

Macaulay's Cycle and the Christian Church

THE EDITOR OF a well-known evangelical newspaper recently showed the need for the church to urgently evangelise. He showed this, not simply from the present spiritual state of our nation but rather from the cycle which democracies go through. He quotes from Lord Macaulay [1800-1859], who stated that a democratic nation only lasts for about 200 years.

Lord Macaulay's 'cycle' is this: a nation goes from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from great courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to selfishness; from selfishness to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependence back into bondage.

Lord Macaulay's theory does seem fairly Biblical, given the record of the Israelites in Scripture. The Israelites were redeemed from bondage through spiritual faith (despite the skepticism) in sprinkling their doorposts with blood and crossing the Red Sea. (all requiring faith). They developed courage for the many battles they engaged in Canaan and enjoyed liberty and freedom in the land, until they had abundance. But Moses had to write "*Jeshurun*

waxed fat and kicked" [Deu 32:15].

Spiritual complacency followed when Isaiah warned them of their attitude "*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*" [Isa 22:13]. They became so selfish they were prepared to sacrifice their own sons and daughters to devils [Psa 106:37]. They became indifferent and apathetic towards the Lord who had delivered them and saved them times without number, until they were finally carried away captive to Assyria and Babylon under enemy domination. Israel became entirely dependent on the mercy and goodwill of ungodly nations.

It is not difficult to see the very same cycle and pattern in our own nation. At what precise stage are we at? The Editor gave worrying reasons why we could be approaching the dependent stage - just before a return to bondage! One of his concerns was that a criminal investigation led by the Serious Fraud Office was called off by Tony Blair.

The reason for the call off was that it would not be in Britain's interests to continue with the investigation. The investigation was regarding corruption in an arms deal between the defence firm BAE Systems who allegedly had paid

millions in bribes to Saudi officials to secure the Al Yamamah deal - worth about £40bn to the company. The Attorney General Lord Goldsmith explained that the investigation would cause 'serious damage' to UK relations with the Saudis. He particularly mentioned the undermining of co-operation over Islamist terrorism with serious consequences for national security.

We might ask, 'Does this mean that we are now prepared to set aside justice and the Law, in order to keep good relations with other nations? Does this mean that we are dependent on other nations for our national security?'

Whether these things are true or not, as the Editor pointed out, it is *"Righteousness that exalts a nation"* [Pro 14:34], and there is an urgent need that we pray, fast, and evangelise more than ever so that our nation will repent and turn to God.

Our leaders pay little attention to what God says in His Word, but they are interested in vote catching. It is therefore important for us to understand the Biblical method for building a Christian society.

We will never create a godly society by a bureaucratic 'top-down' administration forced to legislate what it does not really want! The 'powers that be', must themselves become convinced of the principles they seek to enact. We need more William Wilberforces who are zealous for God's kingdom to be established on earth.

The Biblical method is not a 'top-

down' bureaucratic tyranny by unconverted rulers, but a 'bottom-up' strategy to convert the people, making them desire godly rulers. Create a nation zealous for God's truth, righteousness and justice to be established in the land. Politicians will then be chosen by the Christian public, who will want godly rulers to rule over them.

It is only after the majority of the public are Christians can we expect them to appoint Christian candidates for office. An ungodly nation will not want godly rulers. We must first make our nation godly.

It is our duty to put into office those people who will stand up for God's Word. For Christians, Party politics must be put aside - God's honour is more important than any Party. The question we need to ask ourselves before we vote, is: Who will most likely uphold God's Word? How wonderful to be in the position of having to ask, which godly candidate is most likely to stand firm on God's Word! That can only happen when our nation is overwhelmingly Christian again.

This will mean that the Church has the great responsibility of preaching the gospel, far and wide across the land. Evangelism and mission, more than ever, needs to be high on the agenda of every denomination and congregation. This was Jesus' desire as He left this world giving His Church the mandate to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature and teaching them to observe all things that He commanded them!

Marks of a Good Preacher

By James Gunn © 2007

THE FOLLOWING tentative observations are very personal and carry no authoritative weight. They are merely my ruminations and reflections as a Christian who has been on the receiving end of many a sermon over the last several years. (I've come under the preaching of more than two dozen men in the eight short years since I first repented of my sin and publicly proclaimed my belief in Christ as Lord and Saviour.)

These thoughts were precipitated by the need to fill a pastoral vacancy in our own congregation. They are offered to those who may also be struggling with the void created when a congregation loses its under-shepherd and it is in need of guidance and support through the usually protracted period of the vacancy.

But let me begin with a word of clarification. There are two functions most often associated with the Pastor: one function is teaching, the other is preaching. The Bible lists these two functions separately, Eph. 4:11 for instance, but if we take Paul as representative then we are led to the reasonable conclusion that often, if not always, teaching and

preaching were carried out by the same person depending on the circumstances [1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11]. Notwithstanding, the functions are separate whether or not one man performs both and even though it may be hard for us to know when the preaching ends and the teaching begins, as in many sermons.

The word for the act of teaching most commonly used in the NT is *didasko* while the word used for preaching is *kerusso*. *Didasko* means to hold a discourse with another person with the intention that the other person will learn something from the encounter; it is to impart instruction of some kind through dialogue. It is essentially didactic. *Kerusso* on the other hand refers to proclamation, or announcement. A preacher is first and foremost a herald. It is he who heralds—that is proclaims—the character of God and His plan of salvation as found in both the Old and the New Testaments.

A preacher's first and most important duty is to herald this message for God's people. The second and separate duty is to teach others to grow in the grace *bestowed on them* by God, *won for them* by Christ and *applied to them* by the

Holy Spirit.

So with these preliminary thoughts in mind, let me begin by stating the obvious: a preacher will be, beyond doubt, a born-again Christian; the fruit of the Spirit will be manifesting in his life to a discernable degree and he will have an unshakable conviction of his calling. As well, a preacher will conform to the essential nature of the criteria for elders given by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus.

Finally, he will be a man who strives to live a pious and holy life. This being the case, what might be some of the attributes or marks of a good preacher?

Authority

Since a preacher is really an ambassador for Christ [2 Cor. 5:20] the first mark must be authority. Just as a worldly ambassador or herald has the authority to speak for the leader of his country, so a preacher speaks for the Leader of his country, the Kingdom of Heaven, who is the triune God. And just as the worldly ambassador is given his authority by his country's ruling powers, so too a preacher's authority comes not from himself but rather from God through and in the person of the Holy Spirit. Just as Christ did nothing on His own, but did the will of His Father in all things [John 5:19, 30; 6:38] so too a preacher must do the work of Christ, his sovereign Lord. This means being a servant of the whole counsel of God.

A preacher can never pick and choose what he will preach,

neglecting those truths he may find personally disagreeable. He must be prepared in and out of season to speak only as his rightful King directs him through the leading of the Holy Spirit and the direction of God [Isa. 6:5-8] through His Word. So, a preacher will speak with authority.

He will speak not as the scribes and Pharisees [Matt. 7:29] but as one who speaks on behalf of and for his Master in Heaven. Consequently, his Master will, through the working of the Holy Spirit and the illumination of Scripture, enable him to speak the very words of God.

But what are the means employed by a preacher to know and understand what he is to proclaim (*kerugma*)? I believe that to a great degree, a *preach-er* must also be a *pray-er*. He must saturate himself with prayer; the prayer of one who is dependant on the great triune God and who consequently will be obedient to His will [Phil 2:5-8]. Without prayer, there can be no preaching because there is no relationship with God. Prayer is the conduit for maintaining a one-to-One relationship with God, thus being open to the leading of the Spirit through the agency of the Word.

Confidence

A shy man is likely to have a harder time reaching out and impressing others than one who is relaxed and at ease in the company of others. A preacher must be confident in

himself while not being over-blown with his own talents. While he must be a confident man, he must also realize that the source for this confidence must be found outside himself. So he will trust always in the strength and wisdom of God who has given him the very gifts and talents he is called upon to use in his role as herald.

His confidence, unlike his authority, is the working out of his trust in personal experience and is usually a product of trials and difficulties over the course of many years [2 Peter 1:5-8; James 1:2-3]. Thus, all other things being equal, an older man is often the better preacher, and a good preacher in his youth will usually improve with age as his experience informs and deepens his understanding and knowledge of the ways of God in his life and the lives of others.

Confidence also implies personal strength and integrity. The confident preacher will not bend in the first little breeze that comes along, nor will he be tossed to and fro like a child who is powerless and at the mercy of others [Eph. 4:14; James 1:8].

Humility

He must be contrite and humble in his own life [Ps 51:17; Pr. 16:19]. This does not imply conflict with the attribute of confidence; the two are not contradictory as much as complementary. The confidence of a preacher will force people to sit up and pay attention but his humility will prevent him from exalting

himself in his confidence and his talents. His humility will act as a strong counter-measure to the arrogance and pride that confident (and accomplished) men must always be on guard against.

His humility will allow him to remember that he is merely the messenger, the herald of the Good News and as such he must never let his own agenda come to the fore instead of the message God intended him to preach. His humility will enable him to speak the truth in love, regardless of the offence it may cause in the pews, but at the same time he will never say things merely for their shock value alone. Indeed, when the preacher is in the pulpit, he must decrease while Christ must increase [John 3:30].

Knowledge

I speak here not only of biblical knowledge, although that is essential. I'm referring to a more general kind of knowledge concerning the things of the world of science, literature, art and culture.

While the preacher must be pious and strive for biblical holiness, he should also be well-informed and not bury himself in theological treatises to the exclusion of being a human among other humans and who will see God's handiwork as much in a play by Shakespeare, a sonnet by Donne, a fugue by Bach, or a painting by daVinci as he does in his Bible. But in his knowledge of the natural world, the preacher should also be cognizant of God's sovereignty over all creation [Job

38:1-39:30].

Certainly, the preacher must be swathed in the Word of God. It must inform his every waking thought. He must have large portions of it memorized and must be able to use it for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness [2 Tim. 3:16], remembering that it is the sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] used for cutting through all worldly deceptions [Heb. 4:12].

But to know his Bible well, he must be familiar and comfortable with the Hebrew and Greek. To that end he must study diligently in these two languages. He must also have a sound understanding of the important translations in current use and the underlying original-language texts from which the translations are derived. He must be able to defend his own choice of translation, whatever it may be.

Compassion

A preacher without compassion for the lost and suffering souls in this world is in my opinion no preacher of God. How can a man proclaim the Good News of redemption and salvation which is freely offered to all [Isaiah 55:1-2, 6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4] who is not motivated by love and sorrow for suffering, and who has no passion to relieve that suffering to the degree enabled him by the Holy Spirit? The gospel of Christ, and his sacrifice for all who will come to believe in Him as their Lord and Saviour, is undoubtedly for God's elect (I am no Arminian), but

election, in and of itself, saves no one. It is only through the once-for-all payment for sin that the elect are able to inherit the salvation won for them by Christ. But how are they to call upon Christ for salvation if they do not believe? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher [Romans 10:14]? No, for me the error of denying the free offer of the Gospel is not a mark of a preacher but rather a mark of one still living in bondage.

Affection

A man may be knowledgeable and confident in his ability to rightly divide the Word of God and may have a strong intimation of the authority he wields on behalf of his Master, but if he lacks warmth and affection he won't necessarily be embraced or readily accepted by his flock. He may, as a result, be hampered in his ability to teach them or counsel them in times of trouble. God is love; it therefore stands to reason that someone who claims to know God and to speak for him must also be able to express love and genuine affection in his thoughts, words and actions [1 John 3:14].

This is not to say the preacher must be an extrovert. That is something entirely different, although extroverts have less difficulty getting to know others. But the people of his flock must trust and feel that they can genuinely grow to like this person. Affection goes along way to building trust and

trust is essential for the effective work of a preacher.

Passion (Zeal)

The preacher must love God's Word even as the Psalmist [Ps. 119:14, 20, 35]. If a preacher is indifferent to God's Word or the great responsibility to which he has been called, how is he to be of any benefit to others who may need the encouragement, edification, admonishment or even discipline that only someone who is passionate about God is able to convey? Indeed, I would go so far as to say that if one is not passionate about his calling, it is likely a sign that he is not really called to begin with.

Many a preacher has taken up this way of life as an act of gratitude for his own salvation. It is something he "feels" called to as a way of expressing his thankfulness and joy over his God-enabled conversion. Another may decide to become a preacher because he loves untangling theological knots or solving linguistic riddles. Such men are likely worthy Christians but probably should not consider the pastoral call.

A preacher must understand that he will be held to a higher standard than others [Luke 12:47-48; James 3:1] and so must be absolutely sure of what it is he is doing and why he is doing it. He will then be able to make the sacrifices the calling sometimes demands.

Courage

A preacher must be able and willing

to "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" if he is to be a herald of God and His Kingdom. He must be able to stand up for what he believes, fully clothed in the armour of God, wielding the sword of the Spirit.

In today's pluralistic, relativistic society where the new paganism of Secular Humanism is the predominant world-view, fundamental Christian doctrines are being constantly attacked — even within the Church herself — and so it can be hard and discouraging to stand for God's truth and His absolute standards. A preacher must be courageous enough to suffer abuse whether he is proven right or not. The man should not be a shrinking violet in the face of opposition but must be prepared for onslaught at any moment, from any direction [2 Tim. 1:7].

He must have the perseverance to maintain God's standard of holiness in spite of what others — even his own loved ones — think or believe. He must — of all people — be an over-comer [Rev. 2:17] firm in the conviction that he is more than a conqueror through Christ who loves him [Rom. 8:1].

Patience

A preacher will have to have patience, not only for the members of his flock, but also for himself. There will be times when he will not see any spiritual growth in the congregation, in spite of his best efforts (or, may it never be so, just because of them). He may notice

that people seem lukewarm in praise or unmoved during his preaching. He may see uncomprehending stares at each and every service in spite of his attempts to clearly articulate his hermeneutic.

He may be frustrated at the lack of growth in numbers in spite of his evangelistic outreach, and will be in danger of losing his patience. But as bad as these may seem, worse yet is a preacher who loses patience because he has come to rely on himself and his own personal strengths and talents. A good preacher will always wait on the Lord in trust and confidence, knowing that it is God's sovereign will to work all things for good according to His pleasure [2 Cor. 3:5; Eph 1:9; Phil 2:13] even when He may be chastising the congregation for a season, whatever the cause [Rev. 3:1-2].

Physically strong and constitutionally healthy

While it would be ideal for a preacher to be strong and healthy, such is very often not the case. Nevertheless, preaching is tough and demanding work — at least I imagine it to be — for the sincere and earnest man. Being in good health and condition will make burning the midnight oil when studying and writing all the easier.

As well, standing for lengthy periods delivering the sermons (not

counting the fellowship after) is demanding on back and joints and can be very tiring. This is not counting the visits to families, along with Bible study or prayer meetings on one or more evenings during the week.

While a man who is zealous for his work and the calling he strives to fulfil can to a degree overcome personal weakness or compromised health, it is nevertheless not an ideal. A good preacher must therefore be moderate and conscientious in his lifestyle and activities.

In summary then, I would say that these are at least some of the qualities or marks I would definitely look for in a preacher of God's Word. Of course, each potential preacher will have some of these marks to a degree but no one will exhibit these marks in every situation or to the same degree in every case.

So is the list definitive? No. Neither is it complete or comprehensive. Much more could be said about such qualities as honesty, self-denial, optimism, trust and others (and has been said by many others with greater wisdom as well as experience) and perhaps every person would come up with a different list of attributes or marks of a good preacher. This one just happens to be mine. I pray it will be of some value.

“PREACHING MEDIATES not only God's authority, but also His *presence* and His *power*. Preaching effects an encounter not simply with truth, but with God Himself”.

J I Packer

Congregational News

LAIRG/ROGART

As I write we are looking forward to hosting the first meeting of the Northern Reformed Fellowship in our Lairg church. I am due to give an address on the Reformed doctrine of church and it is our prayer that these meetings will bear much fruit in the North. The next meeting of the Northern Reformed Fellowship will be on Friday 20 April at 7.30pm in the Gair Hall, Bonar Bridge when the speaker will be Rev. Kenny Macleod of Thurso Free Church.

We are also establishing a Bonar Bible Study group which will be held in Sandy and Alison Mackenzie's home in Migdale from the first Thursday in March at 7pm. I aim to use the Westminster Confession of Faith as the basis for our study and already a couple of ladies from outwith our denomination have shown an interest. Our prayer meeting in Lairg reverts back to 7pm from 11am the first Wednesday in March as we hope the worst of the winter is now behind us – what winter!

I'm looking forward to the Kinlochbervie Communion season which is the third in March. Services are Friday 16 March at 7pm; Saturday at 11.30am; Lord's Day 12 noon and 6pm, DV. I'm also looking forward to taking the Harris

Communion in late April which month also gives me an opportunity to share the Good News in Lairg Primary School. Many thanks for your prayers. Please do continue to pray that the Lord would build us up and add to our numbers.

Wayne Pearce

DUNDEE

The sad news first. Our elder who was our precentor and treasurer, together with his wife have left the congregation. Kevin and Sine Stirling have been a great help in the congregation and have served us well for seven years. We will miss them very much and wish them God's blessing in the future.

The good news is that we have had very good attendances at the preaching services. A young girl of 18 years, who first came to our Sunday Club and stated she did not want any of the 'God Stuff', has attended for 6 weeks now and has requested a Bible. Another young boy has been coming along with Rosalind to our evening services. We ask that you pray for these young folk so that they will come to know the Lord. We are enjoying one or two more local Christians coming to worship with us from time to time.

Another good thing is that

Maureen Fagan's daughter, Joanne, who has worshipped with us very regularly and is now a student in Glasgow, has professed faith in Christ and has become a member in St Vincent Street Free Church where she now worships. We rejoice when those who have been under our ministry and leave the city, develop in their faith.

STORNOWAY

The congregation immensely enjoyed the preaching of both Geoff Thomas from Aberystwyth in Wales and Rev Andrew Coghill from Leurbost at its Communion in February and was very encouraged to have two additions to the Communion Roll. All sermons were recorded on the congregation's new Recording System and CDs of all six sermons can still be purchased for only £5.

The 'Christianity Explored' 10-week Course is still being run and it provides a wonderful opportunity to speak face-to-face with people about the realities of eternity.

One or two new faces have been appearing from time to time at different services and this always gives encouragement. The mid-week meeting is now in the form of a Bible Study alternately with the traditional style of prayer meeting and provides an opportunity for fellowship amongst the congregation that was not previously available.

The fortnightly Fellowships after the evening service on Lord's Day continues and a wide variety of

speakers are enjoyed from various denominations.

Please continue to remember in prayer the Harris congregation as several are unwell and not able to attend as previously. The Harris Communion is on the last Lord's day of April and Rev A S Wayne Pearce from Lairg/Rogart is the visiting preacher.

EDINBURGH

Sadly, Burdiehouse/Southhouse was in the headlines for the wrong reasons once again. Towards the end of February, a well dressed bogus Dr got access to a disabled ladies home, and after examining the 37 year old, he carried out a sexual assault. Neighbours were totally shocked at the callousness of this act on somebody who was defenceless, very confined, extremely disabled and depending on carers visiting her. Pray that the culprit would be brought to justice and especially that the lady and those closest to her would know God's gracious help, healing and salvation.

We are often very encouraged by how appropriate the sermon subject is to both congregation and preacher in our particular situation. No doubt this is a common experience whenever God's word is preached or discussed in what must be thousands if not millions of situations around the world. The preacher chooses a text, because he believes that God wants the congregation to be helped and

blessed, through the message in that passage. Not only is it helpful to some in the congregation, but the preacher himself finds it a great blessing in his own experience.

Not unlike a mother enjoying cooking a meal for her family, and when they eat, thoroughly enjoying the fact that this is exactly the food they need, and she herself enjoying the meal in its own right. It may not be the favourite food, but it may be very necessary for the health of everyone.

People have a spiritual need which is as basic as the need for daily bread. This spiritual need is met perfectly by God's word and Spirit, when people accept Christ as their Saviour. This is as certain as the fact that man's physical appetite is satisfied by food. Sadly there is a big market for unwholesome food, and this is even more true when it comes to spiritual food.

Here is a taste of some of the spiritual food that we felt lead to serve to the congregation, service by service, since last we wrote to you.

The joy of all true preachers, *"I have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in the truth."* [3 John 4]. We walk in the truth when we believe it and live it. To see people doing this is a great joy to preachers because: It is God honouring and Christ exalting; preachers long to see people converted and living the Christian life; it's a powerful witness when people's actions match their beliefs and it shows that they are authentic and not play acting.

Mark 9 v 14-32. The healing of the boy with the evil spirit. The distraught father confessing his struggle with unbelief, while at the same time believing. The failure of the disciples to cast out this evil spirit, and been told later that this kind could only be cast out by prayer. One of the most important keys to doing the Lords work is a real commitment to a life of prayer.

Mark 9 v 33 - 37. The petty but very human question of the disciples, *"Who is the greatest?"* Then the response of Christ, *"Sitting down Jesus called the twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.'" He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in His arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."*

How good for the congregation and myself to be reminded of what true spiritual greatness is and the importance of children. Welcoming and serving children is close to the heart of God.

2 Kings 6:24-7:20. But especially the decision of the four lepers in verse 9 *"We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.....Let's go at once and tell it to the royal palace."* Sadly, as Christians, we often do wrong in our gospel day of good news, we keep it to ourselves. More than ever may we tell it to high and low.

Mark 9 v 42-50. *"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.....if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off."*

Emphatically and repeatedly Jesus warns about the danger of offending God's children and the subsequent punishment. How can anyone doubt what the bible says about coming judgement.

I hope to go to Mozambique in early April DV with Eddie Brito (whose work is featured in the latest Blythswood news).

My reasons for going are:

1 To encourage Eddie & Vilma in their lonely but very important and large work. (Important because they are helping with basic survival while trying to equip the recipients materially and in their attitude to help themselves. Even more significant is the fact that they preach and teach the gospel of Christ. It is a very large work, in this sense, that for just two people, to take on the responsibility of trying to organise funds, volunteers and helpers to feed, clothe and supply "some educational materials" for around 700 destitute children, including very many orphans, in 4 different locations, 2 in Mozambique and 2 in Malawii and at the same time try to oversee the erecting of a number of suitable buildings and also trying to organise adults to become self sufficient through agriculture and manufacturing, would be a big challenge for a much

larger team. To us it will be an amazing achievement if Eddie and Vilma, by God's grace make progress towards this goal.)

2 To preach and teach the gospel to anyone who will listen, whether children or adults; believers or non believers; church leaders or regular congregations. Each situation will be a privilege, honour and responsibility. DV.

3 To help Blythswood, and anyone else who would be good enough to support the work to get a clearer picture of all that is involved in this enterprise.

4 To help in strengthening the basis for long term encouragement and support in the work that Eddie and Vilma are doing.

More than ever we need and covet your prayers for every aspect of our plans and work.

INVERNESS/DINGWALL

I wish I could report on a Spirit-worked revival in the congregation. I cannot do that, but I can tell you that we are crying to God for one. We are done with religion that allows us come to the house of God and go home again seemingly untouched. Remembering the words attributed to Spurgeon, I say to one and all, *'Do not pass the pulpit, do not pass the Bible, do not pass Jesus Christ on the way to Hell'*.

I thank God for all who gather around the worship of God and the preaching of the Word in

both places. They are precious souls, and I do not want to see any of them go without Christ into death and beyond. The very thought of that should fire me, and you, with an urgency of spirit fuelled from hearts of love.

The early Sunday morning time for prayer is precious beyond words. We are calling on God to honour his name, to keep his promises in our midst. We are looking and longing for such a movement of the Spirit of God as will cause us and others to cry out '*It is the Lord*'. We have had encouragement of visiting preachers come and refreshingly teach us from the Bible. We are also encouraged by the appearance of new faces at some of our meetings.

The Men's Breakfast meetings have been special. These

meetings are 'Testimony meetings', and as the speakers tell the story of God's grace in their lives, I just wish that more men were there - and even women, to hear the good stories of God's grace.

We are planning to start putting these stories into booklet form and have them printed for wider circulation. There is such amazing variety in the way of God's dealings with sinners, but he always brings them to the one Person to make them into saints. That Person is Jesus Christ.

There are Ladies' meetings also, and hopefully I will get a 'report' of these for the next issue of the APC News! Next time round we will also tell you something about the work among the children - just wait.

Calum MacInnes

CALVIN on the LORD'S SUPPER

THE FOURTH MAIN point that Calvin makes about the celebration of the Lord's Supper is that it should be observed frequently. Knowing what the sacrament is and what benefits it brings 'all, like hungry men, should flock to such a bounteous repast'. Calvin believed that the Supper should be observed at least once a week. He explains 'It was ordained to be frequently used amongst all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness; finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves, give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ's body'.

It is no wonder then that Calvin cites with approval the practice of the apostolic church in the book of Acts, in which 'it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayer, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving'. Despite his stated wishes, Calvin was not allowed by the city council of Geneva to implement weekly communion. Instead he was forced to settle for monthly communion and later for quarterly communion.

Keith A Mathison

Not From a Worldly Point of View

THIS WAS LARGELY composed while I was flying to Chicago en route to San Diego on the Pacific Coast of the USA – approximately 100 miles south of Los Angeles.

Having spent 3 hours in Heathrow airport, terminal 3, amid a seething mass of people, all so busy going about their own business and to us it was so different from the comparative peace and quiet of Easter Ross. As we read the bible this morning (17 February), our reading was in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5 and I quote just some parts as follows:

Verse 7 We walk by faith not by sight. Verse 8 We are confident, I say and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Verse 9 So we make it our goal to please him. Verse 10 For we must all appear at the judgement seat of Christ. Verse 11 Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. Verse 14 Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. Verse 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view, though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Verse 19 And he has

committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God was making his appeal through us, we implore you in Christ's behalf "be reconciled to God, may God bless these words to us."

You will note I have underlined part of verse 10, because as I was passing through Terminal 3, I saw multitudes of souls in the "valley of decision" [Joel 3 verse 14] and there were scores of security men, searching baggage – taking off our shoes, emptying our pocket, passing through x-ray machines and armed police on patrol, searching for terrorists/drug dealers etc and yet they could not see into the heart.

When you come to believe in Jesus you see people in a different light, as one hymn writer put it, "People need the Lord". I remember the late Rev John (Ian) Nicolson, who ministered in Ness and then in Tain and Fearn, saying that after he was converted, the first time he walked down Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow, he saw a multitude of souls on their way to eternity - before he regarded them from a worldly point of view – but now no longer from worldly point of view.

In Tain and Fearn these first 3 months of 2007, we have had the inestimable blessing of continuous ministry from Revd Terry Atkinson who has spent the majority of his 50 years in the ordained ministry of the Gospel as a missionary in the Mediterranean, Italy and Greece. One of his sermons was on John Chapter 4 verse 35 *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields for they are white already to harvest"*. We must be inclined to look at people as on the broad way that leads to destruction but the message of our Master is – they are ready for harvest.

So in the light of all this what are we to do? Pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into his harvest and we must be ambassadors proclaiming the message "Be reconciled to God"

and as we engage in the work, be assured that this is God's purpose and plan and therefore anticipate God will bless this work in His time remembering the words of Habakkuk 2: 3 *"though it tarry wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry"*.

My trip was planned by me in a comparatively short time, but this written message from the Lord was written and planned long ago and the fact that you are now reading this article was also planned long ago. So once again, I take you back to the word of Isaiah 25:1, *"Oh Lord you have done wondrous things in faithfulness and truth, things planned long ago"*. God bless us all as we face and take up our responsibilities to serve our Master in the ministry of prayer and reconciliation.

Spurgeon on Open-Air Preaching

"THE GREAT BENEFIT OF open-air preaching is that we get so many new comers to hear the gospel who otherwise would never hear it. The gospel command is *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* but it is so little obeyed that one would imagine that it ran thus *"Go into your own place of worship and preach the gospel to the few creatures who will come inside"*. *"Go ye into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in"* - albeit it constitutes part of a parable, is worthy to be taken very literally, and in so doing its meaning will be best carried out. We ought actually to go to the streets and lanes and highways for there are lurkers in the hedges, tramps on the highway, street-walkers, and lane-walkers, whom we shall never reach unless we pursue them into their own domains...Some of our brethren are prosing on and on, to empty pews and musty haddocks, while they might be conferring lasting benefit upon hundreds by quitting the old walls for awhile and seeking living stones for Jesus. Let them come out of Rehoboth...leave Salem...let them dream no longer at Bethel...and even [get] away from Trinity...St Agnes...St Michael-and-All-Angels, and St Margaret-Pattens...and try to find new saints among the sinners who are perishing for lack of knowledge". (*Spurgeon in 'Lectures to My Students'*)

Our Culture of Spin

THE ENTERTAINMENT WORLD is a dominant factor in our consumer society. As both Marxists and detectives in American pulp fiction, well know, if you want to understand any given situation, you should follow the money; thus if you want to find out what is important in any given society, you should simply look to see where the money is - pop stars, movie actors, sports figures - these are the people who earn the money - these are the people who earn the real money in our world. Love him, or hate him, the President of the USA does basically shoulder responsibility for the safety and stability of the world as a whole - but he earns peanuts compared to even a modestly talented footballer or or film star...It is a strange world where we begrudge the Prime Minister a six-figure salary while continuing to patronise magazines which pay himbos and bimbos hundreds of thousands of pounds for meaningless trash.

Why do we do it? Probably there are numerous reasons, but a prime factor has to be the useful role we see celebrities playing in our society. They entertain us, and that we think is a good thing, worth paying for - indeed worth paying more for than good government and better public services. And why do we think this way? Well, one interpretation offered by some is that there is, in fact, a spiritual dimension in this culture of celebrity and entertainment. Sports figures, pop stars, celebrities - they offer us meaning and fulfilment, albeit vicariously, in a world where the old gods of traditional religions have failed. Thus, at its apex, this culture produces new messianic figures, such as Elvis, John Lennon, and icons, such as James Dean, David Beckham, and Princess Diana. The deification of these figures in modern culture, it is argued, indicates that there is something innate in human beings that strives for transcendence, for something beyond the routine of every day life.

Why do we pay sports stars, actors and the various airheads that populate the airwaves more than we pay our political leaders? Because they help us to take our minds off the deeper, more demanding truths of life, particularly the one great ultimately unavoidable truth: death. And it's not just the entertainment industry that does that: the huge amount of money expended on the health industry in general and the cosmetic surgery industry in particular also point us towards the basic drive in society to avoid this one at all costs. As Pascal himself says, 'It is easier to put up with death without thinking about it, than with the idea of death when there is no danger of it.'...Pleasure and fun are good things; but when they become means of keeping us from facing up to the truths of our creaturely existence, they are profoundly bad for us.

Carl Trueman - 'The Wages of Spin', Mentor

Franco Maggiotto

Franco Maggiotto was a former Roman Catholic priest who turned Protestant many years ago, and was well known to many of our readers. He ministered in Italy. Here is a short obituary from Revd John Tallach

FRANCO WAS born on the 7th of July, 1937, in Turin, Italy. From an early age, Franco had a deep hunger for God. For a time he followed a hard life in a monastery near Rome. After that he trained as a priest. His motive was always the same.

He wanted to find God for himself. However, even though he spent time trying to overcome sin in himself and in speaking about God to others, he could not attain to that personal peace with God for which he longed. That peace came suddenly and unexpectedly, when Franco was in charge of the Mass one day in a large church in Imperia.

A student was reading a passage from Hebrews 10, and the words of verse ten came as a message from heaven to Franco: *"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* For the first time he realised that what he had been seeking during all these years had been provided through the cross of Christ nearly two thousand years before. From that moment onwards, to the end of his life, Franco had a burning desire to share the gospel of Christ with others.

It was not easy to work with him. He was such an individualist that he found it difficult to be part of a team. But Blythswood had the privilege of channeling at least some support to this unique man from 1980 to the day of his death. He was extremely gifted. He was never content to find one spiritual formula and to apply it rigidly to the various situations which he met. He was constantly interacting with the gospel on a personal level, and was always seeing new ways in which the gospel could be applied to the problems with which he was confronted.

I remember being with him once at the home of a minister in Scotland who thought of himself as a great champion of the principles of the Reformation. Franco responded to this man's comments to the following effect: "You are looking back to the Reformation. But you are not like the Reformers. They were looking forward. They were thinking hundreds of years ahead. They were not buried in the past. If we really want to be like them, we will not be controlled by the past but will look to the future, as they did." For once, that minister had nothing to say.

That was one outstanding

characteristic of Franco. He was a courageous little man. He never said things to please people, to be popular with his hearers. That was one thing which he helped me to see, during the thirty years that I knew him. He had been disappointed by a church which sought to draw attention to itself. Once he had himself come to know Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, he had a very deep grasp of the church's duty to point people away from itself to Jesus.

I recall some of those to whom Franco ministered. The depth and breadth of their understanding of the gospel testified to the high quality of his ministry. I remember a gracious and mature Christian lady who said to me, "Per me, Franco e stato un altro Paulo" (For me, Franco has been another Paul). This might seem like an exaggeration, but she was just expressing from her heart her sense of indebtedness to someone whom God had used to help her really to grasp the gospel of God's grace.

In keeping with this, at the funeral service when Franco's body was laid to rest in a Waldensian cemetery, a moving tribute was read from one of the churches which he was the means of founding. Franco's ministry was realistic, facing up to

the difficulties which ordinary people face. It was also charged with a hope born of the God of hope. Both these aspects of his ministry were reflected, in the meditation which he wrote on Romans 8:25 *"But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience."* This meditation accompanied the last Prayer Letter sent out on Franco's behalf before his death. *We will give our hope to the hopeless, our joy to whoever is sad. To wait with perseverance, with patience, means entering into conflict, into the sadness and defeats of the human race. But the Lord's promise accompanies us in our journey of faith and allows us to see, beyond the horizon of sadness, the light of his coming reign. And we say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus" [Rev. 22:20].*

For Franco, after those years of searching, after those years of taking up the cross and following Christ in a ministry which was difficult but whose fruits will last, that prayer was answered just before midnight on the 20th of December, 2006. Our love and prayers surround his precious wife Aurora, along with his daughter and his son, Tabitha and Alberto.

John Tallach

"IN MANY INSTANCES ministerial success is traceable almost entirely to an intense zeal, a consuming passion for souls, and an eager enthusiasm in the cause of God, and we believe that in every case, other things being equal, men prosper in the divine service in proportion as their hearts are blazing with holy love. *"The God that answereth by fire, let him be God"*; and the man who has the tongue of fire, let him be God's minister".

Charles H Spurgeon

Our Desire for the Churches

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” [Acts 9:31].

THIS MUST BE our desire for the churches. This is something to pray for and be ever working towards. With that in mind let us note that the one true church comprises God’s people meeting in particular localities: *the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria*.

God’s word makes clear that there is but one church ‘it comprises the elect of God; all those chosen by the Father whom the Son undertook to save to the uttermost in the Covenant of Redemption. It is the body of Christ which He purchased with His blood: *“And He is the head of the body, the church” [Col.1:18a]*. Hence we believe in the holy catholic church which transcends all national, cultural, ethnic and denominational barriers. It is truly beyond space and time in that it includes the church triumphant as well as the church militant.

The church however manifests itself in the here and now in particular places. The Apostle Paul writes: *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called*

to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” [1Cor.1:2]. The local church is made up of those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus ‘called out of the world and set apart as vessels fit for the Master’s use. Such are called to be saints: that is they are to be holy, godly, imitators of God, walking in His ways, obedient to His word. Such are those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. They acknowledge Christ alone as Lord and Saviour.

The churches enjoyed peace. They enjoyed a cessation of animosity, persecution and violence against them [Acts 8:1, 9:1]. They enjoyed a period of rest from overt hostility. *“When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” [Pro.16:7]*. And this is something that we must pray for, especially for brethren in difficult and dangerous places around the world who suffer regularly for Christ’s sake.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks

be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" [1 Tim.2:1-2]. In the truest sense the church has peace/rest in Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of peace. Only those who are reconciled to God through faith in Christ can know this peace and therefore we should not be surprised when we are exposed to the ire of those who are at enmity with God.

The churches were edified. The word means to build up; it speaks of being constructive and confirmative. *"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another"* [Rom.14:9]. *"Let all things be done for edification"* [1 Cor.14:26]. We are to encourage and spur one another on in the things of God. We are to do so *"till we all come to unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* [Eph.4:13].

Therefore we must continue steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer [Acts 2:42]. Neglect of these vital things undermines and militates against edification. Neglect deconstructs and destroys the foundations upon which the church stands. It breaks down the walls of the church and the living stones begin falling apart. We must pray that we would be edified and work to ensure that we are faithful to the word of God.

The churches were walking in the fear of the Lord. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"* [Ps.111:10a]. The churches understood who God is: that He will not be mocked; that He is a consuming fire; that He is infinitely holy and perfect in all His ways.

They grasped that the one, true and living God had saved them for a purpose and that He would bring to fruition what He had started in them. *"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* [2 Cor.7:1]. The churches are walking in the ways of the Lord. It speaks of momentum and progress - the pilgrim's progress, growing in knowledge and grace as they humble and submit themselves to God. While we need to understand the mindset and ways of those to whom we are sent to proclaim the gospel, it is not more relevance we need in the church but more reverence.

The churches enjoyed the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus had promised to send the Comforter [John 14:16-17]. The Spirit indwells the church. He reveals Christ and unites us to Him. He illuminates His word and empowers and equips the church. We must pray that the Lord would fill us with the Holy Spirit; that we would be under His complete control and influence [Eph.5:18].

It is not signs and wonders that God's people ought to be seeking but more of the greatest

imaginable sign and wonder - His name is Jesus; He is the Christ, the only begotten Son of God our Lord and Saviour.

Finally we are told that the churches were multiplied. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. The church is to be fruitful and multiply. We must pray earnestly for this in our day when we appear to be

living through a famine of the hearing the words of the Lord [Amos 8:11]. However our priority is with God not the church. Nevertheless let us continue to be **A**lways **P**reaching **C**hrist that God would duly bless our labours to His glory.

Wayne Pearce

Reproving Brothers, in Love

ONE REASON MANY PROFESSING CHRISTIANS fall and few stand is that only a small remnant of saints are faithful enough to fill the office of reproving brothers. They prefer to tattle the problem to others - they bring disgrace rather than help. When we gossip, we forfeit all hopes of helping the involved person. It is hard to make a Christian believe you have come to heal his soul after you have already wounded his name.

A person who cannot face plain dealing and straightforwardness, hurts himself more than anyone else, for this reason - he seldom hears the truth. If you do not have enough humility to accept a rebuke you are 'a scorner' [Pro 9:8]. On the other hand, a man who does not have enough love to give a reproof in season to his brother is not worthy to be called a Christian and proves himself a 'hater of his brother' [Lev 19:17].

David said he would take as 'a kindness' for the 'righteous to smite' him [Psa 141:5]. He accepted reproof as if the brother had broken open a box of precious oil upon his head - a high expression of Jewish love. And his actions backed up his word. Indeed, both Abigail and Nathan knew Godspeed in their mission to reprove David. Abigail warned him about his treacherous intentions for his sin against Nabal and his family; and Nathan reproved him for his sin against Urriah. Whereas Abigail prevented the king from sinning by her reproof at the right time, Nathan forced him to come out of hiding and repent of the dismal murder he had already committed. And notice this - not only did these two saints prevail in their unpleasant errands but actually endeared themselves to David by being obedient to God and faithful to their friend. David took Abigail as his wife and Nathan as his private counsellor [1 Sam 25, 2 Sam12].

William Gurnall in modernised abridged version of
'The Christian in Complete Armour'

It Will be Better Higher Up!

IS THERE ANY place higher up? This a serious question deserving serious consideration. To what extent do you believe in existence after this life, and especially in heaven above?

If you have been to funerals, you might be excused for concluding that the life-story of many people who are no longer here, is a story of 'forget God here, and somehow be with God there'. It reminds me of the little boy in Sunday School, where the class were told the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. As you will remember, the Rich man went to hell. Lazarus was very poor in this life, but obviously he had saving faith in God, so when he died he went to heaven. The teacher then asked the children which of the two men, the Rich man or Lazarus, would they choose to be. One little boy answered, "I'd be the rich man here before I died, and then I'd be Lazarus after I died".

It is sad that so many people spend their lives neglecting God, but in a vague way expect to be in heaven when they die. There is something even more serious than that – if anything can be – and it is ministers who leave people with a false hope. What false preachers they are. This language would fail the Politically Correct test. I am reminded of the words of Lachlan MacKenzie, who said "The streets of Hell will be paved with the skulls of graceless ministers".

I cannot be faithful to God, if I do not preach about his love against the backdrop of sin and the death of Jesus and his resurrection. That is the central content of the gospel, and the sure foundation of a rich hope for the future. It gives substance to the expectation that things will be better higher up.

The experiences of this life are intended to prepare us for the eternal world. If we are materially well-off, we are to serve God with what he gives us and realise that the riches of God's company are better than silver and gold. If we are stretched to make ends meet in this life, we are to be amazed that the Lord who loves us here, loves us although we have nothing but need, and that He has in store for us in heaven treasures that will never fail.

It was an invalid woman in poor circumstances who used the expression I have taken as a title to this little piece. She lived in a small apartment, five stairs up. The whole scene was one of poverty, seen by all who cared to climb five stairs to visit here. Often their comment would be on the hard conditions in which she had to live. Invariably her response was, 'It will be better higher up'. Her right to say this was not because of her poverty, but rather because the Lord Jesus loved her and she loved and trusted in Him for forgiveness and for heaven. Can you say, 'It will be better higher up.?' *Calum MacInnes*

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