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The Wonder of Restraining Grace

From the Word of God it is very plain that man is fallen and sinful and lost. While it is true that we have brought ourselves very low by our sin and rebellion against God, yet it is equally true that we cannot deliver ourselves out of that state in which we are held as fallen creatures, apart from the grace of God. It is only saving grace that can deliver us out of a state of sin and misery and bring us into a state of salvation through a Redeemer. Therefore that is the blessing that we are to seek with all our soul and heart — that the Lord would manifest Himself to us in His saving grace and power so that we may be delivered from the wrath to come.

But what of man's condition so long as he remains in the kingdom of darkness? How clear it is that man left to himself would go on in every form of sin and evil. In the heart of fallen man is the seed of every evil. Yet it is also clear that men do not go to the length in sin which they would go, if left to themselves. This surely proves that there is some restraint on man, other than that put on him by upbringing and example. This can only be the restraining grace of God which He is pleased to put upon men, even fallen men, so that this world does not become a veritable hell on earth. This must flow from the goodness of God, even to rebels who deserve to be cut off in their sin and be cast off for ever. Even Judas Iscariot had this restraining grace upon him, until at last he left the company of the disciples and was so left to himself that he betrayed the innocent blood. What a fearful condition man is in when restraining grace is withdrawn or even withheld in a little degree. It is then that man will discover for himself what depths of evil and wickedness are in the human heart.

When we consider our own lives, where would we be without restrain-

ing grace? Into what innumerable evils and calamities we would have brought ourselves were it not for the Lord's restraint upon us in some measure. Truly then, restraining grace itself is something to be thankful for and something to praise the Lord for. Surely it should fill us with wonder that the God against whom we have rebelled should set bounds for us in wickedness which we cannot pass.

How we ought to remember continually that the goodness of the Lord in this leads us to repentance. Here is a loud call to us to forsake the foolish and live, and walk in the way of uprightness and truth. Restraining grace in its very nature gives no encouragement to men to sin but the very reverse. It is a warning to men that the way of transgressors is hard and that there is a better way — the way of life — into which poor sinners, rebellious and sun-darkened though they be, may be brought in the mercy and kindness of God.

If we are aware then in any degree of the exercise of restraining grace over us, it ought to make us desirous of possessing that grace that is saving. Restraining grace on its own will never save a soul or bring that soul to glory. Saving grace will do both. It will bring a sinner from the depths of sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God. It is through faith in the Redeemer that we can come to know in our experience what it is to be saved from our sins. What a revelation the Word of God presents to us when it says: "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," and when it says that whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.

Let us then be earnest day by day seeking to have imparted to us the rich grace of God in Jesus Christ so that we may be made heirs of eternal life. Let us not rest satisfied because a measure of restraining grace is upon us. Let us be thankful for it, yet at the same time let us seek the higher blessing — the good part which Mary sought — and which was never to be taken away from her. Let us seek to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through Christ Jesus. Those who are partakers of divine saving grace shall never perish but shall obtain eternal life.

Notes of a Sermon

by Rev. D. A. Macfarlane, M.A. preached at Dingwall, on Sabbath 18th April, 1971.

"Where is the fury of the oppressor?" Isaiah 51: 13.

There is a reference here to the long captivity of the children of Israel

in Babylon. Every seventh year the land was to rest so that it would be shown that the land and people belonged to the Lord. They despised the commandments given by Moses His servant, and they, especially Jerusalem and the land of Judah, were taken into captivity in His own time and way. The hand of the Lord came in judgment upon them, especially by Nebuchadnezzar and his armies. At last, on account of their enormities in manifold ways, as in the days of Manasseh when even the children were caused to pass through the fire to Molech, the Lord gave them over to Nebuchadnezzar, and they were in captivity in Babylon for seventy long years, as told in the last chapter of 2nd Chronicles. Manasseh got repentance in the kindness of the Lord, and was brought from darkness to light. Josiah also was a gracious king but the bulk of the kings and people down to the time of Zedekiah went away fearfully from the Most High. Isaiah makes reference to this in the opening chapters of his prophecy: "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land." The end came when Jerusalem was brought low. Many were killed, children were dashed against stones and the bulk of the people taken to Babylon. Many settled on the banks of the river Chebar. While judgment was foretold again and again, nevertheless the Lord had a remnant according to the election of grace, even in captivity. This was set forth to comfort those in captivity who were by grace fearing the Lord so that they might plead to be restored from captivity and from the fury of the oppressor. Nebuchadnezzar was as a rod to come down on Judea where there was far more desolation than on the land of Israel. The main cause of their being brought down and suffering so much was on account of the land not getting her sabbaths and revelling in iniquities in one form or another. Yet, we have this question, "Where is the fury of the oppressor?" Fear ye not the reproach of men. In the question there is a promise implied — that the Lord would bring to an end the fury of the oppressor.

Two instances may be helpful in meditating on the question of our text. The fury of the oppressor came to an end on the night when Belshazzar was at a banquet. On that very night the Medo-Persian empire and generals got the river turned to a prepared channel and the river bed at Babylon was dry so that the Medo-Persians got right up to Babylon. In the holy providence of the Lord, when the seventy years of captivity were fulfilled, the land of Israel got rest. By that time Belshazzar saw an outstretched hand writing on the wall, and his knees shook. On that night the king was slain. The glory of his gorgeous banquet vanished. He had little taste

or relish for his delicacies when hosts of soldiers and officers came hurrying in on every side. Where was now the fury of the oppressor? The children of Israel endured sore afflictions during their captivity, but the Lord's time came — prophesied by Isaiah one hundred years before the days of Nebuchadnezzar. This was to comfort in advance the remnant that the long captivity would come to an end, and encourage them to put their trust in the Lord. By the time Belshazzar was slain we have this question, "Where is the fury of the oppressor?". The answer is in Micah, Jeremiah and in Ezra, who tell of the deliverance that Cyrus gave in bringing back the Israelites to their own land, and giving full permission for the building of the temple. "Zerubbabel . . . shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings crying, Grace, grace unto it." Though He dealt with us as he did, yet the remnant would be saved. There was a golden thread running through it all. We have an account in Zechariah of how the Lord blessed him and was a wall of fire round about him and the glory in the midst.

Whatever plan is brought against the Cause of Christ, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." There was an Israel within Israel. Many said, "We have Abraham to our father, therefore we are secure", but this is carnal security and not the language of humility, lowliness, faith. This is one outstanding instance of our text — the end of the Babylonian captivity and the Medo-Persian beginning. The purpose of the Lord was fulfilled, and they were permitted to re-build the temple. Where is the fury of the oppressor?

Instance 2. The Lord has a care over His own Church in all ages. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In Psalm 8 we read, "How excellent in all the earth, Lord our Lord is thy name." "From infants and from sucklings' mouth thou didest strength ordain." Though these are infants sanctified from the womb we believe this portion is not limited to literal infants. We have the case of David, who in his early days, was sent by his father with parched corn and cheese to visit his brethren at Elah. Goliath of Gath defied Israel for many days. David may be regarded as a man after God's own heart. How could you speak of a man who had killed a lion and a bear as a suckling? He was well trained in the use of the stave. How are we going to look on him as an infant or a suckling? His brothers taunted him with pride. The backbone of the matter is when, in the providence of the Lord, he undertook to meet Goliath, he could not take Saul's armour but had a staff and a sling. Even the soldiers were terrified by Goliath's boasts and challenge. When David came forth he said, "Am I a dog that you come to me with a stave?" Goliath overlook-

ed the sling. He made no reference to the sling and stone. He was going to give David, and, therefore, Christ in David, to the birds of the air. Satan at the back of Goliath wished to cut the promise which ran from the garden of Eden to the womb of the virgin Mary, that is what is in the background. Goliath was very mighty and powerful, but "brutish folly plainly is their wisdom and their way". "They to their fathers' race shall go, they shall never see light etc." David had, at this time, what Saul had not got, viz. God the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. David got into many a snare, but he was a man after God's own heart, and he was anointed to be king, and in course of time the Redeemer would come from the house and lineage of David. The Lord sealed on Him what he was to say and do, and he was dependent, like a babe or suckling, even to old age and to all eternity on the breasts and promises of the everlasting covenant. We must desire to grow in grace, humility, self-abhorrence, love to God and to our fellow-creatures, but in being dependent on what God the Lord doth speak. David did not say: "Well, I'll do my best while I'll hear 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' but I'll do this other thing also." No. He put his amen to the good and holy will of God, and he knew in advance that the stone he took to cast from the sling, unseen by Goliath, would not bounce off the helmet of Goliath, and that it would not come down with a thud on his breastplate. "I come to thee in the name of the Lord God of Israel." 'Thou shalt sling it but I shall sling it too.' There were two at the back of the stone. David used skill, but he knew that the pebble would come on the forehead of the poor miserable Goliath, that his forehead would be broken, and he would come down with a slump on the ground. When David ran and took the pebble he was guided by the Lord who created the pebble, and the forehead of Goliath smashed, and where now is the fury of the oppressor? You can apply it to one hundred cases, if you like. Who is going to have the last word in the matter?

Our closing instance concerns Christ, and if I were to lead up to the ministry of the Redeemer, Gethsemane and Calvary we should need to read the evangelical narratives and holy records in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and all the prophecies in the Old Testament — His being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, His birth, Herod's attempt to slay the child Jesus, His public ministry, and if the Jews could, He would have been over the brow of the hill. Where then would be Isaiah chapter 53, Psalm 69, and Psalm 22, which in an acceptable time, were to have their fulfilment? They were to be fulfilled by the time in Gethsemane, the council hall of Pilate and Herod, the condemnation and crucifixion, sufferings which we cannot understand, and which he bore

in love in the cup, which he drank in love for you today if you love the way of salvation, and if your soul is married to the meaning and virtue of salvation. You died with Christ and rose from the dead with Him. Those who crucified the Redeemer did their utmost, as if they had all power over Him, and got complete victory over Him, but in the midst of all He dismissed His own life. They could not do it. He had the Holy Spirit not according to measure, imparting strength to His human soul to endure what He judiciously undertook to endure. He took the sting out of death and rose from the dead, and all the Church rose in Him. Quite a number of men and women here today were in the grave representatively and rose with Christ, and if you like the gospel and if Christ is your bread and wine, and the slaker of your spiritual thirst, then you have in you a well of water rising up into everlasting life. If you are burdened with indwelling sin, and your heart is like a lump of stone, you are ashamed of your ungodliness and fruitlessness, you are just walking in the footsteps of Paul and David. But Christ is precious to you, and you rose representatively in Him.

May the Lord grant that our little company today may be able to say "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us Kings and priests unto God and His Father: to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

"Let us Hold Fast Our Profession"

by Rev. J. C. Ryle

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." — Hebrews 4: 14.

"Let us hold fast!" We should mark well this expression. A careful reader of the Epistle to the Hebrews can hardly fail to observe that the words "*let us*" are found no less than four times in the fourth chapter. In the first verse you will read, "let us fear", — in the eleventh verse, "let us labour", — in the fourteenth verse, "let us hold fast", — and in the sixteenth verse, "let us come boldly to the throne of grace". We should take note of this.

Now why did the Apostle St Paul write in this way? He did it because the Hebrew Christians, to whom he wrote, were a peculiar people, and occupied a peculiar position. They were not like Gentile converts who had been brought up to worship idols, and had never received any revelation from God. The Jews were a people who had enjoyed the special favour

of God for fifteen hundred years. All through that long period they had possessed the law of Moses, and an immense amount of light, which had not been given to any other nation on earth. These privileges had made them very sensitive and jealous at the idea of any change. They needed to be approached very gently and delicately, and to be addressed in a peculiar style. All this St Paul, himself born a Jew, remembered well. He puts himself on a level with them, and says, “Let us, — I speak to myself as well as to you, lest I should offend you.”

But this is not all. I might add that the Jewish Christians had very peculiar trials to undergo. I suspect they were far more persecuted and ill-used after their conversion than the Gentile Christians were. No doubt it was a hard thing for a Gentile to turn from idols. But it was a much harder thing for a Jew to profess that he was not content with the ceremonial law of Moses, and that he had found a better priest, and a better sacrifice, even Jesus of Nazareth, and the blood of the Cross. This also St. Paul remembered well, and he cheers and encourages them by placing himself by their side, and saying, “Let us fear,” — “let us labour,” — “let us hold fast,” — “let us come boldly,” — “I am as you are, we are all in the same boat.”

I shall confine myself in this paper to the text which heads it, and I shall try to answer three questions.

- I. What is the profession of which St. Paul speaks?
- II. Why does St. Paul say, “Let us hold fast?”
- III. What is the grand encouragement which St. Paul gives us to “hold fast”?

Before I go any further, I ask my readers to remember that the things we are about to consider were written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost for the benefit of the whole Church of Christ in every age down to the end of the world. They were meant to be used by all true Christians in England, and by all classes, whether high or low, rich or poor, in London, or Liverpool, or in any part of the earth. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not an old worn-out letter which only suits the Jews of eighteen centuries ago. It is meant for you and me. We all need to be exhorted to “hold fast our profession”.

- I. Let us begin by considering *what is meant by “our profession”*.

When St. Paul uses this expression there can be little doubt about his meaning. He meant that public “profession” of faith in Christ and obedience to Him, which every person made when he became a member of the Christian Church. In the days of the apostle, when a man or woman left Judaism or heathenism, and received Christ as a Saviour, he declared

himself a Christian by certain acts. He did it by being publicly baptised, by joining the company of those who had been baptised already, by publicly promising to give up idolatry and wickedness of all kinds, and by habitually taking part with the followers of Jesus of Nazareth in all their religious assemblies, their ways, and their practices. This is what St. Paul had in view when he wrote the words, "Let us hold fast our profession."

Profession in those days was a very serious matter, and entailed very serious consequences. It often brought on a man persecution, loss of property, imprisonment, and even death. The consequence was that few persons ever made a Christian profession in the early Church unless they were thoroughly in earnest, truly converted, and really believers. No doubt there were some exceptions. People like Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon Magus, and Demas, crept in and joined themselves to the disciples. But these were exceptional cases. As a general rule it was not worth while for a man to profess Christianity if his heart was not entirely in his profession. It cost much. It brought on a man the risk of a vast amount of trouble, and brought in very little gain. The whole result was, that the proportion of sincere, right-hearted, and converted persons in the Church of the apostle's days was far greater than it ever has been at any other period in the last eighteen centuries. There was a very deep meaning in St. Paul's words when he said, "Let us hold fast our profession".

In the days in which we live "profession" is a very different thing. Millions of people profess and call themselves Christians, whom the apostle would not have called Christians at all. Millions are annually baptized, and added to the rolls and registers of churches, who have little or no religion. Many of them live and die without ever attending a place of worship, and live very ungodly lives. Many more only go to a church or chapel occasionally, or once on Sunday at the most. Many others pass through life without ever becoming communicants, and live and die in the habitual neglect of that Holy Sacrament which the Lord commanded to be received. Most of these people are reckoned Christians while they live, and are buried with Christian burial when they die. But what would St. Paul have said of them? I fear there can be no doubt about the answer. He would have said they did not deserve to be reckoned members of any Church at all! He would not have addressed them as "saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus." He would not have called upon them to "hold fast their profession". He would have told them they had no profession to hold fast, and that they were "yet dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2: 1). All this is sorrowful and painful, but it is only too true. Let those deny it who dare.

Let us, however, thank God that there are not a few to be found in every part of Christendom who really are what they profess to be, true, sincere, earnest-minded, hearty, converted, believing Christians. Some of them, no doubt, belong to churches in which their souls get little help. Some of them have very imperfect knowledge, and hold the truth in solution, with a mixture of many defective views. But they have all certain common marks about them. They see the value of their souls, and really want to be saved. They feel the sinfulness of sin, and hate it, and fight with it, and long to be free from it. They see that Jesus Christ alone can save them, and that they ought to trust only in Him. They see that they ought to live holy and godly lives, and in their poor way they try to do it. They love their Bibles, and they pray, though both their reading and their praying are very defective. Some of them, in short, are in the highest standard of Christ's school, and are strong in knowledge, faith, and love. Others are only in the infants' room, and in everything are weak and poor. But in one point they are all one. Their hearts are right in the sight of God; they love Christ; their faces are set towards heaven, and they want to go there. These are especially those in the present day to whom I wish in this paper to apply St. Paul's exhortation, "Let us hold fast our profession." Let us cling to it and not let it go.

Now I cannot forget that we meet thousands of persons in daily life who are always saying, "I make no profession of religion." They not only say it, but rather glory in saying it, as if it was a right, wise, and proper thing to say. They seem even to despise those who make a profession, and to regard them as hypocrites and impostors, or, at any rate, as weak and foolish people. Now if this paper happens to fall into the hands of any person of this kind, I have somewhat to say to him, and I invite his best attention.

I do not deny that there are many hypocrites in religion. There always were, and there always will be, as long as the world stands. As long as there is good gold and silver coin in the realm, so long there will be forging, coining and counterfeit money. The very existence of bad coins is in indirect proof that there is something which it is worth while to imitate, and that there is such a thing as good current money in circulation. It is just the same with Christianity! The very fact that there are many false professors in the Churches is an indirect proof that there are such persons as true-hearted and sound believers. It is one of Satan's favourite devices, in order to bring discredit on Christianity, to persuade some unhappy people to profess what they do not really believe. He tries to damage the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world by sending out

wolves in sheep's clothing, and by raising up men and women who talk the language of Canaan, and wear the coat of God's children, while they are inwardly rotten at heart. But these things do not justify a man in condemning all religious profession.

I tell those who boast that they make no profession that they are only exhibiting their own sorrowful ignorance of Holy Scripture. The hypocrisy of some unhappy people must never prevent us doing our own duty, without caring what men may say or think of us. We must never be ashamed of showing ourselves boldly on Christ's side, by honouring His word, His day, and His ordinances, by speaking up for Christ's cause on all proper occasions, and by firmly refusing to conform to the sins and the follies of the children of this world. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ ought never to be forgotten: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9: 26). If we will not confess Christ upon earth, and openly profess that we are His servants, we must not expect that Christ will confess us in heaven at the last day.

In short, the very last thing that a man should be ashamed of is the "profession" of religion. There are many things, unhappily, of which most people seem not ashamed at all. Ill-temper, selfishness, want of charity, laziness, malice, backbiting, lying, slandering, intemperance, impurity, gambling, Sabbath-breaking, — all these are terribly common things among men, and of most of them people do not seem a bit ashamed, though they ought to be! They that habitually "do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. v 21). But of Bible-reading, praying, holy living and working for the good of bodies and souls, no one ever need be ashamed. These may be things which many laugh at, dislike, and despise, and have no taste for, but they are the very things with which God is well pleased. Once more, I repeat, whatever men may say, the very last thing of which we ought to be ashamed is our "profession" of faith in Christ, and obedience to Christ.

The Word of God Shall Stand

by Rev. K. D. MacLeod, South Harris

Some thoughts on Isaiah 40: 6-8. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Our generation, perhaps more than any other in history, has been con-

scious of change. Change in so many spheres has reached a faster pace than ever before. At one time nations could generally take refuge in the unchanging nature of their religion. Whatever else was changing — for one generation was all the time passing away and giving place to another — yet when they looked around for something that was permanent they could usually find security in the fact that their's was the same religion as that of many previous generations. But our generation, by and large, does not have even that refuge and has therefore become all the more conscious of how impermanent everything is. Change, purely for the sake of change, has so often become the order of the day.

However, we all look for something unchanging, even in a changing world. Where can we get that? The one answer to that question is the answer which Isaiah got when he asked, "What shall I cry?" — "*The Word of our God shall stand for ever*".

When the voice of God came to Isaiah, calling on him to give a message to his people, his immediate reaction was to ask in return, "What shall I cry?" He was very conscious that he needed to get his message from God; he could not trust his own religious thoughts if he was to say something that would be useful to the souls of his fellow-creatures and relevant to their spiritual needs.

If Isaiah had been a present-day theologian, who had been commanded to give a message to his fellow-countrymen, he might have spent the rest of the day working out his past religious experiences, his past thoughts of God, together with his knowledge of the spiritual life of mankind generally and of the various other religions he had encountered personally. We would expect him to give special place to the way in which Jehovah was worshipped in Israel, but he would take what he considered to be best in all religions and pass on his considered opinions to his hearers. But Isaiah could not thus trust his own mind; he could not trust his own religious thoughts, or the religious thoughts of any other individual or group of people. He knew that he had to ask for a revelation direct from God.

It was because Paul had the same consciousness of the insufficiency of his own intellect that he declared, "Now then we are *ambassadors* for Christ" (2 Cor. 5: 20). An ambassador is fundamentally no more than a messenger who goes from one country to another to say exactly what he is instructed to say. That is how both Isaiah and Paul saw themselves, and that is how every minister of the gospel should see himself. The fact is that no man — however religious he may be — can have any genuine knowledge of God apart from revelation. God has a perfect understand-

ding of how man thinks, and so He declares, "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vain" (Ps. 94: 11). Man unaided — the man who has not been taught by God — can therefore never be relied on to think correctly in the spiritual realm.

Man does have considerable power of thought; he is perfectly capable of grasping many things about distant stars, for instance, and about the minute particles which make up the atom. But it is an altogether different matter when even the most brilliant mind attempts to understand spiritual truths, apart from a revelation from God. What lies at the bottom of this difficulty is the vitally important fact of sin. Man is a sinner; sin affects every part of his being, but never is he more seriously affected by sin than when he thinks religiously. It is not that today's preachers, or anyone else, is to expect fresh revelations from God — the time for that is over, but they are unfailingly to use that perfect source of religious knowledge that He has already given — His revelation in the inspired Scriptures.

This is the attitude that everyone should have when they come to think about spiritual things, and to think about spiritual things is an absolute necessity if we are to be safe for eternity. God has given us our minds, not that they should be wasted, or that they should be confined to the things which are seen and temporal, but that they should be used, more than for anything else, to think of spiritual realities. And, when we realise that God is calling on us to think, what is to be our response? Must we not reply, somewhat as Isaiah did, What shall I think? To which question the answer must be, in Augustine's expression, To think God's thoughts after Him.

Religion should be the controlling factor in every part of our lives. But what kind of religion will that be? Our religion must have a sure foundation, and that foundation will be positively insecure unless it is the revelation that God has given in the Bible. God is so much higher, infinitely higher, than we, His creatures, are. How then can we be sure of anything we might think about Him unless He has revealed it to us? Besides, we must acknowledge the natural sinfulness of our minds, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2: 14). Even when we have a revelation from God we will not submit to it unless the Holy Spirit will apply it to us. No one will receive what the Spirit of God has revealed in the Scriptures, unless the same Spirit will make him spiritually alive. No one needs any kind of spiritual knowledge except what has been revealed in the Word of God, but we do need that God would apply it to us.

Surely it was the consciousness that Isaiah and the other prophets had of their need to get a revelation from above that made them so often introduce what they had to say with the words, "Thus saith the Lord". It was as if they were saying, "I do not come with my own message; I do not come with those thoughts that I have worked out myself. I come with what the Lord God has said; He has revealed it to me, and I am passing it on as His ambassador." So it should be with all who preach the gospel; everything that they say should be exactly in line with God's revelation in the Bible, for it is the only source of reliable knowledge in religion. That makes it all the sadder when professedly Christian ministers acknowledge a debt to other religions, and hold inter-faith services involving participants from a number of different religions. We must be absolutely clear on the fact that truth in religion is only to be found in a revelation from God, and we must be equally clear that such a revelation is only to be found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which from beginning to end are absolutely without error, and so totally reliable.

When Jonah was sent to Nineveh he was given very clear-cut instructions: "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jon. 3: 2). God's messengers today are also under obligation to obey these same instructions. God has given the Bible to us as something that is absolutely relevant to the needs of every generation. If this Book had been the product of a creature's thoughts, the product of the thoughts of even the most brilliant of men, it would have been altogether inadequate to give any light in the religious sphere. In particular, we could get no answer to that most basic of questions, How may sinners be received into favour by the God against whom they have rebelled?

If preachers have an obligation to take all their ideas from the Scriptures, their hearers have a corresponding obligation, to say from the heart, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" (Ps. 85: 8). Hearers are to say, "I will listen to the preacher, but if his ideas are not moulded by the Scriptures then there is something wrong. What I must hear is what God the Lord will speak." That is why the people of Berea were praised, when Paul came to them claiming to preach the truth about Jesus, they "searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so" (Acts 17: 11). They directed their minds "to the law and to the testimony". That is how they were minded to determine whether or not Paul was speaking the truth. They soon found out that Paul's message was in perfect agreement with the Old Testament Scriptures, and they concluded that what he said was the truth. As a result they got a blessing for their souls, for

many of them were given grace to believe. So if we know that it is the truth that we are hearing then it is our bounden duty to give up all resistance to it, and to submit to the truth of God as it is being declared to us, resolving, By the grace of God I will hear what God the Lord will speak.

It was a worthwhile activity for Isaiah to write down God's message, because he was assured at this very time, "The Word of our God shall stand for ever". It is therefore not a case of one message for Isaiah's generation and another for our's, for the truth of God never changes, and never will. Modern man may say that Isaiah's doctrines probably had some relevance for his generation, but that twentieth-century man is far too sophisticated for a message like his. Such is the pride of modern man, but the reality is different. The Bible as it was originally given, and as it has been so wonderfully preserved in the providence of God, is perfectly accurate; it is absolute truth and permanent truth.

Modern man will not believe in the infallibility of Scripture, he prefers to think that it is more or less inaccurate. And, sadly, far too much of the so-called evangelical world is thoroughly modern in this respect; while agreeing that the Bible can be relied on when it speaks of doctrine, there is a refusal to accept that it is dependable when it speaks about geography or science, for instance. Thus, most conspicuously, there is a willingness to accept some form of the theory of evolution in opposition to the Scriptural account of creation. It is, however, impossible to divide up Scripture in this way into separate watertight compartments; the idea that man came into existence by some process of evolution cannot be squared with the history of Adam's creation given in Genesis, and in turn it is in conflict with the Biblical *doctrine* of the fall. Any departure from the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible is positively dangerous and at once undermines other doctrines, leaving us with no sure foundation.

What lies behind the infallibility of the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration, for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3: 16). This is an inspiration altogether higher than the inspiration with which a poet, say, is credited, when his work is of such a quality that it still attracts attention centuries after it was first written. We can certainly speak without qualification about the high literary quality of the Bible, but there is far, far more to be said than that, for what is meant by Scripture being inspired is that it is *God-breathed*.

Often what Isaiah and the other prophets recorded was the very words of God, and when they wrote them down they did so with perfect accuracy, because they wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And when, on

the other hand, Isaiah wrote the history of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, or some other historical event, the record is just as inspired, and it is just as accurate. For, when Isaiah used the powers of his own mind in writing down the account of these various incidents, God the Holy Spirit was guiding him supernaturally. What Isaiah recorded was exactly what God wished him to record, and it was therefore perfectly accurate.

This is true of the whole of Scripture. No part of Scripture therefore can possibly become dated; no part of it will ever lose its relevance. Thus the Word of God always has a claim on us. Because it will stand for ever it will have a claim even on those who will live at the very last moments of this world's existence. It will still be perfect truth then, and it will still be perfectly relevant to man's spiritual needs. Never will God's Word become less useful to man's spiritual needs than once it was. That is why, at the very close of the Bible, God gives such a solemn warning against adding to it, or taking away from it: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22: 18f). And we can safely take it that this warning applies not only to the Book of Revelation, but to all 66 books of the Bible.

We can thus be sure that if we take religious ideas from any source except the Bible we are guaranteed to go wrong, and guaranteed to go seriously wrong. We must not accept anyone's claim to a fresh revelation, for God has already declared in the Scriptures everything that anyone needs to know to get safely through this life, and safely into heaven. We all need to learn more of, and to understand better, what God has already revealed, but there can be no safety in giving the least authority to any other possible source of religious knowledge, Roman Catholic tradition and the teachings of Charismatic prophets included.

In particular, the Bible stands true today when it makes it clear that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3: 23), and when it makes clear that sin is man's basic problem. Whatever problems there are in today's world — and there are uncountable multitudes of them — they are all, in one way or another, the result of sin. This is just as true today as when Paul first wrote these words, for we, individually, have sinned and come short of the glory of God. God has revealed this to us so that we might take notice of this solemn fact, and be convinced in our souls of the seriousness of our natural condition as rebels against God. So too has God given a revelation of the seriousness of the consequences

of sin, for He warns that "the wicked shall be turned into hell" (Ps. 10: 17). If God has given us minds so that we might use them then, when He speaks about sin in particular, we are under obligation to submit to Him and say, "*I will hear what God the Lord will speak when He is speaking to me about my sin and its consequences.*"

It has been revealed with equal certainty that "it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1: 15). The person who wrote these words, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was someone who had taken seriously what God has revealed about sin, for he immediately adds: "Of whom I am chief." God spoke to Paul about his sin, and Paul listened. He not only accepted it as a general truth that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," but he accepted it as something which spoke about himself and his relationship to God. And, just as he took seriously God's revelation about sin and about the one and only remedy for sin, so he would have others take these things seriously also; he wished that others would close in with the great and gracious and glorious faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners".

God ordered it that that particular expression of Paul's thinking should be preserved for us so that we too, to whom it comes almost at the end of the twentieth century, might close in with Christ as the one Saviour of sinners. His statement is still as true, and it is as relevant, as ever it was — not so much because Paul said it, but because it is a perfectly accurate expression of truth as revealed by God — and therefore it demands our supreme attention. There is equally good ground for our being assured of the truth of the statement, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (Jn. 6: 47). It was the Son of God that made the statement, and it has been recorded with absolute accuracy. We can be perfectly sure of the eternal security of everyone who believes in Christ.

We can be just as sure of the authority and accuracy of all the doctrines revealed in Scripture, but what is central to the message given to Isaiah is a vivid statement of the fact that man's time on earth is short in the extreme. No one needs to be told that everyone else must die. That is not what we forget; what we forget is that we ourselves must die. What we need is to apply this truth to ourselves, and to follow out its consequences.

On a summer's day we see the grass alive and green, and the flowers bright and colourful. But we saw the grass and the flowers just as attractive as that in previous years also, and then autumn came, and winter after

it. The grass withered, the flowers soon faded. And what we are to learn is that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it, surely the people is grass." The wind in a hot country, which like everything else in providence is under the control of God, dries up the grass and the flowers and makes them wither. So when God touches a person's life it is at an end. Thus the question is asked: "For what is your life?" And the inspired answer is, "It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4: 14). We are assured also that "there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war" (Ecc. 8: 8).

The grass will wither this year also, and even the most beautiful of flowers will wither with it. So it is not only the common man that must die, but even the most accomplished of his fellow creatures, the most brilliant of scientists and political leaders, for instance. They may have made good use of the natural powers which God has given them, it may be that they have been extremely conscientious in discharging their duties, but none of them can have power over his spirit to retain his spirit when God's time comes to remove him from this world. The most successful men of the world are no less subject to the power of death than are others. Neither can great possessions keep anyone in the world — "the rich . . . as the flower of the grass he shall pass away" (Jas. 1: 10).

There is only one distinction that will matter at the end of the day; it is this: Do we, or do we not, have a new heart? Have we, or have we not, closed in with the great and gracious and glorious faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"? They are commended who "confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth" (Heb. 11: 13). That was because they sought a better country, heaven, and they did so because they were persuaded in their inmost souls that what God had revealed to them was truth, truth that would stand for ever. That race of people is not yet off the earth; they still give the first place to the things that are unseen and eternal.

All the glory of this world is passing. Where can we find something secure, something unchanging in this changing world? God has given the only dependable answer in what he told Isaiah to proclaim; the one thing that is unchanging in a changing world is the Word of our God, which shall stand for ever.

The Sabbath or Lord's Day

It's Origin and the Duty and Benefit to Mankind in the keeping of it.

By the Lord's help I wish to examine the subject in the form of a dialogue, there are three speakers: the first a **Minister**, the second, a young Christian called **Nathanael**, the third, an unbeliever called **Thomas**.

MINISTER: Well friends let us have a discussion about the Sabbath or Lord's Day.

NATHANAEL: Sir, I would like to know the true position for a Christian in regard of the keeping of the Sabbath. Many say it is a Jewish institution.

MINISTER: Well Nathanael first you must understand that it is not only a Jewish law, because we read in Genesis 2: 2,3 that God instituted and blessed the **Sabbath day in the garden of Eden** after finishing His work of creation.

Genesis 2: 2,3 states: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made".

So this day was instituted hundreds of years **before the Jewish nation existed**, even before men fell into sin. But after the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were again reminded of it, in the giving of the law of God in the ten commandments on Mount Sinai by his servant Moses, Exodus 20: 8, 9,10, 11. Verse 8 says: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy". So it is **part of the moral law**, which can never be abrogated. For instance who would question the duty of the keeping of the 8th commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", which is also part of the moral law? Therefore we ought to keep the Sabbath day holy, first, because of **God's own example** as a day of rest; also to reflect on the glory of God in creation, and providence; and especially, as New Testament believers, to reflect on the glory of the new creation in the finished work of Christ by giving Himself a perfect sacrifice for sin.

We read in Scripture that God's laws are holy, just and good. We see God's goodness in giving us six days to do our own work, and requiring only one day for Himself. It is surely evil to **rob God** of His own holy day by doing our own thing. So it is just that God requires a day of rest to keep holy, lest we forget our Creator and Benefactor, and would be swallowed up by the materialism of our age, or be exploited by the worldly businessman. Therefore God has promised His blessing by the keeping

of His day.

Many a Christian knows from experience, that at the end of the week they are often oppressed with worldly cares and concerns, and that during and after the keeping of the Sabbath, they are lifted above these cares by keeping His day, by seeing things in the right perspective in the light of eternity, and so getting renewed strength to carry on joyfully through the new week.

THOMAS: But how are we to know we are keeping the right day anyway, as the Jews and Seventh Day Adventists keep the seventh day, and the Christian Church the first day of the week? How can you change a moral law?

MINISTER: Before answering this question, let us have another look at the fourth commandment which is part of the moral law and cannot be broken. Let us understand that the **morality of the Sabbath does not consist in being the seventh day, but in keeping a whole day in seven holy to the Lord**, so by a change of day the morality of the commandment is still preserved. Having said this, let us now examine from Scripture which is the right day to keep for us. As we find out by studying the Scripture, the seventh day was always kept in Old Testament times until Christ's resurrection, but then his disciples started keeping the first day of the week, being the resurrection day of Christ after He had finished His work of redemption, which is a far greater work than creation. In creation God spake and it was done, but in the work of redemption, God, the Son, became man, while still retaining His Divine nature. As the God-Man He was able to suffer and bear the sins of His people on the cross, and by His life He worked out a righteousness for His people to be imputed to their account. So they are accounted righteous in the sight of God, because Christ kept the law perfectly for them. By faith a believer is made partaker of these blessings.

Christ himself says in Matthew 12: 8 **"For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day."** Therefore He has the authority to change the day, and His apostles, who acted by His direction, and under the influence of His Spirit, constantly met for divine worship on the first day of the week, which is called, "the Lord's day" Acts 20: 7. Rev 1: 10. The apostle John says: **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega."** Then follows Christ's revelation to His servant John. So we see that **Christ honoured His own day, in revealing His mind to His servant.**

Now in regard of the Seventh Day Adventists' claim that the Emperor Constantine's edict in the year AD 321 changed the seventh day to the

first day of the week, is grossly misleading. The truth is that Constantine on becoming a Christian **merely ratified** what was the **common Christian practice** since the days of the apostles.

NATHANAEL: Sir, after what you have said I can clearly see the duty of keeping the Lord's Day, but how must we understand Rom. 14: 5,6 "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and given God thanks"? And also Colossians 2: 16, 17 "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day's; which are a shadow of things to come: but the body is of Christ."

MINISTER: Well, these texts are very similar, so we can treat them as one. As most Bible students know, the early church was troubled by Judaisers. These were Jews who insisted that the Mosaic law continued in force, and that Christians were bound to conform to its prescriptions with regard to the distinction between clean and unclean meats, and the many feast days on which all labour ceased.

At that time when this epistle was written, the church was in a **transition period**, therefore the apostle by inspiration leaves it to the individual to keep them, but not to judge one another for keeping, or not keeping them. Some at first were keeping the Jewish Sabbath, and some the Lord's Day, we read in history books some even kept both days.

So, in no way are we to understand that the weekly Sabbath is optional. It has been observed from the creation, and the **apostles themselves introduced and perpetuated the Lord's day, as the Christian Sabbath.**

We can divide the laws of the Old Testament into three categories: 1. **Moral Laws:** These are summarised in the ten commandments, and are binding on all men for all time. 2. **Ceremonial Laws:** These are largely typical, pointing to Christ (offerings, holy days etc), fulfilled in Christ, and therefore are shadows passed away. 3. **Civil Laws:** These have largely to do with the Jewish state.

THOMAS: Sir. But what about this text Rom. 6: 14. "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." I think therefore we are not obliged to keep a Sabbath.

MINISTER: Well, friend, a believer is free from the law as a covenant of works. That means the law cannot condemn him now as far as his standing before God is concerned, because the believer looks by faith to Christ,

the one who fulfilled the law on his behalf and satisfied divine justice by suffering the penalty for sin on the cross on behalf of his people. But, as a rule of life, the believer seeks by grace to run in the way of God's commandments, as **Christ says: "If you love me keep my commandments"**. The commandments are holy, just and good, as His word declares.

As I said before, the Sabbath is an integral part of the moral law, therefore binding on all mankind. It is absurd to think that the law is not binding because of Christ's sacrifice for sin.

In effect what you are saying is that because of Christ's atoning work, we have now liberty to sin, which is blasphemy, as we know that **sin is a transgression of the law of God**.

I conclude as a Puritan put it: "Christ redeems us from the curse of the law, but not from the command of the law."

I hope that this will clear up this question.

NATHANAEL: Sir, thank you for answering our questions. Please could you give us some guidance as how to keep his day holy.

MINISTER: Well, Nathanael, this is a very good question, because God's word says that we must not only be hearers of His word, but also doers of the word. Well, first of all, we must make **preparation** for the day, by ordering our affairs in such a way that no work is left to be done on the Sabbath. Also spiritually we ought to make preparation. For instance, we ought to pray for grace to lay aside our worldly cares, so as to better observe His holy day. On His day we must not waste holy time, but seek to be diligent to improve the time by reading, praying and meditation, and of course in attending the house of God; but works of necessity and mercy may be done, as we have the example of Christ, in visiting and attending the sick. We must lay aside all works and recreations which are lawful on other days. Also we must teach our children the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of Wisdom.

I conclude by quoting Isaiah 58: 13, 14, which is far better than anything I can say.

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, **from doing thy pleasure** on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, **not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, not speaking thine own words**: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Also the duty of the government is to uphold the Sabbath day by **legislating laws** to protect the day.

THOMAS: But many people do not want to be restricted to keep the Sabbath day. Why should the government enforce a law on an unwilling people?

MINISTER: Well, Thomas, the government, as a God given institution, is duty-bound to **uphold the law of God**, which is holy, just and good, even though many people do not see it that way. We, as fallen creatures, are often our own worst enemies.

Therefore there ought to be laws in place to protect the day from Sabbath trading, public transport, entertainment and the many blatant forms of Sabbath breaking in our land. The sad part is that today we see the very opposite — governments repealing these laws, thereby tempting many people into Sabbath work.

We therefore incur the displeasure of God, and his judgments are sure to follow our land. To truly love the Lord's day there must be **love to the Lord of the Sabbath**. Therefore the duty of the Church is to teach the people **how to keep** the day holy, and by the true preaching of the Word, and by the blessing of the Spirit of God, this will bring the people to love the Lord of the Sabbath, and also to love His day as the best day of the week and so experience His blessing in it.

MINISTER: Friends, I conclude by advising you to carefully consider what I have told you. Endeavour to **keep the Lord's day in a scriptural way** and I am sure you will receive the benefit of it for body and soul, for all God's commandments are **holy and just and good**.

— J. H.

Obituary

The Late Angus Maclean, Elder, Ness.

Angus Maclean was born in the village of Port-of-Ness in 1929. Like many of his fellow-islanders, he left home at the early age of seventeen years to join the Merchant Navy. For eleven years he sailed on foreign-going vessels, including a number of seasons on whalers in the Antarctic.

In 1958, a sense of duty to his aged parents decided his return home to care for them. Some years after, he was employed as an Insurance Agent with the Pearl Assurance, serving Ness and the West-side of Lewis. His pleasant and polite disposition earned him the respect of those he served.

His place in the means of grace was seldom unoccupied; and it was at a service during the October Communion in 1973, at Ness, that Angus was awakened to a sense of his lost condition. The words in Canticles 1: 8, "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock" were impressed upon his mind, we believe, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, to leave him

restless and peaceless. The time to favour him came when he was enabled to rest his sin troubled soul on the memorable words of the Saviour, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" John 8 v 36. His joy in the Lord was not only real to himself but obvious to others also.

Not long after his deliverance from the Kingdom of darkness, Satan the enemy of God and man attacked him with venom, resulting in bondage, sleepless nights and inability to give his customary attention to his lawful calling. He cried to the Lord and searched His Word for the restoration of the joy of salvation. This was granted to him through the words of Galatians 4 v 9.

In October 1975 he was received to membership in the Ness Congregation. In June 1980 he was ordained to the Eldership in the aforementioned congregation, and in July of that year, he was appointed Session Clerk. The duties of his office and appointment he fulfilled with dignity and proficiency. He represented the Session in Presbytery and Synod in 1987. This was the first and last Synod he attended, and he fully realised that a sifting time was imminent.

The last public service our friend attended was a Prayer Meeting in the Stornoway Church. That evening he heard our African minister, Rev Aaron Ndebele, Ingwenya Mission, preach from the words in which he found the Messiah. Angus was refreshed and greatly encouraged.

The next evening, following upon an accident at his home, he was removed to the Lewis Hospital. All that was medically possible was done, but to no avail. On the 5th day of June 1989, the end came. His removal cast a gloom on the whole community, and left a great blank in his home congregation and in the hearts of his many friends.

The esteem in which Angus was held was evidenced by the large number of people that attended his funeral. Probably every parish in Lewis was represented and some from the neighbouring island of Harris.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to his like-minded widow, son, daughter and sister, and our prayer is that the Lord, who richly blessed him whom they mourn, will uphold them in their sore bereavement. "The memory of the just is blessed," Proverbs 10 v 7.

(This obituary was compiled by two friends. Editor)

Those who live a mortified life, who are humble and self-denying, and dead to the world, command respect, and men have a secret value and reverence for them, more than one would imagine.

Matthew Henry

Book Reviews

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY, Lectures on Doctrine by A. A. Hodge, The Banner of Truth Trust, 448 pages, £7.95.

Prefaced by a 33-page biography, this well-produced hardback contains 19 lectures on various doctrines of the Bible. It begins with the doctrine of God and closes with the doctrines of heaven and hell. It does not deal with all the doctrines which one would expect to be covered in a volume of systematic theology, for the lectures which make up this volume formed a series delivered to a general audience in 1886, the year of the author's death.

As one would expect from a Professor of Theology in the nineteenth-century Princeton Seminary these lectures form, on the whole, an able presentation of the areas of doctrine which Hodge has chosen to deal with. However, for an all-round, and warmer, presentation of Christian doctrine for the general reader I am happier to recommend the same writer's exposition of *The Confession of Faith*. One reason for the extra warmth of the latter book is that it makes much more use of the actual Scriptures.

In *Evangelical Theology* there are a number of points on which care is required. It is quite amazing for a Presbyterian minister — as Hodge was — to claim that no form of Church Government is prescribed in the Bible. He is also weak on the spiritual effects of false doctrine, Arminianism for example. In his discussion of those who were baptised as children coming to the Lord's Table one misses a clear statement that they should first be converted. Nor should one be happy with his acceptance of "long geologic ages" in the history of the world, or his acceptance of the type of text of the Bible which is used in modern versions. On another matter of detail, Hodge makes an impressively passionate attack on the omission of religion in schools; it reveals a healthier attitude to the relationship between Church and State than is common in American writers.

K. D. M.

THE NEW AGE CULT by Walter Martin, Bethany House Publishers, 144 pages.

Martin was a well-known authority and writer on the various cults which have become so plentiful in this twentieth century. He died in 1989 shortly after this book was written.

The *new age* is the so-called Aquarian Age, which New Agers believe is now dawning, bringing with it a period of enlightenment and peace.

Many of its roots are to found in Hinduism with its belief in the return of individuals to the world in further incarnations to work off the bad deeds of previous lifetimes. The movement is also strong on the inherent divinity of man, because of its acceptance of Pantheism — the idea that there is no personal God, but that God is the sum total of everything that exists. Other roots are in the occult. Martin outlines some of the false and blasphemous doctrines of the movement and gives Scriptural answers (though one could wish that the AV was used).

It is not easy to get a clear picture of the movement; for one thing there is considerable variation in belief and emphasis. But this is the type of thought that lies behind the Greenpeace movement, the Green Party and much more. Unquestionably there is a duty before God to take a responsible attitude to His Creation, but we have to consider the philosophy which lies behind these organisations. In a generation which has cast off the whole concept of religion as a revelation from God, our society is in danger of being overwhelmed by such dangerous movements as the New Age. Martin's book, a large-format paperback, is a useful introduction to the subject.

K.D.M.

Mission News

The Rev D. B. Macleod, the Rev A. B. Ndebele and Mr Dick Vermeulen met in Nairobi on 7th December and proceeded the next day to Sengera in the Kisii District of Kenya.

There are services held regularly in six different places by the three African men. The attendance at each place varies from thirty to sixty. The two ministers held services in each place and in addition gave further tuition to the three preachers, in the main doctrines. There is a great need for someone from Scotland, New Zealand or Zimbabwe to go to Kenya to give systematic instruction to the three men.

The small hospital still awaits staff. The Roman Catholic Church is doing its best to prevent our getting a Permit for the hospital. They have a clinic which deals only with minor cases. The local men are anxious that our hospital should open as the journey to other hospitals is too great for the ordinary people to undertake without transport.

On the Day of Prayer the people gathered together at Sengera. There were about one hundred present. The weather was cool with rain falling for about two hours each afternoon.

The Rev Ndebele was kept busy helping a few of the men to put prose psalms into verse. It is hoped to put some of the psalms into a small booklet, eventually.

Nursery schools are still carried on and at least one Adult Literacy class. Some of the people are unable to read.

In Malawi the weather was very hot. On New Year's Day the Rev D. B. Macleod took a service at the Mozambique Refugee Camp. It is possible that the people will have returned home before next New Year's Day as there seems to be a prospect of peace in their homeland.

The following weekend the two ministers went to the North Shire Valley to hold services there. They stayed in a Guest House beside the river. The hippo munched grass around the Guest House during the night, lions roared in the Park across the river, bullfrogs and other noisy creatures carried on a serenade until dawn. Both ministers enjoyed travelling together, preaching the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They left for Zimbabwe on 11th January. Mr Macleod spent one weekend at Ingwenya and another at Mbuma. Mr Dick Vermeulen stayed on in Malawi and then returned to New Zealand via Holland.

Since beginning to write these notes we have heard with great sadness of the death of one of our African ministers, the Rev B. B. Dube, who passed away in hospital in Bulawayo on 5th February, 1991, after some months of illness. This is a great and unexpected loss for his family and for the congregation at Zenka, and for the Mission at large.

J.N.

(We regret that the above was held over from the March issue. Editor)

More Mission News

The month of February was a very sad month for our Mission people, and for all of us who are concerned for their welfare. The Rev B. B. Dube, minister at Zenka, one of our two younger ministers, passed away on 5th February, after some months of pain and discomfort.

In December 1990, in addressing his congregation, Mr Dube told them that it might be the last time he would be with them as he was very ill. Mr Dube was attending the doctor in Bulawayo. On Monday of Bulawayo Communion he went to see David Ndlovu who was very ill in hospital. He said to David, 'Ndlovu, you are ill but I will be away before you.' As one of the Mission staff wrote, 'The Lord was preparing him for going'.

The funeral was held in Bulawayo on February 9th. There was a large gathering of people in the church. The Rev P. Mzamo spoke on, 'Therefore

there remaineth a rest for the people of God.' Mr Dube was buried in Athlone Cemetery, Bulawayo, where his remains lie until the Resurrection morning. Mr Dube left a widow and seven of a family to mourn his loss, as well as a large congregation, brother ministers, Mission staff and friends.

A week after the passing of the Rev B. B. Dube, our young ambulance driver Zenzo Mpofu, was returning to Mbumba after delivering a patient at Bulawayo hospital when he fell asleep at the wheel. The ambulance went off the road for about 500 yards and crashed into a tree. A nurse was travelling with Zenzo and she escaped unhurt but Zenzo received a severe head injury. One of our Mission staff, Mr Mziya, was travelling some distance behind the ambulance. He saw what had happened and took Zenzo to Inyathi hospital which was quite near. Zenzo was then transferred to Bulawayo where after a few days he was discharged, but after spending a few days with relatives he became violently ill and died in hospital.

Zenzo was a most likeable, and pleasant young man. He was the son of Mr Charles Mpofu and great-grandson of John Mpofu who was sent by the late Rev John Radasi to Nkai in 1923 and opened up the work where we now have Nkai, Zenka, Mbumba and several other preaching stations.

Zenzo received many loving admonitions to seek the Saviour and many prayers were offered up on his behalf. We would hope that during the week he was spared, some of these admonitions were brought to his mind and that he was enabled to flee to Christ.

Last week a young Form Two pupil at the John Tallach School, Ingwenya, was taking part in a race when he collapsed and died. Needless to say this was a great shock to the whole community. 'Be ye also ready'

J.N.

Notes and Comments

End of Hostilities in Persian Gulf

In the kind providence of the Lord, the war in the Gulf was brought to an end when a ceasefire was declared at the end of February. After several weeks of heavy bombardment by the Allied air forces, a land war was mounted which in a few days shattered the Iraqi land forces in Southern Iraq and in Kuwait. Before fleeing from Kuwait the Iraqi forces set the Kuwaiti oil wells on fire and executed wanton destruction on many buildings in the city of Kuwait. During their occupancy of the city the Iraqi forces also committed many atrocities. Iraq in the conflict has suffered a tremendous death toll while the allies suffered only a minimum

of deaths and other casualties. The allied Commander of the forces described the small death toll as miraculous.

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, who proclaimed himself a follower of Mohammed, the false prophet, and set himself in defiance to the God of heaven, has been taught a solemn lesson — that there is a God in heaven — the living and true God — who rules in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Well it would be for him if he laid it to heart as his predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar did. For his crimes against humanity, Saddam will yet have to answer to the God whom he defied.

The British Forces and Islamic Rules

While the British forces were in Saudi Arabia to defend that country from aggression by Saddam Hussein and his forces, they found themselves subject to Islamic restrictions. This caused considerable resentment. Sad to relate, some of our soldiers were advised not to take their Bibles with them to Saudi Arabia. It is good that one American soldier at least would give no place whatsoever to such an idea. The Commander-in-Chief had his Bible by his bedside. His example is to be admired in comparison to the sychophantic example of the British authorities. How blind our rulers are to the truth of God's Word: "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

Caledonian MacBrayne and the Sabbath

Under pressure it would seem from the Scottish Office, Caledonian MacBrayne have abandoned for the present at least, their attempt to begin a Sabbath service to Tarbert in Harris. The opposition to this evil venture was overwhelming and a blockade of the port by fishing vessels was threatened if the scheme went ahead. It is time that Caledonian MacBrayne learned that though Christianity has fallen low in the Islands as well as elsewhere, it is not dead yet, and that there are in the Islands still a godly seed who have the ear of the Most High.

Low Moral State of the Nation

The low moral state of the nation is reflected in the figures given for 1989 as to the number of births outside marriage. The figure of such births is 186,000 an increase of 8000 on 1988. The number of births within marriage dropped to 502,000, the lowest figure for more than a century. The declining moral state of the nation gives cause for serious alarm in view of the judgments threatened upon an ungodly nation. We should not be surprised if these judgments should prove to be swift and very terrible.

Rome and the Mass Media

That the mass media is manipulated by the Roman Catholic Church for its own ends has for long been obvious to those who take cognisance of what is happening around them in the world. The widespread coverage given to the recent installation of a new Romanist Bishop of the Isles by Press, Radio and Television reporters might well be regarded as providing a notable instance of this. Even the Stornoway Gazette, printed in the heart of Protestant Lewis, thought the event worthy of an almost full-page spread. Rome, long since has realised the propaganda potential of the mass media and its opportunistic policy has paid off handsomely. The present Pope is said to be an ex-actor and dressed in his pontifical uniform, surrounded by scarlet-clad underlings, has, in the course of his perambulations, particularly outside the Vatican, and on the world stage, made the most of all available opportunities to perform in front of the television cameras. Others, desirous of drawing attention to themselves, or the cause they espouse, might very well have to pay substantial fees but Rome gets free publicity for her Pope and advertises her wares by courtesy of television producers, of which not a few seem to be her devotees.

It is indicative of the importance Rome attaches to the mass media and the expediency of influencing what is communicated to the public that it has in place at least two communications organisations of its own. Towards the end of last year the "International Catholic Organisation for Cinema" and the "International Catholic Association for Radio and Television" held their World Congresses in Bangkok and they were addressed by an Archbishop Patrick Foley, himself the President of the "Pontifical Council for Social Communication". "We need more Catholic programming," delegates were told. "We need good devotional programming, whether it be through the tasteful coverage of the Eucharistic liturgy or through a compelling presentation of the Word of God in the language of the media." We understand that to mean that prominence is to be given to Rome's blasphemous mass and its perverted Gospel.

J. McL.

Britain's First Mormon MP

"The Independent" informs us that Mr Terry Rooney, the Labour victor of the Bradford North by-election, has the distinction of becoming Britain's first Mormon Member of Parliament. That is sad news as far as we are concerned and surely an indication of the spiritual apathy that must prevail in that part of our nation. Mormonism is a satanic cult which seeks to rob Christ of His glory.

J. McL.

Clerics and the Gulf War

The Pope, as far as one is able to assess his position, was opposed to the intervention of Allied Forces in the Gulf conflict and indeed received "glowing opinions in the Arab world for his outspoken condemnation of the Allied bombing campaign". (The Times, 21/2/91). No doubt he will now try and put together some form of words which will place him in as favourable a light as possible in the eyes of both victors and vanquished. The media reported that the Vatican's envoy to Baghdad remained there throughout the conflict. One wonders what he found to do. Surprisingly, Tariq Assiz, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, is a practising Roman Catholic, and perhaps Rome's envoy was at hand to act as his spiritual adviser. Archbishop Winning must now find himself out on a limb after boldly stating in his own diocesan newspaper: "Given the present circumstances, a Gulf war would be morally indefensible."

J. McL.

The Decade of Evangelism

At the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Protestant Truth Society held in London on 14th January, 1991 the following resolution was passed unanimously:

"THAT this Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Protestant Truth Society, while encouraging every effort in Bible based evangelism, expresses concern at the manner in which the Gospel is obscured through the recently launched Decade of Evangelism — Decade of Evangelisation — since there is no agreement among the participants as to what the Gospel is.

It is noted with regret that a Novena of Prayer to inaugurate the 'Decade' commenced with a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham on 29th December, 1990. It is also noted that the 'Decade' has the blessing of Cardinal Hume, and of other Church leaders who cannot be described as Evangelical.

We urge all Evangelical believers who value Biblical truth to beware of co-operating with those who proclaim 'another Gospel' which is a perversion of the Gospel of Christ. (Galatians ch. 1 verses 6 and 7). At the same time we affirm that it is the duty of all born again believers in every decade to proclaim the Gospel of God's Saving Grace to lost sinners, who include those who 'have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.' (Romans ch. 10 verse 2)".

A. J. Roberts

Secretary

18th January, 1991

Church Notes

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Skye: At Bracadale on 1st April at 7 p.m.

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

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo on 11th June at 2 p.m.

Western: At Laide on 11th June at 6 p.m.

Notice re Synod Agenda

Any late items of business for the Synod Agenda should be forwarded to the Clerk of Synod at once.

(Rev) D. B. Macleod, Clerk of Synod

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 nurse 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.

Letter to Harris Transport Action Group

Dear Sirs,

The Skye Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, convened this 16th day of October, 1990, wish to convey to you, our deep and prayerful interest in your contendings against needless and further secularisation of the sanctity of the Lord's Day by Caledonian MacBrayne. The moral, social, traditional and psychological arguments already used, possess their own validity, but apparently these have fallen on deaf ears. Revenue rather than righteousness is the decisive over-ruling consideration and criterion. That apart, there are two dominant factors that indicate the utter injustice of the proposal to run a Sabbath ferry from Tarbert to Uig. There is firstly, a definite abuse of power, in the attempt to foist this menace upon the local communities involved. If anything is calculated to foster bad relations between the parties concerned, and to generate grief, strife and ill-will, it is this kind of high handed action. How can Mr Colin Paterson even suggest that he respects the convictions of the people of Skye and Harris? Secondly, and more disturbing still, is the

violation of the law of God under whose jurisdiction we all are. The Church and the world may change the interpretation of the Divine Law, but the Law itself, and its moral obligations never alter. The sanctity of the Lord's Day is one of the pillars of our Christian heritage and society. We are already reaping what we have sown, to our great impoverishment and loss, but the day of final reckoning is yet to come.

Oppression will never pay, so let the Harris Transport Action Group fight on, and all who sympathise with them, in the strength of the Lord.

"To them who have no might he increaseth strength." Isaiah 40: 29.

On behalf of the Presbytery

Yours sincerely

Fraser Macdonald

Acknowledgment of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Bibles for Eastern Europe — D.R.M. & A.M. per D.A.R. £20; Bryn Sein Reformed Church, Wales per N.M.R. £100; A friend in Lewis per N.M.R. £50.

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

Breasclete: Wellwisher £60 for Sust. Fd., and £50 for Congr. Fd.; Friend of the Cause £40 where most needed.

Dingwall: Mrs C. and Miss T., Dingwall £40 for Church Fds.; Mrs G., Dingwall £20 for Sust. Fd; Mrs M., Strathpeffer £10; Mr and Mrs D. MacL., Strathpeffer £10, both for Church Funds; Friend £150 for Kenya and Malawi.

Dumbarton: Harris Friends £50 for Congr. Fds.

Edinburgh: Staffin Friend £10 for Church and Manse Purchase Fd.; Mrs MacK., Achmore, Lewis £20, where most needed.

Glasgow: Anon., £30 for Sust. Fd.; Anon., £10; Anon., £10; Anon., £11; A.A. £10; Matth. 6: 3, £10; J.C., £20; Anon., £20, all for Bus. Fund; Anon., £20; Anon., £100, both for Bibles for Eastern Europe; Anon., £40 for work in Kenya/Malawi; Anon., £2; Anon., £10; A.D.C., £10 all for Famine Relief; Anon., £10; Anon., £25; Anon., £100, all for T.B.S., all envelopes in plate; Aberdeen Friends £20 for Tape Fund.

Larne, N.I.: Erratum on list sent late September 1990. A donation was quoted as £20 for Larne from K. & A. MacLeod, Glendale, apparently the correct amount should have been £100.

Portree: Friend, £9; Tunbridge Wells Friend, £15; Friend, £10; Anon., £10, all for Congr. Purposes; Friends, £20; A.M., £10; Friend, £10, all for Sust. Fd.; Friend, £5 for Centenary Fund, all per F.M.; Anon., £10 for Door Coll.; Anon., £10 for Tapes, both envelopes in plate.

Raasay: A Friend, Raasay, £100 for Sust. Fd.; Anon., £50 where most needed; Friend of the Cause, Inverarish £30 for Congr. Fds; Friend of the Cause, Inverarish, £40 where most needed, both per M. D. MacKay; Friends, Inverarish £30 for tapes per M. Tallach; Envelope in plate £10 for Church door coll.; Friends, Glasgow £10 for Car Fund.

Stornoway: £10 for Sustentation Fund from Miss K. A. MacLeod, The Cottage, Callanish; £10 for Communion Expenses from Friend NT; £20 for Collection from C. McK., all per Rev. J. MacLeod; £10 for Communion Expenses from Friend of the Cause, Breasclete; £10 for Communion Expenses, Anon.; £5 for Communion Expenses, Anon.; £5 for Communion Expenses, Anon., all in Church plate.

Tain: Dingwall Friend £50 for Sust. Fd.