

The Young People's Magazine

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

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



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Cover picture: A part of Leverburgh, Harris; on the right, from the back, is the Free Presbyterian Church; the mountain in the background is Roineval.

The Young People's Magazine

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Volume 90

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Number 12

William Tyndale

Around 1440, Johannes Gutenberg set up a printing press for the first time in Europe. This was a vital invention for the spread of the teachings of the Reformation in the next century. The most important material that could now be printed was the Bible, especially in the language of the ordinary people. But translations of the Bible into languages like English, French and German were what the Roman Catholic Church did not want; they were no doubt afraid that their false teachings would be found out.

One of the first translations to be printed in his own language was carried out by Martin Luther, the German Reformer. You, in reading this article, are making use of English, and you ought to be very thankful for the work of William Tyndale. He was born about 1494 in a village in the English county of Gloucester. He studied in the University of Oxford, but he was shocked to find that his studies in theology did not include Scripture.

How can we learn anything, in a satisfactory way, about God and His ways unless we can consult what God has revealed in the Bible? When Tyndale was born, there were no printed copies of any part of Scripture in the English language. Depending on God, Tyndale was to do what he could to put the situation right, at great cost to himself.

After university, Tyndale went back to his native county and became the tutor of some children. Later he became a preacher, and in his sermons he stressed Scripture. A man warned him that, if he went on preaching from the Bible, "it will cost you your life". And he did lose his life; by sending the Scriptures into England he would weaken Roman Catholic power there.

A "learned man" told him: "We were better without God's law than the pope's". Tyndale answered: "I defy the Pope and all his laws. . . . If God spare my life, before many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost". His wish was that people of his time who had very little education – like a ploughboy – would be able to read the Bible in their own language. Tyndale hoped that such people, even if they had no preaching to listen to, would learn at least the basic truths of sin and salvation, and learn them directly from the Scriptures.

Probably in the spring of 1523, Tyndale arrived in London. His aim was to start translating the New Testament into his own language. He hoped that Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London, would support him. But no, Tunstall offered no help, but thankfully he did not persecute the would-be translator. By early 1524, Tyndale realised just that “to translate the New Testament there was no place in all England”, and he left for Germany, probably in April of that year – never to return.

In 1525 Tyndale was in Cologne, seeing to the printing of his English translation of the New Testament. The printer had produced thousands of copies of Matthew's Gospel and part of Mark's, but printing was stopped by the authorities. A copy of Matthew's Gospel – up to the middle of chapter 22 – still survives. It was the first time that a translation into English, from the original Greek, appeared in print. It was a notable event, 500 years ago, one we should look back to with deep thankfulness.

The following year, the complete English New Testament, translated by Tyndale, was printed in the German city of Cologne. Copies were hidden in bales of cloth and carried down the River Rhine and then across to ports on the east coast of Scotland and England, from where they circulated widely.

Bishop Tunstall was not pleased; he went so far as to describe the English Testament as poison. He claimed to have found 2000 errors in it. Tyndale was to comment that the Roman Church was so taken up with the search for heresy (false teaching) that, though before then they ignored the Bible, now they examined his translations so closely that they would tell the people that it was heresy if he (Tyndale) had failed to dot an i.

Tyndale went on to revise his translation of the New Testament and then to work on the Old Testament. By the spring of 1535 he had finished translating the historical books, as far as 2 Chronicles. He was now living in Antwerp, in modern Belgium, hoping before long to finish his work on the Old Testament.

It was not to be. Henry Phillips a young Englishman, who wanted money, made friends with Tyndale, pretending to be interested in Bible translation. He had arranged with someone in England, probably a bishop, to betray Tyndale. He had trusted Phillips, but when Phillips called him outside, one morning in May 1535, soldiers were waiting for him and they arrested him.

The house where he was staying was raided and all his books and papers were taken away. These papers may have included further translation work and they would have been destroyed. But someone else had his translations of Genesis to 2 Chronicles in his possession, which meant that they were safe and could be printed later.

From prison in Vilvoorde, near Brussels, Tyndale wrote to a local official

asking for some of his own warmer clothes; those he had were worn out, and he was always suffering from a cold and catarrh. He added, "I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark". After spending so many hours, for many years, poring over his translation work and other writing – the prisoner now had nothing to occupy his time, except to pray and think over the truths of God's Word. But no doubt he was getting good for his soul as he did so. Not surprisingly, he also asked to be allowed a Hebrew Bible and Hebrew dictionary in his cell, "that I may pass the time in that study". No one now knows if Tyndale was allowed anything that he asked for.

He spent 16 months in his lonely cell in Vilvoorde. He was condemned to death as a heretic in early August 1536. About two months later, probably on October 6, Tyndale was brought to where a stake had been stuck in the ground. Some brushwood and logs were placed nearby. Tyndale was chained to the stake. His last known words were the cry, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes". Thankfully he was not burnt alive; he was first strangled – because he was a respected scholar – and then his body was burnt.

Tyndale's work was not lost; a Reformer named John Rogers gathered all his translations (two-thirds of the whole Bible) and issued a complete Bible in English – the other books of the Bible were translated by Miles Coverdale. Only a few months after Tyndale's death, 1500 copies of the English Bible were being sold in Britain. The Authorised Version of the English Bible, which we read today, depends largely on Tyndale's work.

We should realise how much we owe to Tyndale for putting so much of the Bible into English, directly from the original Hebrew and Greek – especially when it cost him so much. When he started out on his life's work, he must have seen the danger he was putting himself into. But he pressed on; he had God's glory in view and the good of souls.

But are *we* making proper use of the Bible? Do we read it with care and prayer? The Bible is a valuable gift from God, and unless it was in their own language, most people would not be able to read it. Before Tyndale's time, very few people in England and Scotland had that privilege.

The Bible shows us what we are: we are sinners; we have rebelled against God. It shows us how we may be delivered from sin: through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners. It shows us that He came to deliver sinners from the consequences of sin: eternal punishment in hell. It also shows us that He can rescue sinners from the *power* of sin by giving the Holy Spirit to make them holy. How earnestly we should make use of the Bible if we are to escape God's wrath and curse for ever, and instead spend a blessed eternity in heaven.

The Need for a Testimony (2)

Rev D MacLean

This is the final part of an article reprinted with editing from *The Young People's Magazine* for December 1949. The first part emphasised the need to preserve the scriptural testimony of the Church. To find out more about the events referred to in this article, you should read *The History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970* (available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom).

It will now be evident that the Church which will bear the clearest testimony on the side of God in the world will be the body which adheres most closely to God's Word in its doctrine, government and practice. This constituted the beauty and the strength of the Reformed Church in Scotland.

Both at the First and Second Reformations, in 1560 and in the 1630s, the principle was adopted that nothing would be admitted into the testimony of the Church but what was contained in the Word of God. So the testimony raised by our forefathers, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, was one fully in line with the truth of God in all branches of the Church's witness.

At both the First and Second Reformations, the Reformed Church condemned the observance of Christmas as unscriptural. Because of it, so many festivities are usually arranged this month. There is no authority in the Bible for this festival, nor is there any reason for believing that the Redeemer was born on December 25. The observance of Christmas was not known until the fourth century after Christ. And we know that the customs of a pagan feast held around this date were similar to those now observed at Christmas. This indicates that Christmas had a pagan origin.

So Christmas is no part of the testimony of the true Church of God. Indeed she should witness against such events. The fact that so many of the churches in Scotland now observe Christmas as a religious festival is a sad comment on their declension. A feature of this now generally practised in schools throughout Scotland is the "Christmas party", where various forms of vanity are indulged in.

We give a solemn warning to parents that they will have to account to the Judge of the living and the dead for not exercising their authority to keep their children from attending these traps of the devil to ensnare their families. We also warn our young people to flee from these things as they would flee from the plague. They should remember that "a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

But if a testimony is to be effective, it must be a *living* testimony. It must be active, not only in the lives of the individual members of a church, but must also be seen in the acting of that body as a whole. This fact was early

realised by our forefathers and, through the church courts, a testimony was borne on the side of the covenant God of His people. If there was need of this united testimony in days gone by, there is certainly need of it in our day.

This testimony is needed in the religious world. We live in perilous times, and the Word of God testifies that some will have a form of godliness while they deny its power. The command is, "From such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:5). It is to preserve this testimony against the prevailing religion that the Free Presbyterian Church remains a separate body from other churches in Scotland.

Others say that we have other motives. They say we are "narrow-minded", "harsh and censorious", "fond of the religion of miscalling". The only purpose of our separate existence is to bear aloft the banner which has been passed down to us – the testimony of the Church of Scotland, as reformed in 1560. It is the whole Bible – in our doctrine, in our government, and in our practice.

A glance at our history should be enough to prove this. For the contentings of the First and Second Reformations and the details of the Disruption, we would refer our readers to the history books. It is enough to say that, when the Disruption Fathers separated from the Church of Scotland in 1843, they carried with them the testimony of the Reformed Church. They were the Church of Scotland Free.

In this Church, there arose a party who found this testimony too narrow and well-defined for their liking. They made up their mind to change the testimony by the introduction of a Declaratory Act which would place interpretations more to their liking on some central doctrines of God's Word. This party was headed by Robert Rainy. The other section, who were fighting for the testimony of the Bible, was called the Constitutional Party. By the year 1893, Rainy's party had got their own way. The banner of the Reformed testimony had been hauled down and another banner, influenced by the Declaratory Act, was raised in its place.

Was there no one to witness for this testimony in the General Assembly of the Free Church? The Constitutional Party had decided to remain under the new banner, although they had recorded their dissent against (their disagreement with) the passing of the Declaratory Act.

Was the banner of the Reformed testimony to be left under the feet of unfaithful men and lost to the generations to come? A minister, a small man and not yet well known, went forward to the table at the front of the Assembly and made a protest. By doing so, he not only separated himself from the Free Church with its new banner, but he carried out from that Assembly the testimony of the Reformed Church of Scotland.

Rev Donald Macfarlane was the chosen instrument for this work, and once more this lovely banner was unfurled in Scotland. Men and women flocked to the standard who, like the children of Issachar, had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Thus the Free Presbyterian Church was formed. And as we today walk about our Sion, our branch of the Church of God, and mark its bulwarks and palaces (see Psalm 48) we can still say, to the praise of the great Head of the Church, that the banner of the Reformed Church in Scotland still flies from the tower.

We wish to impress upon our readers the fact that, when Rev Donald Macfarlane left the Assembly of 1893, he left behind both Rainy's Party and the Constitutional Party. Rainy's Party united in 1900 with the United Presbyterians to become the United Free Church. And this new Church united with the Church of Scotland in 1929 to become the present Church of Scotland. Some of the Constitutionalists refused to enter the union of 1900 and formed the present Free Church. We repeat that Mr Macfarlane left both these parties behind in the separation of 1893.

Free Presbyterians may turn their backs on their Church and enter one of these other churches for a variety of reasons, including marriage. It is then clear that they do more than leave one denomination to go to another; they forsake the distinctive testimony rescued in 1893 and preserved pure for them and others.

We live in an age of compromise. The general cry is that it does not matter very much what church one belongs to. If forsaking the testimony of God does not matter, does anything matter? We have been pained more than once by the apparently light-hearted way in which some of our young people can forsake this testimony.

Let our young people rally round this banner. Let them seek grace to recognise its beauty and worth. And by their prayers and interest, let them encourage the hands of those who labour, in the midst of much discouragement and weakness, to keep the banner displayed. Let them learn about the history of the Church's contendings. Above all, "acquaint now thyself with [God], and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job 22:21).

Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind as to this testimony, distinct and clear as it is from other churches, and let no worldly consideration or imagined wrong make them turn away. When the challenge, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve", is put to us, may each one be given grace to answer, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). "So will not we go back from Thee: quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name" (Psalm 80:18).

James Renwick

5. Back in Scotland

F R Daubney

Another section of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. Last month's article told about Renwick's time in the Netherlands, where he began to study for the ministry. It was then decided to ordain him after only a short course of study, and he sailed for Scotland as a minister. His ship called at Dublin.

Renwick left Dublin towards the end of August 1683 on a ship heading for the Clyde. The Scottish harbours were being closely watched, but Renwick persuaded the captain to put him ashore near Gourrock, from where he headed for Edinburgh.

He returned to his homeland at a time of great persecution. It had been going on for 22 years but was now at an even greater pitch. Keeping to the Episcopal order in the Church was being rigorously enforced. Parish ministers were required to report on those who did not attend church. Landowners were held responsible if their tenants did not attend. They were fined heavily if conventicles were held on their ground, even if they did not know the meetings were taking place! Troops were stationed around the country, and military commanders, such as John Graham of Claverhouse, were brutal in enforcing the law. Spies were everywhere.

By the end of 1682, so many had been forced into submission that field meetings had almost stopped. Some of the remaining field preachers had been rounded up and sent to the Bass Rock, off North Berwick; others had fled to Ireland or to the Continent. Individuals were stopped and asked, "Was Bothwell Bridge a rebellion?" "Was Archbishop Sharp's death murder?" "Will you pray for the King?" Anyone who did not give the approved answer might be put to death at once. Torture was widely used, and executions were common. It was a reign of terror and worse was to come.

Into this atmosphere of danger and alarm came James Renwick, and news of his arrival quickly spread among the Societies. He headed off to Edinburgh, but on the way he stopped at a lonely place near Kirk o' Shotts to preach and baptize. The authorities were too late in discovering his meetings but the King's Advocate, Sir George Mackenzie, complained to the Privy Council that "Mr James Renwick, traitor, and pretended Clerk to the treasonable conventions, lately kept at Edinburgh, and to that treasonable commission given to Gordon, late of Earlston, had held two meetings".

The landowners, the Laird of Dundas and the Tradeshouse of Glasgow, were heavily fined. To avoid his tax, Dundas, who owned the land near Kirk o' Shotts, turned out his tenant and demolished his house. From the

start of his preaching ministry, Renwick was described as a traitor and hunted as a fugitive.

The United Societies met on October 3 on a remote moorland in north Lanarkshire, where Renwick was “called and received as their minister”. He pledged himself “to hazard life and all for the testimony of this day, which I am ready to seal with my blood”. He read a pre-prepared document which, for the most part, was a statement of his beliefs, and it affirmed that he kept to the principles of the Societies.

But then Renwick spoke pointedly about the sort of ministers he could not join with in fellowship. He named and criticised some of those who had been field preachers but had succumbed to the pressure of persecution and no longer put themselves at risk. In his criticism, he included the much-respected Alexander Peden who was then in Ireland.

Some of those named were dead, including the highly esteemed Robert M'Ward, who had died two years earlier, exiled in Holland. M'Ward had had a disagreement with Hamilton about indulged ministers and Hamilton's influence can be seen in the document (Hamilton, a Scot also exiled in Holland, could be argumentative, determined not to change his mind, and very difficult to deal with).

Renwick's critics claimed that he had effectively “excommunicated all the ministers of Scotland, some of them after they were dead”. In later years he was to regret that he had mentioned anyone by name and wished for any copies of the document to be destroyed.

Renwick began his ministry at Darnead, south of Shotts, on November 23. Darnead was remote and this was to prove useful on future occasions. Renwick told the people that his mission “was to lift up and raise the fallen standard of the gospel that did fall in this land when that valiant chariot-man, Mr Donald Cargill, fell – yea, the very part of the standard which he held close”.

He pointed out that he did not want to be seen following the examples of mere men, however praiseworthy; “no, no; for we desire only to follow them insofar as they followed the Lord”. His text was Isaiah 26:20: “Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast”.

The meetings would generally last a whole day, whatever the weather, often with the same text being taken morning and afternoon, with the preacher bringing out different aspects of it. Renwick would deal with aspects of the current situation in Scotland – the persecution, the sins of the people and the nation, and the state of the Church. But his main concern was for the souls of the people before him. He would speak sympathetically of their need

of a Saviour and of the eminent suitability of the Lord Jesus. His preaching was powerful, soul-searching and soul-melting. He preached the whole counsel of God. Here is a sample from that first sermon at Darmead:

“There is both ability and willingness in the Lord to give you whatever your necessity requires. . . . What would you have? Salvation and deliverance? Then He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto Him. Lift up your eyes, and behold a wonder which you cannot know, and put forth this question, ‘Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?’

“And His answer will be to you: it is ‘I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save’ But is He willing? . . . Willing He is indeed. He is not more able than He is willing. What are all His promises but declarations of His free willingness? What are all His sweet invitations but to tell thee that He is willing, and you are welcome? ‘Let him that is athirst come.’ . . . Come, what would you have that is not in Christ? O that sweet invitation, ‘Come’

“There is a depth in it that all the angels in heaven cannot fathom. It is no less than Jesus Christ who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification, spreading forth His arms and inviting you. He is opening up Himself – His all-sufficiency and super-transcendent excellency – and calling to all poor, needy things, Come, here is enough for you

“Come, it is a rich commodity and there is no sticking at the price; only receive and have – on the easiest of all terms. This is a free market . . . you who are enemies, lay down your arms against Him and come. You who comply with His enemies, come. . . . All you who are strangers to Him, come . . . and you that know Him, come. We must preach this word, ‘Come’, to you so long as you are here. O sirs, come, come, ask what you will, and He shall give it. O, come, come.”

Can the Christian Church Survive?

2. After the Apostles

Another section of a Youth Conference paper. The first section, last month, explained what the Church is and pointed to the dangers the Church faced in the age of the Apostles – through persecution, and to the even greater danger through false teaching. For instance, 2 John 7 refers to some who taught a very dangerous error: that Jesus did not have a true human body.

Perhaps this error was related to the heresy of Docetism, the false idea that Christ only *seemed* to be a man, and so was unable to suffer – a teaching

which takes away all hope of anyone being saved from their sins. The Bible teaches that Christ *did* suffer for sins (for example 1 Peter 3:18).

The leaders of the Church of the second century were far behind the Apostles in their understanding of the teachings of the Bible, but there were godly men among them who sought to keep to the ways of God.

One of them was Ignatius, who belonged to Antioch in Syria. He had, it is said, a burning sense that God had sent him to preach; he strongly opposed Docetism. When Ignatius was an old man, Trajan the Roman Emperor of the time, visited Antioch. He was told about Ignatius and wanted to see him. Trajan accused him of being "a wicked devil, a deceiver of men".

Ignatius replied, "Not an evil spirit, but I have Jesus Christ in my heart".

Emperor Trajan answered, "Jesus Christ within you? Do you mean Him that was crucified by Pontius Pilate?"

And Ignatius replied faithfully: "Yes, He was crucified for my sins".

So Trajan condemned Ignatius to make the long journey to Rome on foot, where he was to be thrown to wild beasts. It would have taken place about 110 AD in the Colosseum, an arena holding about 45 000 spectators.

Among the other early Christian ministers was Polycarp, who ministered in Smyrna, one of the cities to which the Lord sent letters through the Apostle John (see Revelation 2:7-11). As a young man he had listened to John, who had by then become old. In opposing false teaching in the Church, Polycarp quoted a lot from the New Testament Scriptures.

When he was at least 86, some local government officials pursued him to a lonely farm in the hills and arrested him. The governor of the local Roman province tried to persuade Polycarp to sacrifice to the Roman Emperor, who was treated as a god even when he was alive. To sacrifice would have saved him from being thrown to the lions, but he refused. He knew he could not commit idolatry and remain faithful to his King, Jesus.

He was then ordered to curse Christ, and he gave a most impressive reply: "I have served Him for 86 years, and He has never done me any wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour; but you do not know the fire of the judgement to come, or the fire of eternal punishment."

Polycarp was then sentenced to be burned alive. The sentence was carried out as he prayed to the One who, we can be sure, brought his soul into the eternal blessedness of heaven. Christ is always faithful to all who serve Him, especially those, like Polycarp, who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. And He tells them: "Great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12).

There were several periods of intense persecution which might have reduced the Church to nothing. But that did not happen; the Lord was adding

to His Church throughout these periods. He was preserving it, in spite of all that was being done, by way of persecution, in the hope of sweeping it away.

The position of the Church changed enormously when Constantine, a Roman Emperor in the early 300s, began to protect the Church, and persecution ended for that time. From then on, lots of people professed Christianity, and some of them were appointed to important posts in the Roman Empire, but many of them were not true Christians. The result was a weakening of the Church. And one might ask the question, Could the Church survive this weakening? Yes, but only because Christ was ruling over it and protecting it, no matter what difficulties and dangers arose.

We must always remember that, whatever problems arose, Satan's evil activity was behind them. When persecution arose, Satan was stirring up, in Roman Emperors and other officials, hatred to the true God and those who followed Him. And when error appeared in the teachings of the Church, Satan was behind that too, and false teaching probably caused even more damage than persecution.

We should learn from history that it is necessary for the Church, and for individuals in it, to hold fast to pure doctrine, the teachings that we find in the Word of God. Otherwise there will be very serious consequences for the Church as a whole and for the individuals in it.

It was a long time before people in the Church could agree on what the Scriptures teach *about God*. Even then men were rising up who tried to spread teachings contrary to the Bible. We can put the Bible's teaching in the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, that excellent, exact summary of the Bible's teaching – but written much later, in the 1640s. The *Catechism* states: "There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory". And it states this because it is what the Scriptures teach.

But it took much discussion and debate before the Church settled on the scriptural position. Arius, a minister in Alexandria, in Egypt, was one of those who opposed that position, about 300 AD. He argued against the divinity of Jesus, saying that He was created, that He was not the eternal Son of God the Father. In such situations of serious danger to the Church, God raised up men to defend the truth, and indeed to develop further the Church's understanding of the truth.

The most prominent defender of the true teaching on Jesus – that He was both truly God and truly man – was Athanasius, also a minister in Alexandria. As so often in the history of the Church, one man was raised up by God to be the human leader in opposing error. In this time of danger for the Church, the leader was Athanasius – in opposing Arius and his false teaching. He

was not alone, but he showed tremendous persistence in the face of repeated defeats, until the true doctrine became the settled view of the Church.

God worked through Athanasius and many others to preserve His Church from being overwhelmed by the false teachings of Arius. They took the lead in establishing the fact that Christ is God as the settled faith of the Church. Yet down through the generations various heretics have departed seriously from the truth. Today the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians: that is, they follow Arius in rejecting the *truth* that the Lord Jesus Christ is God.

For Junior Readers

Juan and His Bible

Juan lives in one of the Spanish-speaking countries of Central America. He is a teenager from a very poor area. He had started going to a small church near where he lived, but he had no Bible of his own.

His pastor invited him to attend a Bible conference in a big city, a four-hour bus ride away. He went on this long trip really hoping that he might be able to go home with his very own copy of God's precious Word. But he had no money!

But when he saw one of the conference speakers near him, he shyly asked, "Sir, may I please have a Bible?" The man was very touched by how sincere and earnest Juan seemed and kindly handed him his own Spanish Bible to keep.

Some weeks later, to his surprise, the man received a message from Juan. It seems that the man had left one of his business cards inside the Bible. It contained his e-mail address. So Juan had decided to ask him for advice.

He explained that his mother was a drunkard. When she and her live-in boyfriend began drinking, they often got very angry with Juan for reading his Bible. In fact, the previous week she had hit him with a frying pan for doing so.

Juan then asked would it be wrong, or lacking in respect, for him to read his Bible in the toilet behind their house, because he had nowhere else to go. The man assured him that there would be nothing wrong with doing so. And he wished Juan the Lord's blessing on his continued Bible reading.

In his next letter he said how blessed he felt he was, as he now had God's Word. He hoped that many more Bibles would be distributed to poor people who cannot afford them.

Do you not think that it is wonderful how appreciative Juan was? He went on reading and praying, and also cycling eight miles (13 kilometres) to and

from church every Lord's Day in all weathers. He wrote that he could not wait for the Lord's Day to come round each week so that he could hear more about God and how He can save people like him!

What about you? Have you ever thought how great a privilege it is that you own a Bible of your own and to be able to read it whenever you want? Do you pray every day that the Lord would bless it to your soul? The more privileges you have, the more you will have to answer to God if you do not make good use of it. What did the Saviour say? "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" – and that includes you!

J van Kralingen

What is Proper in a Christian?

Taken from *The Young People's Magazine* for April 1984, with editing. It is assumed to be the work of the then editor, Rev Alexander McPherson.

In the New Testament, Christians are exhorted not merely to abstain from sins that are clearly forbidden and to obey commanded duties, but to observe what is proper for those who profess to be saved. Their conduct is to be such "as becometh saints". Their conversation should be free from "foolish talking and jesting", which are said to be "not convenient," or suitable.

But, unhappily, many professing Christians appear to act on the principle that they may do anything which cannot be proved to be wrong. They insist on a precise line of division between the lawful and the unlawful, and they claim the right to go to the extreme limit. A favourite saying of theirs is, Show me in the Bible where this action is said to be wrong.

There are two objections to this way of thinking and acting:

It is dangerous. The one who decides to lean as far as he can towards what is wrong, without actually going beyond what is right, will be almost certain to lean too far and fall. A sinful nature and a tempting world are powers that need to be watched against and resisted.

It would be perilous for a pure being – if we may suppose it is possible for a pure being to entertain such a thought – to treat evil lightly in this way. The only safe course is to shun the very appearance of evil, in the spirit of Him who is too pure to look upon iniquity. It is not suitable for the Christian character to seek to narrow the obligations of the Christian life.

Character – righteous, holy, godly character is the aim of the gospel. It is to become a perfect man; to attain the stature of Christ's humanity; to know and love Him and, in knowing and loving Him, to become like Him. Not merely freedom from blemishes and stains should be sought, but also

symmetry and beauty of character. Character should harmoniously exhibit whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely and of good report.

He takes a very low and unworthy view of the heavenly calling who does not feel impelled to aspire after every ornament of character. The beauty of holiness is not a mere imagination; rather is it a radiant and happy reality and every child of God should seek after it. Steadfast effort to attain it very much suits anyone whose citizenship is in heaven and whose life is hid with Christ in God. And so does a giving up everything willingly that would divert one from pursuing it.

For Younger Readers

Robbing God

A Chinese preacher was speaking about people robbing God. He wanted to say something about the Sabbath, which is God's day. God wants us to use His day to worship Him. But those who use the Sabbath to do whatever they want are robbing God.

The preacher told a story. One day, a man was walking along a road in China, on his way to a market. He wanted to buy things in the market – perhaps a chicken, or some fish, or a loaf of bread. He had seven coins with a piece of string running through the middle of them. He hoped to use the money to pay for what he wanted: a chicken or fish or bread.

As he walked along, he saw a beggar. Probably he was very poor. Perhaps he was sitting at the side of the road. The beggar asked the man for some money. He gave the beggar six of his coins.

Was the beggar thankful? No, he was not. Instead he stole the one coin that the man had left. He was so greedy that he left the man with no money at all. I am sure that you are calling him a bad man.

God gives us six days of the week to do all the things we need to do for ourselves. He calls us to use the other day, the Sabbath, to go to church, to think about God, and to learn what he is saying to us in the Bible.

But if we use the Sabbath to do whatever we want to do, and do not use it to learn about God, we are robbing Him. God says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy".

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

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Looking Around Us

Two Men From Duns

On this day, November 8, 717 years ago, in 1318, John Duns Scotus died. Scotus means that he was a Scot, and Duns refers to the fact that he was born in the small town of that name near the border with England. He was a Roman Catholic priest who studied theology, but it is said that his teachings were difficult to understand.

What is the point of referring to him here? It is that he was the man who first suggested about Mary, the mother of Jesus, that she was born without original sin (what is called her immaculate conception). The idea is completely false; it is one of Rome's many errors, though it was not till 1854 that Pope Pius IX declared Mary's "immaculate conception" to be the official teaching of the Roman Church. But the claim is not to be found in the Bible; it is one of very many examples of a pope adding to the truths revealed by God in Scripture. Such additions will necessarily be false and therefore dangerous.

We must not claim any religious statement to be true unless it is firmly based on the teaching of the Bible. There is no doubt that Mary was a very godly woman, but she was a sinner. Like everyone else, except Jesus, she could say as David did, "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

She knew she was a sinner, and she said, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:47). Mary would never have realised that she needed a saviour unless God had taught her that she was a sinner. She was basically no different from other godly women throughout the ages, except that God gave her the honour of being the mother of Jesus.

We may also remember another man who was born in Duns, but hundreds of years after John Duns Scotus. This was Thomas Boston who lived from 1676 to 1732 and was the minister successively of two congregations in the Scottish Borders, latterly in Ettrick. He was always careful to keep to the Bible in everything he said and wrote. He believed that he was God's ambassador to the people who were listening to him; so he had to preach what God had revealed, and nothing else. We might say about him, as the Bible speaks about the Saviour: the ordinary people heard him gladly (see Mark 12:37). The people did not find Boston hard to understand.

Boston wrote many books, but the best known of them is *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*. In this book Boston points to four states that a human being may exist in. These are: (1) Innocence, the state of Adam and Eve before their Fall; (2) Entire Depravity, the state of all human beings after the

Fall, when there is nothing spiritual good in them unless they have been converted; (3) Begun recovery, after conversion, when the Holy Spirit is making them more and more holy; (4) Complete happiness or complete misery for ever, either in heaven or in hell. You should read the book whenever you feel able to understand it.

Walking with God

William Cowper

Behind this poem lie the words of Genesis 5:24: "Enoch walked with God".

O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heav'nly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove, return!
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.

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