



**STORNOWAY**  
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO  
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS  
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

## May 2023 Newsletter



### WELCOME

### LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

### PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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## WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

As Christians, we believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God or, as Paul puts it, that ‘all scripture is given by inspiration of God’. I suppose it should be no surprise that this teaching comes under constant attack. After all, undermining God’s Word has been a priority for Satan from the very beginning – as seen in his temptation of Eve, which he began by asking her ‘Has God said?’ (Genesis 3: 1) However, in the face of these constant attacks, those of us who are trying to hold the fort need to know our ground in case we find ourselves wounded, however inadvertently, in the house of our friends.

This came to mind when reading a defence of inspiration entitled ‘The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives’, by Rev Andrew McGowan, a prominent Church of Scotland evangelical, previously principal of Highland Theological College and, more recently, minister of the well-known East Church in Inverness (Church of Scotland).

Although the title suggests that the book is about inspiration, it is really much more than that. It begins by suggesting that the doctrine of scripture should be relocated from the place it usually occupies within the theological system. Then, in discussing the qualities of scripture, it argues the case for adopting a new vocabulary to replace the traditional terminology – a terminology which the author considers inadequate and misleading – and proposes an alternative terminology. It then goes on to re-examine the connection between scripture and the church by discussing the relationship between scripture and creed. It does more too, but this brief review will focus only on these.

As far as the relocation of scripture within the theological system is concerned, his proposal is to shift the location of scripture from its primary place in theological discussion and to relocate it under the work of the Holy Spirit, as one aspect of God’s revelation of himself. In this way, instead of beginning with scripture, a better theological system would begin with God and, under the theme of God’s work through the Holy Spirit, the scriptures would then find their proper place for consideration.

McGowan recognises logical reasons for maintaining the status quo – going so far in his introduction as to say that ‘what we believe about the scriptures determines what we believe about everything else’ – (indeed!) – but he urges a strong theological reason for change, namely, the need to guard against the idea that God’s word is somehow prior to God himself and that it can function, as it were, on its own as a source of certainty apart from the work of God, the Holy Spirit. So, he believes, our theological system should begin with God and move on to scripture.

Now, when it is put like that, who would want to disagree? However, despite arguing his case well, it is hard to say that he succeeds.

First, although in one way it is indeed true to say that doctrine of scripture has the primary place in our current systems of theology – after all, the Westminster Confession of Faith opens with a chapter entitled ‘Of the Holy Scriptures’ – the matter is not as straightforward as that.

The Confession opens, in wonderful prose, by saying

‘Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased’.

A careful reading of this opening paragraph in the Confession reveals that it is not so much the doctrine of scripture, as such, which really lies at the forefront of our theology but the doctrine of revelation. And the Confession is anxious to teach that, although God reveals himself in nature, his primary revelation of himself

in nature, his primary revelation of himself is in the scriptures.

And, indeed, where else can we begin? After all, it is an axiom that we can know nothing of God unless he chooses to reveal himself. In other words, it is misleading to say that it is better to begin with God than to begin with scripture: The true way of stating the case is that in order to begin with God, we must begin with revelation – because we can only know God through revelation. And, therefore, we begin with both the light of nature and the Scriptures. For this reason alone, it is better to retain the doctrine of scripture at the forefront of our Standards, leading on then to the doctrine of God.

And, bearing in mind that later in the book, the writer goes on to suggest the need for a constant revision of creeds to ensure their ongoing relevance – it seems strange that he should advocate a shift of locus for scripture in the historical era in which the sufficiency, perspicuity (intelligibility) and authority of scripture is most challenged by those who claim a special revelation from the Holy Spirit (Charismatics).

Moving on, the author's emphasis on revelation as an 'encounter' between God and man; the distinction drawn between 'revelation' (as an 'event') on the one hand and the 'record of revelation' ('scripture') on the other; and the tendency, at least twice expressed, to put the preaching of the Word in the same category of revelation as the 'incarnation' of the Word (in the ministry of Christ) and the 'inscripturation' of the Word (in the Bible) – these are all, ultimately, damaging to a correct view of inspiration, for the following reasons:

To begin with, all revelation – even the most pictorial revelation of the Old Testament – is designed to be propositional. To rational thought, the lessons of symbols are always understood in propositional terms. There is really no need to draw any distinction between the prior revelation 'event' and the 'interpretive record' of it contained in the Bible – at least in terms of inspiration. The burning bush was a revelation (communicating propositional truth), and the record of the burning bush is also a revelation (communicating the same, and possibly additional, propositional truth).

Again, with respect to the preaching of the Word being the Word of God, it remains the case that, in the preaching, it is the word of God itself which is revelational – not, particularly, the preaching of it: Strictly in terms of revelation, it is as revelational to say 'you must be born again' in a conversation at the dinner table as it is to say it in a pulpit. On the other hand, to say 'I ate an apple last night' while preaching in the pulpit is no more revelational than it is to say so at home. The distinctiveness of preaching lies elsewhere – not in the precise words spoken alone. All in all, in spite of the fact that we can indeed, with important qualification, describe the preaching of the Word as the Word of God, it is better to limit the revelation of God's Word to incarnational and inscripturated forms – bearing in mind, of course, that what is written can also be spoken out loud. To equate proclamation, as we know and practice it, with the writing of scripture seems for more likely to lower the view of the written word rather than to exalt the view of the preached word.

As for the attempt to change the relevant terminology involved in discussing issues of inspiration, aside from the sheer difficulty in effecting a change (traditional nomenclature is notoriously stubborn in all academic disciplines) the case made for the new terminology is, with one exception, unsatisfactory. The exception is 'Spiration': The inadequacy of the term 'inspiration' has been long felt for the well-known reasons that it either conveys the entirely erroneous notion that the Word existed first, in a non-inspired state, and that God then added something to it or that the writers of the scripture were merely 'helped' by God as they issued their own material. However, the idea conveyed by the original Greek term is not the idea of God breathing into anything or anybody else but that of God breathing out the Word from himself. To capture this idea more effectively, the suggested alternative, 'Spiration', seems indeed to be a better alternative.

However, in his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit on the human soul, the author suggests substituting 'recognition' for 'illumination', in describing our mental perception of God's Word, and 'comprehension' for 'perspicuity' in describing the scriptures as being capable of comprehension.

In the first case, substituting 'recognition' for 'illumination', the author is rightly concerned that the term 'illumination' is being understood as though it is the Word itself that is being illuminated. This may well be so. In reality, of course, the Word requires no illumination – only the human mind, existing in darkness, requires it. However, by using the word 'recognition' there is an unmistakable move from the Divine

agency to the human response to that agency. Is that really an improvement?

However, in proposing the substitution of 'perspicuity' with 'comprehension' is the author not aware that he has substituted a quality in the reader's mind for a quality belonging to the Bible? The 'perspicuity of the Bible is a statement about its objective nature as God has written it – not about the subjective state of the mind approaching it. The real substitution should be with something like 'comprehensibility'.

Least satisfactory of all is the rejection of 'inerrancy' in favour of 'infallibility' as the favoured term to convey the trustworthiness of the Bible. It is hard to see, precisely, what the author is trying to gain by this substitution. 'Infallibility' is the traditional term used to designate the reliability of the Bible and conveys the truth that the Bible does not deceive, because it is written by the God who cannot lie. It is an infallible source of truth. How can this attribute not be related to the other attribute at issue – that of inerrancy? After all, it is a fair question to ask of the Bible, which claims to be the word of the God who cannot lie, 'does it always tell us the truth, or does it sometimes contain error'? And if it does not always tell us the truth, how can it be infallible? The inerrancy of the Word is inherently bound up with its infallibility. And if infallibility cannot be retained without inerrancy, why would you substitute one with the other?

After many assurances from the writer that we can rest in knowing that we have just the kind of Bible God wanted us to have – which sounds good but side-steps the issue – the question still remains: is it true? The author is uncomfortable with the question and wishes it would not be put in those terms, or that it would go away, but it is hard to see why it should.

Part of his difficulty seems to lie in the fact that, for him, the concept of inerrancy can't be squared with the loss of the autographs (the original documents written by the prophets and the Apostles) and the resultant diversity of text in the various manuscripts of the Bible now in existence, no two of which are exactly identical. However, bearing in mind that, even if we adopt the conclusions of the most severe textual critic, the vast bulk of the Bible remains undisputed as to verbal content (i.e. we have the exact words) and that, further, the dispute over most of what remains does not affect the basic unit of meaning (which is the clause, or sentence, and not the isolated word) then do we not have warrant to say that our manuscripts are inerrant? That is, that they teach the truth and not lies?

However, it seems that the writer is unwilling to grant necessary inerrancy even to the autographs themselves – on the ground, it appears, that to do so would jeopardise the reality of the full humanity of the authors being involved in the process, reducing them to the level of machines. And here, the usual red herrings and straw men make their customary appearances, as they always do in discussions of this kind, as we are warned of the danger of the mechanistic notions of inspiration which seem to lurk on every corner when evangelical views of inerrancy are discussed.

But, in point of fact, it is rare indeed to meet a believer in inerrancy who holds to a mechanical theory of inspiration (i.e., the theory that the apostles and prophets were simply dictated to) – I, for one, have never met one. In any case, the true doctrine of inerrancy, although sublime in contemplation, is marvellously straightforward, and it is this: the only true and living God, who cannot lie, used the full and free processes of the human mind as the means through which he delivered and recorded his message precisely as he intended it to be delivered. We are at a loss to discover where the problem with this lies. Inherent in the doctrine of inspiration is a glorious wonder, not an insoluble problem.

On further reflection, it is sometimes difficult to avoid the conclusion that the writer does not hold to inerrancy himself. He just finds it difficult to say so.

## NEWS & EVENTS

### ORDINATION IN THE GAMBIA

On May 13th at 5pm, God willing, Sylvester Konteh will be ordained by a commission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. We look forward to welcoming Rev Stephen McCollum (Airdrie RP Church) and Rev Peter Loughridge (North Edinburgh RP Church) to Gambia.

At this service the congregation will be constituted as **Brikama Reformed Presbyterian Church** and those joining the church will take the membership vows of the denomination.

We are delighted at how God has brought us to this point and pray for His continued blessing on the congregation and that He would bless the whole of the Gambia with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the end that the Gambia would recognise the authority of King Jesus.



### JAPAN PRESBYTERY

Rev. Sumito Sakai of Higashisuma RPC in Kobe, Japan, has just returned home from a teaching ministry in South Korea (where there is no RP church).

The main tasks have been:

- (1) to lecture on the significance of Presbyterianism today at a seminar for pastors.
- (2) to preach at a local church where our Japanese Psalter had been translated, if in part, into the Korean language.

with the aim to share our Japanese RP's theological heritage and assets with those even outside Japan.



*Rev. Sumito Sakai (left)*

## FREEDOM IN CHRIST



The psalmist declared, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). Why would anyone love the law of God? Why would we love that which constantly tells us what miserable wretches we are, daily points out all our shortcomings, relentlessly reminds us of all our death-deserving sins, and keeps knocking us down to our knees, leaving us crying out for help?

The truth of the matter is that not just anyone loves the law of God but only those who have been set free by our law-giving, law-keeping, and law-liberating Saviour. We love the law of God not because we possess some sort of inherent self-inflicting, self-deprecating sadistic disposition toward ourselves, but because, in His electing grace, God set His glorious and enduring love upon us, laid His eternal claim upon us, took hold of us and clutches us in the palm of His strong and steadfast hand, and made us His dutiful bondslaves that we might be free to delight in His law in our inner being (Rom. 7:22–25) and strive to observe all the commands of Christ (Matt. 28:20), who by no means abolished the Law but fulfilled it perfectly in our behalf (Matt. 5:17). His death is our life. His fulfilment is our freedom. His duty is our delight.

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Our abundant life of freedom in Christ is not a freedom to do anything we want to do but to have the uninterrupted, Spirit-sustaining power to do what we know we ought to do as the Holy Spirit changes our wants and daily makes all of our God-given duties delightful as we rest in the finished work of Christ (Rom. 8:3–4).

The Holy Spirit sovereignly uses the law in several ways—to teach us about our Creator, to give us a glimpse of His righteousness, holiness, and justice, to restrain sin, to give us a glimpse of the heinous nature of our sin, to drive us to our knees in liberating repentance, to prompt us to cry out daily for help, to guide us in our lives as we strive to die more and more unto sin and live unto righteousness (WSC 35), and to encourage us to lift our eyes to Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, who alone is our righteousness, who alone fulfilled the law perfectly, in whom we rest by faith, and faith alone, and to whom we are eternally united because the Father has declared us righteous on account of the substitutionary righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to us, and our sin imputed to Him, fully and finally.

EVERYONE, ALMOST, CAN BE THANKFUL IN  
PROSPERITY, BUT A TRUE SAINT CAN BE  
THANKFUL IN ADVERSITY.

*Thomas Watson*



THE DEEPEST SPIRITUAL LESSONS ARE  
NOT LEARNED BY HIS LETTING US HAVE OUR  
WAY IN THE END, BUT BY HIS MAKING US WAIT,  
BEARING WITH US IN LOVE AND PATIENCE  
UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO HONESTLY PRAY WHAT  
HE TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY:  
THY WILL BE DONE.

*Elisabeth Elliot*



# Children's Corner



At our prayer meeting recently, a missionary told a little about his work for the Lord in Europe. At the meeting, we had a special collection so we could give money to help him. I've been reading about a missionary. He was called Hudson Taylor, and I'd like to share with you one of the first lessons he learned before leaving England to go to China many years ago.

After Hudson became a Christian, he knew that God wanted him to go to China. And he knew he would have to prepare for it because he was going on his own and he didn't know anybody there. Only God could really help him – but that made him wonder if his faith in God was strong enough. And the more he thought about that, the more he realised he needed to pray more than he had done before.

So, Hudson left his comfortable family home and went to work in a poor part of England. One day, Hudson's boss forgot to pay Hudson – and he was nearly out of money! Now, that was a real test for Hudson. And since he knew that he would have no-one to help him in China, he decided to ask God to provide him with the money that he needed.

But when he only had one coin left, Hudson met a very poor man who begged Hudson to come and pray with his wife who seemed to be dying. The poor man had no money at all and when Hudson got to the man's house, he saw a very thin and sick woman lying on a straw mattress with a new-born baby beside her. Around her were four or five very hungry children in poor clothes and with no socks or shoes. Can you imagine that? We have so much food and clothing! Hudson remembered the coin in his pocket and wished he could give something to these poor people – but he needed the coin himself. Anyway, he decided he would tell these poor people about God.

He began by telling them that things would get better if they trusted God but, as he spoke, a strange thing happened to Hudson. He found it really difficult to speak! He started to feel that he wasn't trusting God himself! 'Here I am telling these people to trust God – if I really trusted God myself, I would give my last coin to this family and trust Him to look after me!'

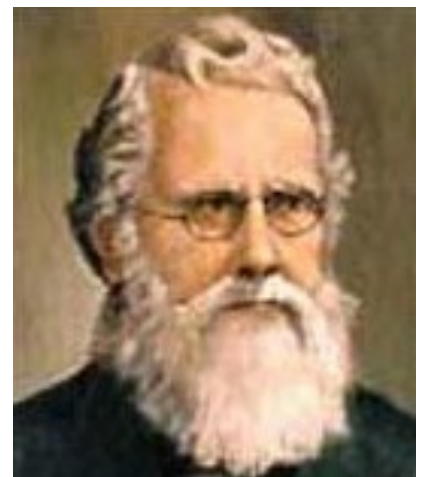
He then tried to pray kneeling on the bare floorboards, but he still felt miserable. After he finished praying, the poor man begged him to help them. Hudson remembered the words of Jesus, 'Give to him who asks of you' (Matthew 5: 42) and, slowly, he put his hand in his pocket and gave the man his last coin!

All of a sudden, Hudson felt very different, and he headed home singing at the top of voice, without a penny and without a care in the world! As he sat down to eat his bowl of porridge (he only had enough porridge for one more bowl) he remembered a verse from the Bible: 'he that has pity on the poor lends to the Lord and He will pay back what he has given him' (Proverbs 19: 17). That verse made him realise that by giving money to the poor, he had really loaned it to God! So, when he prayed that night, he asked that God would kindly repay the loan very quickly or he would have no dinner the following day!

Amazingly, the following morning as he ate his last bowl of porridge the postman tapped the door and delivered a small package. Inside was a pair of children's gloves. As he lifted the gloves something shiny fell out. It was a golden half-sovereign – which was worth four times more than the coin he had! Hudson searched the package to see who sent it, but there was no name or address. But Hudson didn't care - as far as he was concerned it came straight from Heaven!

Hudson also realised that God had given him back the value of his coin plus three extra ones! By putting the money into God's bank for 12 hours, he got four times as much back! 'This is the bank for me' he decided!

Always remember that God rewards our faith in Him! But Hudson still needed his wage, and he needed more faith to wait for God's answer to his prayer for it. We will find out how God finally did this in our next newsletter...



*Hudson Taylor*

With my love and prayers,

Mrs S