

Prayer of the Month, May 2012

Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Lighten, if it be thy will, the pressures of this world's cares. Above all, reconcile us to thy will, and give us a peace which the world cannot take away; through Christ our Lord.

Thomas Chalmers, 1780–1847

Wisdom is an undervalued quality. We tend to value conviction and ambition, but not so much this reflective quality that gives us perspective and orientation. How can we acquire wisdom without a sense of our own life-journey, our mortality? 'Teach us to number our days' is a plea for the wisdom that comes from on high – only if it comes from God can we have a true perspective on our own lives. Our understanding and will are often at variance with God's, intentionally or unintentionally. This prayer expresses the explicit desire to live according to God's will. Only by being in his will shall we know the peace that surpasses our own understanding.

Thomas Chalmers was born in Anstruther, Scotland, on 17 March 1847. From an early age he devoted himself to mathematics, studying at St Andrews and Edinburgh universities. He was also interested in theology and the church and was licensed as a preacher in the Church of Scotland. In 1815 he became minister of Tron Church, Glasgow, despite some opposition to his appointment. However, before long he gained a reputation throughout the country as a preacher – his 1817 collection of sermons on the relation between discoveries in astronomy and the Christian faith went through nine editions and sold 20,000 copies. In 1819 he became minister at St John's, Glasgow, where he applied himself to providing schools for children, and alleviating poverty. Before long over forty schools had been established, attended by over 1,000 children. In 1823 Chalmers became professor of moral philosophy at St Andrews, and in 1828 of theology at Edinburgh. By 1841 he found himself at the head of a factio over church appointments, in a movement asserting that no minister should be appointed to a parish against the wishes of the congregation. In 1843, Chalmers, along with 470 other clergyman, left the Established Church over this issue, and founded the Free Church of Scotland, and in the same year Chalmers became principal and professor of divinity at New College, Edinburgh. He wrote about a large range of issues, theological, moral, social and economic – his published works fill more than thirty volumes. He died on 31 May 1847.



Colin Lunt