



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

September 2023 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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CONTACT DETAILS

Stornoway RPCS
Bridge Community Centre
Bayhead Embankment
Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,
Scotland, HS1 2EB

www.stornowayrpcs.org

info@stornowayrpcs.org

Scottish Charity No: SC043043

Minister—Rev Kenneth Stewart, stewart_k@sky.com

WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

John G Paton, the 19th century missionary to Vanuatu (formerly, the New Hebrides) in the South Pacific, is almost certainly the best-known missionary in the history of the Scottish RP church – and deservedly so.

The difficulties he, and his wife Mary, faced were enormous as their lives were almost constantly under threat from the local population who were cannibals. However, he famously testified that ‘It is the sober truth that I had my nearest and most intimate glimpses of the presence of my Lord in those dark moments when musket, club or spear was being levelled at my life’.

Also, not too long after their arrival, and in what must have been a most severe trial of faith, Mary died just a few days after giving birth to their son, Peter – who, tragically, followed her to the grave at a little over a month old. It is hard to imagine the grief, as well as the anxious thoughts and the prayers of the young missionary as he spent successive nights sleeping on their grave to protect their bodies from the cannibals. He later testified that ‘without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my Lord and Saviour, nothing in the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably’.

These tests and triumphs of faith (he was later to see great blessing) deserve their own separate treatment but, in what is a challenging biography, it remains quite remarkable that the passage that has endured most and, arguably, still makes the greatest emotional and spiritual impact, is the one where Paton speaks of his relationship with his godly father, a passage which John Piper described as worth the price of the autobiography on its own. Indeed, in a day when strong and spiritual fatherhood is harder to find, the passage is priceless and, even with familiarity, it never loses its power.

And when we pray, as we do, for the power of the gospel to return in such a way as to ‘turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers’ (Malachi 4:6 and Luke 1:17) it is good to have before us such a powerful example of what that means.

After each meal in the Paton household – containing eleven children in a ‘Butt and Ben’ with a small closet – his father would go to the little closet for prayer. His voice in prayer could sometimes be heard and all the children revered where their father prayed. John wrote:

‘Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, were blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, ‘He walked with God, why may not I?’

His prayers at the family altar left the same impression:

‘How much my father's prayers at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Saviour and learned to know and love him as our Divine friend.’

In John's early twenties, when the time came for John go to Glasgow to attend divinity school and to become a city missionary, he had to take a 40 mile walk from his home to Kilmarnock to get the Glasgow train. It is in John's account of this journey that the depth and power of their loving spiritual relationship in the Lord, as father and son, came through. Long after his father's death, he wrote:

'My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene.

For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence...his lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil!'

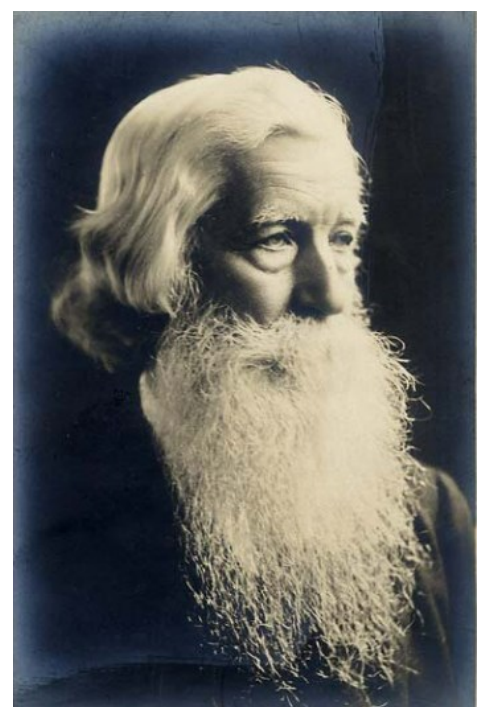
Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him - gazing after me. Waving my hat in adieu, I rounded the corner and out of sight in instant.

But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dike and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return - his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonour such a father and mother as he had given me.'

The appearance of my father when we parted has often through life risen vividly before my mind and does so now as if it had been but an hour ago. In my earlier years particularly, when exposed to many temptations, his parting form rose before me as that of a guardian Angel. It is no pharisaism, but deep gratitude, which makes me here testify that the memory of that scene not only helped to keep me pure from the prevailing sins, but also stimulated me in all my studies, that I might not fall short of his hopes, and in all my Christian duties, that I might faithfully follow his shining example.'

Such events and words require no further comment. If we had such fathers, we were blessed to have them. And if we have not been such fathers ourselves, it is not too late to begin. And that beginning must begin where all spiritual beginnings begin – in the closet.

Your minister



Rev John G Paton

NEWS & EVENTS

CHURCH PLANT IN CHILE

The following photos are from the recent organisation of the first ever Spanish speaking congregation of the RP Church, which is in Chile, South America.

The meeting place is in Rev. Marcelo Sánchez's back garden. They already need to expand as they have grown a lot.



AN UNLIKELY CONVERT

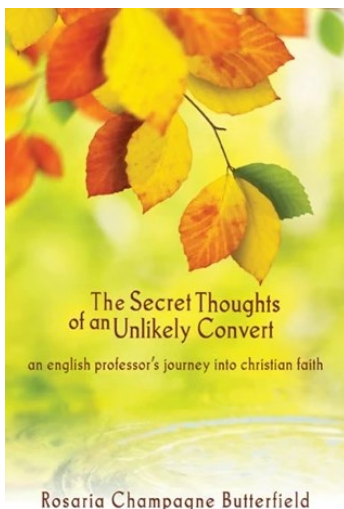
In a recent fellowship, some of us spoke of the author Rosaria Butterfield. She was a leftist professor in a lesbian relationship, who came to Christ and is now a confessional Christian. She is married to Rev Kent Butterfield, an RP minister in Durham, North Carolina.

Rosaria is here pictured with the retired minister, Rev. Ken Smith, whom she recently visited. He first reached out to her when she was a professor at Syracuse University. Ken and his wife had opened their home to her and shared the good news of Christ over a couple of years. Since her conversion, they have become dear friends.

You can read more in her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. This ought to be an encouragement to us to reach out with the Gospel, even to those whom we might never expect to come to Christ.



Rev Ken Smith & Rosaria Butterfield



THE HOLY SPIRIT RESISTED

As I was riding through a village, in which I was almost a stranger, I saw a number of young people entering a schoolhouse. The clergyman of the place was standing by the door. He beckoned to me to stop. He told me he had appointed a meeting for inquiry, and was surprised to find so many assembling. He wished me to go in, and have some conversation with those who were there. I asked to be excused, as I was on my way to fulfil an engagement, where I must be punctually at the time. He would not excuse me, I must stop, if 'only for five minutes.' He conducted me into a room, where were fifteen young women. 'Say something,' said he, 'to every one of them.' I did, though I was not in the room ten minutes. At the same time, he was conversing with some young men in another apartment. As I passed from one to another, in this rapid conversation, I came to a young lady about twenty years of age, whose countenance indicated great agitation of feeling. Said I, 'Do you feel that you are a sinner, unreconciled to God?'

'Yes, I do; I am a lost sinner!'

'Can you save yourself?'

'None but Christ can save me!'

'Why, then, don't you come to him? He is willing to save you; he loves to save sinners like you.'

'Indeed I do not know! My heart is hard and wicked; and I am afraid I never shall be saved!'

She burst into tears, which she seemed anxious to suppress, and buried her face in her handkerchief. 'How long have you been in such deep trouble of mind?' 'For three weeks,' said she, sobbing aloud. 'Then, for three weeks you have done nothing but resist the Holy Spirit!' I left her and passed to the next individual. In a few minutes I left the room, and went on my way.

The next week, as I was riding in a carriage alone, a few miles from the same village, I saw before me a young gentleman and a young lady in a carriage, riding in an opposite direction, and I was just meeting them. She appeared to be trying to induce him to stop, and he did not seem to understand what she wanted. She finally took hold of the reins herself, stopped the horse, and motioning to me, I reined up also; and we sat in our carriages, face to face, and close together.

'That was true—that was true, sir,' said she.

'What was true?' said I. For I did not know who she was, though I recognized her face as one that I had seen.

'What you told me at the inquiry meeting that morning, that I had done nothing for three weeks but resist the Holy Spirit. That expression pierced my very heart. I did not believe it. I thought I was yielding to the Holy Spirit, because I was anxious and had begun to seek the Lord; and I thought you was most cruel to speak to me so. I did not believe you, but I could not get the idea out of my mind. It clung to me night and day, 'For three weeks you have done nothing but resist the Holy Spirit.' That expression opened my eyes. And I could not let you pass us here, without stopping to tell you how much I thank you for it. She said this very rapidly, her eyes swimming with tears, and her countenance beaming with joy. Her whole heart seemed to be embarked in what she was saying. By this time I fully recognized her, and recollected my former hurried interview with her. For a few minutes I conversed with her, as we sat in our carriages. She hoped that God had given her a new heart. She was at peace not only, but full of joy. 'Oh, I am happy,' said she, 'I am so happy. You opened my eyes. You told me just the truth. I thought you was a cruel man. I wanted you to explain yourself, but you would not stop to hear me. As I reflected on what you said, I hated you with all my heart. But the words would come up, 'For three weeks you have done nothing but resist the Holy Spirit.' It seems to me now, that if you had said anything else, or made any explanation as I wanted you to, I should not have been led to Christ. I can never thank you enough for the words which showed me my very heart.' I have not seen her since. I learned that a few weeks afterwards she made a public profession of religion. Her pastor told me that he esteemed her highly, as one of the most intelligent and accomplished of his flock. She belonged to a very excellent family. She possessed a discriminating mind; and did she err in thinking that for three weeks she had done nothing but resist the Holy Spirit?

A VOICE FOR TRUTH IN KIRK AND NATION: REMEMBERING KENNETH MACRAE

The Rev Kenneth A MacRae (1883-1964) exercised a powerful ministry over 50 years in the Free Church of Scotland and his memory lives on in the monumental work, *Diary of Kenneth A MacRae*, edited with additional material by Iain Murray.* He made a lasting impression on my early Christian life. I had correspondence with him and then entered into personal contact. I would like to highlight the significance of his testimony.

A COMMANDING FIGURE

Physically he was a striking figure of a man. There was the strong influence of the military background in which he was reared. He had a fine upright bearing and a brisk step. There was the same disciplined and methodical approach to his work and ministry. This combined with his physical tenacity enabled him to undertake a prodigious amount of work throughout his life. Likewise in church life and in national life he had a commanding voice.

A GODLY MAN

Many things could be said about him as a Christian. His subsequent life was shaped by that conversion experience which he records: 'I hereby put on record that since the Lord in his sovereign mercy entered my heart on the lonely summit of Bell's Hill in the Pentlands on that memorable afternoon – 9th August 1909 – I have ever sought to serve Him as my only Lord'. Finding no food for his new-born spiritual life in the Church his parents attended in Edinburgh, he searched and found a satisfying ministry in Free St Columba's, where the Rev Donald MacLean was the pastor. Soon after his conversion he tasted something of the old Highland piety in the childhood haunts of his native Ross-shire and he carried with him to the end of his days an ideal that he kept pursuing.

A SOUL WINNER

He was first and foremost a preacher and a pastor. He loved to preach Christ and him crucified. He wrote: 'I must not lose sight of the preacher's golden rule, "Never preach a sermon which has not sufficient in it – used of the Spirit – to lead a soul to Christ".' And he was used by God to lead many souls to the Saviour. In one place he gives figures of those brought to Christ under his preaching. He expected conversions. He was a diligent pastor. Typical entries in his diary include: 'Spent a most enjoyable day in Totscore. Gave a brief exhortation in every house upon a text which I judged to be suitable to the state of each family, and thus was able to bring the truth to twenty-three individuals capable of comprehending it, nine of whom either cannot or will not go out (to the church) to hear it'.

A CHAMPION FOR TRUTH

I think we are especially indebted to him as a champion for the cause of Christ in the midst of a deteriorating spiritual situation in the Church in Scotland. Having experienced the soul-destroying nature of theological liberalism and the subtle danger of the new school of Victorian evangelism, he was wholly committed to full-orbed Calvinism all his days. He was ministering in the midst of a drift from the old ways and no man understood the nature of the declension better than Rev MacRae. He felt that the distinctive Reformed testimony of the Free Church was being compromised by a weakening of principles. He had the discernment to see when some of his colleagues were supporting outside movements that would be harmful to the testimony of his Church.

In this connection he had a great concern to instruct the rising generation in these principles. As early as 1936, at the request of the Public Questions Committee and sanctioned by the General Assembly, he undertook a three month itinerary 'with a view to seeking to persuade the young people of the Church to a greater interest in and zeal for the message and testimony which has been given the Free Church to declare'. He prepared a sheet 'What the Free Church Stands For' which was given out at the close of each

meeting. The account of the tour in the Diary is most revealing. It highlighted a great need for such instruction, especially in congregations south of the Highland line.

Sadly the situation did not improve and in later years Mr MacRae had to fight some battles in the courts of the Church. Things came to a head in the 1950s. A booklet which he wrote on his voyage to Australia in 1953 was published under the title, *The Resurgence of Arminianism*, in 1954, coinciding with the time of the Greater London Crusade of Dr Billy Graham. The General Assembly of the Free Church in May 1954 had indicated public approval of the Crusade. Mr MacRae in a letter published in *The Monthly Record* in September 1954 gave 'another point of view' and felt that the approval was 'a betrayal of our testimony.' Coming to the 1955 General Assembly with an Overture from his Synod to deal with the matter in hand he faced some bitter opposition and the motion was defeated by 53 votes to 37. It was a watershed in the history of the Church. He recorded in his Diary: 'It was a sad Assembly, which chilled my heart and filled me with apprehension as to the future'.

A VOICE IN THE NATION

If we assess the situation carefully we will discover that Mr MacRae was probably the last preacher of the Word who made a lasting impact on the nation. He was a firm believer in the church's duty to call statesmen (the magistrate) to account with regard to the laws of God. He regularly instructed his own people about the threats that were arising in the nation, and he was so highly respected that he could carry many in the community with him in opposition to encroachments on the Sabbath. He used the correspondence columns of the newspapers to great effect. A tribute in the local paper after his passing said: 'Probably no man in his day has done more by word and by pen and appropriate action to keep the moral and spiritual tone of the island at a high level'.

Mr MacRae was thrilled to discover in the late 1950s a resurgence of interest in the Reformed Faith, manifested by the reprinting of old classics on both sides of the Atlantic. In his eightieth year he travelled to London to conduct services in the Free Church congregation there and to go on to the city of Leicester to speak at the first Banner of Truth Trust Ministers' Conference when he shared a platform with fellow stalwarts in the faith, Professor John Murray and the Rev W J Grier, Belfast. Back in Stornoway he reported that he had seen in England 'a little cloud like a man's hand'. He concluded: 'Worm Jacob may yet thresh the mountains.'

When he died in Stornoway in May 1964 the crowd wishing to attend his funeral was so enormous that two separate services had simultaneously to be held, one in the main Church building and the other in the Seminary in Francis Street, both packed to capacity. The press reported that at least a thousand men took part in the procession. 'Hundreds of women lined the streets many of them weeping'.

May God raise up men like him in our day!

Rev John J Murray, Banner of Truth

When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles, when he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs, when he stops praying, the devil jumps for joy (Corrie Ten Boom)

Lowliness of mind will never give offence. Meekness will never take offence (Author Unknown)

Contributed by Bill Lucas

Children's Corner



Dear Children,

I'm sure you've noticed that God's world is so full of amazing creatures. And when we look at them very closely, they all seem to have something special to teach us.

Do you think that maybe God meant it that way? I think he did! He deliberately made the natural world to teach us spiritual lessons.

One of God's amazing creatures is a fish that you've probably never seen because it's only found around South America. It's a strange-looking fish with a strange-sounding name – it's called the 'four-eyed' fish.

I've included a close-up picture of its head as it swims in the water – and I'm sure you can see four eyes? Well, maybe *you think* you see four eyes because, in fact, although *it looks like* it's got four eyes, and although *it's called* the 'four-eyed' fish, *it really only has two eyes!*

But these two eyes are two very special eyes: they are both divided into a top part and a bottom part. And here's the amazing bit...

When this fish swims through the water, half of both its eyes are above the waterline and half below (have another look at the picture!) – which means that it can see above the water and below the water at the same time! Isn't that amazing?

Our minister was telling us recently that we should try to keep our thoughts on heavenly things even when we're living on earth – so that even if we are busy living our day-to-day lives at home, at school or at play, we should still be thinking about our *heavenly Saviour* and our *heavenly Father* and our *heavenly home*.

Now maybe it's hard for us to think of how we can do that – but perhaps the fish shows us how!

May God help you to look up while you're looking around!

With all my love and prayers,

Mrs S

