole system of Calvinistic theology. Apart from the particular points made in the Act, it was at its most destructive when it drove a wedge between individual statements in the Confession and the "substance of the Reformed Faith",

a totally amorphous concept. Yet that distinction had its roots very much further back in the Free Church history. Years earlier Robert Candlish had claimed that the formula signed by all Free Church office-bearers "did not bind so much to every separate constituent of the Confession as the resulting 'whole'." It was now claimed that the Church had full authority to determine in any particular case which points fell into this category. It was a device which rendered a successful case of discipline on the grounds of doctrinal aberration almost impossible, something which for the same reason is acknowledged on all hands to be impossible in the Church of Scotland today. However, the writer's own treatment of the theology lying behind the Act is the weakest part of this whole book. (For a clear analysis of the Declaratory Act see the Rev. J. S. Sinclair's articles reprinted as the Supplement to the *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*).

For Dr. Ross the vital question in the whole series of events leading up to the Free Church case is the relationship of a church to her creed. What the House of Lords decided was that not even an overwhelming majority in a church has any right to alter that relationship. Clearly there is a serious question about the moral integrity of those who take office in a church which holds to a particular position and then proceed to change it. There were large numbers of ministers and others in the Free Church by the end of the 1880's who had sworn that the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith was the confession of their own personal faith, when it manifestly did not express their faith. Dr Ross has no doubt about the weakness of the position of the United Free Church, which enshrined in her constitution her right to change her doctrinal position just as she wished. He comments, "With such abundant room for 'open questions' . . . she was left with little doctrinal anchor and was dangerously at the mercy of the tide." Yet he does not seem able to accept that the Constitutionalist understanding of the relationship of an office-bearer to the Confession of Faith is the right one. The more is the pity, because there is no stable middle ground in this matter.

It is interesting to notice at the same time an excellent exposition from the Reformed position of the responsibilities involved in subscription to a creed. Samuel Miller was only the second professor to be appointed (in 1813) to Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA. His *The Utility of Creeds and Confessions* is based on a lecture to his students. In it he answers the objections usually made against creeds and confessions of faith. On the positive side he argues that, among other reasons, a creed is necessary to maintain unity among ministers and members of a par-

ticular church, it enables them to maintain the truth once delivered to the saints, and it makes clear to other churches and to the world around what a particular church stands for.

The 1830's in America was a time of considerable controversy about subscription to the Confession of Faith. In some parts of American Presbyterianism it became possible to subscribe to the Confession while adhering to a significantly different doctrinal position. At that time Miller wrote a series of 10 *Letters to Presbyterians on the Present Crisis in the Presbyterian Church*, which were first published in a periodical. The first three of these have recently been republished under the heading, *Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards*, along with *The Utility of Creeds and Confessions*, to form an attractive and useful book. This book, *Doctrinal Integrity*, has a useful introductory Essay by Kevin Reed (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 160 pages, 1989).

In combating the practice current in his own time of subscribing the Confession while having reservations about considerable parts of it, Miller advocates allowing men to subscribe who have difficulty with some detail or details of this document, provided they make their difficulties clear to the relevant church court. Miller himself at first subscribed the Confession in this way, expressing his doubts about a clause in the chapter on Marriage and Divorce. No harm followed in his case, because he came to see shortly afterwards that the Confession was right, this too is unsatisfactory; it is surely better to seek prayerfully to have one's difficulties resolved first of all. In any case, there is a grave danger that before long *serious* reservations about the Confession would be passed over in the same way.

Miller also comments on those who make the reservation, explicitly or otherwise, that they subscribe to the Confession of Faith only so far as they consider that it agrees with the Scriptures. Into this category fall office-bearers of the Associated Presbyterian Churches when they accept office according to the Formula of their Church. It obliges the subscriber to state that he accepts the documents which form the constitution of that body, including the Confession, only "insofar as each and every one of the documents is consistent with the Holy Scriptures."

"Upon this principle", says Miller, "it is plain that any man might without scruple, subscribe any confession of faith whatever. For, surely a Socinian might, without the least hesitation, declare that he believed a rigidly Calvinistic Confession, so far as he considered it was coinciding with the Word of God. Besides, of what value is a subscription to any creed which is made upon this principle? The only object of subscribing

a creed is to ascertain whether the subscriber believes a certain set of doctrines: or, in other words, whether he believes them to be taught in the Bible." (p85). Now it is not our purpose to claim that any of these office-bearers has departed from the Confession in any particular doctrine. But what is manifestly clear is that if and when such a departure does arise, whether it be less or more serious, it will be impossible to bring any statement from the Confession of Faith to bear against that individual; its full force will be at once removed by that declaration, "I do not accept that that statement is scriptural." By one apparently small change from the constitution of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland the Westminster Confession of Faith has been rendered ineffective in any process of discipline involving doctrine in the Associated Presbyterian Churches.

History has shown the vital importance of keeping a firm hold of the doctrines of the Bible. Without a doubt some doctrines are more vital than others, but when an individual or a body becomes careless about one doctrine there is always a danger of falling into another, and more serious, errors. It was not for nothing that Paul told Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words". Perhaps nowhere was the slide into greater and greater error more dramatic than in the Free Church during the last century. But, however slow or fast the decline may be, the result is the same — unfaithfulness to God and to His grace.

There is a tremendous responsibility laid on churches, and on individuals within churches, to preserve inviolate the doctrinal heritage we have been given in the Scriptures, and which is summarised in the Westminster Confession of Faith. In this, as in every other duty, we need to remember the Saviour's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

N.B. The books referred to in this article are obtainable from the Church Bookroom.

Book Reviews

ON KNOWING CHRIST by Jonathan Edwards. Banner of Truth Trust Paperback. 276 pages. £3.50.

This selection of 10 sermons by Jonathan Edwards illustrates his searching preaching of a full-orbed gospel, which was so greatly owned of the Lord in revivals in Northampton, North America. He shows the necessity of congregations being fully instructed in divine truths. All the glory of the redemption of His people must be given to God. Man's inability is shewn to be his sin. Remarkable impressions were made on his hearers by his sermon: "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." He shows the dreadful state of the unregenerate sinner were it not that he is restrained

by the hand of God upon him. Were it not so, "Hellish principles" reigning in the souls of wicked men, "would soon break out after the same manner as the same corruption, the same enmity does on the hearts of the damned souls." Over against such preaching of the law, he exalted the grace of God in saving such sinners and preserving and sanctifying them unto His heavenly kingdom.

Jonathan Edward's writings were greatly appreciated and owned of the Lord in past generations. We recommend these sermons to readers who may not be familiar with Jonathan Edward's works. May such preaching be owned to the awakening of sinners in our day.

A.McK.

SPIRITUAL REFININGS by Anthony Burgess. 700 pp. £16.00.

This treatise on grace and assurance by the Puritan and Westminster Divine, Anthony Burgess, consisting of 120 sermons, is being reproduced in a facsimile copy of the 1652 edition of the work and will be available early in 1991.

N.McL.

BETHEL PULPIT — SOUND AN ALARM, Sermon Number 61, by Pastor B. A. Ramsbottom.

This pamphlet contains a sermon by the Pastor of Bethel Chapel, Luton preached on 26th August, 1990 from the text: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain, let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Joel 2: 1. It contains a timely warning to the people of Britain in view of the events in the Middle East, particularly the crisis in the Persian Gulf, where the nations are confronting Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq. In the sermon, Mr Ramsbottom is at pains to point out the sins of our own nation and our need as a nation of repentance.

The sermon is available from Mr J. A. Watts, Ridgewood Drive, Harpenden, Herts. AL5 3NL.

D.B.M.

DIVINE GUIDANCE by B. A. Ramsbottom. Gospel Standard Trust Publications. £1.00. 19 pp.

This booklet on Divine Guidance by Pastor B.A. Ramsbottom, Editor of the Gospel Standard, has the sub-title: 'How may I know God's will.' The writer first outlines the problem, then goes on to point out that God

has promised to guide His people and did guide them in time past. He warns, however, of the pitfalls and mistakes often made in connection with seeking to know God's will in specific instances. Lastly, he shows the three elements which must be included in seeking direction from God: (1) the Word of God; (2) personal exercise before God; and (3) openings in providence.

This is a useful booklet and we commend it to readers of the Magazine.

D.B.M.

Notes and Comments

The War in the Persian Gulf

At the time of writing this comment, the allied air offensive against Iraq and against the Iraqi forces in Kuwait continues unabated as a prelude to the ground offensive which must inevitably follow. Already the allies have suffered casualties in the war and no doubt this will increase as the land war proceeds. Many of the young men and women engaged in the war are, we fear, little prepared for death if that should be their lot. To those who have known the truth, the Lord can bless His Word in the solemn circumstances in which they are placed. He can also be a covering for their head in the day of battle. The prayers of the Lord's people will be for their preservation, where that is His will, and for preparation for eternity for those who are to die in the conflict. Our sympathy goes out to those who, at this time, have loved ones serving in the war zone, and trust that the Lord will uphold them and theirs in the day of trouble.

The Roman Catholic Road to Sainthood

The Roman Catholic Church has its own road to sainthood for its devotees. According to a Press report Cardinal Newman, a pervert to Rome and earlier a leader of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, who died over 100 years ago, has been awarded the title of Venerable by the Pope. This is an important step in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church on the way to sainthood. It required a campaign lasting 30 years to accomplish this much. Actual sainthood is still something yet to be attained in the future? It is incredible that men with a modicum of common sense could fall for this tomfoolery. How thankful we should be that we have the Word of God which makes plain to all, not only that the people of God are saints when they enter glory but that they are saints in the day that they are delivered out of Satan's kingdom and brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Plea for Co-operation by Free Church Professor

Professor Donald MacLeod, according to a Press & Journal report, has called on Scotland's Presbyterian Churches to co-operate with each other in a bid to halt the decline in adherence to Protestantism. He refers to the abandonment of reformation theology by the Churches and of the attacks on it from within the Scottish community of Reformed theologians. His view is that people have to be educated about Protestantism. This is no doubt the case. However the question must be asked how Protestants can co-operate if their view of the Roman Catholic Church is so totally at variance, some regarding it as a sister Church to be reformed, others regarding it as a synagogue of Satan which Christ is to destroy with the brightness of His Coming. It cannot be the same Protestantism which holds such antithetical views of the Establishment against which protest is made.

Decade of Evangelism

The Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics and some other Churches intend to launch a decade of evangelism. The question must be asked as to what evangel is to be preached by such Churches. So, too, if we ask why evangelism is necessary in a nation possessing Christianity for so many centuries, we have to conclude that it is because the main Churches largely ceased to proclaim the evangel and people were driven away from them. A return to orthodox Christianity would be of more advantage to Churches which have largely abandoned true Christian teaching than the pretence of a decade of evangelism.

Graham Crusade

It would appear that Dr. Billy Graham whose appearance in this country in 1955 made such a great stir at the time is to visit Scotland again this year. It is said that Sir David McNee approached R.C. Archbishops Winning and O'Brien for their support of the campaign. Well might they give their support as any Roman Catholics seeking counsel will be directed to a local R.C. Church. When Dr. Graham was in Britain in 1955 our Church opposed the Arminianism of his theology and also the methods adopted in the campaign. After that campaign some Churches were gratified at finding an increase in attendance, but before long had to complain that things were worse than before the campaign began. We cannot think that Dr. Graham's ecumenical co-operation and continued Arminian presentation of the Gospel will prove any better in 1991.

Church Notes

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Skye: At Portree on 5th March at 11 a.m.

Western: At Laide on 12th March at 6 p.m.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo on 12th March at 2 p.m.

Northern: At Dingwall on 9th April at 2 p.m.

Committee Meetings (D.V.)

The March Committee Meetings will be held in Inverness on Tuesday, 19th March. For list of Committee Meetings see February issue of the Magazine.

Editor's Return from Africa

In the kind providence of the Lord, the Editor returned home safely from Africa on 25th January after a seven weeks' visit to Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe. We wish to acknowledge the Lord's goodness to us during our time overseas and trust that the Lord will follow with a blessing the labours of the Church Deputies in those lands we visited.

We wish to acknowledge the help received from Rev. John MacLeod, Stornoway, in undertaking editorial duties during our absence.

Death of Rev. B. B. Dube

On 5th February news reached this country of the sudden passing of Rev. B. B. Dube, Zenka. He had been ill for a short time previously. His removal is a great loss to the Church in Zimbabwe and especially to the congregation at Zenka where he laboured in the Gospel. To his widow and family we extend the sincere sympathy of the Church at home and overseas. "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

Urgent Appeal for Foreign Mission Staff

At Ingwenya, at John Tallach Secondary School, there is an urgent need for teachers having any school subject at degree level. Persons not having teacher training will be acceptable.

At Sengera in Kisii Province in Kenya there is urgent need for a doctor or nurses to supervise the setting up and running of the Hospital Clinic which has recently been built.

Again we would urge suitably qualified persons to give prayerful consideration to the above appeal. Anyone willing to respond to these needs should contact the Clerk to the Foreign Missions Committee, Rev. Dr. J. R. Tallach, Free Presbyterian Manse, Raasay, Kyle, IV40 8PB.

A.V. Directory of Churches

Lovers of the Authorised Version of the Bible have produced a directory of churches which use the A.V. to help those on holiday or business to worship where the A.V. is used. The list covers the British Isles and includes the Free Presbyterian Congregations. The Directory may be obtained free of charge by sending a second class stamp to: A.V. Directory, 31 Broadway Parade, Belfast BT12 6JX.

Acknowledgment of Donations

The Treasurers of the following Congregations wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Breasclete: Anon., £50 for Sust. Fund and £50 for Door Coll.; Anon., £200 Psalm 107: 8 (Gaelic) per Rev. J. MacLeod.

Gairloch: Friend, North Tolsta £5; Friend, Kyle £5; Friend, Lochcarron £5; From Estate of M. MacKenzie £50; all for Congr. Purposes, all per Rev. A. MacDonald.

Glendale: Two Portree Friends, £20, where most needed, per Rev. D. Nicolson.

Inverness: Anon., £10; Anon., £20; Mr and Mrs F. M., £50, for Minibus maintenance (all per envelopes in plate); "A housebound adherent", £10 for Communin Expenses.

Laide: Friends, Rogart, Bibles "for Romania" per D.A.R. £120; Friend, Aultbea for church funds per D.A.R. £20; Friend, Portree for Congr. Funds per D.A.R. £20; Friend, for Congr. Tapes per Mrs C. Ross £5; Friend, Aultbea for Church Funds per D.A.R. £20; Anon., Shieldaig, Bibles for Eastern Europe per D.A.R. £15; Friend for Laide Church Building Fund £30; For Sust Fund from A.D.R. £40; Donation for Eastern Europe from A.D.R. £20; Friend, Aultbea for Church Funds per D.A.R. £20; E.M., Lochcarron for Sust. Fund per D.A.R. £10; From A. Ross for Sust. Fund £5; A Friend, Portree postmark, Bibles for Russia £10; Friend, Aultbea for Church Funds per D.A.R. £20; Friend of the Cause, Inverness, where most needed £30.

Lairg, etc.: Anon., £30, "The love of Christ containeth", per A.S.

Portree: Tolsta Friend, £10 for General Purposes; Friend £10 for Sust. Fund, both per F.M.; Anon., £10 for Bus. Fund (envelope in plate).

Stirling: Anon., Friend of the Cause £20 for Congr. Purposes.

Stornoway: "In memory of a devoted wife and mother" £100 for Congr. Funds.