

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbct-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php)

## EDITORIAL

This year marks at least two bicentenaries significant for Christianity in Scotland: one has been widely noted and celebrated, the other has passed with hardly a second glance.

David Livingstone, born on Friday 19 March 1813 in Blantyre by the Clyde, was again in the headlines this Spring. There were a number of points during the celebratory events where Livingstone's faith and Christian aspirations were muted—but no surprise there, really. Although longer articles on his life and legacy in the popular press could not wholly neglect his missionary endeavours, this aspect of his life certainly was not given prominence. The set of ten commemorative stamps released by the Royal Mail managed it, at any rate, with scenes of his life that celebrated exclusively his pioneering achievements. One would have no idea that Livingstone's African adventures arose not only out of the insatiable curiosity of the explorer, but from the convictions of a committed Christian.

Perhaps I am particularly sensitized to this dynamic. The reason I bear the name 'David' is because my father had a deep, even passionate connection with Livingstone. I well remember, back in my student days, standing at my father's side in Westminster Abbey. As he read the words, 'Brought by faithful hands over land and sea here rests David Livingstone, missionary...', the tears rolled down his cheeks, his spontaneous outpouring of emotion completely unselfconscious. Whatever might account for this sense of bonding my father—a Mennonite immigrant child of the Canadian prairies—had with the Victorian missionary, a large part must have been his perception (blissfully uninformed by 'critical' biography) of Livingstone as an exemplar of unreserved devotion to the cause of Christ.

Such sentiment is naturally difficult to find in serious studies of Livingstone's life. It is not that his Christianity is absent, so much as the scientific, geographical, and commercial interests which shaped much of his illustrious career dwarf attention to his faith. More than this, according to less sympathetic assessments, Livingstone's capitalist ideals—which held, as he thought, the key to the betterment not only of the Africa he knew so intimately, but of human society more broadly—proved caustic to his missionary activity. Infamously, Livingstone's evangelistic efforts resulted in a single convert, Sachele, 'a chief, who promptly got an ex-wife pregnant'<sup>1</sup> Livingstone himself doubted that he had made any converts at all.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim Jeal, 'Dr. Livingstone, I Presume? The Victorian Explorer at 200', *The Daily Beast* (= Newsweek Online), 19 March 2013 <<http://j.mp/Explorer200>>.

An older assessment offers greater insight into Livingstone's faith. Mistakenly or otherwise, Livingstone was convinced that commerce would prove a vehicle for the advance of the gospel, and so he wrote from Africa to his family in July of 1850:

If He in whose hand are the silver and gold only turns the tide that way, the enlightenment of the world will not be the work of missionaries: nor is it so very distant as a poor fellow like myself, enveloped in the thick darkness of heathenism and seeing so little progress made, is sometimes correspondingly disposed to think. Then let us pray that come it may, and come it will for a' that, when man and man the world o'er shall brithers be for a' that.<sup>2</sup>

While commemoration of Livingstone's birth drew national attention and a visit from a head of state, the 'other' bicentenary summoned no such grand occasions.

Nine weeks after Livingstone's birth, on Friday 21 May 1813 in Edinburgh, Robert Murray M'Cheyne was born. At least one superficial parallel exists between the two, beyond the proximity of their birthdays: a 'missionary spirit'. Livingstone remains one of the most famous missionaries of all. But M'Cheyne, the parish minister, felt this tug on his life, influenced in particular by David Brainerd's biography and Alexander Duff's words. As late as 1836, already at Larbert, he was willing to offer himself as a missionary to India. It was the same spirit, now under the conviction that God's chosen people continued to hold their place of significance before God, that impelled him to participate in the Mission of Inquiry to Palestine in 1839, despite ill-health and the responsibilities of his Dundee parish.

It is the contrasts, however, between the famous missionary-explorer and M'Cheyne that are more numerous and obvious. So, for example, they came from different social classes; belonged to different churches (Congregational; Church of Scotland) with all that entailed; had different domestic situations (married with children; bachelor); and contributed to strikingly different spheres of service and influence. At death, Livingstone's span of days doubled M'Cheyne's who died in 1843, less than eight weeks before the Disruption. He did not even manage to read once through the annual diary of Bible readings that continues in such widespread use today. He composed it for New Year, 1843, so that his 'flock'

---

Jeal's characteristic and critical hyperbole can be observed even in these few words.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by George Shepperson, 'David Livingstone 1813-1873: A Centenary Assessment', *The Geographical Journal*, 139/2 (1973), 205-19 (quotation from p. 210).

might all ‘be feeding in the same portion of the green pasture at the same time’.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, while Livingstone acquired the reputation for participating in fractious relationships, M’Cheyne’s friendships seem to have been warm and deep. Bonar describes how M’Cheyne ‘used to warn his friends of whatever he apprehended they were in danger from’. Among the examples given is this one, in which M’Cheyne writes to a brother ‘who had written to him despondingly about his people and the times’.<sup>4</sup> His reply has an almost poetic—perhaps prophetic—quality:

I am sure there never was a time when the Spirit of God was more present in Scotland, and it does not become you to murmur in your tents, but rather to give thanks. Remember, we may grieve the Spirit as truly by not joyfully acknowledging His wonders as by not praying for Him. There is the clearest evidence that God is saving souls in Kilsyth, Dundee, Perth, Collace, Blairgowrie, Strathbogie, Ross-shire, Breadalbane, Kelso, Jedburgh, Ancrum; and surely it becomes us to say, ‘I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.’ Forgive my presumption; but I fear lest you hurt your own peace and usefulness in not praising God enough for the operation of His hands.

At a moment when some grumbling among churches in Scotland—evangelical ones, at any rate—might be viewed with some sympathy, M’Cheyne’s more kingdom-orientated perspective is worth bearing in mind.

Meanwhile, between them Livingstone and M’Cheyne encourage us in different ways to ensure that both near and distant horizons stay in view, and to bear in mind that God is always doing more than we might think he is.

\* \* \*

Sharp-eyed readers will note that the cover livery and design has changed from the ‘new-millennium blue’ format that adorned *SBET* from 2000–2012. (Those with especially long memories will note a number of resonances between this new design, and the one that was in use up to 1999.) This marks our new publishing relationship with Highland Theological College (UHI) which begins from this number. We remain grateful to friends at Rutherford House for many years of fruitful collaboration, as

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (rev. edn; Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1892), p. 619.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

we look forward now to this new partnership with HTC with eager anticipation. A dedicated email address is available at HTC for those who wish to get in touch regarding subscriptions and related matters: [sbet.htc@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:sbet.htc@uhi.ac.uk).

*David Reimer*

CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS NUMBER

*The first four articles originated as SETS 2012 Conference papers. The theme of the conference was 'A Godly Commonwealth? The Gospel and Scottish Identity'.*

Dr Dewi Hughes is Theological Advisor for Tearfund

Revd Professor David Fergusson is Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, and Principal of New College, Edinburgh

Revd Dr Doug Gay is Lecturer in the School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow, and Principal of Trinity College, Glasgow

Revd Dr Angus Morrison is Minister of Orwell and Portmoak Parish Church of Scotland

Russell Meek is Adjunct Instructor and PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Dr K. Scott Oliphint is Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary