

An Exception!

OUR MAGAZINE THIS month is an exception. We do not have the space to have long articles and we have resisted the temptation to publish such articles up to now. However, for several reasons, this issue is mainly taken up with two very long articles. **We ask our readers to read them both thoroughly.** There are three reasons why we have decided to devote this issue to two main topics. Let me explain.

The **first** reason is that we believe **our nation is in crises.** The United Kingdom is in a very serious condition spiritually and morally. We are provoking God to anger because we have forsaken Him as our one and only God. He has not dealt with us as we have sinned. But we must not presume that God's patience will last forever.

It is therefore necessary that we look at the subject seriously and try to address it. We must not continue to go blindly on as if our spiritual condition will naturally right itself.

The first article is called 'The State of Our Nation' and is from the Maranatha Community and is reprinted with their permission. It outlines how far away from God we have gone.

If, as we believe, the UK is in the same relationship to God as Israel

were in the Old Testament, then there is need to fear that severe judgment is ahead of us. God is not mocked - a nation reaps what it sows.

The **second** reason we publish the articles is because we need to be reminded that **the remedy for this situation is the Church!** The Church is the salt of the earth and the light of the world [Mat 5:14].

So the second article by Jamie Gunn from our Toronto congregation outlines some reasons why the Reformed Church does not evangelise as it should. We need to think seriously about what he says. His concern comes from the conviction that we in the Reformed Church are not evangelistic enough nor are we glorifying God or making an impression in the world by our good works.

Jesus warned His disciples not to hide their light under a bushel. Rather they were to engage with their culture and change it. Too many of us in the Church today have withdrawn from the affairs of national and public life.

God has appointed His Church to be the means through which the world comes to know God and truth. The Church is the hope of the world. If the salt of the earth loses its saltiness there is no hope for the

world. Not until the Church believes and behaves as God has commanded it, will there be hope for the world.

The Holy Spirit is certainly the means through which people are converted to Christ and taught by the Lord. But He does not operate in a vacuum. He operates through God's people. Revival comes through God's people realising their calling.

Unless the Church in the West arises and takes her commission of being salt and light in the world seriously, we are in danger of God removing His candlestick from among us. Just as God did to Israel, He will give it to another nation or nations.

The Church seems to have forgotten that the gospel is the basic solution to all mankind's problems and needs to repent of its apathy towards spreading the Word among the lost and perishing world. It needs to take the initiative in bringing the world to repentance and forgiveness and then to direct it towards the reordering of society and thus bring glory to God in all areas of life.

The **third** reason we make an exception of long articles is because of the **APC day of prayer** in December. The Presbytery has appointed that the first week in December (the week beginning the 4th) a day should be set apart for specific prayer for the nation. This is usually done on the mid-week meeting night so each congregational Kirk Session will decide which day for each congregation.

This is really an annual event

with us, but this year we need to be much more in earnest regarding the state of our nation and the function of the Church. No longer can we wait for the Holy Spirit to stir us up. We must stir ourselves up as Paul directed Timothy [2 Tim 1:6].

The Apostle Peter was also concerned about the spiritual conditions of his times and wrote to stir up his readers by way of reminding them of the serious times in which they lived and the need for Christians to live exemplary lives among the pagans.

Prayer is so essential and necessary so we appeal to all our congregations to be serious about calling on God in earnest prayer at our public meetings as well as in our private times.

In past issues we have had articles on fasting as well as prayer, and we recommend fasting to anyone who feels they can do this. Fasting is certainly a New Testament practice and needs to be observed more than it is.

We trust our readers will understand our concern and anxiety about our nation and agree with the Church's responsibility to change this. We hope therefore that they will read this issue thoroughly.

We believe and hope and pray that these two main articles, along with the others, will provide good material for us as we contemplate a day of prayer.

We would be happy to have your comments on this issue and if you would like to have similar subject concentrated issues.

THE STATE OF OUR NATION

A Warning Cry to the People of the United Kingdom

OUR SOCIETY IS in a social, moral and spiritual crisis. It is in danger of losing its direction. It is in danger of losing its soul. In spite of our affluence we are seeing the signs of collapsing foundations. We are in fact a sick society. This urgent call is made in the name of many thousands of Christian men and women of every political persuasion. They are committed members of churches of every denomination. It is addressed to our nation and to all in positions of leadership and authority.

A deep sickness has penetrated to the heart of our society. Regardless of the aspirations and strategies of politicians, our nation is in steep decline. We are confronted with great and growing evidence of moral and spiritual disintegration. There is deep unease about the direction in which society is moving.

The increasing breakdown of the marriage-based family is leaving an ever-widening wake of human suffering and social chaos. Drug abuse is now out of control. The media glorify sex, violence and foul language. Degrading pornography has become a major industry, promiscuity is actively promoted and sexually transmitted diseases are now out of control.

Vandalism has become a national

disease and many urban areas are disfigured with graffiti. There is widespread fear because of increasing violence and lawlessness on our streets.

The secular humanist experiment has failed. God has been banished from our national thinking and living, and we are now paying the price.

We are a society with a rich inheritance. Care for the needy, respect for the weak, justice for the poor and high standards of public morality have, in the past, been the hallmarks of our national life. Britain was the cradle of modern democracy and freedom. In spite of many shortcomings, the fundamental dignity and worth of the individual were upheld. Tolerance and integrity were paramount and corruption was abhorred.

Whilst we have been enriched by various cultures, our way of life is deeply rooted in Christian belief, teaching and practice. Our parliamentary, legal, educational and health systems originate in Christian morality. Christian social, political and charitable initiatives have played a major part in forming the life of our land.

If the Judeo-Christian foundation of our society is dismantled and destroyed, the

consequences will be catastrophic. There is no secure alternative.

There has been an alarming increase in levels of emotional and behavioural disturbance, especially amongst the young. Along with this there has been a significant growth in depression and suicide. Insatiable greed and hedonism have become driving forces in the formation of our current culture.

Saturated by non-stop advertising, our consumerist society teaches everyone to be money-orientated and self-orientated. We worship money, possessions, sex and power. We have developed an introspective individualism, obsessed with self-gratification, self-improvement and self-healing. In our secular society, we have created man as the centre of everything – not God.

In spite of all this, we appear to be both inefficient and unhappy. In an age of unparalleled access to money, physical sexuality and choice, great numbers of our people lack personal fulfillment and there is widespread unhappiness. What we imagined would satisfy us has not done so. We have become materially rich but emotionally and spiritually destitute.

While politicians grapple with the problems of an ailing Health Service and a flawed education system, an inefficient postal service and dysfunctional public transport, crumbling unrepaired roads and deteriorating public services, the evidence of human unhappiness is to be seen all around. A huge propor-

tion of the population has declared in public opinion polls that given the opportunity they would emigrate.

Human relationships are increasingly presented by powerful media influences as temporary, valueless, and dispensable. Promiscuity has been blatantly promoted for many years in the United Kingdom in films, television, newspapers and magazines. It has now wrought its inevitable havoc, destroying marriages, wrecking families and inflicting immense harm upon innocent children.

Increasing numbers are locked into dysfunctional families and social groupings. Because of promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, especially among the young, are now virtually out of control. In rushing to deal with the situation, public policies such as the provision of sex education, contraception and abortion for children, have made matters infinitely worse rather than better.

Future generations will judge us by the way we are treating our children. Through the holocaust of abortion, we have denied millions of them the right to be born. Vast numbers of children have been deprived of family life, and especially of their fathers. By wilfully or negligently exposing them to the corruption of the world, we have robbed our children of their innocence. We have poisoned their minds by what they see, by what they read and by what they hear. We have allowed them to be abused and corrupted. We have allowed them to

be exploited by drug traffickers, by pornographers and by prostitution. We are guilty of their moral and spiritual corruption, and the consequences of this are to be seen in every city.

For the convenience of adults, we are destroying the marriage-based family and engineering the precipitous erosion of all moral standards. We appear to be putting the supposed rights of adults to do what they want above the rights of children to be protected against hurtful, damaging or corrupting influences.

Aggression and violence are now commonplace in our society. In many quite ordinary places, people are afraid to walk alone at night. The elderly and infirm are at constant risk of attack. Many parents feel they cannot let their children out of their sight. We are being conditioned to treat others with mistrust and suspicion.

The emergence of a gang culture and the use of knives, sawn-off shotguns and even machine guns in the pursuit of crime are signs of a society in crisis. Assaults become ever more grotesque and sadistic. The rape of elderly women, the kicking of pregnant young women, and the deliberate blinding and maiming of innocent people are evidence of this. Road rage and increasing assaults upon those providing a service to the community are all signs of radical disharmony within ourselves, absence of self-control, and disrespect for life, health, property

and social order.

Public confidence in the criminal justice system has been severely eroded. People are understandably worried about very low crime detection rates and the widespread breakdown of law and order. A growing army of private security forces coupled with high insurance rates are constant reminders of the changes that have taken place in our society. A general feeling that crime and dishonesty pay has emerged. Our prisons are overflowing and our social services cannot cope with the massive load of human need.

Aggression is rooted both in evil intent and in the accumulated hurts and injustices of many years. It is vented in many directions - at institutions, specific groups and individuals. Numbers seeking help with anger management have mushroomed. Studies show that a high proportion of male young offenders have had no father-figure during their formative years. The increasing instability of the family unit, due to the denial of the importance of marriage, heralds an even greater increase in violent behaviour.

This culture of death is manifest at the beginning of life by our readiness to destroy millions of children in their mothers' wombs and at the end of life by proposals to allow doctors to kill their patients. Fundamental questions are also raised by embryonic stem-cell research. The emerging popular culture has an obsession with death and destruction, both in song lyrics

and in film presentations. Popular films and television series increasingly feature images characterised by distortions of the human face and body created by God.

Drug addiction and alcohol abuse have escalated and constitute a serious drain on national resources. A vast number of children now have parents with serious drug or drink problems.

In contrast to the glossy presentation of aspirational lifestyles and hedonism, we have become a spiritually and morally self-destructive society. We are actively embracing death rather than affirming life.

There is a huge gulf between politicians and the people. Politicians are held in low esteem. The young especially, are indifferent and alienated. Frequently, the majority of people in the United Kingdom choose not to vote in elections. Each of the political parties is representative of a comparatively small section of the community. The membership of the political parties is considerably smaller than that of the churches, which are written off by many people – not least in the political parties – as insignificant to the life of the nation.

Our democracy is very fragile. Unlike past generations, most electors do not even know the identity of councillors who represent them locally, some do not know their MP's and very few know the names of their Euro MPs. The overwhelm-

ing majority of the population knows little or nothing about what is going on in the European Union which appears to many to be increasingly remote and bureaucratic.

An huge amount of legislation is being pushed through, both in Westminster and Europe. This is often without evidence of substantial public demand and sometimes due to the activities of small but powerful pressure groups. Lowering Standards Public moral standards are no longer established by leading and respected public figures and institutions such as the Church. Standards are being set by commerce and dubious and often unelected advisory committees, often dominated by special interest groups. We are inventing our own public morality as we go along. We are in fact facing a moral melt-down. Nothing is seen any longer as intrinsically right or wrong.

'Informed choice' and 'the right to choose' has supplanted right and wrong. In schools our children are being taught that there are no absolute truths. As a result, violence, foul language and depraved material on film and television, loutish behaviour in public places, and widespread pornography are being tolerated.

In our postmodern culture, appearances count for everything. Style is more important than content. The packaging (if it sells) is more important than the product. The image (in spin politics) is more important than the truth. Success is all-important. Wealth, power and

popularity are the goals. Many visitors from overseas comment that something has gone badly wrong in the United Kingdom. They tell us that the values which we once espoused seem to have disappeared. They are surprised and saddened by street lawlessness and disorder and also by our continued toleration of acres of graffiti disfiguring urban areas and vulgarity in our media and advertising hoardings.

The welfare society that we carefully created during the first half of the last century has been recognised as deeply flawed. There are still major injustices coupled with huge inequalities in wealth. Many people in real need are in despair. We have built enormous and often wasteful administrative and managerial hierarchies in many of our public bodies and yet they do not appear to be working. No amount of political fine-tuning and no number of utopian manifestos can alter the fact that there is a deep sickness in our society, which is rooted in our rejection of the Christian values which have held the nation together over past centuries.

The destruction of values which took place in the 1960s has brought a bitter harvest. We have turned our back upon God and now we are reaping the consequences. In a shrinking world, with huge movements of population taking place, a pluralistic culture is inevitably emerging, but this should not be giving rise to the confusion and anarchy seen today in the

United Kingdom. Pluralism, so long exalted, is in large measure now seen to be a lie. Pluralism told us that the marriage-based family was one of a number of equally valid alternatives. It is evident that two characteristics of many of the young today are confusion and uncertainty. With the rejection of all absolutes, we have moved steadily towards a nihilistic and disintegrating society.

In spite of all the change and the inflated claims of non-Christian elements in our society, 72% of our people still claim to be Christians, according to the most recent national census. Nonetheless, strenuous efforts continue to be made politically and socially to de-Christianise our culture and to destroy the foundations upon which our nation has been built. Just as those drafting the European Constitution endeavoured to air-brush out centuries of Christian civilisation, so in our country there is a deliberate refusal to recognise that many, perhaps most, of our valued institutions were Christian foundations – schools, hospitals, orphanages and a wide variety of charitable organisations.

In a pluralistic society, the establishment of goodwill between different religious and cultural groups is vital. Christians are in fact at the forefront of working to establish harmonious relationships with minority communities. This does not mean, however, that we can simply reject and turn away from the Christian teachings which have permeated our

nation for centuries and which are respected throughout the world. Christians have welcomed those of other faiths into this country and have recognised the values of diversity and the intermingling of different cultures. This in no way alters the basic fact that the eternal truths to which we have held fast for centuries cannot and should not be eroded.

It is of immense importance that we recognise that the troubles the United Kingdom face today are essentially not political, or even social, but spiritual in nature. If we try to rule out the spiritual dimension of life, as some are anxious to do, we are in danger of taking a very lopsided, unbalanced and unrealistic view of life and human nature. Our deepest need is for spiritual renewal. This will not come from any political party, but politicians must honour the spiritual world in which we have been created and the spiritual framework within which we are designed to live. As Christians, we believe spiritual renewal will in the last analysis come from God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

We live in a world where human rights are given far more emphasis than human responsibilities. Unbelief is rated more highly than belief. All conviction is sweepingly branded as 'fundamentalism'. This is dishonest, cynical and cruel. Tolerance is the new god and we are encouraged to tolerate everything. At the same time there is a prevailing attitude that the solution of society's

problems is someone else's responsibility. Often people do not stop to help someone in trouble on the street. Many do not even know their neighbours.

Our society is clearly in crisis. On the whole local communities are not working – in spite of the superficial appearances of normality. There is a deep malaise within our country, which some leaders claim to be 'non-religious', but the truth is that if we cease to believe in God we will believe in another god. If we do not worship the living God, we will worship idols. We are presented with and bow down before the idols of money, power, and sex, which are self-serving. Celebrities of entertainment and sport set our standards. They receive our applause and our money, but most, with notable exceptions, do little to build up the fabric of the nation and some actively promote an attitude of defiance and irresponsibility.

We have been sold a lie. Though we have been seduced by the false promises of hedonism, problems of human need continue to grow with widespread despair and depravation.

We are not as safe and secure as once we believed ourselves to be. People are uneasy about the risk of terrorist outrage. Issues such as climate change and global warming give people a sense of uncertainty. In spite of our claimed affluence, many feel fearful about the future. They are concerned about widespread consumer debt, job insecurity and inadequate pension arrangements.

At the same time we are beginning to recognise the serious long-term damage probably being caused by a variety of dangerous chemicals and admixtures in the food chain, and additives incorporated into processed and prepackaged foods. We simply do not know for sure the long-term consequences of what we are doing. In addition to this, we are seeing a dramatic increase in a range of diseases rooted in our lifestyle. Obesity has become a national problem, particularly amongst the young. There has been a steady increase in illness directly related to stress and emotional problems, with enormous medical resources being devoted to this area.

We must face the truth.

Secular humanism has failed to resolve the major problems facing our nation. Vociferous, unrestrained and aggressive individualism has destroyed families, communities and public standards. A new intolerant libertarianism is invading our society and political thinking. In rejecting moral constraints we are embracing a culture of vulgarity, which brashly ridicules the virtues of kindness, gentleness, modesty and humility. We have become a consumerist society driven by greed.

We are brainwashed by much of the media and the popular music industry. We have become a society which extols triviality and violence. Instant gratification has demolished eternal values. The dignity of life has been diminished as we embrace the culture of death.

There is a widespread spiritual hunger throughout our nation. At the same time we are seeing the emergence of hundreds of exciting Christian initiatives being taken in countless local communities. Standing with the poor and needy, and working with the disadvantaged, vast numbers of believers, many of them young, are today speaking and living the simple Gospel. Their impact will undoubtedly grow in coming years. We recognise that the Church must bear responsibility for its failure to maintain a powerful Christian influence in the land, and as Christians we repent for the state of our nation. We are glad to see a growing emphasis upon the central, non-negotiable truths of the Christian Gospel.

We must start to look more honestly at the state of our nation today. We must stop denying the seriousness of our moral and spiritual situation. Without a radical spiritual change, our nation will inevitably plunge deeper into the abyss. This is God's world. Even though we may choose to ignore His existence and presence, He is not absent – He is with us. He also has the desire and power to roll back the dark storm clouds which are gathering over us, and to heal our nation.

The world and our nation are in a mess. We need a Saviour – we cannot save ourselves. Some of the basic assumptions of contemporary culture are wrong and need to be directly challenged. We need to recognise the powers that are

controlling the present age and we need to reject all their processes of indoctrination and manipulation. In short, we need to turn to God, as a nation. We have a Saviour, Jesus, sent by God, who can save us, who wants to save us and who will save us if we accept him as our Lord. In pointing to the dark storm clouds over us, we declare that this darkness need not overcome us. We reaffirm the Biblical truth *"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it"* [John. 1.5]. As Christians, we are called to warn of impending dangers, but also to give hope. The prophets were told by God "Speak to

your countrymen" but they were warned *"If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet ... I will hold the watchman accountable"* [Ezk. 33.6].

The way of Jesus is the way of peace, love and healing. It is the way of transformation – changing people and changing society.

As Christians we believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour and Healer of the world. His influence upon the life of this nation over the centuries has been fundamental. We believe that God is calling us to respond again to the words of Jesus – *"I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life"*.

This statement is published by the Maranatha community, a national movement of many thousands of Christians who are active in all the main churches throughout the united Kingdom. It was presented in Parliament in December 2004. Together with a Evidence factual sheet it has been presented to the Prime Minister, leaders of the of the political Parties and those in positions of leadership throughout the country. It is a call to the people of our nation.

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Mr William Taylor, Thurso

AS WE GO TO PRESS WE LEARN of the passing of our elder in Thurso, Mr William Taylor. As most of us know, Mr Taylor served as elder in the Caithness congregations for many years and uncomplainingly took many services on a regular basis. He loyally supplied each of the congregations when their ministers had moved on or died. He was a regular contributor to this magazine and was an active member of Presbytery and Church Committees. He will be sadly missed. Our condolences go to his wife and two sons. A fuller tribute will appear in a later issue of APC News.

Congregational News

EDINBURGH

To be encouraged in the work of the Lord, is vital to keeping going in the work. We trust that you will be encouraged when you read of our encouragements. The three areas that encourage us are, the shop, the services and the young people coming.

To us it indicates that God is helping us. We are very encouraged by the numbers that come to the shop and how some of them wait for a "cuppa" and a "blether". One very interesting comparison between serving tea in the shop and serving it in the home is, that it is hard to imagine how those who come to the shop would be in a situation where they would naturally come to our home it would take a long time to build up such a relationship, if ever.

It is proving to be a very natural relationship in the shop. In the shop, they can take their tea in solitude or with a friend and in either case include us if they so wish. Almost like in a restaurant, although not quite, they do not need to feel obliged to talk to us but we are there if they do, which happens on a regular basis. If they are not for talking, we can carry on with other work without making them feel that they are in the way.

Fascinating and serious conver-

sations are taking place. We would appreciate prayer for more conversations and especially that they would lead to the gospel and to people coming to see how God is well able to help them in more ways than they ever imagined. Pray that, in each and every case, the Holy Spirit would go before us, and the other Christians that come to help.

Some people come to buy, some to donate goods, some just for a chat and some almost use it as if it were time for confession, but with seemingly almost no sense of sin, and some keep conversation to an unimaginable minimum.

With some you feel you have made a huge step forward if they 'just smile'. *"We believe, therefore we speak."* This is a large part of the basis for what we are doing. Although, it must be said, we certainly do not speak as much as we should or as well as we should.

The services are 'over all' very encouraging. However, some loose interest and gain resentment the more they hear the "word" but God has often broken into the life of the most unlikely of people, and we continue to pray for this.

The parish youth worker, a committed Christian, with a passion to see people 'saved and serving', comes regularly to the Service. The children love it when she teaches

them at the end of the service and we love it too. The numbers attending, although small, have risen steadily. We thank God, and pray that we would not hesitate to give him the glory and at the same time look for greater numbers and genuine conversions.

Some of the young ones can have a major "off day" but it helps if they are strategically seated beside an adult. Some youngsters insist on coming to the door during the service but will not come in. We have been thinking, that this could be an opportunity rather than a distraction, if a couple of adults could be at the door to talk to them outside while the service with other youngsters and adults is going on inside.

If somebody felt God wanted them to do this, it might prove to be a real blessing to these youngsters. So pray that more helpers would come forward for this specific task if this is God's will.

We are preaching through the life of Joseph. He was certainly from a 'dysfunctional' family but God raised him up for a great work and brought reconciliation between him and his brothers. How could God carry on his work through such a family? Because He is infinitely merciful, infinitely gracious, infinitely loving, infinitely powerful, and infinitely wise. He is the same God still. May wonderful things be done by Him in individuals and in families from Burdiehouse and Southhouse and in every other place on earth. Although Satan is not slow

to tempt us to despair, when we look at what God is doing here we have to be hugely encouraged. We trust you are encouraged too. We thank you for your prayers in the past and crave them for the future.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him all ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Thomas Ken (1637-1710)

J. Ross.

INVERNESS

Work in the congregation continues, and we thank God for the opportunities we have to serve Him as we serve one another. Ministry to the saints is a privilege.

Often a church is in danger of becoming so pre-occupied with outreach, that the people of God in the fellowship are forgotten, apart from demands being made on them to reach out to those outside. The group of believers needs to be in good health or it cannot effectively minister to others outside the fellowship.

We are thankful that there is a 'healthy body' in the congregation in Inverness/Dingwall. We have our personal problems and idiosyncrasies - we would hardly be human and alive here if not, but we thank God that we are learning to worship and to work together.

The Orphanage Club had a good collection of items for Romania, and the Ladies Meeting had a meeting

which resulted in a substantial donation for orphanage work in Albania.

The Lunch Club, which now meets every Wednesday, is running well and draws some people from the community. The Men's Breakfast meeting has started up again and it is good to hear men speak of what the Lord has done in their lives in his grace. Even more important than all of these is PRAYER.

We have started a Prayer-Time before the evening services and it is a spiritually refreshing experience as we wait upon God.

DUNDEE

Since our last issue we have had an enjoyable communion when Revd Archie McPhail from Oban came and ministered appropriately to us. His sermons enabled us to contemplate the glory of heaven as he spoke of Christ's exaltation.

On another level we have had one or two 'events' in the area of evangelism mainly for the young ones. First there was the 'Hallelujah Party' at the end of October to explain the evils of Hallowe'en and point the children to the Lord Jesus Christ and how He is the only One to be worshipped.

Then there was the 'Bonfire Buffet' on Guy Fawkes night when nearly 40 people came along to the fireworks display in the Park beside us and then had them over for a meal. At this meeting Andy had a talk to them all about their need to

look ahead, not just a few years, but to the life after death. He emphasised the need to have the Lord in our lives and to have our sins forgiven.

It was encouraging to have many of the locals at this meeting and we were able to discuss with some of the children especially at a simple level the main essence of the gospel. One girl expressed delight at discovering what the text "*I am come that they might have life*" actually meant. On hearing that it was Jesus who said it she exclaimed 'I love the thought that Jesus gave to make me feel happy'. That girl had attended our summer camp the day after her mother died and was very unhappy. She has attended several of our Sunday Club meetings.

Our Youth Fellowship had a very good night with several new faces. Andy is going to do a Series on 'Are You Taking Your Tablets?', a course on the Ten Commandments.

Our Sunday Club is still attracting mainly girls. Eileen does a power of work but she does need much more help as the new regulations demand more leaders to be present at each meeting.

We continue to welcome some new faces at the main services. It is lovely to see regularly other cultures coming in to worship with us and enjoy the fellowship afterwards.

We ask for earnest prayer that all we do will be owned by God and that He will be glorified in all our efforts to extend the good news of the gospel to those around us here at Dens Road, Dundee.

From the Moderator's Desk

Apocalypse!

Mr William Byers, Fearn

WE LIVE IN AN age of catastrophe and calamity. Our ears tingle at what we hear. Between terrorism and natural catastrophe, storms, floods and earthquakes, we stand astonished at the carnage, havoc, damage and misery encountered in various parts of the earth, visited alike upon rich and poor and high and low, with its consequent homelessness, famine, sickness and suffering.

With the mass media of television, we were never better or more immediately informed of the sad effects of these events. Our hearts concern goes out in prayer and love to those who suffer consequently.

We are told that some of these events, for instance, the increase in the incidence and ferocity of hurricane force winds and floods, is a consequence of the 'greenhouse effect'. This means the increase in temperature causes the ice caps at the earth's poles to melt with a resultant rise in sea level and then flood. This is the result of our abuse of God's creation. God created this world in six days, out of nothing and continues to uphold all things that He did create.

In past times such catastrophic

events were usually described as 'an act of God, ' and even large insurance companies would ascribe such happenings to God's hand.

We have little of this today.

We are so wise in our own conceits that we leave God out of the picture! But God has not changed. He is still immutable, unchangeable, the same still. The God that brought the deluge upon the antediluvian world is the same still. Truly, 'He's got the whole world in his hands.' In Him we *live* move and have our being'

With all our scientific advancement and knowledge, our wealth and ability, our resources are taxed in the extreme to bring help and relief to those in want and need, as a consequence of the calamities that come upon us. Surely we must realize that this is a new phenomenon in world experience.

Never before does history record such a high incidence of hurricanes and storms with such force; earthquakes in such frequent and so high on the richter scale; tidal waves of such devastating dimensions and power; floods even in the British Isles, causing Gush damage and cost even to human life.

Add to this, world terrorism and it's toll on the lives of our fellow

beings and the consequent grief and misery brought into families and communities, and we have a sorry picture of our world as it is today.

God can say to us, I told *you* so, before it came to pass. It is all recorded in the Bible for us, that we be not caught unawares. Well might the Lord Jesus say to us as he did to the Pharisees all these years ago, *"He answered and said unto them, when it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye cannot discern the signs of the times"* [Matt 16:2,3].

What shall the end of these things

be? But the end is not yet. The precise time of the end is known only to God the father. It is however, generally accepted that we are in last times. Time is short dear friends.

Let us be up and doing while it is called today. Be more urgent with the gospel than ever before; because it is even more evident now that, *"one thing is needful"*. In the light of this backcloth, I beseech you, *"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"* [Isaiah 55:6, 7].

Prayer

WE GRAVELY UNDERESTIMATE the Creator of the world when we view prayer as a technique that can be mastered to manipulate Him. The effectiveness of our prayers does not turn on how well we know how to pray but on how well we know the One to whom we are praying. A truly successful prayer is not one that has secured an affirmative answer to our petition, but One that has brought us closer to the One we've petitioned.

When we pray, we approach the throne of an omnipotent king. Such a thought should inspire so much awe in us that we nearly forget the cares that brought us there. Once we've made our request, we wait for the king's answer, knowing that He has attended to us and need only give the word to fulfill our plea. But when He answers us, if He presents to us a different plan, we must bow to His will. By coming into the presence of the king, we have pledged ourselves to His service. We have opened the door to friendship with the Ancient of Days, a prospect both terrifying and exhilarating. Someone said, "Once you start doing business with Jesus, there's no knowing where it will end. What do you want? Do you really want to ask Jesus, God's anointed one, the Son of David, to start doing things in your life? Because once you do, there's no going back." Prayer always works. But beware: through it God may work upon us in ways we would never have anticipated.

Betsy Childs

A Letter to the Press

We print below a copy of a letter Alan Clifford has sent to the press to show the extent to which our nation has changed its attitude towards our Christian heritage. The media conceal much of the persecutions of Christians throughout the world. It makes for very disturbing reading.

Dear Sir,

I am distressed to learn that on Saturday 29th October a group of Christian school-girls in Indonesia were attacked, apparently by Islamic militants.

Three were beheaded and a fourth was severely wounded. On the way to their Christian school near Poso city, Central Sulawesi, they were set upon by a group of men who attacked them with machetes. Half an hour later the three decapitated bodies were discovered. Later in the morning one head was found outside a church, eight miles from the scene of the attack (leading many to suspect a religious motive to the murders) and the other two heads were found near a police station five miles from Poso.

Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, publicly condemned the attacks and called an immediate cabinet meeting, which resulted in two very senior individuals in the police and intelligence being dispatched to Poso.

But some Indonesian Christians are doubtful about how much will be achieved, given the security forces' record of reluctance to protect Christians or to bring their attackers to justice.

A similarly lawless situation is developing here in the UK. A ex-Muslim Christian family in Bradford has also been threatened on several occasions. Their car was torched and a brick hurled through the window of their house. Yet the police refuse to press charges. So are Muslim criminals safe from the law? I wonder what your readers make of this?

Yours faithfully,

The Revd Dr Alan C. Clifford
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Hindrances to Evangelism in Reformed Congregations

By James Gunn © 2005

IN TRYING TO DETERMINE the nature of the church, theologians have also considered the purposes of the church—that is, what the church is *to do*. While many answers to that question have been given, both simple and complex, the one that best suits the intentions of this article is that proposed by Wayne Grudem [*Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity, Leicester, 1994, p. 867]. It is simple yet comprehensive. Let us look at Grudem’s answer to the question, “What are the purposes of the church?” We can then look at why I have written this article.

Grudem says there are three purposes of the church:

§ Ministry to God

§ Ministry to believers

§ Ministry to the world

These are the three broad purposes of the church but they need a little unpacking before we are able to understand them completely.

By *ministry to God*, Grudem means worship. Worship is essentially those activities of both individual and assembled Christians that offer up to God the glory and praise that is His proper due. This, according to the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms (Q1), is the chief end of man.

By *ministry to believers*, he

means discipleship and sanctification or growth in grace. The church “...has an obligation to nurture those who already are believers and build them up to maturity in the faith” [Col 1:28; Eph 4:12-13].

By *ministry to the world*, he means both evangelism and mercy. Jesus tells us in the so-called great commission, to “*make disciples of all the nations*” [Matt. 28:19]. This is the first part of the church’s mission to the world. The second is performing acts of mercy in order to relieve suffering wherever it is to be found [Luke 6:35-36].

Broadly speaking, these are the three underlying or foundational purposes of the church. In this context, I have chosen to look at the third of these purposes, that of evangelism. It is my intention to help readers discover how well their own congregations are doing in their ministry to the world. My perspective is from the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition and it is to members of such congregations to whom I direct my remarks.

It is my own belief that evangelism and acts of mercy are not optional but normative. They are prescribed in scripture just as surely as is our duty to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. If we are ready to do the

latter, we should also be ready to do the former. Christ has called His church to make disciples from all nations. This is to be the church's mandate until the end (Matt. 24:14).

If a denomination or any congregation within it is luke-warm to this purpose, it is in jeopardy of coming under judgement. Indeed, this is exactly what happened to the church at Laodicea. Although we read that the Lord loved this church, nonetheless He was displeased with its lack of zeal [Rev. 3:15-16].

How well is your own congregation doing in the performance of this ministry? Is it, like the church at Laodicea, neither cold nor hot, or is it zealously performing this purpose in loving obedience to the Lord? Can you say with honesty that your congregation has a heart for the lost and the suffering? Is it blind to distinctions of race, social status, poverty and the like [Rom. 3:29, 9:24; Gal. 3:28]? What hindrances might be in your way? I believe that it is possible to identify five factors that to one degree or another impede the fulfillment of this purpose within Reformed, Calvinistic assemblies.

The first factor is the influence of hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism begins and ends with the sovereignty of God and I should say at the outset that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is of absolute importance to Reformed, Calvinistic and biblical Christianity. Nevertheless, in its relationship to evangelism, hyper-Calvinism can be a detrimental influence because it denies any

responsibility on the part of a believer to be the chosen means of influencing a sinner for salvation or denies that the sinner himself has a responsibility for his own repentance leading to salvation. This, in spite of many verses of Scripture to indicate that this is exactly what God has intended (Jer. 5:3; Eze. 14:6; 18:30, 32; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Acts 17:30 are representative). I should remind the reader that hyper-Calvinism is not usually a conscious thought in the minds of most Christians. It is the sub-conscious result of not knowing the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, predestination and the universal offer of the gospel.

The hyper-Calvinist maintains that since no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him (a conviction held by all Reformed Christians, see John 6:44) there is no point in trying to influence a person to believe the gospel. God will do that for us. God will bring a person to faith even against his or her will if it is His own will to do so.

The related doctrine of predestination of the elect (those whom God has chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world) reinforces this idea. The idea of the elect (or as they are elsewhere called the "remnant") is a thoroughly biblical and reformed doctrine, but is used by hyper-Calvinists to shut out any possible response by sinners to the call of salvation. This may be fine as far as it goes but it simply does not go far enough because it leaves out the fact that only God

knows His elect, whom He has chosen [Mark 13:20; Rom. 8:29-30]. It also leaves out the fact that God uses various means to carry out His intended purposes (1 Ch. 29:12; Ps. 8:3-4; 75:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:6 are all representative). So in evangelism, we understand that we do not know who God's chosen ones are, nor what agencies He will make use of to ensure that His elect will hear the gospel, receive the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit, repent of their sin and so come to salvation in Christ.

This means we are to be faithful to the great commission and be available as the instruments by which the gospel is heard [Rom. 10:14-15]. We ourselves do not convert sinners—that is the work of the Holy Spirit—but we can and must bring them to the gospel.

The second factor is the doctrine of covenant succession. Covenant succession is just a fancy way of describing people being born to believing parents. This, according to many, is the foremost method God uses to grow His church. Covenant succession is a biblical doctrine described in several places in both Testaments (De. 4:37, 40; Ps. 102:28; Isa. 44:3; 54:13; 59:21; Acts 2:38-39 are representative).

However, in some cases covenant succession may become a hindrance to evangelism simply because having babies is so natural and right. It is definitely part of God's overall plan [Gen. 1:28] and making babies is—for most people at any rate—easier, more pleasant and rewarding than talking about Christ to total

strangers. Now I do not want you to think that I believe covenant succession is not a responsibility as well as a privilege and a joy for all Christian parents. I do.

Nevertheless, I also believe that it in no way absolves the church of its obligation to spread the gospel to all and sundry. My point in this section is merely to warn against the complacency that often takes place. We cannot think that this is the only way that Christ grows His church. I respectfully disagree with people (such as Robert S. Rayburn) who maintain that this is the most important way that Christ grows His church. Rayburn has said, "Christian evangelism will never make a decisive difference in our culture when it amounts merely to an effort to replace losses due to widespread desertion from our own camp. The gospel will always fail to command attention and carry conviction when large numbers of those who grow up under its influence are observed abandoning it for the world." ["The Presbyterian Doctrine of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture and Covenant Succession," *Presbyterian* 22/2, 1996]. It is precisely because of such statements that we must be even more vigilant.

Rayburn and other well-intentioned people miss the fact that the gospel can *never* fail since it is God's very plan for the salvation of His people. Christ grows His church by saving the elect through His Holy Spirit. His two primary ways for doing this are covenant succession *and* evangelism. Moreover, the view

of these people contradicts the important doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which maintains that if one is truly saved, that salvation can never be lost [John 5:24; 6:37, 39; 1 John 2:19].

We tend to forget that in every generation there are people being born right under our noses that need to hear the gospel. Some there are in each generation who truly are tares and so are beyond hope [Matt. 13:24-30], but this is not for us to know but only God. There is a constant crop, year after year and generation after generation and therefore a never-ending need for workers in the harvest fields until such a time as our Lord returns [Matt. 9:35-38]. So let us not cease from striving to spread the gospel merely because we have had numerous children, albeit brought up in Godly fashion and who have inherited the covenant promise safeguarded for them by believing, faithful parents.

The third factor is shame and/or fear. In North America and other well-off, developed nations, it is the case that Christians do not evangelize (although they may perform works of mercy) because they fear the rejection, ridicule or contempt of friends, loved-ones, co-workers, or even total strangers. They are also ashamed to be known as those who have come under the influence of, and been brainwashed by, a bizarre fairy tale for fools and lunatics who, unbelievers think, are out to brainwash them. This is hard to overcome, yet we are warned not to

be ashamed of Christ or His gospel [Luke 9:26] and we are both warned and encouraged not to fear [Matt. 8:26; Mark 6:50]. However, as often as not, this fear or shame is rooted in our own ignorance of the meaning of the gospel itself. How many Christians can quickly summarize the gospel and how many having done so can support the proclamation with relevant passages of scripture? If you do not know and understand something, how can you actually believe it to be true and worth suffering for?

In today's world, we do not find this level of knowledge and understanding in many believers, yet there was a time when believers were knowledgeable of scripture, understanding it experientially and not just intellectually. Such were the Puritans and the Reformers. Knowledge is one of the three aspects that make up the totality of a believer's true faith (*Sola fide*). Knowledge is the content of our faith; we must know the object of our faith. It is not enough to simply "have faith and everything will work out." We must know and understand God's intentions and purposes as well as His character. This comes to us partly by studying His creation, but mainly and effectively by studying His Word, because in it He clearly tells us about Himself and His purposes. It is no coincidence that those believers most saturated with God's word were also His bravest martyrs. They believed all that God told them in scripture. Indeed, they rested with a full

assurance that He would care for them in their time of trial and embrace them in His everlasting arms of love should their death be required by Him.

The fourth factor is simply lack of talent or giftedness. Not every believer is able to articulate the gospel and this not necessarily through either lack of knowledge or faith. Not every Christian has been gifted with sufficient skills in oration or logic, to explain to an unbelieving and contemptuous world the glorious riches of God in Christ. Again, not because the gospel itself is difficult or too complex—nothing could be further from the truth. No, it is because God has bestowed different gifts on the members of His church. God bestows gifts like conversational aptitude, logic, scriptural knowledge and gregariousness more on some than on others. He has not said that all are to be teachers, prophets, evangelists and so on [1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11]. It is true; people with the necessary skills make the best evangelists. This is not to say however that only specially endowed Christians should do evangelism. We are each called upon, as opportunity allows, to proclaim the gospel and what it means to each one of us [1 Peter 3:15-16].

The fifth factor is what we call the gathered congregation as opposed to the "parish" or community congregation. Gathered congregations are largely composed of members who do not live in the same geographical location as the

building or meeting hall in which they gather. The members come from outlying communities and are only in the church perhaps two or three times a week, and then never leave the premises until it is time to go home again. They have little to no interaction with the people who live or work in the local community, resulting in a condition where the church members never get to meet the locals, form relationships and so come to see them as their neighbours. The locals and church members are forever strangers to one another.

Because no possibility exists for relationships or even brief encounters, it is easier for the members of the congregation to remain indifferent to the real physical and spiritual needs of the local people. In addition, when members go back home to their own communities, what evangelism that takes place there can only be sporadic and ineffectual because it is removed from the church which is the main provider and support system and where the seeds of evangelism take root and grow.

As far as evangelism is concerned then, the gathered congregation is not a good thing. If the church is to have a ministry to the world it must be a ministry that is based within geo-ethnic communities where real people can come together to share what each has to offer, or to receive what others have to give. This has always been the preferred model.

This is especially true for evangelism. Acts of mercy are not

always tied to the community in which a congregation is found; especially in our world where people can support the needy in countries on the opposite side of the planet just as easily as a needy someone in their own city or town. But evangelism is not like that.

Evangelism is up close and personal. It happens when pastors preach the word of God faithfully to those who are able to come and hear. It is essentially a local and personal event. It was always so until the advent of mass communication media like radio and television. Moreover, I believe that as good and convicting as a well-preached sermon can be on television, it cannot hold a candle to the word preached in person. Personal experiences are without exception more "real" than mediated ones.

So for real evangelism to occur, the congregation should ideally be situated in a specific location where its members are tied to unbelievers among them not by similarities of ethnicity, social position and the like, but whose members simply live, work or volunteer in the same community in which they worship.

This way the lost may experience personal relationships and receive greater empathy. This not only enriches the lives of those unbelievers in the community, it also enriches the lives of those in the church because they actually get to share in the lives of other people and so are truly able to obey the second commandment of Christ, to love your neighbours as yourselves [Matt.

22:39].

We have now reviewed five main factors that may hinder or impede the progress of evangelism and have seen that in two cases the problem for evangelism is a misapplication of a valid biblical and Reformed doctrine: the sovereignty of God and covenant succession. In our look at hyper-Calvinism, we saw that it was the one-sided or unbalanced view of God's sovereignty that inhibited evangelism.

Regarding covenant succession, we saw that in our dependence on bringing children into the covenant, we were in jeopardy of turning our backs on the prodigals in our midst that God loves nonetheless.

Therefore, it now remains to decide what our responsibility is in the matter. Are we justified in allowing these hindrances to remain?

Alternatively, do we have a responsibility to remove them and get on with the work God has asked us to do as His faithful servants [Matt. 25:14-30]? It is obvious by now what my own position is in this regard. We see from numerous scriptural passages that we do indeed have both a privilege and a responsibility to carry out the purpose of evangelism along with acts of mercy. The essential proof-text is Matt. 28:19-20. However, there are many others such as Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-47; Acts 8:26-27, 35; 16:6-10.

Understanding that evangelism and acts of mercy are fundamental to Christianity is only the starting point however. Nor should we say

that it is up to individual Christians alone to carry out evangelism.

Evangelism is essentially presenting the gospel through the act of preaching (remember Rom. 10:14-15). An aspect of the great commission that we often ignore is that Christ delivered it to His apostles who were the first ministers of the gospel, who were also its first elders or overseers, and on whom Christ built His new covenant church.

This means that it is up to duly ordained ministers of the word (as the rightful successors to the apostles) to preach to sinners. It is then the work of the Holy Spirit to apply this preaching to the hearts and minds of lost souls.

How are ministers to undertake this task? Are they to do it alone? Do they simply stand at the front of the congregation, hoping there are some who have yet to hear the gospel? This is certainly a part of what will happen, but members can do much more than simply listen with patience as the minister explains for the umpteenth time the purpose of the law and the necessity of the gospel for sinners. He needs the help, support and active participation of his entire flock.

In this, as in so many other aspects of church life, the elders hold special place. It is their responsibility, by virtue of their position and office, to ensure their congregation carries out all the purposes of the church, and this must include evangelism and acts of mercy.

It is not my purpose here to offer

any particular strategies or methods. This is really a matter for each congregation to decide. There are as many ways as there are members. Many ways have worked as a means to build relationships and trust with unbelievers within a given community. It is really the time, energy, vision, ingenuity, talent, creativity and commitment of a congregation's members that are the limiting factors. Nevertheless, if your congregation can do nothing else, it can pray.

Pray for the lost. Pray for the unbelievers you see on the streets and in the alleys. Pray for the homeless in the community, pray for those who work in the shops and other businesses. Pray for other churches in the area and even local agencies that they will be a sure help for those in need.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, do not forget to pray for yourselves. Ask God to give you a heart for the lost sheep, the prodigal sons and daughters in your midst. Ask Him to fill your congregation with the compassion and mercy that means so much to Him. (Matt. 25:30-46).

Ask Him to give you the strength to overcome your own fear and shame. Ask Him for courage to risk the calumny and contempt of even those you are concerned for, who will reject you and revile you because of Him. For has He not told us that as they did to Him, so they will do to us [Mat 5:11; John 15:20]? Yet such is the obedience to which we are called (1 Pet 4:14, 16, 19).

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