

Free Church **Witness**



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12 Faults For Preachers to Avoid



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12 Faults for Preachers to Avoid

Nothing is more important to the Christian church than preaching: 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Cor. 1:21). Every preacher should aim to be a better preacher. Poor preaching makes poor churches. I write not as the expert preacher whom others should imitate but as one who has been observing many preachers over the last almost half century – some very good and others, many others, very poor. The Scriptures, the history of the church and the biographies of great preachers give many pointers to what we should aim at and what we should studiously avoid. I myself have tried to preach for almost 40 years and have often felt ashamed at my efforts. It should be added that a congregation makes a preacher. If the flock are prayerful, spiritual and attentive it will draw the best out of the preacher. It must also be stated that without the help of the Holy Spirit the best of preaching will be lifeless and unblest. I often used to hear it said that we should not look to the preacher. If it is the gospel that is being preached it should make no difference whether it be the Apostle Paul who is preaching or William Macleod. We should go to hear the gospel, not the man. Now there may be a grain of truth in that. God is able to bless the ministry of any man. Sometimes a poor, unknown preacher can be used in the conversion of a great man, as happened in the case of C H Spurgeon. However, while God for His own glory will sometimes take us by surprise, it cannot be gainsaid that the lazy, careless, worldly, unthoughtful, unprayerful preacher is far less likely to edify your soul than the carefully prepared, godly, gifted, well-trained, spiritually-minded man. The one who would expect to hear as good a sermon from William Macleod as from the Apostle Paul fails to recognize the gifts and grace and measure of the Holy Spirit which God has given to some men more than others.

In this editorial I would like to look at twelve faults which preachers should avoid.

1. The multiplication of words with few ideas

Some men have the 'gift of the gab' and this can be more of a snare than a gift. Even in one-to-one conversation some men can be boring because they take so long to answer questions or to state their opinions. Preachers generally tend to be talkers and love to hear their own voice and this can be a real danger. Standing in the pulpit no one interrupts and so you, yourself, must be self-conscious and self-critical. Realise that it is possible for people to find you tedious. Strive to get more thoughts and ideas into your sermon. Keep moving on from one thought to the next. Lots of words have a soporific effect and lead the congregation to daydream. Vary the flow of words. A silence can sometimes be very effective. Beware of preaching for too long. Aim at half an hour or 40 minutes as a maximum. No matter how good you think you are, after half an hour people tend to switch off. Never say 'finally' twice in the same sermon. Spinning out the conclusion can be exceedingly tedious.

2. Not personally developing theologically

Some ministers scarcely get beyond the little theology which they learned in Seminary. Ten or twenty years later they are still trying to spin a sermon out of the same minimal group of ideas. No wonder the people are bored! Ministers should be constantly

reading good solid works of theology – the Reformers, the Puritans, the Scottish and American nineteenth century theologians and the best works of today. They should use good Reformed commentaries

when preparing their sermons but more than that their

general knowledge and grasp of theology should be constantly increasing. Spend hours each week meditating on passages of Scripture – and not just on the texts on which you hope to preach – turning them over, questioning them, trying to find out more and more of their meaning and their application. Ministers are to be constantly busy working in the goldmines of revealed truth finding nuggets for themselves and their flocks. Some might say, I don't have time for heavy reading. If you don't, you shouldn't be in the ministry. The Apostles spoke of the way they spent their time: 'We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). There is something far wrong if you do not spend at least half the week reading, praying, meditating and preparing sermons.

3. Not preaching Christ

Reading the biographies of the greatest theologians, church leaders and preachers I have been struck with the fact that often on their deathbeds they have regretted that they have not preached Christ more. It is easy to preach on the history, the geography, the society behind a passage, to tell entertaining stories, to deal with current affairs, to enter into theological disputes, to defend the Christian faith and to forget that we have been called to preach Christ. When Paul states what he preached, 'we preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:23), he was setting before us the central theme of all our preaching whatever the text used. Christ is the Saviour for sinners and the food for Christians. Do the hungry sheep in our congregations look up and are not fed? What terrible guilt lies upon the unfaithful shepherds (Ezek. 34)!

4. Not aiming at the needs of the congregation

On my third year in secondary school I had a maths teacher who was very clever but a poor teacher. In the class there was one bright and very diligent pupil. Having explained a mathematical problem this teacher would check if the clever student had understood. If he had, the teacher would then move on to the next problem. As a result of this the rest of us in the class made little headway. As preachers we should try to get to know our congregation and their needs and the best way to do that is by visiting them diligently and not just speaking about the weather and the latest local gossip. In our sermons there should always be a word for the unconverted as some of them are usually present. We must remember too that even church members may never have been converted. There should be a word for seekers, for those lacking assurance, for backsliders, for old Christians and for 'the ewes with young'. Be sure in preparing your sermons that you prepare the application. Some leave it to the end of a sermon but it is probably better to give a little



application at points on the way through. This helps to keep the interest and show the relevance of the message. If it doesn't have application, whatever it is, it's not a sermon.

5. Not communicating

Some ministers seem to be in a world of their own in the pulpit. They are speaking in a strange language which the congregation does not understand. They are talking to someone in the ceiling above the congregation's head or in the book-board. There is no eye-contact with the congregation. There is no direct speaking or telling their people the joyful good news of the gospel. Use clear simple language and short sentences. Strive to explain and labour to be simple. Short illustrations can be like windows giving light. Attention can be caught by making brief allusions to every day events, things which happen to you and to them, or matters which are of interest in the media. But great care must be taken that the illustrations do not distract minds from the message. Demonstrate to people their need and then proclaim Christ as the only answer.

6. Not preaching from the text

The Bible is the authority behind our preaching. We are not preaching our own ideas, or our wisdom, or the church's beliefs or a popular philosophy. We come as ambassadors from the King of Heaven and our message must be, 'Thus saith the Lord'. All our preaching should be exegetical. That does not mean that we have to preach in series working through books of the Bible. That is one method. But whenever we take a text, it should not be treated as a springboard or mere starting-off point. Such preaching not only lacks the authority of the text but soon becomes dull and superficial. All preaching should explain the verse or passage in its context. When our preaching follows this pathway it will always retain a certain freshness, because the Bible, no matter how often you read it, is always new and relevant.

7. Not adequately prepared

Some are more tempted than others to 'wing it', as they say. You may be a ready talker, you have two or three ideas, you launch forth from the text and hope you will get 'liberty'. I remember one minister who justified this method by asserting that he believed that his most prepared sermons were the least blessed. To me his preaching seemed terribly repetitive and predictable. Sometimes we will all find ourselves in the position where for one reason or another we feel uneasy at our lack of preparation. And we know what it is to be helped by the Lord in such situations. But these situations should be rare. Let us not offer to the Lord what has cost us little or nothing. Remember preaching is our main job. Don't scrimp on the time you spend in preparing. Put your heart and soul into it. Make an occasion of every time you preach. Imagine that you will be addressing 1000 people and try your very best. There may be only 10 present but God is there listening and that is what matters. Jesus encourages the most diligent preparation for meaty sermons: 'Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old' (Mt. 13:52).

8. No clear structure

Some ministers have no clear structure to their sermons. Often it is like a Bible study, going through a passage and offering some edifying thoughts. The hearer finds that little is retained in the memory. Seldom is any point driven home. Worse still is the 'preacher' who starts from a text and wanders wherever his thoughts lead him. To keep people's attention and to impress the

truth upon the conscience it is best to follow, more or less, the traditional format for a sermon. Start with an introduction which states the theme and shows its relevance. Then give three or four points drawn from the text and developing and applying the theme. Finally draw all together with a conclusion which seeks to impress the importance of the message upon the hearers. It is helpful to your hearers if they can see where you have come from and where you are going as you make your way through the sermon. It also helps yourself in the delivery. Finding a good structure is almost half the work in preparing a sermon.

9. Artificiality

Acting and artificiality in the pulpit is an abomination to God and to man. Beware of pulpit voice. Some ministers have developed a whine, or a sing-song voice, or a sickly smiley face. This can be terribly off-putting. A conversational style of speaking can be very much more impressive and engaging to the hearer. It makes them feel that you are talking to them and mean what you say. Artificiality, pretended tears and unnatural gestures distract and undermine the sermon. Beware of imitating others, even great preachers, in their idiosyncrasies. Be yourself.

10. Not speaking with passion

Artificiality is off-putting and so also is a cold 'take it or leave it' type of delivery. In preparation, try to feel your message and strive to be convinced of its importance and relevance. As you go out to preach remember that you are there representing Christ. Think too of the desperate needs of those before you. Be caught up in the glory of the truths you have to declare. Beware of the curse of professionalism – doing a job for the pay at the minimum cost to yourself. Put your heart and soul into it. Paul often spoke with tears and so did M'Cheyne. Paul reminds the Corinthians of his preaching, 'As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God' (2Cor.5:20). Having preached in this way, holding nothing back, but giving your all, you will be shattered on the Monday following.

11. Do not misuse the sound amplification system

Never bang the pulpit! Microphones and amplifiers were never designed to convey such noise. It is a torture to people with hearing aids or nervous complaints. Shouting should be strictly limited for the very same reason. You can speak with tremendous stress and emphasis without raising your voice. A slight lowering of the voice can be much more impressive. I remember one minister coming to our communions many years ago. He shouted all weekend and made myself and my congregation totally miserable. The following Wednesday night a gracious old minister visited and preached warmly and it was like sweet balm to our souls.

12. Not accompanied with prayer

Prayer is vital in preparing a sermon, in preparing yourself to preach, in preaching and in following up the preaching. The Apostles gave themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. Jesus spent whole nights in prayer, and if He needed that how much more do we! Paul seemed to be praying without ceasing. Along with prayer let there be expectation. Look for God to come and convert sinners and to sanctify your congregation. Without God nothing of eternal value is achieved. The best sermon is dead. Oh to pray more! Have your regular times of prayer daily and your special days of prayer. Be men of prayer! Be prayerful congregations and see what God will do.

The World in the Church (Part 3)

Rev John P Thackway

Yes, I saw a lot of John', said a member of his family, who had been visiting friends, 'he is getting on in the world'. There was a moment's pause, and then his mother asked, 'Which world?'

The old *Sunday School Times* anecdote sounds a warning that is never dated. Churches are comprised of individuals. If they have 'Johns', their character is affected accordingly. Yet, too many churches are 'getting on in the world' – *this* world. And, although in the short term it seems to achieve gains in attendance (less biblical demands), in the longer term it will produce carnality (less biblical standards), and in the final term it may lead to apostasy (nothing biblical left).

One of the most challenging passages of Scripture for each local church to consider is 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, 'Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire'.

We build upon Christ, the one Foundation. However, two kinds of superstructure can go up. 'Wood, hay and stubble' represent worthless things: light, frivolous, commonplace. Matthew Henry suggests these include, 'Corrupt opinions and doctrines, or vain inventions and usages in the worship of God'. On the other hand, 'gold, silver and precious stones' represent what is truly of God: weighty, solid, precious, enduring. This is the difference between worldly activity in the church, and what is biblical and spiritual; between the pragmatic and the principled.

What counts is 'the day' that shall 'declare it'. The Lord will return and we shall all give account. He will inspect our works as One whose 'eyes (are) as a flame of fire' (Rev. 19:12). There will be the fiery trial of everything we have believed and practised. As He tests it, the 'wood, hay and stubble' will be 'burned' and their perpetrators will 'suffer loss'. The 'gold, silver and precious stones' will 'abide' and faithful believers will 'receive a reward'.

Lessons

This teaches some important lessons.

a) To be Christ's church in this world is serious. What we believe and what we do has eternal repercussions. Justification shields us from condemnation on the great Day, but it does not exempt us from the assessment of our works, and greater or lesser degrees of glory in heaven. Separation from the world in obedience to Scripture is no small matter. Doing God's work in God's way is everything, for time and eternity.

b) Largeness of numbers and apparent success are not the criteria. The Lord will 'try every man's work of what sort it is' – not 'how much it is'. Quality is what counts. Reality is what matters. So many churches justify worldly methods by

pointing to increased attendances. Yet, as Dinsdale T Young once pointed out, the only full place of worship recorded in Scripture is the temple of Baal (2Kgs. 10:21)! Being full of the Lord's presence and favour counts for infinitely more, now and forever.

c) What if everything done in Christ's church were measured by this passage? Much of what goes on would cease overnight. Reformation would begin. In addition, we would have the benchmark with which to measure everything we hold to and work for.

These considerations lead us to our final article on worldliness in the church. In our first, we sought to 1. *Identify some symptoms*. Then we endeavoured to 2. *Highlight some causes*. Now we must endeavour to:

3. Suggest some remedies

Here are a few considerations to encourage us to avoid worldliness in the House of God and strive for what pleases Him.

1) Remember that this problem is nothing new

The world has been in the church as long as the flesh remains in each Christian (Gal. 5:17). At Philippi, two women were not speaking to each other (Phil. 4:2). At Corinth it was worse. There were divisions (1 Cor. ch. 1-3), sin undisciplined (5:1,2; 6:1,4), drunkenness at the Lord's table (11:20,21), pride and anarchy in the worship (ch. 12 and 14), questioning the doctrine of the resurrection (ch. 15), rebelling against Paul's authority (2 Corinthians 11). In the church to which John wrote there was proud 'Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, (who) receiveth us not' (3 Jn. 9).

The history of God's church down to today is replete with worldly and carnal behaviour within its ranks. We should not be dismayed to the point of imagining that this is unprecedented. It has all happened before – and has been dealt with before. Biblical reformation and revival are God's twin purges to restore His church to her purity and order. Let us continue to work and pray for these in our day.

2) Ministers and congregations must reckon with all of God's Word

The Scriptures are holy in themselves (2 Tim. 3:16) and they are an instrument to make us holy (3:17). Therefore we must be faithful to everything God says in His Word. In preaching, it must be 'all the counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). No subject must be omitted for fear of giving offence. The apostle was committed 'to fulfil (margin: 'fully to preach') the word of God' (Col. 1:25). Only a full-orbed pastoral ministry will touch on everything necessary for the sanctification of the life and worship of God's people.

A worldly-wise Christian once said to G Campbell Morgan: 'The preacher must catch the spirit of the age'. In a flash Morgan replied, 'God forgive him if he does. The preacher's business is to correct the spirit of the age'. We agree with

Morgan. Yet, where is such boldness and conviction in preaching and pastoral leadership these days? Let us endeavour so to preach and so to hear, that things are corrected and regulated according to God's holy Word. When faith is thus built up, worldliness is left behind: 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' (1Jn.5:4).

The importance of *application* in preaching cannot be stressed enough. Sermons that are worked out, and their 'uses' made clear relevantly and faithfully, will reach further than the mere understanding. Tender hearts and submissive wills will be moved, so that we pray, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way' (Ps.119:37). Where there seems orthodox preaching from the pulpit, yet *unorthodox* worship and conduct in the pew, something is terribly wrong.

Likewise, where gracious hearts are being fed and exercised through pastoral preaching, there will be much less room for 'ungodliness and worldly lusts' (Tit.2:12). If Christ's flock are feeding in the green pastures, they are contented, and such united pleasure prevents many problems and divisions beginning in the first place.

3) Let us strenuously resist modern worship

Worship is the area where much of the battle for truth rages today. In the 1960s, the moral revolution called 'The Permissive Society' transformed Britain beyond recognition. Few accept that it also began to transform evangelicalism – through a *spiritual* revolution called 'The Charismatic Movement'. Far from being the Holy Spirit, it was the spirit of the age invading the church, with its pretensions to 'miracles' and its exuberant, fleshly worship. It spawned a whole industry of worship songs and singers making sums of money from sheet music, songbooks, CDs, DVDs and ticket prices for gigs. And it has made evangelical churches feel they are missing something in worship. That 'something' is the clubbing culture that has entered the church.

To this day, church after church succumbs to the assumptions of the Charismatic Movement, like an aggressive virus invading a body. It is accepted that the church must change its evangelism and worship in order to survive. Which means the worldly techniques and methods of charismaticism. Pews become chairs, pulpits stages, the organ a music band, a microphone the mixing console, and the minister a worship leader. To the grief of the discerning and godly (who often end up leaving their church for somewhere God-fearing), and to the betrayal of the gospel itself, such churches have become worldly.

The usual approach these days is to say that worship is a 'secondary issue', depending upon personal preference. And in any case, the gospel is not affected. However, is this true?

a) This would be incredible to Christians of better times

Past generations of the godly jealously guarded divine worship. It is true that past evangelicalism may have lacked a fully worked out biblical understanding of how God says we are to worship Him. The fact that it capitulated to charismaticism, particularly in worship, shows this. However, spiritual instincts were right, and nothing was allowed that was incompatible with reverence.

That the character of God's worship is a matter of taste and preference would also be incredible to the biblical writers.

Moses records the Lord giving the Ten Commandments and the first four directly concern His worship: no other gods; no graven image; no irreverence concerning His name and sanctifying the Sabbath (Ex.20:3-11). In other words, He is the sole Object of worship. He must not be (mis)represented in any way. He must only be worshipped with 'reverence and godly fear' (Heb.12:28). His worship is to be set apart from common use as much as His day is. Later, after God judged Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire 'which he commanded them not' (Lev.10:1), He said, 'I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified' (10:3).

Moreover, our Lord's pattern prayer makes reverencing God the controlling priority in all our approaches to Him, 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name...' (Mt.6:9). In Scripture, every encounter a man has with God prostrates him, whether it is Abraham (Gen.17:3), Joshua (Josh.5:14), Job (Job 42:5,6), Isaiah (Is.6:5), Peter (Lk.5:8) or John (Rev.1:17). The Lord is 'fearful in praises' (Ex.15:11) which means, as Adam Clarke expresses it, 'Such glorious holiness cannot be approached without the deepest reverence and fear, even by angels, who veil their faces before the majesty of God. How then should man, who is only sin and dust, approach the presence of his Maker!' It is impossible to truly know God and not be reverent, and worship accordingly.

b) The way God is worshipped does affect what the church believes

If worship is offered to God in the idiom and style of secular rock music, are not such 'worshippers' expressing their ignorance of who God really is? Does it not also beg the question as to whether they are worshipping the true God at all? Calvin said that Scripture is 'the spectacles bleary-eyed men put on in order to see the true God'. Many arm-waving and swaying congregations these days, cut loose from Scripture, may well be worshipping a god they think sanctions such irreverence – a god of their own imagination. It may well be idolatry and 'departing from the living God' (Heb.3:12).

The character of the church's worship affects its whole life. Worship like this is bound to carnalise and worldly a Christian church, and there is growing evidence that this is happening. Immodesty of dress, disrespect of spiritual authority, lax keeping of the Sabbath all prove revealing. When the worship is downgraded, other things are downgraded as well. Dr Samuel Johnson once said if he could control the nation's ballads he cared not who made its laws. The point being that what is sung often has a deeper effect than what is inculcated. The way a church worships expresses its view of God. Ultimately, it will govern and determine its view of God. However, when reverent and scriptural worship is maintained, the world is at bay and heaven comes near, 'O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel' (Ps.22:3).

4) We ministers must be a model of holiness and other-worldliness

Other things being equal, our people will rise as high above the world as our example will lift them. The next most powerful message after the sermon is an exemplary life: 'be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity' ... 'ensamples to the flock' ... 'In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity' (1Tim.4:12; 1Pet..5:3; Tit.2:7). Our Christian walk is a message that inspires long

after the sermon has finished. 'A minister's life is the life of his ministry.'

The importance of this cannot be overstated. Among the qualifications for office in the church, personal character and domestic qualities outnumber other factors. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 the requisite qualities for elders and deacons nearly all relate to what kind of a Christian man, husband, father, head of household each has proved to be. These are highly visible things, that show the true worth of God's servants and show their people the way.

This is borne out by the fact that, in dealing with carnality in the seven churches of Asia, our Lord addressed His words 'Unto the angel of the church...' – meaning the God-sent messenger, the minister (Rev ch 2 and 3). A worldly pastor will have a worldly flock; a spiritual pastor will at least show his people the way to 'overcome the world' (1Jn.5:4).

Baxter's words in *The Reformed Pastor* are more needed now than ever: 'O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts: keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal: be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God — if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers; ... Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation. Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you. For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts'.

Paul could say, 'But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life' (2Tim.3:10). Ministers must be 'the glory of Christ' (2Cor.8:23) and the role model for all ages in their congregations. A compelling example of moderation (1Cor.7:31; Phil.4:5); moral cleanness (1Thes.4:3); savoury and sound speech (Col.4:6; Tit.2:8); patience in suffering (2 Corinthians 6:4); unmoved by either flattery or threatening (Gal.1:10); prayerfulness (2Tim.1:3); heavenly-mindedness (Phil.1:21-23).

The words of Horatius Bonar in his *Night of Weeping* are apt: 'His cure for worldliness is the bringing before us of another world, more glorious than that which He calls on us to forsake. There is no thorough cure for it but this. It is lack of faith that makes us worldlings; and when the believing eye gets fixed on the world to come, then we learn to set our affections on things above ... The opposite of worldliness is heavenly mindedness or spiritual mindedness. This, the new relish which the Holy Spirit imparts at conversion, in some measure produces. But it is feeble. It easily gives way. It is not keen enough to withstand much temptation. God's wish is to impart a keener relish for the things of God and to destroy the relish for the things of time'.

If the Pastor's life and lifestyle is contagious heavenward, would this not make his people feel that the world is nothing but 'vanity and vexation of spirit' – nothing, compared to the deeply satisfying joys of fellowship with God?

5) Remember the cause is not ours but God's

Our Lord prayed for His people in this world, that God would 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth' (Jn.17:15,17) – and God the Father is answering that prayer. He will perfect that which concerns us (Ps.138:8). It is His will that they be 'delivered from this present evil world' (Gal.1:4) – and that will shall be done.

Christ has bought His Church at too dear a price to see her defiled and besmirched by this evil world. He who ransomed her with His blood will cleanse and sanctify her with His Word in the power of His Spirit (Eph.5:26). And when she does slip into worldliness, He will exchange the word for the rod – the rod of chastisement (Heb.12:5-11). 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent' (Rev.3:19). That sanctification will be completed in glorification, when the church is finally out of this world and forever into a better.

All this the Lord will accomplish. Let us, by His grace, be faithful in life, witness and labour. We contribute to this great and grand purpose more than we know. May it be that He can say of us, 'This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise' (Is.43:21).



'To this day, church after church succumbs to the assumptions of the Charismatic Movement. Pews become chairs, pulpits stages, the organ a music band, a microphone the mixing console, and the minister a worship leader. To the grief of the discerning and godly, and to the betrayal of the gospel itself, such churches have become worldly.'

Dark Africa

Rev Greg MacDonald



How dark is Africa? It is still often known as the dark continent. It conjures up images of David Livingstone hacking his way through the jungles of the interior, of Zulu warriors, and of millions untouched by the saving Gospel of Christ.

Africa is no longer dark in that way. Almost everywhere you go, even out into the bush, there is a good signal for your mobile phone. The missionaries of Covenant College all have wireless broadband in their homes, and modern cars on their drives. Africa is not what it once was. Yet it is still dark.

Having visited Petauke for the second time in March this year, I came away with the overriding impression of a place that is still greatly in the grip of the blindness of sin that has come over our world since the fall. Missionaries work tirelessly and have done so for the last two centuries throughout the continent. There are plenty of churches in every district. There is no shortage of people who profess to be saved every year. And for all that Africa remains in the grip of satanic superstition, fear, and ancestor worship.

The school

I was able this year to visit the schools' ministry with Miss Marjanne Hendriksen. This was a joy to me to see the good work that is being done. On Tuesday we visited Kalambalika. At the turn of the year the school buildings were burnt down. Before word reached Marjanne, the community had called the witchdoctor, who called everyone together, performed her rituals, and then identified the 'culprits' with her stick! The boys and their families were ostracized. The boys had to leave school. Eventually the community did involve the police. The policeman had some wisdom: he also gathered the same group, including the witchdoctor. He then took the divining stick and performed the 'ceremony' with the result that this time the stick came to rest at the feet of the witchdoctor! The policeman therefore declared that she was responsible. This reliance on witchcraft is a weariness for the staff of CCZT. But it is ingrained in the psyche of the people.

The harvest

The second example is in the farming ministry. The difference that Phil's teaching makes to the crop is literally life-changing. Or it should be. With yields up by eightfold, a man who could before barely feed his family ought now to be able to sell the equivalent of two years' worth of groceries. All the students see Phil's

methods in action on the College farm. They see it works. So

why do so few take it up? Part of the answer lies in tradition, part in habit, part in human nature being what it is. Phil's methods work well, but require hard work! However there is another reason, and it ties in with the tone of this article. There is hostility and opposition of a spiritual nature. Put yourself into the situation. A neighbour, using new methods, suddenly starts getting nearly ten times your crop. Jealousy is aroused, as well as interest. A visit to the witchdoctor for an explanation confirms suspicions. The neighbour using good farming methods has used up all the goodness from the soil. This is why his is so good, and others were relatively poor. It is nothing to do with the fact that he worked hard. Nothing to do with your carelessness in weeding, in planting, in tending. No. The problem is that this person is using up all the goodness of the soil, through some charm or superstition. So he is persecuted! This sounds far-fetched, but it has happened to students from the College, seeking to use these biblical standards of working.

The bus

At the end of my trip I returned to the capital Lusaka by bus – an adventure in itself! After an impromptu prayer meeting, the 'in-transit entertainment' began, as a movie flickered up onto the TV screens overhead. The movie was all about a woman, possessed by a demon, and who killed her husband by witchcraft. She would regularly cast an evil eye on someone who was annoying her, change into a cat and perform some spell on them. Eventually she was 'caught' by a 'pastor' who, along with his choir, exorcised the demon and the woman died. It was eerie, odd and disconcerting to watch this, but for most passengers it was quite ordinary to see this theme portrayed on television. In many ways it was the ordinariness of it for most people that gave me the greatest shudder!

How dark is Africa? It is greatly in thrall to witchdoctors, ancestors and even simple superstition. But real darkness is measured not by the presence of these things, but by the absence of true light. By that measurement who is to say that it is any darker than our own land?

'Who is to say that it is any darker than our own land?'

A Needed Word of Advice

Rev Terry Atkinson

Mr Atkinson is an older minister working on a Greek Island in which there are many wealthy retired people. He wrote recently in his newsletter:

There is something tragic about all these people. In various degrees they have been very successful in life and now in their retirement they either live or spend much time here and reminisce about the past regaling us with stories of their moments of glory and their accomplishments. They have a mindset that only the power of God can destroy. It is because we believe that God is able to do this that we continue our meetings. And is it not written, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts' (Zech.4:6)?

It is increasingly impressed upon us that if we really believe this, then prayer will be the main thing we do as ministers, missionaries and as Christians who seek to bring the gospel to others.

One of our great regrets as missionaries as we look back over the years is the appalling realisation of how little time we spent in prayer as if we thought we could accomplish something by our own efforts. The apostles, when confronted with all the organisation of the church declared, 'It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables ... we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:2,4). You will notice that they put prayer before the ministry of the word. We find prayer difficult because it involves more labour and effort than anything else we do and we are not willing to pay the price. It is much easier to study or preach than it is to pray.

Another reason why we neglect prayer is because of the high opinion we have of ourselves, our gifts and abilities and we are like this because we do not have a profound and real sense of our guilt, vileness and helplessness. This lack is observable everywhere in the churches. It was observable in the young

people who visited us this summer – so enthusiastic and keen and yet so obviously lacking in a sense of their own sinfulness and this we find even more in our own hearts.

What need there is for heart searching and repentance. I was very moved some time ago when I ran across a poem by John Donne, one of the metaphysical poets, entitled: 'A hymn to God the Father'. The first few lines refer to his consciousness of his sin in the fall of Adam; the rest is entirely personal.

Wilt Thou forgive the sin where I begun
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun,
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore;
and having done that, Thou hast done;
I fear no more.

One of the most helpful things I ever read about prayer was this of a Scottish minister and man of prayer.

1. Pray until you pray.
2. Pray until you are conscious of being heard.
3. Pray until you receive an answer.

'One of our great regrets as missionaries as we look back over the years is the appalling realisation of how little time we spent in prayer as if we thought we could accomplish something by our own efforts.'





News



Photo courtesy of the Stornoway Gazette, 2010

New Church at Knock & Point

Rev James Clark

After ten years of difficulties and disappointments work finally began in mid October on the new church building for the Knock & Point congregation. The congregation has gathered nearly 3/4 of the estimated cost for the project. Many donations have been received from friends near and far and from various denominations, for which we praise God. They wish to thank those who have prayerfully and financially contributed to this cause and also those who shall do so in the future. It is expected that the building will be completed in early 2011. Pictured are the Minister, Rev James Clark, with the other members of the Kirk Session.

Rev James Frew

We heard with sadness that most of the Adelaide Free Church (Continuing) congregation had written a letter to the Home and Foreign Missions Committee seeking to dissociate themselves from the Free Church (Continuing). Also the Rev James Frew wrote a letter to the same body expressing his wish to resign from the ministry of our Church.

Mr Frew was ordained and inducted to the congregation of Kiltearn in 1997. At the time the congregation was very small but under the blessing of God Mr Frew, who is an able preacher, saw a considerable increase in the membership and attendance at the church. When the Free Church Seminary was set up in 2003 he was appointed lecturer in Apologetics and Practical Theology.

His teaching and enthusiasm were appreciated by the students. Three years ago he accepted a call to Adelaide, Australia. The congregation, being small, received support from central funds equivalent to half a minister's stipend. The congregation has now grown to the position where it is able to support its own minister.

In his letter of resignation Mr Frew made several serious complaints against the Free Church (Continuing), so on 5th October the Commission of Assembly decided:

'The Commission of Assembly note that the resignation of Rev James Frew from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) cannot be accepted at this time due to outstanding allegations against him and direct the Committee to follow the procedures set out in the law

Desk



and practice of the Church; The Commission of Assembly instruct the Committee to take all steps necessary to vindicate the good name of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)'.



Rev James Frew

Baby Smiling in Womb

Christian Institute

Images of a smiling 17-week-old unborn baby have been captured in its mother's womb by the same doctor who pioneered 4D imaging scanning technology. The remarkable image has been described as 'fantastic' by the baby's parents, Sam and Louise Henry. Prof Stuart Campbell, who took the picture, exclaimed: 'This is a joyful expression of the humanity of the foetus'. The image could once again ignite the abortion debate. In England, Scotland and Wales, abortion is allowed up to 24 weeks of pregnancy. Prof Campbell, former head of obstetrics and gynaecology at King's College and St George's hospitals in London, said: 'I have seen a foetus making

a crying face at around 18 or 19 weeks, but not a nice smile. This is the earliest on record – it is just a delight'. Prof Campbell commented that he did not know what caused the facial expression but said: 'It is part of a sequence that involves yawning and making breathing movements and opening its eyelids and, of course, it makes a crying face'.

How wicked it is to kill the unborn child!

Andrew MacLeod

Cammy MacLeay

Andrew MacLeod, a son of the Portmahomack Manse, recently felt a desire to serve voluntarily in our mission at Covenant College, Zambia. He has been accepted to help in the schools and on the mission complex. Andrew has a degree in modern languages and served for some time as a foreign language assistant in Germany. He then spent two years in China as a teacher of English in the Hexi University. Later he attained a formal qualification in Mandarin by attending a university in Taiwan. Returning to Scotland he qualified as a teacher and taught for a year in a primary school in Dumfries. Andrew flew out to Zambia at the beginning of November. He and his family would value your prayers and support while he is there. I am sure that he will be a great help, especially to Marjanne Hendriksen in the schools and to Phil Bailey on the farm.

Katag MacAskill

On 5th October 2010 Katag MacAskill, the oldest member of the Free Church (Continuing), passed into eternity. She was 107, having been born in 1903. She clearly remembered for example the day the lolaire sank outside Stornoway harbour with the loss of many servicemen who had survived through the whole war and



Andrew MacLeod

drowned a few yards from the shore of their beloved Island. She remembered the people coming home from church that Sunday morning with the news. She remembered the faith and heroism of a Church of Scotland elder who told two young lads to climb up on his shoulders to escape. 'What will happen to you?' they asked. 'Don't worry about me', he replied, 'I'm ready'. He drowned but they escaped. In 1924 she emigrated to Canada on the Metagama and married. She spoke of being roasted in summer and frozen in winter. She hated the flies. She, her husband and two children returned after a few years to Glasgow where she spent the rest of her life. She always had an open door for the sailors from Lewis. She was a member of Govan

Free Church and associated with Thornwood Free Church (Continuing) after the Division of 2000.

I visited her a week before she died. By this stage she had taken to her bed but was still very bright. She asked about my family and the church. Then she said she was waiting for her telegram and pointed upwards. She had had her telegram from the Queen but she was waiting for the one from the King of kings and queens. She asked, 'Why is He leaving me so long?' She yearned to be with Christ which is far better. Her great, great grandson was present at her funeral. She had seen her children's children's children's child – five generations! David Sibbald, who is married to her grand-daughter Catriona, founded and built up Atlantech Technologies, a software company which he sold to Cisco Systems in March 2000 for £115 million. He is the Founder and Trustee of the Kate MacAskill Foundation, a charitable organisation providing education, care and micro-enterprise funding for children and young adults in the developing world. She delighted in receiving letters and visits from African young folk who thanked her for her help.



Online Donations

Angus MacMillan

We are very pleased to report that our Church is now able to accept online donations and also online payments for books, tapes, CD's etc. Those wishing to do so should go to the homepage of our Church website at www.fccontinuing.org and click on the 'Donate' button at the bottom of the homepage. Donations and payments can then be made to the Church using a debit or credit card. We are also able to reclaim Gift Aid tax where donations are made using this online method by a UK tax payer.

Iraqi Hope

Barnabas

The Iraqi government has pledged to help exiled Christians return to their homeland after thousands were forced to flee amid intense persecution. The new Iraqi ambassador to the Vatican, Habbab Mohammed Hadi Ali Al-Sadr, said in a recent statement that the government had taken steps to preserve the country's Christian heritage and culture. It follows years

of campaigning on behalf of the decimated Iraqi Christian community on an international stage by Barnabas Fund.

Mr Al-Sadr said: 'For its part, the government has committed itself to all those who return, to give them a job, a plot to rebuild their homes and 1.5 million Iraqi dinars'. He affirmed that the Iraqi Constitution sanctions the total equality of rights for Christians and also gave them the possibility of creating a semi-autonomous region like Kurdistan.

It seems the government has finally acknowledged the problems faced by Iraqi Christians, who have been targeted in waves of savage anti-Christian violence over the last 20 years. As a result, the Christian population of Iraq has declined from 1.5 million in 1990 to perhaps as low as 400,000 today. Much of this decline took place after the invasion of 2003, with many of the remaining Christians now internally displaced.

The Chilean Miners Delivered

Christian Institute

Wearing t-shirts proclaiming 'Thank you, Lord' in Spanish and English, the miners gradually surfaced one by one as their rescue from the collapsed mine was completed. During their time underground Jose Henriquez, the evangelical preacher, had asked for 33 Bibles to be sent down to the miners in a small capsule and the BBC reports the miners prayed at twelve noon and six o' clock in the evening. Mr Henriquez also exchanged written messages with a Baptist minister, Marcelo Leiva. Mr Leiva's final letter encouraged the miners to continue praying and to have confidence in God. He ended with 'Be strong and go forward, Hosts of the Faith', from the Spanish version of the hymn Onward Christian Soldiers. Applause met Mr Henriquez's arrival to the surface as he smiled broadly and hugged his wife. Omar Reygadas, a 56-year-old electrician, arrived at the surface and knelt down with a Bible in his hands. On Mr Reygadas' helmet were the words 'God Lives'. The miners' t-shirts had words from Psalm 95 on the back, according to media reports.

People from around the world commented on a BBC story of the rescue: Nicole in Manila, Philippines, said: 'Our prayers for their safe return to their families are unceasing. We join all Chileans around the world in joy and happiness for every miner who comes out safely. Praise be to God who is keeping all the brave miners and heroic rescuers safe, and congratulations to the fantastic rescue operations of the Chilean government! Long live the People of Chile!'

S'bongile in Lilongwe, Malawi, said: 'I am so happy for these men, I'm glued to my laptop and following whatever is happening. So much praise to God!'

In a television address to the nation the President of Chile, Sebastian Pinera, said: 'What ended up as a real blessing from God started as a possible tragedy'.

It is good to see God being acknowledged by President and people. Oh to see our own land recognising God!

A Miracle in Chile

Radio Five Live interviewer Peter Allen speaks to Rev Alfredo Cooper on the rescue of the Chilean miners. (Supplied by the Christian Institute.)

Peter Allen: 'Reverend Alfredo Cooper had turned up to thank the British press for what they'd done on this whole event and when they heard his English voice they got him in front of the microphone. He's called the Reverend Alfredo Cooper. He's actually chaplain to the country's president and

he told me when he first became involved in the aftermath of the mine's collapse'.

Rev Cooper: 'I am a chaplain in the presidential palace and so we had to quickly put together an emergency prayer meeting and it was with all our hearts because to imagine these 33 men a kilometre under the earth not knowing whether they were alive or what was going through their minds. 17 days we prayed and then the miracle came when the boring machine glanced off a rock and hit them – hit the cavern they were in – and of course we just erupted in praise. The second service the president called for was a praise meeting so we had a thanksgiving service and then of course we've had constant prayer. And this has been one of the interesting factors for folk like us to notice. Many of the miners went down as atheists or unbelievers or semi-believers and they have come up to a man testifying that they were not 33 but that there were 34 down there – that Jesus was there with them and that they had a constant sense of his presence and guidance'.

Peter Allen: 'If you truly believe that it was divine intervention which rescued them then presumably you also believe that it was divine intervention which left them down there in the first place. I mean it doesn't always make sense this kind of argument does it?'

Rev Cooper: 'Well the thing is that in this fallen world this is exactly what does occur. Man is subject to accident and all sorts of problems thanks often to his wilful negligence as was the case in this mine. There are consequences when you don't care enough for people. And of course in those situations we might compare Jonah in the whale – you know people tend to cry out to God and this is what's happened. And God has answered'.

Peter Allen: 'So you believe God listened to your prayers? God listened to your prayers – God listened to their prayers. You believe they were rescued by divine intervention really?'

Rev Cooper: 'Well we of course see the hand of all these magnificent experts all around, and the good will of so many people internationally, the brilliant coverage of the press and we would suggest that all this works together for good, that certainly as we pray God has guided in remarkable ways – even the scientists. I was with the NASA people who came the other day. And to my surprise – to a man they were believing scientists in their case – and they all said: "This is a miracle. There is no other word for what happened here"'.
Peter Allen: 'Okay'.

Rev Cooper: 'So I mean – Scientists, politicians, presidents – we've all come together in one happy moment saying, "Goodness! God is there and He answers prayer". That's how we feel. And certainly the miners are testifying to the world of this – not just about that but certainly it seems to be a central factor'.

Retiral of Rev John Morrison

Rev Richard Ross

It was with genuine sadness that the congregation of Kilmuir and Stenscholl Free Church (Continuing) met on Thursday 25th March 2010 to bid farewell to their beloved minister, Rev John Morrison, who was retiring from the pastoral ministry. After a short time of worship, those gathered enjoyed the sumptuous feast that had been prepared by the congregation. Gifts were then presented on behalf of the congregation by Mrs Mary Gillies to Mrs Morrison, and by Ewen Macleod to Mr

Morrison. In replying, Mr Morrison thanked the congregation for all their kindness to himself and his wife and wished them the blessing of the Lord in the future.

As a mark of the esteem that Rev Morrison was held in Skye, the Presbytery of Skye and Lochcarron also arranged a farewell for Rev John Morrison on Friday 26th March 2010 in Portree. After a time of worship in the church, a sizeable crowd moved to the Hall to enjoy a time of fellowship around a cup of tea.

Mr Alasdair Nicolson (Struan) in presenting Mr Morrison with a gift spoke of his great admiration for Mr Morrison's preaching and practical talents. He assured Mr Morrison of the Presbytery's sorrow at his retiral. Mrs Morrison was presented with flowers by Mrs Chrissie MacInnes (Snizort).

Rev John Keddie spoke of the important contribution Mr Morrison had made to the work of the Presbytery over the past eleven years. Rev Andrew Allan, a former student under Mr Morrison at the Seminary, thanked him for all his help and recalled how Mr Morrison was a thorough but fair lecturer. Mr Donald Robertson brought the good wishes of the Strath congregation of which Mr Morrison was interim-moderator. Rev John Morrison thanked the Presbytery for their kindness and spoke of how thankful to God he was for giving him such a lovely wife and family. He also spoke affectionately about his beloved grandchildren. He assured the Presbytery that although he was retiring, he had no intentions of taking it easy.

Rev John Morrison retired after 35 years in the pastoral ministry at Fort William, Shawbost, and Kilmuir and Stenscholl. During that time he was involved in building projects in all the congregations he served. His 'Nehemiah like' efforts are testified to by the beautiful church building in Staffin that was completed and opened in 2005.

Rev John Morrison continues to serve the Lord as Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the Seminary in Inverness.

'The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build' (Neh.2:20).



Rev John & Mrs Agnes Morrison cut their cake at the farewell



Books

The Life of John Milne of Perth

Horatius Bonar

Banner of Truth Trust

hbk, 464pp £12.00

John Milne (1807-68) was born in Peterhead, studied at Aberdeen and became a minister of St. Leonard's, Perth, in 1839. He quickly made friends with an outstanding circle of young preachers among whom were William Chalmers Burns, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and the Bonar brothers. Horatius Bonar, author and hymn writer, was one of his closest friends and so well qualified to write this *Life of John Milne* (1869).

Milne joined the Free Church at the Disruption of 1843. He married in 1847. His daughter Jessie Marie was born in 1848 and son Robert in 1851. Three days after Robert's birth Milne's wife died and then Robert died in 1852 and Jessie Marie shortly after. Thus after several years of being a bachelor minister he had the joy of marriage and the birth of a family but the Lord who gave also took away. In the midst of his sorrows and no doubt feeling he had no ties he felt called to India. From 1853 till 1857 he worked as a missionary there. From the large, busy congregation of Free St Leonard's it was a huge contrast to work in a congregation of English speakers in Calcutta. There he met Barbara Nicolson and they married but due to her ill health he had to return to Scotland where unusually he was called back to his old congregation where he laboured till his death in 1868.

Much in this biography is fascinating – the revival which came to his congregation in Perth shortly after his induction in 1839, his labours alongside William Chalmers Burns and M'Cheyne, his days of prayer and fasting, his coping with sorrow, his year off with depression in 1859 and then the revivals of 1860. His letters and journals give a glimpse into his soul. Wherever he went he spoke to people about their greatest need. He would speak to salmon fishermen and tell them he was a fisherman too and then when they looked surprised witness

to them of their need to be caught in the gospel net. He would speak to men breaking stones by the roadside saying that he too was a stone-breaker and tell them about the stony hearts of men. He would speak to the city watchmen of the need to watch for the coming of the Lord. He missed no opportunity to plead with sinners to repent. What a challenge he is to us!

Here we have a blessed heart-warming book which I strongly recommend.

William Macleod

The Greatest Hoax on Earth? Refuting Dawkins on Evolution

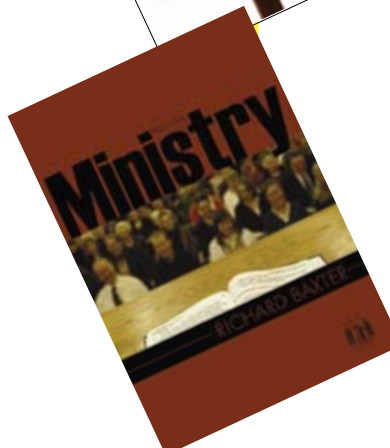
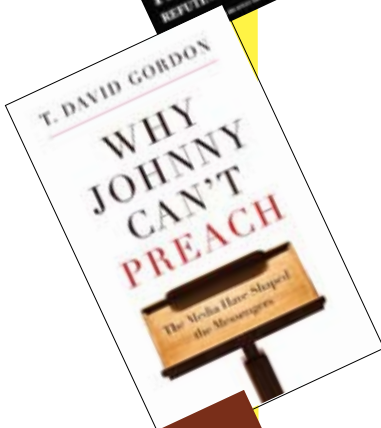
Jonathan Sarfati

Creation Book Publishers

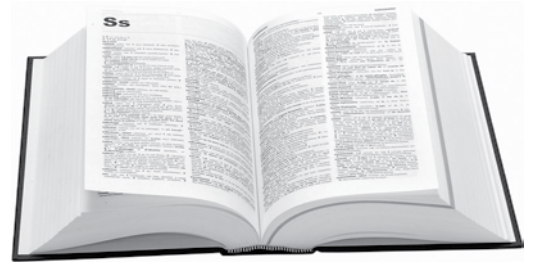
pbk, 333pp, £8.50

John Blanchard (*Dealing with Dawkins*, John Blanchard, Evangelical Press, pbk, 95pp, £2.50) reviewed in the September *Witness* has provided a brief popular response to Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: the Evidence for Evolution*. Jonathan Sarfati has written a much more thorough treatment. He goes through Dawkins section by section. Each chapter begins with a short summary. The Dawkins' arguments for evolution are fairly presented and carefully answered. Finally each chapter ends with a very helpful summary.

You need to have some scientific knowledge or at least to be very interested in the subject to read it through. However for many Christians it is an excellent reference work. It is fascinating to see how Sarfati demolishes Dawkins' arguments. His chapter on the 'Origins of Life' I found masterly. What use is evolution as an atheistic explanation of the universe when no credible theory of the origin of life on earth can be provided? His chapter on "Bad design": evidence for evolution? I also found to be specially helpful in explaining why certain organs are made the way they are by the Great Designer. The apparent great age of the earth troubles many but Sarfati shows the various assumptions which underlie for example radiometric dating.



Books



A few examples might help to give an impression of what the book is like.

Dawkins for example alleges that bad backs are a relic of our evolution from four-legged creatures. Sarfati responds: 'But leading spine experts point out that the human spine's inward curve makes it stronger than a gorilla's spine, pound-for-pound. Restoring this curve has helped treat bad backs, while evolutionary assumptions have worsened them'.

Some rocks are supposed to be millions of years old, but Sarfati shows how in certain cases this ancient date must be wrong. 'Carbon 14 has a short decay half-life, so should not be present in samples over a few hundreds of thousands of years. But ... it occurs in diamonds allegedly billions of years old'.

'Creatures with the best fossil record have no transitional forms, etc. It is where the fossil record is sparse that evolutionists try to claim examples of transitional fossils. But all it takes is one little discovery and it all unravels. The fossil record overall contradicts evolutionary expectations – that's why Dawkins wants to downplay its significance'.

Highly recommended.

William Macleod

Why Johnny Can't Preach

T David Gordon

P&R, pbk, 108pp, \$9.99

The catchy title of this little paperback instantly grabbed my attention. Written while the author was undergoing treatment for potentially terminal cancer, it is a powerful indictment of the current state of preaching. Gordon was himself in pastoral ministry, but thereafter spent many years as a seminary lecturer, sitting in the pew each week under other men's ministries. From this perspective, his assessment of the general standard of preaching is scathing. He argues that 85% of sermons have no discernable point, and even of those that do, only about 10% really ground that point in the passage of Scripture under consideration. His anecdotal evidence of how few Christians really speak appreciatively of the *preaching* of their ministers is genuinely disturbing, and all too familiar to us in Scotland.

Gordon argues that the current weakness in preaching is based on our loss as a culture of three 'sensibilities': the close reading of texts, the art of composed communication, and the discerning of the significant from the insignificant. The book is sub-titled 'The Media Have Shaped the Messengers', and Gordon makes a compelling case that the loss of these skills is due to the contemporary world media having accustomed us to receiving and communicating information very rapidly in bite-size chunks, thus destroying our ability to undertake really thorough analysis of Biblical texts in their own contexts,

and effectively communicate our conclusions to congregations through orderly, unified sermons. As a remedy, Gordon calls for ministers and divinity students to cultivate these sensibilities, through close and focused reading, through regular practice of writing, and through congregations allowing them sufficient time free from other responsibilities to prepare adequately for pulpit duties. He also argues that ministers should have an annual review to help them to identify areas where change or improvement is necessary.

Gordon critiques the absence of Christ in much of contemporary preaching and gives four examples of typical sermons that are not Christ-centred: Moralism, 'How-to' sermons, Introspection and Social Gospel/Culture Wars messages. Gordon argues that we should only preach Christ and Him crucified. This area of the book is weaker, as preaching must reflect what is in the text, and some texts do give moral teaching, or encourage self-examination, or give Christian responses to contemporary culture. However, a Christ-centred preacher must not stop there, but go on to boldly preach Christ, developing this focus legitimately from the message of the text.

This book is more than a mere rant; it is a compelling call to solid and serious proclamation of Christ from the pulpit, based on deep and thorough study of the Word.

Alasdair J Macleod

Pastoral Ministry

Richard Baxter

Banner of Truth Trust

small pbk, 118pp, £3.25

This little gem comes from the Banner's recent set of Pocket Puritans. Arranged into daily readings for a month, this anthology from Baxter's classic work, *The Reformed Pastor*, serves up bite-sized portions for meditation and challenge. Obviously with a special aim for ministers, this collection is to be highly prized and commended. Set in such an accessible manner, it is ideal for a minister who has already read the larger work, and wants to be reminded of its major themes throughout his ministry. I think it would be beneficial for this reviewer to read it yearly. It would be of use for those in the pews too, both as an insight into the work of the ministry and a motive to stir up serious prayer for those called to preach and pastor.

A short quote will give some flavour of its contents: 'A wicked man may be more willing for another's reformation than his own, and may thence have a kind of real earnestness in dissuading them from it: because he can preach against sin at easier rates than he can forsake it'.

Greg MacDonald

Remembering the 1859 Revival in Scotland (Part 3)

Rev Maurice Roberts

The Aberdeen Revival

Over the years a stream of eminent preachers, from the Highlands especially, had passed through Aberdeen University's Marischal College. A time of fresh spiritual visitation was now at hand. On Sunday 3rd October 1858 there arrived in Aberdeen a zealous young Ulsterman, fresh from the stirring revival scenes of his native land. His name was the Rev H Grattan Guinness, a member of the famous family of that name in Dublin. He commenced a mission in the Granite City, using for his meetings the Bon Accord Free Church in the mornings and St Paul Street Presbyterian Church in the afternoons. There were good attendances. The people listened with attention and in certain cases with conviction. Enquiries followed.

A month later, in November 1858, Brownlow North arrived in Aberdeen to conduct meetings – not for the first time, for he had preached there before. The preaching of these two servants of Christ was blessed. But it was largely a preparation for what was to follow and what was to become a work of grace on a large scale. On 27th November 1858 Reginald Radcliffe arrived in the city. Seeing that Brownlow North was enjoying popularity and having success he modestly kept himself in the background, conducting meetings for children in premises at Albion Street and counselling those awakened by Brownlow North. But after the latter had departed, Radcliffe preached almost every night during the winter of 1858-59 mainly in Greyfriars Church of Scotland, whose minister, the Rev James Smith, was a hearty supporter of the awakening which now began, even though his support brought him no little criticism from his Presbytery. Great crowds attended Radcliffe's services and it was generally agreed that his preaching was more effectual than that of the two men mentioned earlier. It may be added that there was initially opposition to the preaching of laymen from some good ministers and men. This opposition, however, was not bitter or prolonged, as the nature of the awakening was seen increasingly to be from heaven and the disapproval appears to have passed away. Before long the revival was nationwide in scale and importance. The initial disapproval respecting the labours of Brownlow North melted away so that in the Free Church Assembly of the same year, 1859, Brownlow North was given unique recognition as an evangelist.

The words used by Professor William Cunningham, the moderator for that year, deserve to be quoted in part as they show the fair-mindedness and candour which he and the Free Church as a whole felt towards preachers called in an unusual way to their work: 'I have had a strong and growing conviction that the Church ought to make provision for occasionally deviating from her ordinary arrangements. I never could see the warrantableness of any Church of Christ, however deeply impressed with its importance in ordinary circumstances, venturing to lay down as a resolution that she would not

see, and would not recognise, gifts for preaching or for the ministry, except in men who had gone through the whole of the ordinary curriculum. No Church has a right to lay down that rule. This Church has not laid down that rule, and I trust never will'.

The Aberdeen awakening was the first outstanding such work at this period and it continued for several years. Students witnessed to their fellow-students. Open-air services were held. Children's meetings flourished. In 1864 Richard Weaver came to assist, invited by Reginald Radcliffe.

Other Areas

During the months of 1858-9, reports had increasingly reached Scotland and other parts of Britain about the amazing religious revivals taking place first in America and then in Ireland. Inevitably these reports kindled new expectations that Scotland might be visited in turn, especially as the tide of blessing was plainly travelling from West to East. These expectations were not to be disappointed. The secular and religious press began to report unusual spiritual occurrences by the month of August, 1859.

K. Moody Stuart was not the only writer to notice that the progress of the revival, when it did come to Scotland, followed a significant path: 'As the late Professor Millar remarked, when he announced in our house the first news of its [the revival's] having touched the Scottish shores, it came just in the track that cholera would have come, crossing the Channel [ie the Irish Sea] at its narrowest point, and appearing first on the coast of Ayrshire, from which on a clear day a keen eye can identify the outline of the hills of Antrim'. Stuart went on, evidently with necessary caution, to write: 'This fact does not reduce that remarkable awakening to a mere epidemic, though it was accompanied by physical phenomena'.

Contemporary sources are available to show that the 1859-60 revival in Scotland, which began now to show itself in the areas of Clyde and North Ayrshire, shortly after spread to more or less all parts of the land from Ness in Lewis to Stranraer, and from Wick to Eyemouth and the Borders. The men who were instrumental in this growth were all remarkable men. The zealous James Turner alone is reputed to have been the means of converting 1,000 souls in the North-East-coast fishing villages. As for Robert Cunningham, he had a voice that sounded like thunder. Duncan Matheson was a born open-air speaker and had 'a voice like one of the bulls of Bashan', according to Alexander Whyte. Of Reginald Radcliffe it was said that 'there was something in his face that smote opposition out of a man before he uttered a word'. There can be no mistaking the kind of preaching which these men gave to their hearers for Brownlow North was sometimes termed 'the brimstone preacher', such was the power and seriousness of the sermons he delivered.

By any interpretation, the 1859-60 revival was a glorious visitation of the Spirit of God. We conclude with an abridged account of one of the scenes described in the press at the time. It refers to the town of Glengarnock in north Ayrshire and must have been typical of many similar occurrences in the time of the 1859-60 revival in Scotland.

Account by Mr Steel, minister of Dalry

'About six weeks ago I preached at the Cross of Dalry, in an open space, capable of receiving four or five thousand people. Every possible effort was made that one night to put me down... There was a perfect sea of faces looking up to the preacher... An immense crowd, however, turned out to hear the preaching of the Word – a multitude that I could not number, accustomed as I am to open-air meetings. They continued to listen with solemn attention, in the midst of a heavy shower of rain, but they were so closely packed together that the rain could only reach their head and shoulders...

'We were driven into the Free Church school, which will hold, when full, about 500 persons. The noise continued outside, but the school was filled with an attentive audience. About ten o'clock, a person rose and said that we ought to kneel and engage in prayer. A working man then rose, and, with a heart like to burst, poured out a most earnest prayer to Almighty God. I cannot tell whether it was at the close of the prayer or after we rose that, all of a sudden, the whole meeting seemed to be moved by an invisible power.

'Here and there through the whole schoolrooms there were persons crying out for mercy, and strong men crying in such manner as I had never heard before. I have seen persons suffering under various stages of cholera, I have seen much agony in my day, but never such a sight as this. I felt myself utterly powerless. I believed that I had the coldest heart and the most suspecting eye in that assembly, and sat down in a corner, feeling that I must sit still and know that He was God. But it was wearing on to 12 o'clock, and I felt that I must do something. A number were carried out, stricken down, as people have been in Ireland, and the elders and working men were busy speaking to anxious souls. At length I said, I will engage in prayer; and I poured out a prayer to God such as I had never uttered before. While I was thus engaged I heard them carrying strong men past me, and when I rose, wherever I went I found anxious souls...'

The question which rises up spontaneously in the mind in the light of these stirring acts of God in past times is, When will God visit us like this again? Never did Scotland seem more in need of such a work of divine grace as at this hour. It is a vision to be cherished and a dream to be prayed for. Ought we not to spend, each of us, some special time each week, in prayer for God to revive us again? Why not set aside half an hour each week on a Friday morning to cry to God to send his Holy Spirit down upon us again?

Remittances - October 2010

	2010 Oct	2010 Total	2009 To Oct
Presbytery of Inverness			
Aberdeen	2,562	11,740	9,634
Duthil-Dores	3,833	19,299	21,344
Inverness	3,000	28,000	28,000
Kilmorack & Strathglass	2,902	17,246	15,122
Total Inverness	12,296	76,285	74,100

Northern Presbytery			
Assynt & Scourie	720	1,283	2,987
Brora	4,142	19,834	17,093
Kiltearn	1,800	18,000	18,000
Tarbat	1,463	8,686	9,739
Total Northern	8,126	47,803	47,818

Southern Presbytery			
Arran	2,037	7,265	6,761
Ayr	1,712	3,460	1,538
Dumfries	0	0	0
Edinburgh	12,042	37,713	23,079
Glasgow - Partick	9,982	32,982	27,000
Glasgow - Shettleston	3,042	17,185	13,123
Glasgow - Knightswood	3,024	22,318	25,190
Rothsay	147	293	220
Total Southern	31,986	121,217	96,911

Outer Hebrides Presbytery			
Cross	2,639	19,539	19,957
Harris - Leverburgh	2,788	13,546	12,399
Harris - Scalpay	3,788	21,288	18,759
Knock & Point	2,975	13,949	11,575
North Uist	2,368	12,646	11,053
Stornoway	11,969	72,579	57,982
Total Outer Hebrides	26,527	153,547	131,724

Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron			
Bracadale	2,178	11,785	12,078
Duirinish (Waternish)	500	4,000	4,400
Glenelg & Arnisdale	741	2,260	1,815
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	7,646	15,121
Lochalsh & Glenshiel	2,172	6,888	5,464
Poolewe & Aultbea	2,219	9,810	9,148
Ullapool	0	400	0
Portree	6,589	17,389	15,424
Snizort	3,847	17,090	14,575
Strath	220	2,257	4,529
Total Skye	18,465	79,525	82,556

Total Congregations	97,399	478,376	433,110
Other Donations	8,430	22,672	23,130
TOTAL	105,829	501,048	456,239
Including Gift Aid	47,682	91,090	64,086

Street Children Work - Zambia

Dear all,

There are two bits of news I wanted to share with those who have taken a special interest in the work here at Old MacDonald's Farm, perhaps because you have visited us, or perhaps because you have held us close in your prayers.

By way of explaining about the first piece of news, let me take you back to November last year when most of our lads went to a camp for young folk run by Kabwata Baptist Church. When they came back most of them were very thoughtful and quiet and had been affected by the messages they had heard. We then came to the end of the year and the start of 2010. The very first Sunday of a New Year is usually a time for congregations to review the year past, and here in our little home church things were no different. Our brother who came from Kabwata Baptist preached on the passage from Luke 13:6-9: 'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'.

The preacher explained the parable and challenged all of us to examine ourselves as to what fruit we had borne before God, and stressed it was not enough just to be in the vineyard with other fruit-bearing trees. It was thought-provoking and again we noticed the quiet contemplation in a number of young minds.

The following Sunday we assembled again with a different preacher who took the same text without reference to the previous preacher. He made broadly the same points and the effect this time was much more marked. That evening we discussed the message at family prayers, and it is fair to say that nobody, myself included, was unaffected by the clear message from God to us all. This sense of conviction was multiplied significantly by the realisation that 9th December had marked the end of three years at the farm and that we were, as a family, already into the 'extra' year. We had to conclude that there had been little fruit over the first three years, individually and as a family.

Well, the following week we had the same preacher and he took a different text, but on the fourth Sunday a third preacher came and the stunned attention when he announced his text was Luke 13:6-9 could be felt physically. The poor man must have wondered what was wrong with us or his message! When he finished I asked him if he was part of a pre-arranged plan to preach this message, and the poor chap had no idea what I was talking about. When I explained to him, he was able to say that there had been no collusion and that the only planning had been done by heaven.

In the days that followed we dealt with a lot of questions and fear on the part of individuals that the message had been directed by God at them individually, with a number of lads

even afraid that they were going to die in the next 12 months. We tried to handle it as sensitively as we could and felt that really God was at work in a number of lives. Those of you with more experience of this sort of thing know that such effects and impressions can pass as quickly as they came, and sadly that proved the case in a number of instances, although I do believe that nobody in the house was left unaffected in some way, even the two younger girls.

However within a few weeks I was privileged to listen in awe to professions of faith from three of our lads – Lucky, Owen and Ackim. Rightly or wrongly, I felt that since this was clearly God's work, I did not need to push them into public profession, but preferred to wait with them to see how their new lives would develop. And I can tell you with great joy that in spite of attacks on them from Satan, and ongoing temptations and sin, each of them still continues to cling to Jesus and make a credible profession. The change in their lives is marked and although they feel their own failure and weakness before God, they want to live for Him and in Him.

So rejoice with us! Please pray for them individually and as a group. It is wonderful to see how they cannot be silent but do their best to speak to the other boys and girls about salvation, and watch out for each other. As for the others, I don't believe it wise to count converts – God knows all our hearts – but I must tell you that several of the boys are earnestly seeking salvation, some reaching that point of self-despair that suggests to me they will not be long before being born into the kingdom.

Please pray for them also that Jesus himself would lead them on until they can say, 'I am His and He is mine'. And please pray for the youngsters who are unchanged, some careless and indifferent, some complacently feeling they are good enough as they are, and others bitter and sullen because they have been 'left out'. My heart breaks for them, and I beg God not to let them drift away feeling unloved and rejected. Pray for our preachers who are just now alternating between two very relevant and searching series of sermons on Joseph and the five wise and five foolish virgins. The latter series especially has stirred up a lot of feeling similar to that which accompanied the fig tree sermons. Above all praise God for his marvellous grace in rescuing lads from the street and bringing them into His family as joint heirs with Christ. And don't forget His grace in allowing us to see it. We expect additional attacks from the enemy especially now that I have 'broken' the news. He will not be able to bear the joy around the world as well as among the angels. So pray for protection for us all, especially the three young believers.

A School?

Well, after all that, the second piece of news is bound to be an anti-climax, but we find it also quite exciting. As many of you know, we have felt for a long time that the next step in the work here would be to create a Christian-based community school to help the poor kids of the area who do not get the chance of a proper education. While this was an aspiration, we could not see how it could come to fruition as we had



no money, no human resources and no time to set up such a venture.

However just a few weeks ago, completely out of the blue, we were contacted by the owners of a nearby school called Lusaka East. It is the school where most of our boys have attended and although it is a secular school run as a business, it has played a significant part in reforming the boys' characters and getting them back into mainstream society. The owners are a couple who have run the school for years – Mr Mbewe is Zambian and Mrs Mbewe is Russian – and they have now decided to sell the business and move to USA to be with their children. The reason they contacted us was that they wanted to give us first option to buy the school and run it for the good of poor kids. It is tremendously exciting.

It is a successful business already with a full complement of qualified staff and we could continue to take in fee-paying children to meet costs and then use the facilities in the afternoons to provide free education for children in the area. If you add to that the possibilities of having volunteer Christian teachers from home come out to help, the opportunities for school twinning, and the chance to create scholarships for capable kids who are from poor families, then you can

see what a force for good it could be.

We have not yet been given a selling price, so we cannot take the next steps yet but we are all ready to go forward through this opening door if it is the Lord's will. If it is not, we are equally ready for that, and will wait His time for the next step in the adventure. Once we know how much we will need to raise we will approach a local bank to get a loan for the purchase, and of course the business would have to be able to cover that cost as well, otherwise we will not proceed as to get into unsustainable debt would be irresponsible and wrong.

So just when we thought we could take things easy after all the trouble of the past 12 months, we find ourselves facing a new set of challenges. Please pray we would have wisdom to

deal with these correctly.

I think that is enough to share just now. Please continue to support us by speaking to God on our behalf and on behalf of the lovely young folk whom it is our privilege to live with and love.

Yours in Christ

Don and Christine Macdonald



“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power,
and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance”

I Thessalonians 1:5