

Free Church **Witness**



FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE



Riches of the Psalms

- Malcolm Watts



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Deacons

The Bible is the only infallible rule we have to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God and so fulfil the purpose of our creation. We worship God only in the way He positively commands. This is our highly valued 'Regulative Principle of Worship', so necessary in a day of confusion such as ours when everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. People foolishly imagine that God will be pleased with any offering provided the worship is sincere. Similarly when it comes to church government the Bible must be our rule. In the New Testament there are ordinary and extraordinary officers in the church. Apostles and prophets were appointed by the Lord as the foundation of the church (Eph.2:20) and have passed away with the laying of that foundation 2000 years ago. Apostles were witnesses of the resurrection of Christ having seen Him with their physical eyes risen from the dead. There is no longer a need for prophets since the Bible is complete and all we need to know for salvation is to be found in it. Evangelists are mentioned as a distinct office (Eph.4:11). While the work of evangelism is something in which every Christian should be engaged, no description is given as to what these evangelists did or what qualifications they required. It seems most likely that the term was used to describe those who like Timothy and Titus were special assistants of the apostles, and were left in areas to complete the work done by Paul and others in organising local churches and ordaining elders and deacons (1Tim.1:3; 3:15; Tit.1:5). This office too passed away with the apostles.

Ordinary Officers – Biblical Warrant

The ordinary officers in the church are elders, deacons and pastors and teachers (pastors and teachers refer to the same office as is clear from the Greek, Eph.4:11). A careful study of the terms elders and bishops (overseers) in the New Testament will show that they refer to the same individuals. They do not refer to one individual set over a number of churches but rather to several who are to be found in each local church (Phil.1:1). Two passages set out the qualifications for eldership (1Tim.3:1-7 & Tit.1:5-9). The qualifications for deacons are described in 1Timothy 3:8-13. But what are the qualifications for pastors/teachers? Paul in addressing Timothy on how he ought to organise the affairs of the church of God states, 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine' (1Tim.5:17). So there are some elders who labour in the word as well as ruling and pastoring. These are the pastors/teachers referred to in Ephesians 4:11. In his letter to the Romans the Apostle speaks of preachers: 'How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?' (10:14-15). There is a category of elders who are called to preach.

Definition – Division of Labour

The Greek word for deacon means servant and this implies that their work is one of service. But even an elder or bishop is not to regard himself as the master of the church. Peter, acknowledging that he himself is an elder, warns fellow elders, 'Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock' (1Pet.5:3). Jesus taught that the one who wishes to be first shall be last and those who wish to lead must take the lowest place. He himself, acknowledged to

be Lord and Master, was among his disciples with basin and towel as one who served (Jn.13:13-16). Shortly after Pentecost, the church was expanding rapidly, and the new Christians full of the Holy Spirit gave generously to the church for the relief of the poor, but problems arose. The Apostles as the leaders were in charge of the distribution. They were too busy and no doubt mistakes were made. Satan got in. The Grecian widows complained that they were being neglected in comparison to the Hebrew widows. Godliness with contentment is great gain, but very rare. To address the situation it was decided by the apostles that seven men be appointed to 'serve tables' but the apostles themselves would give themselves 'continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). These seven men were the first deacons. Their job was to look after the givings of the church and the distribution of these monies, especially charity and the care of the needy. To this can be added the care and maintenance of any property which the church possesses. The elders' role was to be specifically that of the spiritual oversight.

Qualifications

Interestingly the first men to be appointed were to be 'of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom' (Acts 6:3). Stephen went on to be a great theologian and preacher and of course the first Christian martyr. Philip, another of the original seven, became a great missionary, bringing the gospel to Samaria. Once the church had become established Paul laid down the qualifications for deacons in the churches of Ephesus and in other places (1Tim.3:8-13).

1. Deacons must be grave or sober and sensible.
2. They must not be doubletongued, not liars but trustworthy.
3. They must not be given to much wine. Wine spoils the judgment and addiction undermines honesty. No drunkard, without repenting, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor.6:10).
4. Deacons must not be greedy for filthy lucre. They must not love money.
5. They must hold the mystery of the faith being sound in doctrine because beliefs affect life.
6. They must have a good conscience being moral, upright people.
7. They must not be new converts but first be tested and approved.
8. Their wives too must be good women supporting their husbands in the work, not slanderers or gossips.
9. They must not be polygamists.
10. They must rule their own families well.

Women Deacons

Some churches believe that women should be appointed to the diaconate or to a parallel office. It is said that the diaconate is service rather than rule. Also it is argued from the fact that in the Greek verse 11 simply says 'the women' rather than 'their wives' as in the English. 'Their wives' is an interpretation. But immediately after referring to 'the women', the Apostle returns

to the men, implying that he is not dealing with women deacons or a further category of church officer. Also he lays down the requirement that deacons be husbands of one wife and there is no similar reference to the women having one husband or not being involved in a polygamous relationship. The reason for referring to the women or wives in the case of deacons rather than elders is that deacons handle money which could be a temptation to deacons' wives. The fact that it is stated that a deacon is to rule his own house well implies that his work is one which requires wise ruling. Other passages make plain that a woman is not to rule in the church (eg 1Tim.2:11-12). Another passage sometimes looked to for support of women deacons is Romans 16:1 where Phebe is called a servant (deacon in the Greek). But the common translation of the word is servant. There is no warrant for ordaining women deacons. Of course

wise deacons will make ample use of their wives and other female Christians in carrying out their duties, especially in ministering to women.

Reward

It is a wonderful privilege to be allowed to do anything for the Lord but we note here again that no labour in the Lord is in vain. There is a reward even for offering someone a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord. Those who fulfil the office of a deacon well 'purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus' (1Tim.3:13). They receive blessings in this life and in the life to come. It is wonderful to have proper boldness and confidence in approaching the Lord. Deacons who are diligent can look forward to the Saviour saying in His grace, 'Well done good and faithful servant'.

Christians DO get Depressed!

VII. The Carers (2)

Rev David Murray

We have covered so far the Crisis, the Complexity, the Condition and the Causes of Depression. Last month we began to deal with the Carers. The carers are the depressed Christian's family, friends, and fellow-Christians, who will be involved to one degree or another in helping the sufferer to get better. We dealt with the first five of ten areas for carers to consider. The ten areas are Study, Sympathy, Support, Stigma, Secrecy, Self-esteem, Subjectivism, Speak, Suicide and Slow. This final article will consider the second five of these.

6. Self-esteem

Depression and anxiety bring to the surface deeply rooted self-doubts and self-criticism. The depressed person will often feel useless and worthless. They will have very low self-esteem. What should we do to address this?

Some Christians are reluctant to give people any praise or encouragement because of the risk of making a person proud. However, it is safe to say that pride is one of the least risky vices for someone who is depressed. Pride results from having an over-inflated view of oneself. Depression involves the opposite.

Other Christians misconstrue the doctrine of original sin and total depravity to mean that there is no kind of 'good' in anyone, and so again fail to say anything positive to the person. However, without minimising the wickedness of the human heart and without denying our inability to do anything pleasing to God apart from through faith in Christ, we should feel free to encourage the depressed person to have a more realistic view of themselves by highlighting their God-given gifts, their contributions to the lives of others,

their usefulness in society, and, if they are Christians, their value to the Church. For example, a depressed young mother may feel a total failure in every area of her life because she has not got a perfect home or perfect kids. We can help such a person to see that she achieves much in a day even though she might not manage to do everything she would like. We might remind her of all the meals she makes, clothes she washes and irons, the shopping she organises, and so on, and so help her to see herself and her life in a more accurate and realistic light.

Elshout writes: 'It is wrong to pat ourselves on the back when something has been accomplished as a result of our initiative. It is equally wrong, however, to focus on what we have not accomplished. In 1Corinthians 15:10 we have a clear example of humility accompanied with a healthy opinion of one's accomplishments: "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me". Paul knew very well that he daily offended in many things (James 3:2; cf. Rom. 7; Phil. 3:12), and yet he did not go so far as to cast out all his accomplishments. I do not believe that this is God's will. In contrast to sinful forms of self-confidence and self-respect, there are also those that are good, necessary, and useful. Without a healthy sense of these, human beings cannot function well. We may pray for an appropriate sense of self-confidence and self-respect, clothed in true humility, and we must oppose everything that impedes a healthy development of these things (be it in ourselves or others) with the Word of God'.

"We should feel free to encourage the depressed person by highlighting their God-given gifts, their contributions to the lives of others, their usefulness in society, and their value to the Church."

7. Subjectivism

One of the most common tendencies in depression is to focus on feelings, and to base beliefs and conclusions on these feelings. This is especially true of Christians. They may feel forsaken and so conclude they are forsaken. There is also the tendency to read Bible passages and books which address the feelings in the hope that this will help to restore true feelings, whereas such a focus tends only to make things worse.

We should encourage the depressed person to move away from the realm of the subjective and to instead think on the objective truths of Christianity – things which are true regardless of our feelings – justification, adoption, the atonement, the attributes of God, heaven, etc.

8. Speak

The general rule is to listen much and to speak little. However, here are a number of things not to say:

- Pull yourself together
- Don't get so emotional
- Oh, you'll soon get over it
- It's a sin to be depressed
- Just believe the promises
- Smile, it can't be that bad
- Well, things could be worse
- At least it's nothing serious
- You should confess your sins
- You are not still on medication, are you?

The more you understand depression the less likely you will say such hurtful and damaging things.

9. Suicide

If you suspect someone is considering suicide then you should sensitively and wisely ask the person if they are thinking along these lines. This will not plant suicidal thoughts in their minds, but may allow the suicidal person to admit to this and to seek professional help.

In *Broken Minds*, Pastor Steve Bloem who has suffered from depression gives a number of reasons he has used at times to convince himself not to commit suicide:

- It is a sin and would bring shame to Christ and His church.
- It would please the devil and would weaken greatly those who are trying to fight him.
- It would devastate family members and friends, and you may be responsible for them following your example if they come up against intense suffering.
- It may not work and you could end up severely disabled but still trying to fight depression.
- It is true – our God is a refuge (Ps.9:10).
- Help is available. If you push hard enough someone can assist you to find the help you need.
- If you are unsaved, you will go to hell. This is not because of the act of suicide but because all who die apart from knowing Christ personally will face an eternity in a far worse situation than depression.
- If you are a Christian then Jesus Christ is interceding for you, that your faith will not fail.
- God will keep you until you reach a day when your pain will truly be over.

10. Slow

It is important to realise that there are no easy answers and there are no quick fixes in dealing with depression. It usually takes many months and in some cases even years to recover. You should, therefore, take a long-term view and patiently wait for improvement. Don't get frustrated over lack of progress and be aware that temporary relapses may occur. Lockley says: 'Patience is essential, because, by the nature of illness, the depressed person is likely to go over the same ground time and again, needing the same reassurance that was given a day, a week or a month ago.

In the meantime let us take our depressed Christian brethren continually before the throne of grace and plead, 'Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick.'

CONCLUSION

In the course of these lectures we have been looking particularly at how depression affects the Christian. In closing I would like to refer back to something which I have touched upon now and again – the way God will sometimes use depression to bring an unconverted person to the Saviour. If you are unconverted and feeling depressed, at least part of the solution may be repentance from your sins and faith in Christ. That is not to say that you may not need medication and counselling as well. However, medication and counselling will only be a temporary solution if you do not seriously address your spiritual state before God. Pills might get you through this world, but they will not be available in hell, the place of ultimate torment, despair, and gnashing of teeth.

'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved'.

Right Relationships with God and Men II

Rev Jeff Ballantine

Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Bangor, Northern Ireland

This is Part II of a lecture given at the School in Theology at Larbert in September 2007. In Part I Mr Ballantine looked at the basis and importance of a right relationship with God.

1) A Right Relationship with God (Continued)

c) The obstacles to this relationship

What are they? They are of course that unholy trio of 'the world, flesh and the devil'. Here are three enemies that oppose us all our days and the battles never relent so long as we are in the body. One day we will 'rest from our labours', but not just yet (Rev.14:13). The nature of the battle may change as time passes. Perhaps in our latter years we will struggle more with areas such as learning contentment and mortifying bitterness. As our bodies become more uncomfortable these are areas where we need to be particularly careful. Tragically 'a root of bitterness' can spring up in older Christians. Sometimes they become quite intolerant of those who are young in the faith, forgetting what they were like at that stage of their Christian experience.

Or, perhaps, the battleground may not change. Some years ago a student of Westminster Seminary asked Cornelius Van Til about the sins he faced as an old man. He answered, perhaps unexpectedly: 'I have trouble with the same sins today as I had fifty years ago'. Here are three areas where ministers need to be especially careful:

The first is the Seventh Commandment: 'Flee also youthful lusts' (2Tim.2:22). And if you have a make-up like Van Til remember 'middle age lusts' or even 'old age lusts' can be dangerous too. We are to treat 'the elder women as mothers: the younger as sisters, with all purity' (1Tim.5:2). 'Be thou an example of the believers... in purity' (1Tim.4:12). We must aim 'to be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work' (2Tim.2:21). Failure in this area is nothing less than disastrous.

The second is the Tenth Commandment: 'Beware of covetousness' (Lk.12:15). This is also a requirement for an elder: 'not covetous' (1Tim.3:3). If our people ever have reason to suspect that we are money-minded we will lose our credibility and effectiveness as ministers.

The third is the Ninth Commandment. Our tongues are our 'stock in trade' and our great objective is that God will bless what we say. However, speech can also become our Achilles' heel and the scope for going astray here is almost endless.

It's easy to 'speak unadvisedly with our lips' as Moses did (Ps.106:33), or we can break confidence and thereby lose the trust of our people. Sins of speech also grieve the Holy Spirit as the context of this subject clearly shows: 'putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour:... be ye angry and sin not' (Eph.4:25-26). Every time I make a phonecall or engage in visitation I pray: 'set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips' (Ps.141:3). And if you ever think you've mastered your tongue read the Larger Catechism on the Ninth Commandment. The list of 'sins forbidden' and 'duties required' is enough to humble anyone.

d) The cultivation of this relationship

Getting right with God is one thing; maintaining and developing a right relationship with God is another thing altogether. Of course we should never cease to marvel at the fact that we are right with God in a once-and-for-all sense. The matter of our eternal destiny was settled the moment we believed on Christ. Now we can say 'I am his and He is mine, forever and forever'. Contemplation of that covenantal reality should cause us to be 'lost in wonder, love and praise', but that's only the beginning. The Apostle could say: 'To us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1Cor.1:18), and that is as true for ministers as for church members. We too have never-dying souls which are in the process of 'being saved'. We too are to 'take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee' (1Tim.4:16). We must live as Christian men before we act as Christian ministers. That means putting sanctification first. We are to be examples to the flock (1Pet.5:3) so spiritual nurture is paramount.

What Means then are we to use?

1) Prayer: 'Pray without ceasing' (1Thes.5:17); 'enter into thy closet' (Mt.6:6). We cannot grow in grace without communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God blessed forever. John Owen's volume *Communion with God* has this distinctive feature: he continually emphasises the Trinitarian nature of our communion and shows how it is our privilege to enjoy communion with each Person of the Godhead individually. What a mysterious and wonderful means of grace prayer is and nothing is more central to nurturing a right relationship



with God than this! Alas, talking about it is one thing, doing it is another. Perhaps indwelling sin rears its ugly head here more than in any other area. Why is it that we never get tired watching a rugby match, yet prayer makes us feel listless? There's only one thing for it: we have to persevere and shake ourselves out of our lethargy, but that's easier said than done.

2) Word: The study of, reflection upon and submission to God's

Word is again absolutely central in cultivating a right relationship with God. Perhaps a particular temptation we face is that of reading our Bible with a view to finding sermons. We need to remember that God's Word is to be food for our souls before it becomes food for our people: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God' (Lk.4:4). God commanded Ezekiel to eat the roll before He spoke to the house of Israel: 'Son of man, eat that thou findest, eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel' (Ezek.3:1). It was also God's Word that sustained Jeremiah in the depths of his trials. He could say: 'thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart' (Jer.15:16). Luther said 'Prayer, meditation and temptation, make a minister.'

3) Fellowship: 'They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name' (Mal.3:16). Conferences such as this can also be a means of cultivating an ever expanding and God-honouring relationship with our Maker.

4) Reading of good books: Spurgeon made this comment about Paul's prison request for 'books, but especially the parchments' (2Tim.4:13): 'How rebuked are they (preachers who won't study) by the apostle! He is inspired, and yet he wants BOOKS! He has preached at least for thirty years, and yet he wants BOOKS! He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants BOOKS! He had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants BOOKS! He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, and yet he wants BOOKS! He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants BOOKS!' The apostle says to Timothy, and to every preacher 'Give attendance to reading' (1Tim.4:13).

5) Listening to sermons: Sermonaudio and other websites provide privileges for which other generations would have sold their shirt. We have access to over 100,000 sermons by the best preachers of our age, all at the touch of a button. What a privilege! Some are even in text format so that we can read the parts we're interested in without having to spend time listening to the whole sermon! May I suggest that you use this facility on Saturday nights to help warm your heart for the Lord's day.

Somebody Looking!

Mrs M A Chaplin

Three small boys in a country town
Passed a house where the blinds were down:
And over the wall, where a ladder stood,
A man was stripping the fruitful wood.

'Throw us an apple', the children cried.
'There's somebody looking', the man replied:
'No', cried a boy, 'there is nobody here:
You can throw us an apple, and never fear.'

But the honest man in the apple tree
Looked kindly down on those children three,
And pointing solemnly overhead,
'There's somebody looking', again he said.

Fifty years have now rolled away,
And one of those boys said yesterday,
He had all along of his life been glad
Of the good man's word to the thoughtless lad.

Comforts, as well as caution, grew:
'There's somebody looking', helped him through:
When the right was rough and the wrong was sweet,
'There's somebody looking', held his feet.

And now when the fogs of sin and fear
Thicken his Christian atmosphere,
When Satan rages and foes molest,
'There's somebody looking', bids him rest.

So, speak to the children when you can:
God often uses the speech of man:
Who knows but your words may as fruitful be
As those of the man in the apple tree?

Friendly Companion: August 2007



Right with the Law

Rev Maurice Roberts

God has given to his people both in the Old Testament and in the New two blessings of incalculable value: gospel and law. In his law God informs us of what He requires of us in this life; in the gospel He shows us how He freely gives us all that He requires from us. In all ages there have been men who have confused and confounded law and gospel, mixing up the one with the other. It is our wisdom to know the vital difference between these two; law and gospel. To go wrong here is to risk making spiritual shipwreck. None are apt to go so far wrong as those who are religious, yet unregenerate. This is why Christ rebukes the Pharisees so sternly.

Law and Gospel

The gospel offers us the perfect righteousness before God which God's Moral Law requires. When we believe in the gospel we at once receive the accreditation of Christ's perfect obedience and pass from a condition of guilt to a state of justification. In addition, when we believe in Christ we are given a fresh edition of the moral law written on our heart, with a love for this moral law and a sincere desire to live in obedience to it.

The gospel and the law are not in conflict with one another. Their relationship is that of friends. What the one requires the other provides. What God justly demands from us we cannot give because of our spiritually ruined condition. But all that God justly demands of us we have when we believe in Christ: a perfect standing before God by the imputation to us of Christ's obedience unto death. We also have a renewed will to please God by keeping his moral law. No justified person is without a renewed nature which feels the instinct to please God by a life of obedience.

To be a real Christian is to yearn to obey God. This yearning arises from the renewal of his soul by which he loves God and wishes to please Him. Owing to residual indwelling depravity the believer must surmount his inertia and exert himself towards this new obedience which he knows to be his duty. Professing Christians who have no sense of inward urge to keep God's law are devoid of real grace. They are gospel hypocrites.

Which Law?

There is only one Moral Law but over the course of time God has given other forms of law to his people. It is of the utmost importance to be clear what the permanent Moral Law of God is, over against other forms of law. As we noted above concerning law and gospel, confusion has abounded over the years as to which laws of God are still in force and which are not in force any longer. God is not honoured nor

is true religion advanced, when those who profess faith in Christ are unclear as to which laws bind our consciences and which do not.

Three Forms of Law

The Bible presents to us three forms of law: Moral Law, Ceremonial Law and Judicial Law. It is obviously essential to us to know the difference between these three forms of law and also to be clear as to which of these forms of law are binding on us today. Indeed it is impossible for us in our own Church to take an ordination vow without our being sure as to the relevance of these three forms of law, since they are matters upon which our *Westminster Confession of Faith* makes a decided pronouncement. (See *Confession*, chapter 19). What, in brief, is the way in which our *Confession* teaches us to look on these three types of law given to us by God? We are to understand first that the Moral Law is of permanent relevance as a perfect rule of righteousness containing our duty towards God and our duty to man (19:2). The reference here is to the Ten Commandments. They are a rule of life to Christians. We are to keep them, not to gain eternal life but to express our gratitude to God for the eternal life which is ours in Christ.

Ceremonial Law

In the Old Testament period God gave to His people Israel, as His church under age, ceremonial laws (19:3). These ceremonies were largely a God-given picture of how Christ, when He came, would suffer and redeem us by His blood. The *Confession* states clearly: 'All ... ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament' (19:3).

It is guilty ignorance on the part of church authorities when they attempt to reintroduce sacrifice or other aspects of Ceremonial Law of any kind into New Testament services of worship. That, alas, is the folly committed by Ritualists and Sacramentarians. To bring these ceremonies into New Testament worship is to suppose that outdated and abolished rituals are still obligatory on worshippers today. But this error is to 'light a candle at noon-day', as good Bishop JC Ryle used to say in reference to the Anglican Ritualists of his day. Christ has fulfilled all the Ceremonial Laws and rendered them obsolete.

Judicial or Civil Law

There is a third form of law which God gave to his people Israel in the Old Testament. We refer to it as the Judicial or Civil Law. These Civil Laws were given by God to Israel as a theocracy. (A theocracy is a nation under the direct rule of God). Israel was both a church and also a nation in the days before Christ. It was uniquely under God's government

and so received from Him as its King a code of laws and punishments which were meant for Old Testament times only. Examples of Civil Law are: stoning rebellious children to death, capital punishment for adultery, the placing of a battlement on a new house, the prohibition not to sow a vineyard with divers seeds, the prohibition not to make a garment with a mixture of materials, the obligation to wear a fringe on one's garment and the duty of a man to marry the childless wife of his deceased brother.

These and similar duties, prohibitions and punishments were obligatory for Old Testament Israelites. However we are not to view these laws as binding on our consciences in New Testament times.

The *Westminster Confession* expresses it in these words: 'To them [the Jews] as a body politic [God] gave sundry judicial laws which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require' (19:4).

Theonomy and Reconstructionism

There are Christian theologians who wish to argue that the Judicial Law should be regarded by the church as still in force in New Testament times. The name which is given to such theologians is 'Theonomists'. Their views are sometimes referred to as 'Reconstructionism'.

A number of writers, especially in America, belong to this school of thought.

The objections to the Reconstructionist view are these: The New Testament is silent on the application of the Judicial Law to states and governments to which the gospel has come. The apostles

did not press on Gentile rulers that it was their duty to enforce the sanctions of Israel's Judicial Law. The theory that the Judicial Law is permanent has over the centuries found some supporters but it is a theory which is firmly refuted by Calvin and by the Westminster divines.

Calvin writes scathingly of this view in these words: 'There are some who deny that any commonwealth is rightly framed which neglects the law of Moses and is ruled by the common law of nations. How perilous these views are let others see; for me it is enough to demonstrate that they are stupid and false. We must attend to the well-known division which distributes the whole law of God as promulgated by Moses into the Moral,

the Ceremonial and the Judicial Law and we must attend to these points in order to understand how far they do or do not pertain to us' (*Institutes* 4: 20:14).

The Law of Love

The above words of Calvin are a reminder to us how important it is to guard against seeking to place men's consciences under any form of law besides God's Moral Law.

It is not proper to raise scruples in men's minds by suggesting to them that laws of God which are now obsolete and outdated ought still to bind us to a careful performance of them.

The Moral Law is permanent and unchangeable in that it reflects the holy and righteous character of God Himself. God cannot require less of us than that we should love Him with all our heart and also love our neighbour as ourselves. The happiness of churches and of society in general rises or falls as men either keep, or else break, God's law. The preaching of the gospel always tends to promote the observance of the Moral Law. Where it is loved and kept, men's lives are safe and relationships are stable. In glory the moral law will be kept perfectly and eternally. That is why heaven will be 'a world of love'.

"How important it is to guard against seeking to place men's consciences under any form of law besides God's Moral Law."





News



2008 Moderator Designate Rev John W. Keddie

Born in 1946 and educated in Edinburgh, John Keddie first professed faith in 1966 under the ministry of the Rev James Philip. He came into the membership of the Free Church at St Columba's, Edinburgh some two years later.

Mr Keddie is a qualified accountant and a member of the Chartered Management Institute. He worked in London for twelve years and for a time was Commercial Manager of the Dunlop Sports Company.

Following theological studies in the Free Church College and a pastorate in Burghead, Mr Keddie has, since 1997, been ministering on the Island of Skye where he is minister of Bracadale Free Church (Continuing).

A keen interest in Church history and theology has led to his authoring books, booklets and many articles for the Christian press, including books on *Sing the Lord's Song: Biblical Psalms in Worship* (Crown and Covenant, 2003);

George Smeaton: Learned Theologian and Biblical Scholar (Evangelical Press, 2007); and *Running the Race: Eric Liddell, Olympic Champion and Missionary* (Evangelical Press, 2007).

Mr Keddie has had a very close interest in sport over the years, both as a competitor and as a writer. In his competitive days he was Scottish Junior triple jump champion in 1965, and in athletics represented the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association and Scottish Universities. In rugby he played for Boroughmuir School Former Pupils XV for several seasons. He is the author of *Scottish Athletics, the official centenary history of the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association* (1982). He assisted the writer of the screenplay for the award-winning film, *Chariots of Fire*, in which a character was named after him.

Married to Jean, they have a family of four children and have five grandchildren.

Rev Sherman Isbell Semi-Jubilee

On Friday, November 2nd, 2007 members of the Washington D.C. congregation, along with members of the Presbytery and other friends from outside the Church gathered in Bethesda, Maryland to recognise and celebrate the semi-jubilee of Rev Sherman Isbell's ordination to the gospel ministry. Rev William Scott (retired minister of Dumfries) opened the event with the singing of Psalm 132:1-9 and conducted public worship. Mr Scott preached on the suitable theme of 'Responsible for the Blood of Jesus' from Matthew 27:25. He ably applied the sweet message of Christ crucified to those who were gathered. Following the worship service, Rev Robert McCurley read the letters of greeting that had been sent for the occasion from several of the brethren in Scotland as well as ministerial colleagues from other ecclesiastical



Desk



bodies resident in the United States. Mr McCurley then expressed words of appreciation drawn from many years of acquaintance with Mr Isbell and his ministry. Mr John Burton, the congregational precentor in Washington, presented a gift to the Isbells and conveyed the deep gratitude of the congregation for Mr Isbell's eighteen years of faithful service among them. A pleasant reception with a variety of refreshments had been prepared. Those present lingered to enjoy the extended time of fellowship. The evening was blessed with a savour of the pre-eminence of Christ and of His gracious presence.



York rejects Mugabe

The Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, cut into pieces his clerical 'dog collar' on a television programme broadcast by the BBC to the world, and the Ugandan-born cleric vowed he would not replace it until Robert Mugabe is no longer president of Zimbabwe. The second-highest ranking cleric in the (Anglican) Church of England was himself a refugee from the tyrannical regime of Idi Amin,

who ruled Uganda from 1971 to 1979. He said it was right for British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to refuse to attend the December conference of European Union and African leaders held in Portugal because of Mugabe's presence there.

Christianophobia

Christian Institute

In December members of Parliament debated a perceived rise in intolerance towards Christians in Britain. The 90-minute Private Members' debate on the sidelining of Britain's Christian traditions by the 'politically-correct brigade' was called by Mark Pritchard MP. Several MPs agreed that there was such a thing as so-called 'Christianophobia', often promoted by what one described as 'aggressive secularism'. Many affirmed the value of Britain's Christian heritage.

Church Splits over Gay Rights

A Californian diocese has voted to become the first to break away from the US Episcopal Church in protest at its support for gays in the Church. Delegates of the San Joaquin diocese in Fresno voted 173-22 to secede. It follows years of disagreement with Church authorities triggered by the consecration of a gay bishop in 2003. The Episcopal Church is the US wing of the 77 million-member Anglican Communion, which is threatened by a deep split between conservatives and liberals. The Episcopal Church says that in recent years 32 of its 7,600 congregations have left, with another 23 voting to leave but not taking the final step. San Joaquin is

the first of the Church's 110 dioceses to complete the split. In a later vote, the diocese accepted an invitation to join a conservative South American Anglican congregation.

Rev Jan van Straaten

Writes...

We are grateful to the Lord for His protection, provision, guidance and grace during 2007. It was our first full year back in SA and we had to wait on God for openings and opportunities to serve Him here where He has placed us for this time of our lives. We were blessed by our involvement with the students in Mandelapark-Khayalitsha, Villiersdorp, Kraaifontein and Kleinmond as well as with the children and a few elderly folk at Betty'sbay and the women in Villiersdorp.

Whenever one prepares to teach others from God's infallible Word one receives a great blessing oneself. 'And he that watereth shall be watered also himself' (Prov.11:25). Often one also receives a blessing from the very people one ministers to and so we build each other up in our most holy faith and encourage one another to walk faithfully with the Lord till He comes to take us to be with Him or when He comes with the clouds to receive those who had put their trust in Him.

One of our old students from Covenant College, Zambia, Lovemore Banda and his wife Violet visited Cape Town. We took them to Monte Vista Church for a Sunday morning worship service. It was a wonderful opportunity for the believers there to meet one of the students who studied at the College they have supported since 2001. The Bandas were also blessed and

encouraged by the love and hospitality of the believers here in SA.

Graduation day at the Bible Institute was an event of great joy, giving glory to God. Five of our students who are enrolled in the Shepherd Schools received their certificates in the Leadership Training Programme – a three-year course they faithfully completed. Each one also received a parcel of reference books from the Pastors' Book Fund. Pray that the Lord might use them mightily in His service to His glory.

Death of

Rev Clement Graham

Principal Emeritus Clement Graham, who passed away on 27th November 2007, was one of the leaders of the Free Church during the latter half of the twentieth century. His ministry began in Tain in 1943 and he continued there for thirty years till he was appointed Professor of Apologetics and Practical Theology in the Free Church College in Edinburgh. Having a good grasp of Church law he was for many years a clerk to the General Assembly, and was one of the few men to have been appointed Moderator twice (1969 and 1993).

He had a good intellect, a philosophical mind and a sharp wit. Press obituaries of him have remembered him for his 'hounds of death' speech of 1996 in which he gave his whole-hearted support to Professor Donald Macleod and did his best to ensure that Macleod would never have to stand before any court of the Church to give account for his alleged scandalous conduct. The passing of Principal Graham's wife in 1989 was a great blow to him as he was very dependent upon her.

Death of

Professor Tom Torrance

Born of CIM missionary parents in China in 1913, Tom Torrance became eventually the best-known academic in the Church of Scotland ministry. As well as studying at Edinburgh and Oxford he spent two years under Karl Barth at Basel and this made a huge impact upon him. He became the main populariser and



promoter of Barth's theology in the English-speaking world.

Following two pastorates he became Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh in 1952. Though he retained the language of evangelicalism, the meaning was quite different. To him the Bible was not the infallible, inerrant word of God – not the truth but rather a witness to it. Famously he asserted in contrast to the Westminster Confession that the Word of God cannot be 'contained' in the Scriptures. For him truth about God is not to be found in historical investigation or in searching the Scriptures but only in 'encounter' with God in Christ.

In 1961 he was faced with what he later described as one of the most difficult decisions of his life when he was invited to succeed Barth in the chair of Dogmatics at Basel. He was an editor in the team which translated Barth's works into English and also of that which produced the new translation of Calvin's commentaries. He founded the Scottish Journal of Theology and wrote many books even into his ninetieth year.

Neither liberal nor evangelical, his influence is likely to decline with that of Barth. Much to his disappointment, his successor at New College was James Mackey, a radical Roman Catholic scholar. Fashions in theology come and go, but only the truth and the Scriptures which proclaim it will stand the test of time.

Shortage of Ministers

A shortage of Church of Scotland ministers is impacting on many parishes throughout Scotland. Perth city centre is especially hard hit as three vacancies already exist there and a further one will arise with the forthcoming retirement of the Rev. David Denniston, minister at the North Church. The national Church reports 1,200 pulpits and roughly 1000 ministers to fill them.

New Creation/Evolution

Film

The creation–evolution battle and the battle for Hollywood converge in a new film to be released in February. Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed brings us Ben Stein, TV personality, actor and former White House speech writer, on the big screen, asking one of life's biggest questions: 'Were we designed, or are we simply the end result of an ancient mud puddle struck by lightning?'

In the movie, Mr Stein, who is also a lawyer, is stunned by what he discovers – an elitist scientific establishment which has traded in its open-mindedness for dogma. Even worse, say publicists for the feature film, 'along the way, Mr Stein uncovers a long line of biologists, astronomers, chemists and philosophers who have had their reputations destroyed and their careers ruined by a scientific establishment that allows absolutely no dissent from Charles Darwin's theory of random mutation and natural selection.'

Mr Stein says, 'Scientists are supposed to be allowed to follow the evidence wherever it may lead, no matter what the implications are. Freedom of inquiry has been greatly compromised, and this is not only anti-American, it's anti-science. It's anti the whole concept of learning.'

Expelled documents how teachers and scientists alike are being ridiculed daily, denied tenure and even fired for believing there is evidence of 'design' in nature and challenging the current orthodoxy that life is entirely a result of random chance.

For example, Mr Stein meets Richard Sternberg, a double PhD biologist

who allowed a peer-reviewed research paper describing the evidence for intelligence in the universe to be published in the scientific journal *Proceedings*. Shortly after publication, officials from the National Center for Science Education and the Smithsonian Institution, where Dr Sternberg was a research fellow, began a coordinated smear-and-intimidation campaign to get the promising young scientist fired. The attack on scientific freedom was so egregious that it prompted a congressional investigation.

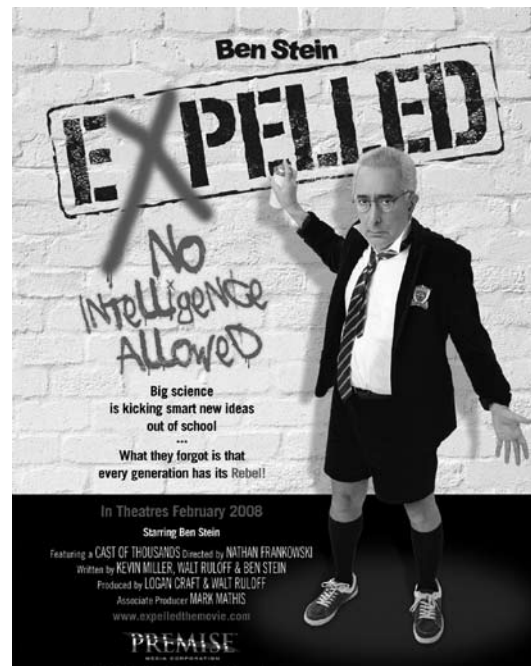
In the film, Mr Stein meets other scientists like astrobiologist Guillermo Gonzalez, who was denied tenure at Iowa State University in spite of an extraordinary record of achievement. Gonzalez made the mistake of documenting the design he has observed in the universe.

And there are others, like Caroline Crocker, a brilliant biology teacher at George Mason University who was forced out of the university for briefly discussing problems with Darwinian theory and for telling the students that some scientists believe there is evidence of design in the universe. Unlike other popular documentary films, *Expelled* isn't one-sided – it confronts scientists like Oxford evolutionist Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, influential biologist and atheist blogger PZ Myers, and Eugenie Scott, head of the National Center for Science Education. In fact, the creators of *Expelled* spent two years interviewing scores of scientists, doctors, philosophers and public leaders for the film.

According to the *New York Times*, Dawkins, Scott and other evolutionists are now claiming the film's producers deceived them into going on camera by hiding the Intelligent Design orientation of the film. But Mr Stein denies misleading anyone. 'I don't remember a single person asking me what the movie was about', he told the *Times*.

'The incredible thing about *Expelled* is that we don't resort to manipulating our interviews for the purpose of achieving the shock effect, something that has become common in documentary film these days', said Walt Ruloff, co-founder of Premise Media and the film's co-executive producer. 'People will be stunned to actually find out what elitist scientists proclaim, which is that a large majority of Americans are simpletons who believe in a fairy tale.'

Expelled is produced by Premise Media, and marketed by Motive Entertainment, which has spearheaded *The Passion of the Christ*, *Polar Express* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It will be distributed by Rocky Mountain Pictures, with numerous box-office successes to its credit. Find out more from www.expelledthemovie.com.



Arbroath Weekend

Sandra Macaulay

The young people's Weekend Away in Arbroath ran from Friday 19th to Monday 22nd October. Only getting the chance to meet up twice a year, we make the most of our time together. The days began with breakfast at 8.30 and finished with worship just before 11pm with some of us chatting on until 4 in the morning (others just can't keep up the pace!). The speaker this year was Rev John J Murray who gave five talks centred on 'The Glory of God':

1. God and His Glory: Creation
2. Beholding His Glory in Christ
3. Reflecting His Glory: Holiness
4. His Glory in the earth: Kingdom & Church
5. His Glory in the Consummation: New Heavens and New Earth

Worship each morning and evening was led by the young Christians in turn, with a prayer, a reading of a favourite passage with a few brief thoughts, and a Psalm. We also got the chance to hear four of the young folk give their

testimonies – God working in their lives to His Glory. We all had a chance to contribute to the small group discussions on Saturday morning, as we were split into groups to discuss the (difficult!) questions set by Mr Murray. Later on, it was our turn to ask Mr Murray some questions, and the question times on Saturday and Sunday evenings gave a good opportunity for us to raise various difficult issues with regard to the Bible and Christian experience. The Psalm-singing on Sunday afternoon was led by Jonathan and Mairi Keddie, and was an opportunity to praise God and to learn some new Psalm tunes. As usual, it was a weekend enjoyed by all. Recordings of the talks are available to download from www.bible-sermons.org.uk.

The dates for the weekends in 2008 are 8-11 February 2008, and 17-20 October 2008, both to be held as usual at the Windmill Christian Centre in Arbroath, and all young folk are warmly invited.



Books

Questions and Answers on the Shorter Catechism

John Brown

Reformation Heritage Books

hbk, 356pp, \$22

This book begins with an interesting twenty page biographical introduction, which traces the life of John Brown from his birth in the village of Carpow near Abernethy, Perthshire, in the year 1722, to his death 75 years later. Converted in his youth, John Brown was first employed as a shepherd and later as a travelling pedlar. Possessing a great mind and an equal amount of diligence he undertook training for the ministry. In 1751 he was ordained to the ministry and inducted to the Associate Church at Haddington, East Lothian, where he would remain for the rest of his days.

John Brown was a prolific writer, publishing some 30 books including doctrine, history and works for young people. It was young people that he had in mind when he wrote this book, as is evident from his 8-page foreword, 'An Address to the Young Readers of this Catechism.' The work consists of a catechism on the Westminster Shorter Catechism and was originally entitled 'An Essay towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism.' Brown himself had a great love for catechisms and has left on record that he 'had a particular delight in learning by heart the Catechisms published by Vincent, Flavel and the Westminster Assembly and was much profited by them.'

The book is straightforward in layout. Having given the familiar question and answer for each catechism he follows on with further questions, each one designed to deepen our understanding of the answers devised by the Westminster fathers. The first catechism, concerning the 'chief end of man', is followed by 64 questions all of which are answered in one sentence. He asks why and how we should seek to glorify God and what it means to enjoy Him, both in this world and in the world to come. Almost every

response includes at least one scripture proof alongside it. Some of his later responses are a little longer than just one sentence but they rarely extend beyond a brief paragraph.

Sometimes as we read through the book we are intrigued by points which are raised that in turn lead to a host of further questions. For instance on page 79 he asks, against which of the offices of Christ do we have the most open enmity? His response is that we have the most enmity against his kingly office. He follows this up by enquiring as to which office we have the most secret enmity? He responds by saying that we have the most secret enmity towards Christ as a priest. To find out why he maintains this view you will have to buy the book!

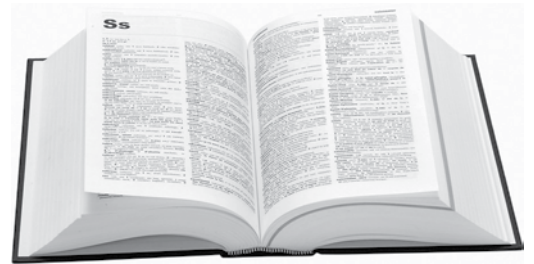
His section on the Ten Commandments, running to almost 100 pages, is particularly searching. The first commandment alone gives rise to 143 questions. He examines the nature of idolatry and demonstrates the tendency and evil of secret idolatry in the heart. Touching on the devil and his works he warns us of the evil of fortune-telling and lucky charms.

It is unlikely that any reader will agree with every point made and every view advanced but no one will be disappointed by the book or be left feeling that Brown's treatment is scant or superficial. The book has an attractive cover but is badly let down by its layout, which is a facsimile taken from an edition published in 1846. Overlooking its dated appearance however, discerning adults will find endless help and soul-feeding in this volume. Whatever its original intention I am afraid that it would not be suitable for young children, and most teenagers will probably be put off by its appearance but if they could be persuaded to delve into it they would find a treasure trove of teaching and sound advice. Clearly this is not a book to read at one sitting; it was never designed for such an approach, but a careful systematic study will prove most helpful and I am very happy to commend it to our readers.

Rev Murdo A N Macleod



Books



The Life and Times of George Whitefield

Robert Philip

Banner of Truth Trust

pbk, 608, £10.00

Here is a feast of fat things. Many times, as I read, I was moved to tears and to prayer. Oh the need we have for God again to raise up another Whitefield in our land, or to take some lesser mortal and use him for His own glory in turning the multitudes to Christ! Since the days of the Apostle Paul surely no one has been so mightily used by God. He came from a relatively poor background and was a barman at the family inn in Gloucester. At school he had an interest in drama, from which he learned some useful skills. His eloquence, passion and ability to project his voice to immense gatherings in the open air was amazing. By working as a servitor he was able to pay his way through Oxford University. While there he met the Wesleys and formed a life-long relationship. Stirred up by them, such was his earnestness in prayer and fasting that his health broke almost fatally. His first sermon produced a complaint to the bishop that it had driven fifteen people mad, but the worthy bishop replied that he hoped the madness might not be forgotten by the next Sunday! I used to think it a pity that Whitefield got involved with the colony of Georgia and particularly with the building and maintenance of an orphanage which was a constant financial burden to him, but as I read the book it was impressed upon me that this was God's plan to keep Whitefield constantly moving from place to place both in America and in Britain preaching the gospel. He had to travel all over these lands to raise money in order to maintain the orphanage in this most expensive part of the British Empire.

I was disturbed by reading again of Whitefield's relationship to the Erskines. They were godly, sound men. They belonged to the Secession Church which had been forced out of the Church of Scotland because of their stand for the headship of Christ. They had invited Whitefield to Scotland,

appreciating the great work he had done in England and America. He came and met their Presbytery. They tried to persuade him that he was under the Solemn League and Covenant but he replied that he could not see it. He said he would preach no covenant but that which he saw in the Bible – the covenant of grace. They wanted him to preach only for them and support them in their stand against the persecuting majority, but he replied that he would preach wherever a door opened – even in the pope's pulpit if allowed. He then proceeded to accept invitations to preach from the evangelical ministers in the Church of Scotland and saw multitudes saved in a great revival which affected Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cambuslang, and many other places. The Secession ministers turned bitterly against him and called him a tool of the devil and those 'converted' through his ministry, deluded idolaters. What a lesson there is in this for us! We must beware of party spirit and self-righteousness – thinking we deserve more blessing than others because of our stand for the truth. We must be careful not to condemn converts because they do not belong to our party. God is sovereign and blesses whom He chooses. His ways and plans are higher than ours. There is much that we cannot understand at this point in time. Let us rejoice in every sinner saved by grace.

Another matter which impressed itself upon me was the openness of people to the gospel in these days. All Whitefield had to do was set up his pulpit in Moorfields Park and many thousands flocked to hear him. Wherever he went, in town or country, crowds gathered and many were saved. But it wasn't just Whitefield, God was at work through lesser individuals too. There was persecution. Some of these men, including Whitefield, knew what it was to be stoned, covered in mire and thrown into pits of filthy water. Today, sadly, the gospel message stirs up no response, not even hostility. It can claim relatively few hearers whether preached in churches, halls or the open air. To a large extent God's judgment rests on Western Europe. Oh for God to return

to us again in His great mercy and mighty power!

Let me give you just a taste of what is related. He visited Bristol and was able at first to get the use of churches. In one, he states, 'Great numbers were melted down. Thousands could not find room'. It was said of him 'Whitefield has set the town on fire'. The devil was not pleased. The churches were soon closed to him. So he went into the fields at Kingswood to preach to the rough colliers who lived there. Few would venture into the area. His first audience was almost 2,000 and they listened quietly for an hour. His next audience was 5,000 and soon 20,000 gathered. 'Blessed be God' he writes, 'for such a plentiful harvest'. On another occasion he says 'The trees and hedges were full. All was a hush when I began. The sun shone bright, and God enabled me to preach with great power'. It was reckoned that he preached more than 18,000 sermons. Even on the last day of his life, though his health had greatly failed, passing through Exeter, New England, on his way to preach in Newbury Port, he was persuaded by the people there to preach in the open air. He loved open air preaching, and, getting liberty, continued for two hours. From there he rode to Newbury Port where he died of an asthma attack through the night. He was fifty-five and worn out in the Master's service. His epitaph states, 'His zeal in the cause of God was singular: his labours indefatigable, and his success in preaching the gospel remarkable and astonishing'. But perhaps you are wondering why the Banner of Truth Trust have produced another biography of Whitefield considering that they have already published the excellent two volume work by Dallimore. The reason is that this biography complements Dallimore as it is largely written in Whitefield's own words taken from letters and journals. I commend this volume to you. May it warm your heart as it did mine!

Rev William Macleod



The Riches of the Psalms

Rev Malcolm H Watts

This excellent series of articles on the Psalms by Pastor Watts first appeared in The Messenger, which is the magazine of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury, and is published, with permission, in six instalments over the next few months.

The book of Psalms provides us with a 'summary of sacred learning'. It is a collection of poems and the productions of many different authors, but these have one peculiar feature: for the first and only time in the Old Testament a man is represented throughout as speaking to God, whereas in all other books God is represented as speaking to man. For this reason, the godly will appreciate, value and love this book. It is a manual of devotion to those who long for a personal relationship with God and who desire to know how to come and remain in the presence of the Most High. Here, then, is experimental religion and, significantly, this book is the central book of our English Bible, the middle chapter being Psalm 117, and the middle verse, Psalm 118:8 – 'It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.'

1. The Nature of the Book

Both our Lord and His apostles called this book 'the book of Psalms' (Lk.20:42; Acts 1:20). Its Hebrew name is both simple and significant: 'Tehillim' – 'Praises', or, more fully, 'Sepher Tehillim' – 'Book of Praises', which title expresses its great and leading characteristic – the praising of Jehovah, the one living and true God.

We make the following observations:

First, 'praise' in the Bible relates to the adoring of the divine excellence: 'Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee' (Ps.63:3). Other words generally relate, not to what God is (as 'praise' does), but to what He does ('blessing', 28:6; 68:35) and to what He gives ('thanksgiving', 116:12-19).

Second, this is a spiritual exercise: 'Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul' (146:1). It will include belief, knowledge, esteem, longing and delight.

Third, only gracious hearts can have a real sense of his worth: 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise' (57:7). There must be a prepared heart, with a fixed purpose, if we are to praise God aright.

Fourth, our praise must be such as the Lord appoints and requires: 'My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation'

(22:25). It may be translated 'from thee' as in the Hebrew it is a genitive of source, indicating that we must use the songs God has provided.

Fifth, we need to be stirred up to this work: 'Praise ye the Lord: for it is good (most acceptable) to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant (full of refreshment); and praise is comely (most fitting for the Lord's people) (147:1).

Sixth, praise should be glorious, for our God is infinitely glorious: 'Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious' (66:2).

Seventh, the end of it is God's glory and His people's good: 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me' (50:23); 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel' (22:3) – Observe from this latter verse that God dwells where He is praised.

Names for the praises in this book are, first of all, of course, 'psalms' – a general term for 'praise with musical instruments', from 'psallein', 'to strike the lyre', and 'hymns' – praises devoted to Almighty God, eg Psalm 18, 145, and 'spiritual songs' – inspired poems, containing doctrine, history, or prophecy, eg Psalms 45, 78, 102 (Eph.5:19; Col.3:16). As William Sommerville remarks, 'They are all Psalms, as having been occasionally sung by instrumental music. They are all Hymns, because composed in honour of the Supreme Being. They are all Spiritual Songs, because poetical and composed by the direction of the Spirit.'

2. A Brief History of Psalmody

Songs were sung from ancient times, as is clear from Laban's remonstrance with Jacob, 'Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret and with harp?' (Gen.31:27). However, Hebrew sacred song really began with Israel's birth as a nation, and it then continued for more than 1000 years. The earliest recorded composer of Psalms was Moses. His first was a solemn choral song, with musical accompaniment, sung after the crossing of the Red Sea. 'Then sang Moses and the children of Israel...' (Exod.15:1, 20, 21). He followed this up

with other songs, some of which were made for particular occasions (Numb.21:17; Deut.31:22, 30; 32; Ps.90 – title).

In the time of the Judges, Deborah and Hannah received the prophetic gift for composing such sacred songs. We read, 'Then sang Deborah ... Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel...'; 'And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord...' (Judg.5:1ff. 1Sam.2:1ff.). The former celebrates the redemption of God's people and the latter contains an early reference to 'his anointed' (1Samuel 2:10).

'We have a song of victory in Exodus (15); we have a song of victory in Numbers (23, 24); we have a song of victory in Deuteronomy (32); we have a song of victory in Judges (5); we have a song of victory in the first of Samuel (2) ... and all these songs were preludes to the new song, the song of Moses and of the Lamb, which the saints of the church glorified, from all nations, will sing at the crystal sea, with the harps of gold, when all the enemies of Christ and His church will have been subdued, and their victory will be consummated for ever (Revelation 14:1-3; 15:2-4)' (Dr. Christopher Wordsworth).

Later, it seems, the art of sacred song was cultivated among 'the sons of the prophets' in those prophetic societies founded by Samuel. When Saul came to Gibeah, the hill of God, he was met by 'a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them... (1Sam.10:5; cf 2Kgs.3:15, where music prepared Elisha's soul for revelation). A society, or college, was established at Ramah where David may have received his first impulse to compose Psalms: 'David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah... And Saul sent messengers to take David: and... they saw the company of the prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as appointed over them...' (1Sam.19:18, 20).

David

David, whom the Spirit of God eminently qualified for the purpose, brought Israel's psalmody to its highest degree of perfection. He was 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' who said, 'the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue' (2Sam.23:1ff). After arranging Psalms for the bringing up of the Ark (1Chron.15:16), he appointed psalm-singing, with its 'typical' musical accompaniment, for solemn worship (1Chron.6:31, 16:4-8). This was evidently under divine direction and approved by various prophets, for we later read of Hezekiah that 'he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets (2Chron.29:25). 'The sweet psalmist of Israel' is literally 'the lovely one in

Israel's songs of praise'. Altogether 73 of the Psalms in our Psalm-book are ascribed to him, and it seems certain that he was the author of a number of others (eg Psalm 2; Acts 4:25.) It is possible that he was responsible for more than half, perhaps even two-thirds, of the entire collection. Dr William Taylor offers the following comment on David's titles: 'So sweet that as one listens he seems to hear for the time the melody of heaven, and all sorrows and anxiety are charmed away. His joyful odes bear aloft our praises, as on eagles' wings, to heights to which alone, and without his assistance, we had never soared'.

Some Psalms are ascribed to others: for example, Asaph, the director and seer, composed twelve of them (1Chron.6:39; 2Chron.29:30); Heman, one (1Chron.15:16-22); Ethan, one (1Chron.15:16-22); the sons of Korah, eleven (1Chron. 9:19-33); and Solomon, two (1 Kings 3:5; 9:2).

It is evident that some of the later prophets also composed lyrical pieces (eg Is.12; Jon.2; Hab.3) and some of their productions may have been included in the book of Psalms, albeit anonymously. Psalms were possibly being written right down to the exile (Psalm 137: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down...') and even to the return (Psalm 147: 'The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together

the outcasts of Israel'), although it should be said here that some conservative scholars believe that these Psalms were David's, who was enabled to predict Israel's captivity and deliverance.

Certainly it is true to say that, 'In no other literature extending over

centuries is so perfect a harmony to be found, and it would have been impossible in this, if the psalmists had not been 'men who spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost' (William Binnie).

From the very beginning, then, *the prophets* produced the Psalms, and the Psalms were therefore always *inspired* compositions. This is a vitally important point. Historically, God's people never sang anything other than divine songs, supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit.

The book of Psalms itself was intended to be Israel's hymnbook, as is clear from its name – 'The Book of Praises', the various titles (eg 'To the Chief Musician', which occurs 55 times), and from various hints within the Psalms themselves (eg Psalm 116:19 – 'In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord'). There is also ample historical evidence to show that the Psalms were used for public worship: 'Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped' (2Chron.29:30).

To be continued.

Congregational Remittances

- 2007 -

	2007 Dec	2007 Total	2006 Total to Dec			
Presbytery of Sutherland				Presbytery of Lewis		
Brora	2,883	20,394	21,573	Cross	2,143	23,488
Assynt & Scourie	980	8,532	8,238	Harris - Leverburgh	2,495	13,312
Total Sutherland	3,863	28,927	29,811	Harris - Scalpay	2,600	20,601
Presbytery of Inverness				Knock & Point	2,078	12,559
Duthil-Dores	3,952	21,608	23,791	Stornoway	9,351	71,386
Inverness	2,000	30,000	34,650	Total Lewis	18,667	141,347
Total Inverness	5,952	51,608	58,441	114,394		
Presbytery of Ross				Presbytery of Lochcarron		
Kilmorack	3,121	19,587	17,996	Glenelg	308	1,870
Kiltearn	1,700	20,400	20,160	Lochalsh	3,101	16,000
Tarbat	8,907	17,220	16,852	Aultbea	2,443	14,097
Total Ross	13,728	57,208	55,008	Total Lochcarron	5,852	31,967
Presbytery of Edinburgh				Presbytery of Skye & Uist		
Aberdeen	1,421	7,288	8,000	Bracadale	1,319	13,697
Edinburgh	6,812	33,467	36,098	Waternish	903	5,303
Total Edinburgh	8,232	40,755	44,098	Kilmuir	2,457	18,118
Presbytery of Glasgow				North Uist	1,918	11,072
Ayr	880	2,892	1,873	Portree	6,200	19,621
Arran	788	7,049	6,289	Snizort	2,281	21,486
Dumfries	0	85	768	Strath	513	6,636
Glas. - Partick	5,800	32,000	33,000	Total Skye & Uist	15,591	95,934
Glas. - Shettleston	5,024	16,824	13,688	Total Cong. 87,888 532,778 530,842		
Glas. - Thornwood	3,463	24,135	24,537	Other Donations	2,266	25,128
Rothsay	46	2,046	2,097	TOTAL	90,153	557,906
Total Glasgow	16,002	85,032	82,252	Including Gift Aid	42,095	90,512
						82,918

Zambia Report

Rev Timothy J. McGlynn

On Sunday April 1st I preached in Scalpay then made my way to Stornoway. The flight was early the next day, but my reason for going north of the Clisham was more personal. In Bethesda Hospice my dear friend and fellow elder, Donald (Dollie) MacSween was preparing to pass into eternity. The *sweet sorrow* of parting was apparent

to all as we fellowshiped together for one last time in this world.

The journey to Lusaka was an uneventful one, my favourite kind, and Rev Cees Molenaar met me at the airport. We went to the Baptist Mission compound in Lusaka as the Molenaars had agreed to purchase some items from missionaries who



were leaving Zambia. These furnishings would be needed when the Molenaars' new house was completed. After the newly acquired goods were safely loaded onto the trailer, we added the provisions Mirjam had bought earlier in Lusaka and set out for Petauke.

Lectures on Ethics

Life at Covenant College was as busy as I remembered it. Having arrived in Lusaka on the Tuesday morning, I commenced lecturing at 7.30 am in Petauke on Wednesday. The schedule involved me taking the first three lectures, 7.30-11.00 am on Wednesday and Thursday. These first six lectures on Christian Ethics were followed by further lectures, in the second week, on the ethical importance of *The Ten Commandments in the Christian Life*.

Due to difficulties phoning Scotland from Zambia on a mobile, my wife, prior to the trip, explained to me the wonderful world of *text messaging*. Armed with this new method of communication I was able to keep in relatively close contact with Agnes and the children. My eldest daughter, Sophie, was delighted (not to say amazed) when daddy managed to send a text to her mobile.

In Zambia many of the churches follow the so called 'church calendar' quite closely, and Easter is particularly noted by them. Consequently, students finished after the lectures on Thursday, to enable them to return home for *Good Friday* and the *Easter* weekend activities. This left only three students at the College over the weekend; one from Mozambique, one from the Copperbelt, and one who could not afford the sum of KW 30,000 (about £4) to get home. It was only afterwards, when going to church on Sunday that I learned why the third student, Eric Shumba, had been unable to go home for the weekend.

Staff

The Trust meeting took place over the 13th-14th April to consider the needs of the College. Following the departure of Principal Van Straaten, the most pressing need was a new College Principal. In the interim Rev Cees Molenaar had operated as *Acting Principal*. We faced the question, *Should we look for another man, or approach Mr Molenaar to fill the post?* The Committee decided to approach Mr Molenaar and invite him to be *Principal* of Covenant College. The following day Mr Molenaar accepted the post of Principal.

The appointment of Mr Molenaar left us with a need to seek another lecturer as a matter of some urgency. It was decided to make the need known in the various denominations already actively supporting the work. At the same time, we also sought to cast the net more widely throughout the Reformed world, in an effort to find a suitable lecturer. The Rev Heinrich Zwemstra and family are preparing to join the Molenaars in the year that lies ahead. The prospect of having two called, committed and qualified men with their families on site is most exciting.

Buildings

The structural development of the College, raising up new buildings and redeveloping old ones to meet the ongoing needs of the College called for the Trust's attention. With the new residence for the Principal being close to completion at that time, attention turned to other needs. The student accommodation was desperately in need of upgrading. The decision to give this priority was warmly welcomed by students and staff alike. The estimated cost of £17,000 was approved, and the building is now almost ready.

In addition a home for the second lecturer and his family is a pressing need with the arrival of the Zwemstras due at the start of 2008. A second lecture hall and the redevelopment of existing buildings are additional projects where the opportunity exists to contribute to the future of Covenant College. Please consider prayerfully the possibility of supporting the building programme financially.

The final days of the trip were spent preparing for the Sunday services in Scalpay. The exam on my lectures took place on Wednesday morning. After the exam I gathered up the papers, took a cup of coffee and set off. I marked the papers en-route, as Phil Bailey drove the Aucamps, Bill Tanis and me to Lusaka in his pickup. After four and a half hours I finished the marking and handed over the sheets to Phil to take to the College when he returned from Lusaka. Bill Tanis and I spent the last night at the home of Dr Wilbroad Mutale, a member in the congregation pastored by Conrad Mbewe. It is my prayer that we as a denomination will never lose the sense of wonder and privilege at being part of this important work for God in the great mission-field of Africa.

Rev Timothy McGlynn
(Representative Trustee, FCC)





Arbroath - October 2007

(L-R) Rhiann Spencer, James MacInnes, Murray MacKay, Daniel van Straaten, Sam Smith, Rev John J. Murray, Gordon Lindhurst (Concealed), James Boyd, Esther Boyd, Christine MacLeod, Mrs Cynthia Murray, Volker Winkler, Partheepan, Gary McCulloch, Dafydd Spencer, Murdo MacLeod, Kerry Martin, David Woods, Alasdair MacLeod, Derick MacLean, Sandra Macaulay, Michelle Campbell, Mrs Ruth Keddie (Seated, with Matthew and Elizabeth), Joan Mackintosh, Sandra MacKay, Esther Semmens.

Photo Courtesy of Philip Mackereth (Shettleston)

**'O praise the Lord, all ye nations:
praise him, all ye people.
For his merciful kindness is great toward us:
and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.
Praise ye the Lord.'**

Psalm 117