

# THE MONTHLY RECORD

April 2009

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## MESSIAH OR ANTI-CHRIST?

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**Front Cover** - Barack Obama speaking at a Campaign Rally  
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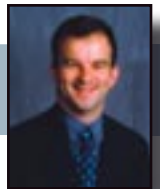
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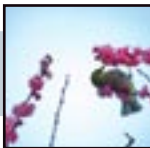
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**READ, ENJOY AND RESPOND!**

# A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT – THE AUDACITY OF HOPE

## DEAR PRESIDENT OBAMA,

Greetings from Scotland and congratulations on your momentous accession to the presidency of the United States. Forgive us writing you in such a public manner, but as, at the time of writing, another Scotsman is in the US urging you to lead/save the world, and as you are likely to be a significant figure for all of us for many years, we thought it might be worthwhile reflecting on where we are and where we might be going. By the way, thanks for treating our countryman with respect and calling him 'Mr Prime Minister', and apologies for his 'Barack'ing you. Perhaps this over familiarity was because he wanted to do the 'George/Tony' thing and appear on first name terms with the President, or maybe it's just that you can take the boy out of Kirkcaldy but you can't take Kirkcaldy out of the boy!

You are a very unusual politician – not just because you are the first black President of the US (welcome and astounding as that is – I seriously doubt that it would happen in Britain), but also because we do not have to rely on the spin, political rhetoric or the misrepresentations of your foes in order to understand what you think or believe. You have written two books, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, which clearly tell us of your background, development, religion and beliefs. And unlike so many political memoirs, they are not ghost-written, retrospective, banal or boring. In fact, I have to say that I have greatly enjoyed reading both of them – finding them moving, stimulating and in many ways inspirational. You are an excellent writer and manage to convey who you are in a clear, succinct and non-patronising way. We love it. They have both been bestsellers here in the UK in a way that none of our own politicians could ever expect.

These books are important because they reflect who you are and what you would like to do. And as President of the United States, that will have an impact on us all. As we read them we also realise that you deal with the most important issues in life, issues that are vital to us all, and issues which the Bible has a great deal to say about. So perhaps you will forgive us if we engage with what you say, and use the opportunities you provide to reflect upon our own audacity of hope.

When you came into our view a couple of years ago as the young, dynamic Senator from Illinois, we did wonder if this would be another short-lived American celebratory politician. But astonishingly, you managed to defeat the formidable Clinton political machine, overcome racial prejudice (and of course benefit from it as well), and the rest, as they say, is history. I visit the US often and love it. I am a culture watcher – and therefore it is fascinating to see the different reactions, on talk radio, in the *New York Times* and especially in the Church. You do seem to engender extreme reactions.



2009 © Ben Vess. Image from BigStockPhoto.com

On the one hand there is the 'Obamania' phenomenon, whereby you are almost seen as the Messiah. In the popular press and culture (especially in the UK), this is portrayed almost as much as George Bush was vilified. This can have amusing consequences. I was travelling on a late night train from Edinburgh to Dundee, my home city, when a group of teenage boys joined us at Markinch in Fife. They were somewhat inebriated and, much to my amazement, proceeded to amuse the other passengers by literally singing your praises for the rest of the journey. How strange the world is – I bet you never thought that drunken teenagers from Scotland who have no interest in politics would be singing the praises of an African American President!

On the other hand there are those who regard you as the anti-Christ – especially in the Church in the US. I struggle to understand this. Certainly you have the most 'liberal' record of any US senator, and there are issues where I as a Christian would really struggle with you (more of which at another time). But reading your books, there is no Messianic or anti-Christ mentality at all. Of course you are not the anti-Christ (despite one 'Christian' talk programme I listened to with open mouthed astonishment, which seriously discussed this possibility). Indeed, we are astounded at the openness with which you discuss your Christian faith and the impact it should have on public policy.

Atheist websites such as Dawkins' were exultant at your election, but they clearly have not read your two books. Our militant fundamentalist atheists want the complete exclusion

of religion from public life. You are clearly not on their side. As you state in *The Audacity of Hope* - 'Surely secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square' (p.218). And even more explicitly 'To say that men and women should not inject their "personal morality" into public policy debates is a practical absurdity; our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.' Well put. I was recently speaking at a debate where my opponent seriously asked what Christianity had to do with the law of the land – as most of our laws were based on paganism anyway! The fact that anyone could make such a statement – never mind expect to get away with it – shows the basic ignorance and ahistoricism of our postmodern society. Thankfully, you are not ignorant and your appreciation of the Christian roots of much of Western society is appreciated.

**'BUT KNEELING BENEATH THAT CROSS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF CHICAGO, I FELT GOD'S SPIRIT BECKONING ME. I SUBMITTED MYSELF TO HIS WILL, AND DEDICATED MYSELF TO DISCOVERING HIS TRUTH.'**

However, you move beyond a mere recognition of the importance of Christianity to a discussion and confession of your own personal faith. Although there are many gaps it is fascinating to observe. Firstly, you clearly came to realise that the 1960's style of rejecting authority and asserting self was itself destructive and ultimately brought a new authority... in the words of The Who, 'meet the new boss, same as the old boss'. 'Eventually, my rejection of authority spilled into self-indulgence and self-destructiveness, and by the time I enrolled in college I'd begun to see how any challenge to convention harboured within it the possibility of its own excesses and its own orthodoxy' (*The Audacity of Hope*, p.30).

In *Dreams from My Father* you recall the following being questioned about faith - 'Where did your faith come from? He has asked. It suddenly occurred to me that I didn't have an answer. Perhaps, still, I had faith in myself. But faith in one's self was never enough.' (p.279). Indeed. In fact, faith in oneself is always delusional and disappointing. We need an object of faith far greater than ourselves. And we need a whole lot more than the substitute religions of our world. You recognise that. 'That was the problem with booze and drugs, wasn't it? At some point they couldn't stop that ticking sound, the sound of certain emptiness' (*Dreams from My Father* – p.96). It is so reminiscent of Augustine's 'Our hearts were made for thee and they are restless until they find their rest in thee.'

And you state you have found that rest, or at least begun to. 'But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side of Chicago, I felt God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth.' (*The Audacity of Hope*, p.208). These are wonderful words to hear any politician, let alone the most powerful man in the world, state. I find them particularly moving because they are very

reminiscent of my own experience – praying and submitting to the will and truth of God. Did you ever ask 'was it real'? Of course, only the Lord knows those who are His and it is not for any of us to judge, although the Bible does say, 'you shall know them by their fruits.' What really interests me is how you felt God's Spirit (surely it should be with a capital S?), and even more, how do we know what the will and truth of God is? I am a good Calvinist, so I believe that all truth is God's truth, and there are of course many truths that exist outside of the Scriptures. But, as regards the particular matter of the knowledge of the will of God, this comes not from feelings, culture, tradition or church authority – all of which can be wrong and confusing. It comes from revelation, the enscriptured Word of God. God does still speak to us. His Spirit speaks through the Word He has inspired.

I realise that this is a stupendous claim. But when you think about it, it does make sense. Why should not God reveal Himself through the written word, in its many forms, recording the acts, words and meanings of those whom He sent to bring us to Himself? Men did indeed speak 'from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21), and it is the testimony of many millions of Christians, from the beginning, that He continues to speak through that same Word. The Word that tells us that we are to pray first 'for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness' (1 Timothy 2:1). So we do pray for you regularly – even here in the UK. We desire that you come to know Jesus Christ more deeply and personally than you have ever known before, that you may grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, and that you will govern in accordance with the will and truth of the One before whom you bowed the knee, that day in Chicago.

Yours in the love of Christ,

David



'Obamamania'

2009 © Ryan Roderick Beiler. Image from BigStockPhoto.com

# WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN GERMAN, IN *DIE ZEIT*, EARLIER THIS YEAR. WE ARE GRATEFUL TO **REINER LUYKEN** FOR BOTH WRITING AND TRANSLATING IT.

## **I TRUST IN THEE - A visit to a Scottish village church in an era of atheist campaigns**

The storm lifts the spray from the sea and whips it across the brown moor. At the entrance of the village, an unadorned church building cowers in the wind, without a steeple, with very few windows, the white walls washed out by the salt. Seven cars turn into the car park. The people who emerge battle with lowered heads towards the entrance. Gusts pull at their clothes. Are they crazy to go to church in such awful weather?

The Coigach Free Church is the place of worship for around two hundred inhabitants of the townships spread out over a peninsula on the Scottish west coast. Just about twenty of them are regular churchgoers. Amongst them are Michael MacLeod, the most successful fisherman of the area, his wife and six children, his two sisters, his cousin Ian, a crofter and skipper of a cruise ship, the sheep farmer Kenny MacLennan, another fisherman, and a few widows.

By far the largest part of the community sticks to the theme of an atheist advertising campaign that started last week in London. 'There's probably no god', it proclaims in big letters on the city's buses. 'Now stop worrying and enjoy life.' This week the campaign is being extended to other towns in the UK. A group of private individuals collected 150,000 Euro for the rent of the advertising space, though the adherence to the churches amongst Britons has fallen long since to a level comparable to the unholy GDR.

## **I BELONG TO THE STIFF-NECKED UNBELIEVERS. I AM GREETED, NEVERTHELESS, WITH OPEN ARMS.**

The crusade against the god delusion is driven by a 'humanist society', the philosopher A.C. Grayling and the evolutionary scientist and best-selling author Richard Dawkins. Dawkins himself spent quite a bit of money to finance it. The wishy-washy 'probably' doesn't seem to fit at all with his radical atheism. Apparently, the slogan would have failed to pass the advertising standard criteria without this qualification. The criteria are designed to prevent claims for products (or non-products) that cannot be substantiated.

That it is impossible to prove the non-existence of God doesn't stop a small minority of the population of our peninsula from eyeing the few churchgoers with distrust. Perhaps some of them have had a look at Dawkins' website, where he rails against 'the enemies of reason' and 'the root of all evil'. Once, a lady who moved here from England shot out of her house and accused the totally affable Ian MacLeod of being a member of a 'Free Church Mafia'.



Die Zeit, 4/2009, 15 January 2009

In the assembly hall of the supposed secret society there is nothing to distract the mind from the purpose of the event, neither an altar nor a cross nor a musical instrument. The Free Church sees itself as the rightful heir and standard-bearer of a Calvinism that held sway over Scotland up to the beginning of the last century, and right into the 1950s in the Highlands. It discriminates strictly between re-born Christians and unconverted churchgoers. The former may participate at communion, the latter not. I belong to the stiff-necked unbelievers. I am greeted, nevertheless, with open arms. I might, after all, see the light one day, might I not?

The congregation hasn't got a minister of its own. We sit down in a half-circle on blue cloth-covered chairs. Michael MacLeod, the church elder, remains standing; he opens a book with psalms, catches his breath and begins to sing a melody from the French-Genevan Psalter of 1551 to words confirming his faith in God. I join the singing. Do I trust in God? Do I know of 'no good apart from thee' as we continue to sing? Do I believe in a god at all? Don't I feel rather a bit like David Cameron, the leader of the Conservatives, who joked recently that his religiosity was like listening to FM while driving through the Chiltern Hills - on and off?

Michael prays in halting sentences for the persecuted, the suffering and the sick all over the world. For us he asks for God's blessing. We sing a second psalm. Then he switches on a DVD player. On the screen, the face of a minister appears; his congregation is about two hours away by car. His sermon lasts three quarters of an hour. He likes to admonish his flock not to zip off their heads when coming to church. In his book, one goes to church to use one's mental faculties. Today's sermon is titled *Look Who's Talking* after the American film comedy. It is anything but shallow. The DVD-preacher takes us from Stephen Hawking and the immensity of the universe to the bible verse 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' He talks about robots and consciousness, about freedom and necessity, about metaphysical thought in the children's book *Anne of Green Gables*.

The slogan of the London atheists asking for carefree enjoyment of life goes through my mind. Who is trying to sell me short - the deniers of God's existence or our church?

# HIS STORY

**BARBARA CROSS** BEGINS A NEW SERIES ON CHARACTERS AND INCIDENTS IN HUMAN HISTORY THAT INDICATE THAT IT REALLY IS HIS STORY – A RECORD OF THE GRACE OF GOD AT WORK IN HUMANITY.

## **JOHN HARPER: AN UNKNOWN HERO OF THE *TITANIC***

In 1872 John Harper was born to a Christian family in Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. At the age of thirteen John was converted through God's grace. As a young man he worked in the mill by day but spent all his free time preaching in his village, pleading with all who would listen to come to the Lord. In his early twenties he was brought to London to work with Baptist Pioneer Mission. Later he established Paisley Road Baptist Church in London – a church that started with twenty-five but through his ministry grew to five hundred.

John married, but after a few years was widowed and left with a young daughter named Nana. It was in the April of 1912 that John, along with six-year-old Nana and his cousin Jessie Leitch, boarded the *Titanic* to sail to America. He had been asked to preach for three months at a large church in Chicago.

### **AS JOHN AND HIS COUSIN STOOD ON THE DECK ADMIRING THE SUNSET, HE COMMENTED, 'IT WILL BE BEAUTIFUL IN THE MORNING!'**

The last day on the *Titanic* found the three family members having morning prayers and later attending the Sunday morning church service. In the evening, when Miss Leitch and Nana went to find John, he was engaged in urging a young Englishman to place his faith in Jesus Christ. Before going to bed, as John and his cousin stood on the deck admiring the sunset, he commented, 'It will be beautiful in the morning!'

At 11:40 PM on 14 April, 1912, that great ship which had been described as 'virtually unsinkable' struck a giant iceberg. The side of the *Titanic* was ripped open and water flowed into a number of watertight compartments. Learning of the danger, John hurried to put Nana and Miss Leitch into the eleventh lifeboat that had been lowered. Leaving his family, he rushed back to the frightened people who remained on the ship. As the water began filling the *Titanic*, John shouted for 'the women, the children and the unsaved' to be put into the remaining lifeboats. Eighteen of the ship's twenty lifeboats had been lowered, but these were only enough to hold half the passengers on board. John was among the 1,528 passengers left on the sinking ship who were thrown into the icy waters or forced to jump to save themselves.

Three times before, John had escaped death by drowning. At age two he had fallen into a well and was saved by his mother. He was swept out to sea when in his twenties, but a change in the current brought him back to the shore. At thirty-two he was in the middle of the Mediterranean in a leaking ship.



*Rev John Harper*

For over an hour John swam urgently from one to another of those who were dying of hypothermia to bring the gospel to them. One young man was clinging to some debris from the ship, and John asked him if he was saved. The man replied, 'No.' As the man drifted away John shouted to him, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' A few minutes later the current brought the two men together and once again John urged him to trust in Christ for salvation. Then and there the man believed; but John, aged 39, who had given his lifejacket to another man, slipped under the water never to be seen again. At 2:20 AM on 15 April, the *Titanic* broke apart and sank deep into the ocean.

### **IT IS BY CHRISTIANS WHO HEAR HIS STORY THAT THE BRAVERY AND WITNESS OF JOHN HARPER WILL BE REMEMBERED**

Only a half dozen people survived those icy waters of the Atlantic. Among them was a young Scotsman who, four years later at a meeting in Hamilton, Canada, testified that he was the last person with whom John had shared the gospel. For almost a hundred years, much has been written about the *Titanic*. It has been found in the icy depths. Museums have been established to show its salvaged contents. But it is by Christians who hear his story, and certainly in heaven, that the bravery and witness of John Harper will be remembered and celebrated.

# STREET PASTORS



## WHO ARE THEY?

Street Pastors (SPs) is an inter-denominational Christian response, in partnership with the police and the local authority, to street problems, engaging with people to listen, care, and chat. Pioneered in London in January 2003 by Rev. Les Isaac, Director of the Ascension Trust, SPs, in their distinctive blue uniforms, are – or are training to be – on the streets of several Scottish towns and cities, e.g. Aberdeen, Dunfermline, Glasgow, Inverness, and Perth.

## WHO CAN BE A STREET PASTOR?

Christians who are involved in a local congregation, have a reference from their minister and attend a three-month training course.

## WHAT DO THEY DO?

After praying together and checking with police/CCTV, SPs will be out typically from 10pm-3am. Equipped with radio contact to police/CCTV, and trained in first aid, they carry flip-flops and spikeys, which are a source of comment and contact. There is good-natured banter, but many they encounter are hurting with problems. While CCTV, doormen, or police may refer folk to SPs, often people chat because, unlike consulting rooms, this is 'their turf' and they can walk away. SPs listen and help where appropriate. SPs never raise the question of faith, so no one can feel 'got at', and there can be no accusation of proselytising. 'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.'

## IS THERE A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THAT APPROACH?

From his experience of bungling when challenged, Peter advised: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. But do it with sensitivity and an awareness of God.' (1 Peter 3:15)

**Attractiveness of hope** – In a society with problems, grounded hope is a distinctive Christian feature.

**Account to which we are called** – While the faith is not a thing we have reasoned, it is rational: it has a basis to be examined. Christians are to be prepared to help folk examine it ... always!



**Attitude that counts** – Christians are not to be abrasively scoring points but graciously presenting God's invitation to a relationship (v17), the passage highlighting key aspects:

- *Gentleness* – sensitivity for hurts rather than dismissing the heartaches of a lifetime in two seconds flat;
- *Respect* – vertical awareness of God; and
- *Consistency* – there is no point in pontificating if daily life is a mess.

## THROUGH BEING AN SP I HAVE LEARNED AFRESH ...

1) Operationally, prayer is the vital dimension: we are channels of God's love and message. There have been many instances of bumping into someone in need – these are not co-incidences, but God-incidences!

2) Listen with sensitive spiritual antennae! It is the same people who are on the streets at weekends that are our neighbours, friends and acquaintances who work in shops, offices, factories and trades, and have the same issues and hurts during the week.

3) Be memorably brief! Every night folk do raise searching questions! Here are some issues raised: see how few words you need as a first response!

1. Why doesn't God do something about the mess of the world ?
2. We understand how the world works by science – that has disproved God's existence.
3. What about the fighting in the middle east?
4. I've had a bad experience of church/religion!
5. Religion is all in the mind/it's all made up!
6. Who do you think you are that you and your views are better than anyone else's ?

Of course answers will depend on the person, for one listens to the whole person rather than focusing on a point, but possible sample answers are below ...

1. He has.
2. I understand how a Ford car works; that doesn't disprove the existence of Mr Ford.
3. It was into an occupied middle eastern country that Jesus opted to come; He came to sort the world by sorting people.
4. So had Jesus. He was put to death by religious folk! We are not talking about religion, but about a relationship with God made possible by Jesus.
5. It's really not! The cross marks the spot in history.
6. We don't! It's not our views, but God's good news. We all matter to Him.

Shouldn't all Christians have that pattern in their daily conversation anyway?

**Sandy Gunn**  
sandygunn@btinternet.com

# CAMPAIGNERS RE-BORN



Campaigners Scotland has finally emerged as an organisation in its own right after a period of restructuring, and is now better able to continue the work of youth ministry that it has been engaged in for many years. The renewed movement will be leaner and fitter as it continues to reach out to the young people of Scotland.

Many of our congregations are familiar with the organisation and know the benefits it can bring. Recently I heard of a family who had begun to attend church after their child had attended Campaigners for a number of years.

What are the advantages of belonging to a national youth movement?

- Recognition as a charity with eligibility for support and funding
- Provision of a programme and structure for children from 4-18 years (C Club, Kidz Zone, Cross Trax and Delta)
- A pool of resources that can be used in a flexible way
- Regular review of materials so that they remain up-to-date
- Corporate identity provided by a uniform that is modern and attractive
- Insurance cover for all activities
- Training and contact with other centres engaged in the same work

In the same way that we have a national camps programme for our young people and use centrally produced material for our Sunday Schools, Campaigners offers a coherent programme with a proven strategy.

Many of our congregations have been able to sustain a ministry to children over many years because they have been part of an organisation like Campaigners.

As part of the programme of revitalization that has begun, Alan Veals from Stornoway, a member of the Scottish Council, has been visiting all the centres; and Anne Muirden, Free North, Inverness, has been appointed as an administrator. It is also hoped that there will be a central meeting in the near future for all those involved in running Campaigners. Please pray that as we move forward we will know the leading and blessing of the Lord.

**Sandy Finlay**  
Council Member



IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH REV. VINCE JENNINGS.

Tel: **01294 465150**. Email: **JenninV@aol.com**

# DORNOCH FREE CHURCH - MISSION TRIP TO WEST VIRGINIA

Our partnership with Stony Point PCA Church in Richmond, Virginia, began in September 2007, and as a result we have made many great friends. It all began when James and Jennifer Murphy, a young couple from Stony Point Church, came over to Dornoch in 2007 to serve Christ as youth workers for two years. Since their arrival, they have been doing excellent work both within the community and the church. As well as undertaking Scripture Union in the primary and secondary schools, they take Sunday School, Youth Fellowship, Bible Studies, and are involved in the Youth Club. In addition, they led us on our first mission trip to West Virginia in July 2008.

Before that, though, a team of ten people from Stony Point came over in March 2008 to work with Dornoch Free Church to run a Holiday Bible Club. Our common bond in Jesus made it very easy for us all to become friends; in fact, it felt like we had known each other all our lives. It was during that visit that the seed was planted to join Stony Point on their annual mission trip to West Virginia. We naturally jumped at the chance, and very soon afterwards the flights were booked and the fundraising planned.

It wasn't long before July came round, and a team of seven from Dornoch Free Church left for Richmond, Virginia to join Stony Point in their mission trip to Fairmont, WV. After a long journey from Sutherland we arrived at the Stony Point Church in Richmond, where we were made very welcome; and just like at the Holiday Bible Club, we clicked straightaway. Two days after arriving in Richmond we left for Fairmont. The journey took nine hours, but it provided a great opportunity to get to know the people we would be working with. It was not until after the church service on Sunday that we met our hosts and saw their homes and the work we would be undertaking during our mission week.



*Hard but rewarding work*

To give some background, Fairmont is a mining town where many men lost their lives working underground, resulting in a high number of widows. Over time the weather and years have taken their toll on all their homes, leaving them in a very poor state. Unfortunately, their poor financial situation means they are unable to afford repairs; hence this mission, which also allowed us to share God's love with them. Although this work proved to be very hard, it was extremely rewarding. It started with a 5:45 a.m. alarm call! Breakfast was at 6:45 a.m. at the community centre three miles away; then there was a 30-minute drive to the worksite.



*A host with some members of the Stony Point & Dornoch mission teams*

The Stony Point group was divided into three worksites and a special operations team. On arrival at our site we all prayed together before beginning work. Our jobs involved everything from painting to re-roofing, erecting railings, installing guttering, insulating, gardening and, especially, sharing the love of Jesus with our hosts.

During the working day there was constant prayer, and we each took turns at the 'prayer chair'. We also wrote encouragements to each other, and these were handed out at the end of the day. At 1:00 p.m. we stopped for lunch and devotion time, when a team member would give a short reading and talk about what this meant to them. After our break we resumed work until 5:00 p.m., when we returned to the community centre for dinner before heading back to the camp to freshen up. Each night there was a service with all the other teams from across America, after which there would be a 'debrief' with the Stony Point and Dornoch teams. During this time we were able to share with each other how we saw God working during the day, and this proved to be very encouraging.

The mission trip last year was very God-centred and was a massive faith booster, especially to us newly born Christians. We would all love to go back again this year, but this cannot happen without your prayers and financial support, so please consider committing yourself to pray for us daily and contributing towards this project.

To this end, we have planned a range of fundraising events for Fairmont 2009. These include Coffee Mornings, a Curry/Family Fortunes night (which is also an outreach event), sponsored walks and a Sale of Work. As team members we all have to pay 1/3 of the trip, so we each have to raise £750. Please prayerfully consider supporting us financially to enable us to help with this worthwhile mission.

If sending a donation, please make it payable to 'Dornoch Free Church' and post to Coral & James Mackay at 5 Hall Street, Embo, Dornoch, Sutherland IV25 3PW.

Thank you.

## TEN YEARS AT DUNBLANE

On Saturday 7th February, members and friends of Dunblane Free Church met in the Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan, to celebrate a very happy occasion.

In January, our minister, Rev. Alasdair Macdonald, had been with us for ten years. Most people said that they could hardly believe that so many years had passed, and perhaps that is an indication of how pleasant and encouraging the congregation had found his ministry to be. After an enjoyable lunch, the Session Clerk, Alex MacAskill, made a short speech. In it, he referred to Alasdair's diligence throughout these years. Various efforts had been made at outreach, and Alasdair had distributed tracts and trailed up long drives with the Good News of the Gospel.

In spite of all these efforts, we are still a fairly small congregation, but that has its own benefit in that we all know each other and are concerned for each other. We also like to think we are a friendly group, and thus we are joined by friends from other congregations who enjoy the fellowship but, more importantly, also appreciate the sound biblical teaching from the pulpit. Alex remarked that he envied the precise organisation of Alasdair's sermons—always ending exactly where and when intended! Of course, Catriona, the lady of the manse, was also mentioned with great appreciation. She is a friend to all of us and we hope she has enjoyed our company as much as we have hers. A new car was given to Alasdair some months earlier as the old one couldn't quite make it to the anniversary. However, our minister was here presented with a small replica car incorporating a clock with the hope that it would sit in his study to keep track of time.

Alasdair replied, expressing his own memories of these years and his appreciation of all the support he had received. He remarked that he was unusually fortunate in being able to call on so many men to take his place when required, and he thanked them warmly for that. Sometimes, however, the help could be over-enthusiastic. He recalled a time when he and one of the congregation went to visit an elderly and profoundly deaf member, bearing chocolates and other goodies. Not receiving any response to their knocking, and the door having resisted the friend's attempt to force it, they presumed the person didn't hear and so inserted the presents through the letterbox. On asking the people in the shop below to inform the elderly man of their visit, they were told that they had gone up the wrong close!

We all enjoyed this happy occasion and look forward to many more years with Alasdair and Catriona in the Dunblane manse, if the Lord wills.

**May Macaskill**

### CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

The figures printed for Back Free Church in last month's *Record* were £1000 short. The total should have been £118,751.

## HARRY KEITH ELDER, CAMPBELTOWN, TARBERT & ISLAY



The congregation of Campbeltown, Tarbert and Islay sustained a severe blow in the loss of their elder, Harry Keith, who died on 19th June 2008 aged 84.

Harry was a Caithnessman, born in Latheronwheel, the youngest of a family of six, of whom two survive him. From school he went to sea, serving during the War in the Royal Navy in the English Channel. Later he joined other members of the family fishing out of Wick in the vessel Good Hope. Compelled for health reasons to leave the sea, he then embarked on a farming career, eventually settling in Argyll. Thereafter he was employed in a variety of occupations: carpet-fitter, taxi-hirer, ambulance driver and others. Over the years he became a much-loved and highly respected figure in the community, always willing to help anyone who was in trouble or need, without ever broadcasting the fact or seeking any return. His great leisure activity was bowling and he derived much pleasure from the hours he spent playing at the bowling club and the company he shared there. Although an incomer, he took Tarbert to his heart and Tarbert took him to their hearts. In 1997 he was elected Tarbert's citizen of the year.

But the first place in his life was the church. In 1948, through the influence of the late Campbell Graham, who was to become his father-in-law, he came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his whole life was revolutionised. 'And He has stood by me ever since!' he would say, and his face would light up as he said it. 'It's been wonderful ever since!' He became a member of the congregation in Tarbert in 1968 and was ordained to the eldership the following year. A loyal and faithful member of the church, he served as session clerk, presbytery elder, and as church officer, rising in the middle of the night in the bad old days to ensure the heating was on for the Sunday services. For many years he would assist if required with the conduct of worship and with the leading of the praise, until this was prevented by a throat condition. He was both wise and discreet with regard to individuals. All he did was quietly done in the service of His Master.

His faith sustained him in the difficult days—the sad loss of his wife Nan, and the times of personal illness. When he went into hospital not knowing whether he would be receiving surgery or not, he said, 'If I come home, I come home: if I don't come home I will go home.'

He has gone home now to be with the Lord he loved and served so faithfully—a quiet, unostentatious man, yet a friend to all, a man of strongly held convictions, a gentleman, and a man of God.

We give thanks for his life of service and commend his daughters, Ann and Mairead, and his three grandchildren, Rachel, Claire and Darren, to the grace of God in their bereavement.

# BRINGING A WORD OF HOPE

**DAYSPRING MACLEOD** MET UP WITH THE OM LINE-UP TEAM FOR THE SHIP **LOGOS HOPE**, COMING TO LEITH'S OCEAN TERMINAL FROM 2-13 APRIL. THEIR REMIT IS 'MISSIONS AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY.' HERE, **KAREN** FROM GUATEMALA, **ESTHER** FROM SOUTH KOREA, AND **MARJAN** FROM BELGIUM SPEAK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE **LOGOS HOPE**.

## How did you come to the Lord, and then to the OM ships?

**Marjan:** I come from a Christian family – both my parents and my two brothers are Christians. My parents started a church in our town in Belgium five years ago. I am the first missionary to come out of that church, so everyone is really excited and they are giving me enormous support with prayer.

**Karen:** My family is also Christian, and I grew up going to church, but I went away from it in my teens. Eventually I came back, and I wanted to join an OM ship. My parents did not support this idea – they thought I was very young and being emotional – and my pastor said that he would not support my missions if my parents didn't. I first worked with OM as a translator, and have been blessed to do other missions with them and other organizations before starting ship work seven years ago. I told God that He had to help my parents understand, and now our relationship is very good, and they will talk to other parents whose children are doing missions.

**Esther:** Eleven years ago, my father passed away. He was not a good husband or father – his own father was not good, so he had no example – and one Christmas Eve, my mother left us for seven days with no contact. I felt I needed someone to hold my hand; I felt I could not trust my parents. My father had some health problems. He was getting dizzy, because of a blocked blood vessel in his head. The first time this happened, he had an operation, but the doctors said that if it happened again, he could die. It did happen, and he died. At the funeral, one of my classmates told me the gospel. She said, 'You say you can't trust God, but still He loves you.' She took my hand and prayed, and she started to cry; her tears fell on my hand. I said, 'Why are you crying?' and she told me, 'I don't know – I just feel that still God loves you.' I decided to go to church to find out about who it was that loved me, and why there were such struggles in my life. After five years, I was a Christian. I underwent a disciple training course, and I was thinking about John Ross, who translated the Bible into Korean, and who had traveled to Korea by ship. A missionary suggested to me that I might think about doing mission with a ship, and that reminded me of John Ross. I did not think I would come to Scotland!

**Editor's Note:** *Esther also has a Korean name, but she prefers to be known as Esther – 'because my pastor said I was to be an Esther to my non-Christian family.'*

## What is the most difficult part of life on the OM ships?

**M:** Lack of privacy. After working all day, sometimes you just want to go back to your cabin and rest. But you have three



*Karen, Marjan and Esther*

other people who sleep there, and sometimes there are others there too, just hanging out!

**E:** I did one year of work in the galley [ship kitchen]. It was very hard physical labour, standing up for eight hours each day. And there is always some programme after work – some worship or seminar – and you are very tired! Sometimes I did not get enough sleep, and then it was hard to pray or read my Bible.

**K:** People – but I don't mean that in a bad way! There are always so many people that you are meeting, going in and out of your life. It is emotionally exhausting; I find it easy to let people into my life, but hard to say goodbye. All mission is like that.

## And what are the highlights?

**M:** For me, there are no Christians my age in Belgium; all my friends there are non-Christians. So to have so many people my age is amazing – friends to talk and pray with.

**E:** Dynamic. It's wonderful to see what God has done in this city or that country.

**K:** There are many opportunities to be built up – personally, spiritually, and professionally, because you learn to do so many different tasks. Also, going on the ship, you learn that there are 300 different ways to think about an issue – so you must be either flexible or miserable!

**What element of the mission seems to be the most effective in converting non-Christians?**

**K:** Sometimes I think I have to go out into the port and talk to people and distribute tracts, but I have seen people converted through drama alone, with no speech, and also through books. One person in the Caribbean stole books from us, including the Bible. About three months later, he contacted us to say he had been reading the Bible, and we sent someone to speak with him. He was converted and gave us the money for the books he stole! Also, our line-up team researches the community before the ship comes to a port. We create long-term friendships.

**M:** Conversions come through personal relationships. We share not only through words, but by the way we behave, through example.

**K:** In Germany, we met a girl from Uruguay, and introduced her to others of different nationalities who lived there, so she was no longer alone. Now she's getting married!

**How has the ship worked with local churches?**

**E:** I get to visit new churches, and they keep in touch with us and feel encouraged. For churches in South Korea and China, it's really good for them to have testimony times and speakers from the ship, since they struggle to get speakers.

**K:** Every port is different. Sometimes churches are more difficult to find and get involved. It's helpful to have committees from different churches – but then you can't please everyone!

**Is it more difficult to have a real Christian presence in some countries, for instance those with strong different beliefs?**

**K:** We have a secular profile through our book fair, so it's seen as voluntary work in more political places. But people are smart, and they tend to already know who you are. They will ask if you are Christian. You do not deny Christ if they ask you that – and it's not a big deal talking about your beliefs as long

as you treat others with respect. Muslims will not convert unless you are talking to them 25 or 30 times, so we are more planting seeds in those places. They think it's ridiculous if you believe in Christ but you are afraid. 'What are you scared of? I'm not going to kill you here!'

**What have you learned about the body of Christ from experiencing it in so many nations?**

**M:** Despite different denominations, you believe Jesus is Lord, and you don't focus on the little differences.

**E:** Each community has strength from God. Koreans love to worship and pray – all Korean Christians get up at 5am to pray and intercede for our country and others – but European churches are not dying, as people say. There are some that are really strong.

**K:** We give a simple message. It's Christ-focused.

**What else would you like Scotland to know about the Logos Hope before it comes to Edinburgh this spring?**

**M:** We want to get the youth of the church excited about missions. On the ship you see so many young people from all over the world not only working together, but serving God together. It's so exciting.

**E:** If you want to see dynamic nationalities, come to the ship.

**K:** Our main focus is to present the gospel to each person who comes on board, in one way or another. We want to reach that one person in a million who will be saved. Also, we want to strengthen church unity through knowledge, help and hope. We ask, what does the church here need? We expose the crew to local needs and challenge them to find Christ in the place they are working. After each visit, we have a Port Report, and the crew can report anything special that has happened – a great conversation with somebody, or a confirmation of their calling.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT VISITING OR ACTIVITIES ON BOARD THE SHIP, OR ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER, PLEASE CONTACT **KAREN TOHON**, LINE-UP TEAM LEADER, ON **0131 332 5086** OR [karen.tohon@gbaships.org](mailto:karen.tohon@gbaships.org), OR **SHARON ROSE**, OMIK SCOTTISH COORDINATOR, ON **0141 572 0050** OR [sharon.rose@uk.om.org](mailto:sharon.rose@uk.om.org). YOU CAN ALSO VISIT THE WEBSITES BELOW:

[www.logoshope.org](http://www.logoshope.org)

[www.uk.om.org](http://www.uk.om.org)

# MESSIAHS POINTING TO THE DOOR

There are many differences between American and British culture. Most obvious, perhaps, are the sports: baseball versus cricket, and football (where feet are rarely used) versus football (where feet, and the occasional head, are all that can be used) and even, once again, football (where pads are compulsory and no period of action lasts for more than 5 seconds) versus rugby, where pads are the despised accoutrements of pansies and where, unless you can actually run for more than five seconds, you are likely to get flattened. The list of American idiosyncrasies could go on: the American penchant for men's shoes with tassles that, thankfully, has no counterpart in Britain; the post-colonial idea that a sausage on a lollipop stick is edible; and the constitutional right to eat cheese delivered from an aerosol can without government interference. Freedom is surely a wonderful thing.

Joking aside, there is one other aspect of American culture that is perhaps most obvious at this particular moment in time: the cult of the individual celebrity. Now, 'celebs' and the vacuous hoo-hah that surrounds them seem to be a cultural universal, one that scarcely distinguishes America from Britain; but a closer examination reveals that there are significant, instructive differences between the way celebrity functions in the two cultures.

## **OBAMA IS LIKEABLE AND ARTICULATE; IT IS INEVITABLE THAT HE IS RECEIVING MUCH GOOD PRESS AND POPULAR ACCLAIM IN HIS EARLY DAYS IN OFFICE; AND, LIKE THE LABOUR PARTY, IT IS CERTAIN THAT HE WILL DISAPPOINT ON MANY FRONTS**

This is clearly seen in politics. It has been fascinating over recent months listening to the rhetoric surrounding the election of President Obama. It reminded me of nothing so much as the Labour Party election victory in Britain in 1997. For those too young to remember, Britain had had a Conservative government from 1979-'90 under Mrs Thatcher, then from '90 to '97 under John Major. When Tony Blair's Labour Party swept the Tories away, it ended nearly two decades of Tory political domination, and of Labour's internal disarray. Of course, 18 years in power had made the Tories into a corrupt and complacent political gang, and the popular sigh of relief that they had finally been shown the door was palpable. People talked on the news about a new dawn, about a feeling of hope across the nation, about a fresh start, about the potential for a bright new future. Of course, 'new' Labour soon showed themselves to be as sleazy and corrupt as the 'old' Tories, but that's not my point: the point is that the language of hope and expectation was focused on an institution, the Labour Party, rather than on Tony Blair as an individual.

The election of Obama has generated similar rhetoric in the US. Like the Labour Party, he replaces a morally discredited



*Barack Obama speaking on issues of faith and politics, 2006*

and deeply unpopular executive; people want a change from the old ways of doing things; Obama is likeable and articulate; it is inevitable that he is receiving much good press and popular acclaim in his early days in office; and, like the Labour Party, it is certain that he will disappoint on many fronts. What is different from Britain in '97, however, is that the rhetoric of hope is focused upon him as an individual rather than upon the Democratic Party as an institution. He may not be a king, but the language used about him would seem to indicate that he, as an individual, is regarded as embodying the nation, as carrying the nation's hopes, as the one with whom we will all stand or fall, and as the one who will be able to deliver. American presidential elections are ultimately, and inevitably, about individual personalities. That is not the case in Britain: have you ever wondered why Winston Churchill lost the 1945 General Election between VE and VJ Day, the moment of his greatest personal triumph?

Numerous thoughts come to mind at this point. First, the Obama rhetoric, like the 'W' rhetoric before it, is quintessentially American. A nation built on the frontier, on wide open spaces, on the rugged individual forging ahead against the odds, is still apparently wedded to the 'great man' theory of history. But history does not work like that. As any student who has managed to stay awake during any of my classes at Westminster would tell you: social and economic conditions apply. No man is great enough to single-handedly change the great social and economic forces that drive history along. It is simply absurd to think that an individual, be it George W. Bush or Barack Obama, can make that much difference. That is not how history works: to repeat, social and economic conditions still apply, even in a nation that believes

all you need is the political equivalent of John Wayne or Clint Eastwood to run the problems – moral, economic, social – out of Dodge. Obama is doomed to fail on at least some of the things that are being expected from him because he stands under, not above, these macro-historical forces. This should be a sobering thought for his supporters and an encouraging thought for his detractors. The former should make their expectations of his positive contribution more realistic; the latter should not overestimate the damage he can do.

Second, this should make us sit up and think about the power of politics and particularly individual politicians. To invest so much in an individual betrays a profoundly Pelagian understanding of reality. As New Labour ultimately proved more corrupt (and arrived in Sleazeville more quickly) than the Thatcher-Major governments, so Obama is a fallen man, surrounded by fallen men and women. We should not expect too much from them: politics are messy and dirty at the best of times, and the best we can hope for is that they might prove less messy and dirty than some of their predecessors.

Third, as well as being Pelagian, the rhetoric of American politics is too often Manichean: a battle between good and evil, with clear moral monopolies being attributed to different sides by their various supporters and detractors. Rush Limbaugh and Keith Olbermann are great examples of Manichean thinkers, albeit with very unmanichean senses of humour. Would that life were as simple as these men make it out to be, that political thinking and decision making was a 'slam dunk', as Americans might say, or a simple 'kick between the posts', to use a more British idiom; that political differences provided a simple way of reading moral differences, because the 'goodies' all think one way and the 'baddies' all think the other. But politics isn't simple: it's a dirty, pragmatic business that involves practical compromises left, right, and centre (if there is any centre remaining!). This is not to say that our laws and our policies and our platforms should not represent high aspirations; but it is to say that the reality is always somewhat more complex than ideal aspirations allow, and an acknowledgment of that fact is an important part of the political thinking and action itself.



The White House

Finally, we need to move beyond the messiah complex that is perhaps now part of the essence of the American presidential process, where so much significance is, at least at a popular cultural level, invested in one individual. Indeed, it is amazing that a country that is typically very suspicious of the government as a corporate institution is willing to put so much trust in a single person. In Britain, it is virtually the opposite: often there is a blind trust in institutions but a deep distrust of individual politicians.

## **POLITICS ISN'T SIMPLE: IT'S A DIRTY, PRAGMATIC BUSINESS THAT INVOLVES PRACTICAL COMPROMISES LEFT, RIGHT, AND CENTRE (IF THERE IS ANY CENTRE REMAINING!)**

When I listen to the hopes and aspirations of people relative to President Obama, my mind not only goes back to the '97 elections in Britain, but also to The Who's great rock opera *Tommy*. Towards the end, in the song, *I'm Free*, Roger Daltrey sings, 'We've been here many times before, messiahs pointing to the door, but no-one had the guts to leave the temple.' Well, we have been here many times before. Many political messiahs have come and gone; and, as the great British Parliamentarian Enoch Powell once commented, all political careers end in failure. Perhaps not so much in America, where term limits means that a leader cannot do the heavyweight boxing champ thing and go on too long until he gets his one-way ticket to Palookaville; but even given this, the most successful American politician can only achieve a fraction of what they want, and inevitably make compromises and dirty their hands along the way.

And, of course, as in politics, so in religion. The American political process, as I argued above, is simply the most dramatic example of the 'great man' theory of history that pervades American society. I had often wondered why certain British figures – Jim Packer, N.T. Wright, Alister McGrath, etc. – were much bigger this side of the Atlantic than back home in their native country. Was it just the accent? Surely it couldn't be the dentistry...? Maybe the dress sense? No. It is all to do with the way America is a personality/celebrity-oriented culture in a way that Britain, while she may well be catching up, has historically not been. The American church reflects the culture: ministries built around individuals, around big shots, churches that focus on god-like guru figures, all of them pointing to one door. I have lost count of the conversations I have had with church people anxious to tell of whom they heard at this conference, of which person they corresponded with, of how this opinion or that opinion would not sit well with this demi-god and is therefore of little value; and, of course, of how anyone who disagrees with, or criticizes, this chosen hero must, of necessity, be morally depraved and wicked. People want the gods to do their thinking for them. All of the Pelagian, Manichean celebrity malarkey of the American political process is alive and well in the church as well. The question is: when it comes to churches and ministries built around messiahs who are supposed to point not to themselves but to the true Door, who is going to have the guts to leave the temple?

# INTRODUCING ... SMITHTON-CULLODEN FREE CHURCH

## WHERE?

The communities of Smithton and Culloden were born out of the 1970's oil boom, which changed the physical and economic landscape of the north of Scotland. Thousands of houses were built to accommodate the expanding work force that was drawn to the area, especially the oilrig construction yards at Ardersier and Nigg.

Located three miles from the centre of Inverness, the parish is north of the A96 Aberdeen road and east of the A9 road south. It is an area packed with residences from council housing to the most expensive properties in the district. It is an area targeted for even more rapid growth and will be the location of the main campus of the new University of the Highlands and Islands. It is also the site of a massive retail park and is adjacent to one of the region's main employers, Raigmore hospital.

## BEGINNINGS

As the area grew, the Presbytery of Inverness, largely with the vision of Rev. Finlay MacKenzie, saw the potential of this new situation and decided to plant a church in this growing area. A small number of local families committed to the church, which benefited from the visionary leadership of the late Rev. W. R. MacKay. This fledgling band of people has grown into a strong congregation with an outward focus.

The membership of the church is about 200 and is attended by about 300 people on an average Sunday. There are three services, at 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. It is not possible to get the whole morning service into the building and the seating arrangement can certainly be described as 'compact'. One of the blessings and encouragements at Smithton is an exceptionally well-attended evening service. There are 12 elders and nine deacons.



*Ethan Smith, Murdo Macleod, David Meredith, Ali MacDonald & Charlie Anderson*



## A TEAM MINISTRY

Another blessing at Smithton is the presence of a small but active church staff. At present the minister is assisted by Ali MacDonald, the family support worker, whose main responsibility is supporting women and families in the church and in the community. Ethan Smith is the youth worker who looks after the 40-plus secondary school pupils as well as supporting older teens and twenties. The staff received an addition recently with Charlie Anderson, who looks after the administration of the church and manages a budget of £326,000 as well as providing some pastoral support, especially for men.

## THE CORE ACTIVITY

The core activity of the church is the Sunday worship, which is marked by consecutive expository preaching with application to the needs of individual souls and the wider contemporary culture. Another key activity is the prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings, when the church meets to praise God for His goodness and to intercede for the church, community and the world! Men and women pray at this meeting, where there is a short message followed by a time of sustained prayer.

## EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL CONCERN

The church is exceptionally busy in evangelism and social concern and really does seek to maintain an outward focus. There are two youth clubs, a mission Sunday School held in the afternoon, a lunch club for seniors on Tuesdays, and a drop-in centre for seniors on Wednesdays. We hold regular courses looking at the issue of drugs among young people as well as Christianity Explored and Discipleship Explored. There are a number of small groups held throughout the week for Bible study and prayer. The church staff meets each week to study a topical or classic book and pray for the

work. International ministry is not forgotten, and we hold an annual missions weekend; we also support Marsali Campbell in Uganda and send our young people on short-term mission trips. The office bearers also meet each week to bring the needs of the church to God in prayer. It is a busy church and all are deeply aware that busyness on its own does not bring spiritual vitality, and in fact it can be a mask for a lack of faith and dependence on the Holy Spirit. We are conscious of this danger and can only watch and pray that we do not yield to that particular temptation.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

We have several challenges in the coming years. This year the church is 30 years old, and it is conscious of the danger of middle-aged atrophy! The early young leadership are now 30 years older than they were and the age profile of the church is slowly creeping up. The physical growth of the church is another issue that has exercised the leadership. We have purchased just under three acres of additional land and hope to significantly extend the building in the near future. We would love the congregation to grow larger and deeper in the coming years. A large gathering for worship on a Sunday is an encouragement, but while we are working hard to promote growth, we need to encourage the spirit of community that marked the church in the New Testament. In earlier days a congregation of 300 was not considered especially large, and even today it is tiny compared to the potential and spiritual needs of the community.



*Senior lunch club*

**SUPPORTING SMALLER CHURCHES**

Complacency and introversion are common maladies of 30-year-old churches. We have increased our links with the Nairn congregation and we seek to support the work there. Murdo Macleod is officially the assistant minister at Smithton, but he is essentially the minister at Nairn. So far one couple have committed to Nairn full-time and are in the process of physically moving there, and a number of people attend Nairn from time to time. We are also delighted to supply a DVD ministry to Achiltibuie, which has been such a source of encouragement over the years.

When we look at Smithton, we realise that we never fully grow up as a church. Where there are sinners there is always need of the refining, maturing work of the grace of Christ. We have enjoyed a congregational life that has been largely happy, united and committed, but we are more conscious of what has not been achieved than what has.

**BRIAN AND JANET DAVIDSON**

Our names are Brian & Janet Davidson. We have three grown-up children: the eldest is Brian, then Naomi, and the youngest is Christopher. Brian is a podiatrist, Naomi a nurse, and Christopher a joiner; the boys currently live in Edinburgh.



Janet was baptised in the United Free Church in Fort William, though her family have church connections with Kilmallie Free Church going back to the 19th century. After hearing the gospel, Janet and I were both converted in February 1982, thereafter attending a Pentecostal church for 12 years. After these years, we found ourselves returning to the United Free Church, and settled there until we moved to Inverness in 2007. Our three children have all professed Christ as Lord of their lives and enjoy involvement in Carrubbers Christian Centre, Edinburgh.

We moved from Fort William to Inverness in April 2007. We had planned to search for a church in our local area, where we hoped to settle. On our first Sunday morning in Inverness we decided to go to the Baptist church in Culloden, but we could not find it, and as a result we arrived at Smithton-Culloden Free Church. The preacher's opening address included the sentence 'You may think you've arrived here by chance today, but you are here because of the providence of God.' We returned to Smithton the following week. Being exposed to solid biblical teaching every week has been such a blessing to our lives.

Smithton has provided us with friendship, fellowship and opportunities to get involved. Having attended Christianity Explored, we are now currently involved with the Church, Community and Change core group and are developing relationships and getting to know others within the congregation. The mid-week Bible study/home group provides us with an environment where we can share interesting discussions around God's Word.

SMITHTON-CULLODEN FREE CHURCH IS LOCATED AT MURRAY ROAD, SMITHTON, INVERNESS. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SMITHTON, NAIRN, OR THE YOUTH WORK, PLEASE VISIT THE WEBSITES BELOW:

[www.smithtonchurch.com](http://www.smithtonchurch.com)

[www.nairnfreechurch.co.uk](http://www.nairnfreechurch.co.uk)

[www.smithtonyf.co.uk](http://www.smithtonyf.co.uk)

# PUBLIC EYE

## ATTENBOROUGH BLAMES BIBLE FOR DEVASTATION OF THE PLANET



David Attenborough produced a fascinating and very helpful documentary for the BBC on Darwin. However, it was greatly let down when he tried to use it as an excuse to attack the Bible, arguing that Genesis 1:28 was to blame for the burning down of tropical rainforests and the extinction of species. One suspects that not many loggers or mining companies are sitting with copies of the Bible in their offices, but that did not stop Attenborough's illogical ad hominem attack. He was raised as an atheist and has obviously been unable to escape the teaching of his childhood. His knowledge of the Bible is miniscule in comparison to his knowledge of the environment, and it is disappointing that the BBC once again gives the opportunity for atheists to make the most ridiculous claims without allowing any intelligent response from those who actually know the Bible.

## GOOD GERMAN LAWS

In Germany it is illegal to hang our your washing on a Sunday. A quiet time is observed between noon and 3 pm – it is forbidden to mow the lawn, wash cars, play loud music and hammer nails.

It is illegal to build an office without a view of the sky.

*Daily Telegraph – 31st Jan 2009*

## MARRIED COUPLES TO BE A MINORITY

51% of adults were registered as married in 2007, compared with 59% in 1998, according to the Office of National Statistics. Within a year it is anticipated that it will fall below 50%. The number of weddings in England and Wales is now the lowest it has been since 1895 – despite a vastly increased population. Almost half of women living outside wedlock had children. Recent changes in the tax and welfare system mean that married couples can be up to £5,000 per year worse off than those who remain single.



## THE THOUGHT POLICE ARE AT IT AGAIN...

A couple who protested against their grandchildren being adopted by two gay men have been told they will not be able to see the children until they drop their opposition. According to press reports, the grandfather was told: 'You can either accept it, and there's a chance you'll see the children twice a year, or you can take that stance and never see them again.'



The grandparents were told by social workers in Edinburgh that at 46 and 59 they were too old to adopt the children themselves. Instead, the council decided to place the grandchildren – a four-year-old girl and five-year-old boy whose mother is a recovering heroin addict – with a homosexual couple.

The children's grandparents have protested that their best interests were not being served by denying them a mother figure. Social workers have themselves admitted that the little girl is 'more wary' of men than of women. They also revealed that several heterosexual couples were keen to adopt the children.

The grandparents' own bid was rejected because of their ages and health problems. The grandfather has angina, and his wife receives medication for diabetes. They tried to challenge the decision in court, but after two years conceded defeat and were assured by social workers they would still be able to see the children.

But the tone of the authorities changed when the grandparents rejected the view that adoption by same-sex parents would best meet the children's needs. They were told that the social workers would 'certainly look' at allowing them access to the children 'when you are able to come back with an open mind on the issues'.

The grandfather said: 'The ideal for any child is to have a loving father and a loving mother in their lives. But in our society the mother is generally the cornerstone of the family and the most important person for a young child.' His wife added: 'It's so important for children to fit in, and I feel our grandchildren will be marked out from the start when they draw pictures of their two dads.'

Peter Kearney, a spokesman for the Roman Catholic church, said: 'This is a devastating decision which will have a serious impact on the welfare of the children involved. There is an overwhelming body of evidence showing that same-sex relationships are inherently unstable and reduce the life expectancy of those involved. With this in mind, the social work department has deliberately ignored evidence which undermines their decision and opted for politically correct posturing rather than providing stability and protection. It is impossible to see how this decision is in the best interests of the children.'

*The Christian Institute*

# A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

AS THIS IS THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF CALVIN'S BIRTH WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO HAVE A SERIES OF ARTICLES INTRODUCING CALVIN'S *INSTITUTES*. WE ARE DELIGHTED THAT **JAMES EGLINTON** HAS BROUGHT AGREED TO WRITE THIS 'CALVIN FOR DUMMIES' SERIES. JAMES IS WELL KNOWN IN THE FREE CHURCH WHERE HE ASSISTS IN ST COLUMBA'S, EDINBURGH, WHILST DOING HIS PHD AND WINNING PRIZES AT PRINCETON! READ, LEARN AND ENJOY.



Five hundred years ago, in the relative obscurity of small town in northern France, a child was born. In the centuries that have followed, the man he would become has been both lauded and loathed. In post-Christian 21st-century Scotland, John Calvin is something of a clichéd scapegoat for all the ills of modern Scottish life. The stereotyped Calvin caricature is trotted out by our intellectual chatterati whenever life goes wrong: quintessential Scottish dourness, teenage pregnancy, social deprivation, global warming - they are seemingly all Calvin's fault.

Even in the academy, this trend continues. Some refuse to engage with Calvin because he 'had Servetus burned at the stake' (Michael Servetus was a 16th-century heretic killed by the Genevan authorities for being anti-Trinitarian. It is commonly and wrongly assumed that Calvin was Geneva's autocratic ruler, who thus was singularly responsible for Servetus' death. In fact, Calvin had little influence on the Genevan ruling council). Others portray him as a theological one hit wonder whose only song (*Predestination*) is best left unplayed. (In fact, Calvin's theology of predestination is thoroughly Augustinian, and everybody loves Augustine.)

**ONE SUSPECTS THAT MANY CALVIN-DESPISERS HAVE NEVER READ CALVIN. IRONICALLY, MANY PROFESSING CALVINISTS ARE IN THE SAME BOAT. PERHAPS BOTH WILL, AT POINTS, BE SURPRISED AT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CALVINIST.**

In our broadsheets, universities and national psyche, Calvin is an exaggerated piñata, taken out and beaten when we feel the need. Our Calvin tried to spread his brand of joylessness across Europe from a Geneva akin to the Taliban-era Kabul; apparently we have little for which to thank him.

However, as it is the five hundredth anniversary of his birth, it is perhaps time for Scotland to reappraise John Calvin. Every cliché wears thin. Piñatas are amusing only to children and the childish. Who was the real John Calvin? What did he actually think and teach?

Born in the summer of 1509, Calvin grew up in a fascinating and turbulent time. His childhood saw the German reformer Martin Luther rock the very foundations of Roman Catholic

Europe. After leaving school, Calvin studied law at the Universities of Orléans and Bourges. While working as a legal academic, Calvin's professors offered him an honorary doctorate, which he refused. He then moved to the University of Paris, where he studied the arts. In 1532, aged 23, his first book, an acclaimed commentary on Seneca, was published. The young Calvin was thus making his name in Parisian academic circles as a promising author, lecturer, and public intellectual.

Emanating from Germany and Switzerland, the Reformation was making waves across Europe. Rome had, in response, asserted its opposition to this movement. Moving in the intellectual circles of Paris, Calvin began mixing with other young thinkers whose sympathies lay in Wittenburg and Zurich, rather than Rome. During this time, John Calvin was converted and became part of an underground reformist movement.

A decisive moment in his life occurred in 1533. Calvin's friend Nicolas Cop, the newly appointed rector of the University of Paris, used his rectorial address to call the Roman Catholic Church to reform. The speech was condemned as heresy by the Faculty of Theology. Investigations into the speech implicated Calvin as having influenced Cop and thus he was forced to flee Paris. After several months in hiding, he was exiled to Basle. At this point, as a twentysomething fugitive-come-asylum seeker, Calvin wrote the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. After a short time in Italy, Calvin's life was spent as a pastor and theologian in Geneva and Strasbourg. In 1540 he married Idelette de Bure. Their three children died in infancy. Calvin himself suffered poor health, eventually dying in 1564 from malaria. He wrote extensively, expanding the *Institutes* and writing biblical commentaries.

Geneva, during Calvin's lifetime, became a haven for French Reformed refugees. This sets the context for the letter to Francis, King of France, which prefaces the *Institutes*. Calvin wrote on behalf of his refugee congregation, trying to demonstrate that their Reformed faith was both reasonable and credible.

One suspects that many Calvin-despisers have never read Calvin. Ironically, many professing Calvinists are in the same boat. This *Calvin for Dummies* series is self-consciously written for both camps. Perhaps both will, at points, be surprised at what it means to be a Calvinist.

# LOCAL CHURCH EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND

## PART THREE: REAL ACTIONS, REAL STORIES, REAL PEOPLE

**MARTIN ALLEN** CONTINUES HIS LECTURE ON LOCAL CHURCH EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND. IN PART ONE, MARTIN ARGUED THAT MISSION WAS THE MAP OF THE BIBLE, THE CENTRAL HERMENEUTIC. IN PART TWO HE SPOKE OF DEVELOPING A LOCAL MISSION MENTALITY. THIS MONTH MARTIN GOES ON TO HIS NEXT TWO PRINCIPLES.



We can develop the missionary mentality by attempting to get members to think globally as well as locally. Last month I was invited to the opening and dedication of a new church building in Edinburgh. Research studies indicated to this Christian church that the two most unchurched areas in Edinburgh were Leith and Gorgie. They already had a church building in Leith. This new building dedicated as a church that evening was in Gorgie. At the service, over 600 were present and the average age appeared to be around 35. There were some things to find fault with that Sunday evening, but one could not fault the passion for the lost of Gorgie, nor the global concern for the lost of the world. An Indian Christian spoke movingly and tellingly of the killing of Christians and the burning of churches in the state of Orissa in NE India in the present time. So to act locally and think globally is perhaps a useful slogan and strategy to adopt.

### PRINCIPLE 2: MAKING THE MOST OF ALL LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul describes his general evangelistic mindset: 'by all possible means that I might save some,' he says. These words have often been misapplied, but they cannot be misunderstood as to the content of the short paragraph in which they occur. Paul there is talking about winning, winning, winning, winning, winning as many as possible--- yes, five times he uses the verb, and winning is synonymous with saving; and saving some involves, in the apostle's mind, trying all possible legitimate means.

### PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT WINNING, WINNING, WINNING, WINNING AS MANY AS POSSIBLE

Dr Bruce Milne writes of his experience as senior pastor in First Baptist Church, Vancouver, a large congregation in a sprawling downtown area of the city. In his book about the church, *Dynamic Diversity* (IVP), he says this: *Long gone are the days when evangelism could be reduced to a single method or means, whether the preaching from the pulpit or the outreach of a well developed Sunday school or vibrant youth group. Each of these will continue to be a means of grace to some as they grope their way towards a living faith. But these means will be joined by ministries as diverse as free meals for street folk, classes teaching English as a second language, Christian theatre productions, a Christianity Explored or Alpha course, seven-step groups for the overweight, home movie*

*evenings, Agnostics Anonymous discussion groups, cycling weekends, street ministry for homeless young people, classes on good financial management, or occasions celebrating the contribution of a local hospital emergency department, local school teachers, firemen, police officers or social workers. The list is endless; the doors into the kingdom are as multiple.*

'Our experience in such a congregational context', he says, 'was that the more doors into the kingdom we opened, the more people came through them.'

Assessment of our locality's needs and opportunities in the parish of Chryston and Moodiesburn led to the establishing of the Honeypot Nursery school in Moodiesburn, 14 years ago. There have been around 30 pupils in the school each year. Contacts led to a weekly coffee group, and eventually six of the mothers came to faith. The school has received very encouraging reports from the H.M.I. and has led to a lot of goodwill in the community because of the educational standards and the Christian ethos. Over the years, we have developed the work of the nursery school under the umbrella of a separate registered charity, THE SPARK INITIATIVE, and this now includes a Befrienders scheme in the parish with a number of volunteers, calling on needy, lonely and depressed people in the locality, who are often referred by the local social work department. 'Jesus went about doing good.' Do we?

### PRINCIPLE 3: TELL EXTRAORDINARY STORIES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

In John 4:29 we read, 'Many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the woman's testimony.' The woman's word, actually! *Logos* in the original term. *Logos* doesn't usually mean 'story', but it does here, and the woman's *logos* was quite a story! 'He told me everything I ever did.' Extraordinary! At least to those who heard, it was a story that was outwith their worldview and life experience. It seemed to come from another world and as such it held some attractions for enquiring souls.

Just over a year ago, the church where I was minister produced a glossy booklet entitled *Real People Real Stories*. The stories of ten ordinary people were selected from those who were converted to Christ over the years through the witness of the local church and recorded in the booklet. The idea was to hand out the booklets where appropriate after conversations with neighbours, friends and colleagues, or

to use them in door-to-door visitation in the community in the future. We are fairly convinced today that it's not just Samaritans who are intrigued by stories of ordinary people involving extraordinary spiritual changes and that for the better. Let me indicate something of three of the stories here.

There is the story of the 50-year-old man who resisted invitations to church for 28 years after his wife was converted. He had a chronic gambling problem, but Christians befriended him over all these years and visited him and accompanied him to social events and even went on holiday with him and his wife. At last, 28 years on, he came to a residential church weekend in the country, experienced the change of heart which Christ brings through the gospel, and committed his trust to Him. He is now in church almost every Sunday in the year and has publicly professed faith and become an active member of the church. He has experienced new self-control in tackling his gambling habits, and most of what he earns now is channeled towards the paying back of old debts. It is an extraordinary story!

## **DEVELOP A MISSIONARY MENTALITY, MAKE THE MOST OF LOCAL SITUATIONS, AND FINALLY, TELL EXTRAORDINARY STORIES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE**

Or there is the story of the young mother in her thirties who had never been to church since early childhood. After moving into the community, a Christian neighbour befriended her. A young Christian mother from a local playgroup wrote her a card and offered to pray when her father was seriously ill at hospital. Another Christian neighbour offered to take her and her children to church and Sunday School. This lady gladly released the older child but made the excuse of the infant's needs for staying at home. Two to three years passed, and when the younger girl was Sunday School age, she agreed to venture up the road with

that Christian neighbour. She dropped both the children off at Sunday School and went halfway back down the road, but on an impulse, turned and went back to the church service. That day, she heard a message that told her everything she ever did, as she said in later years. She found Christ in the months that followed. She is now the church secretary, her husband is an elder, and her older daughter, after studying at missionary college, is now married to a pastor in a church planting context in southern Ireland. How extraordinary – at least it's a story outwith the ordinary experience of the materialistic worldview around.

And then there's the story of a woman who found Christ in the church services twenty years ago. She was of a very anxious, shy, retiring disposition. Her husband, a leading light in the local masonic group, made life very difficult for her. But she stuck it out within the Christian fellowship, though he didn't with the masonic fellowship! After a disagreement, he left and eventually came to church and trusted in Christ at a Good Friday service. Two years later, after suffering from cancer, he died. It was a heavy blow to her, but she kept going. Then her middle son died with no warning. Another devastating event, but she kept going. For twenty years she had been on the Reception desk at the local high school. That is, she had been the first person people met and the first person people spoke to on the telephone at the school. And over these years her gentle, consistent, caring, prayerful Christian testimony won the respect of many in the school. She received awards year after year from pupil votes. She was given a massive retirement dinner in a local hotel by the Head Teacher, and presented some of the prizes at her last school prize giving. And now she heads up the Scripture Union prayer network for the five schools in the locality. EXTRAORDINARY, I would say, but an ordinary person. REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES. And many from that town (not only Sychar, but also Chryston and Moodiesburn); will believe in Him because of their testimonies. So develop a missionary mentality, make the most of local situations, and finally, tell extraordinary stories of ordinary people.



YOU CAN LISTEN TO MARTIN ALLEN'S LECTURE  
ONLINE BY VISITING:

[www.freescotcoll.ac.uk](http://www.freescotcoll.ac.uk)

**Skye and Wester Ross  
Women For Mission  
Ladies' Day**

**in Aros, Portree on  
Saturday, 19 September 2009**

**Main Speaker: Mrs Ann Allen  
Church of Scotland**

**Topic: God's Second Chances**

**More details to come!**

# An t-earrach

Nach mòr a tha na ràithean a' teagasg dhuinn mu bheatha. Cha bhi a' chùis an-còmhnaidh dorch. Bidh dòchas againn ri soilleireachd. An t-seachdain a chaidh ann an Siabost chuala sinn iomadh nì misneachail. Bheachdaich sinn mar shluagh le taingealachd air "an duine seo." Abair gun do rinn Esan obair mhòr a tha dhuinne na dhoras dòchais. Ged a chunnaic E na h-uabhasan a bha roimhe b'ann airson na h-obrachsa a thàinig E don t-saoghal. Nach bu chòir do shluagh a' Chruitheir a bhith taingeil gu bràth airson na rinn E dhaibh. Dh'fhuiling E mòran ach an tugadh E mòran a chum Glòire. Sluagh beannaichte gun teagamh ged a bhios iad gu tric air am buaireadh a-bhos an seo. Thig là agus cha bhi uallach no buaireadh nan eachdraidh, agus nach e an smuain sin a tha beannaichte.

Is e nì tlachdmhor a th'ann a bhith a' faicinn òigrìdh ar là anns an eaglais, ag èisteachd ris an t-soisgeul, nuair a tha mòran den co-aoisean gun ùidh sam bith aca ann an nithean mar seo. Bidh feadhainn aca a' treòrachadh a' choithionail ann am moladh, agus tha seo gu cinnteach maiseach- a bhith a' cluinntinn neart, spionnadh agus ceòl na h-òige nan guth. Nach iad a bhios taingeil aon là gun tug iad na làithean a b' fheàrr don Chruitheir. Gheibh iad gu cinnteach buannachd às.

## SEANFHACAIL.

### CHAN EIL SAOI GUN CHOIMEAS.

### IS FHEÀRR AM FÒGHLAM A DH' ÌSLICHEAS DUINE NA AM FÒGHLAM A DH' ÀRDAICHEAS E.

Tha sinne anns na ceàrnaidhean –sa a' cluinntinn mòran de nithean ionmhiannaichte agus bidh e na cheist orm dè a tha mi a' dèanamh leis. Bidh e gun teagamh air iarraidh oirnn', oir an dream a fhuair mòran bidh mòran air iarraidh orra. Fhuair sinn earailean feumail feasgar Diluain a' cur nar cuimhne gu robh an Cruitheir ag iarraidh ar beatha. Dh' fheumadh sinn a bhith faiceallach cò ris a shealladh sinn agus càit' an dèigheadh sinn anns an t-saoghal. B'ann Leis san a bha sinn agus tha còir Aige oirnn'. Bidh sinn ag ùrnaigh gu faigh sinn air a bhith dileas Dha-san fhads a tha sinn air thalamh.

Anns a' Ghiblean an-uiridh chaill an sgìre sa, Col Uarach, dithis a bha glè fheumail ann an iomadh dòigh. B'iadsan Murchadh Dòmhnallach air an robh sinn uile glè eòlach, agus Dòmhnall Caimbeul a bha a' fuireach an ath dhoras.

O sgìre Chuil Uaraich tha an talamh fo ghruaimean  
O sgìre Chuil Uaraich tha an talamh ri bròn  
O sgìre Chuil Uaraich is e earrach glè chruaidh  
A thàinig am-bliadhna 's ghoid asad na seòid.

Nan nàbaidhean sona gu dicheallach, toilicht'  
Iad èasgaidh nam beatha, is chuidich iad tòrr  
Nad adhbhar-sa ag obair le cuimhne agus cobhair  
Do shluagh a bha bochd –is sin thall san Roinn-Eòrp'.

Dh' fhalbh thu leo còmhla 's tha am baile fo thùirse  
Na daoine air am fàgail a' snàmh ann an ceò  
Cò as urrainn do thuigsinn? Cò nach fheum a bhith a' ruighinn  
an àite san can iad, "Tha do làmh-sa gar leòn"?

Ach an làmh a nì leòn is i cuideachd nì slàinte  
Is i thogas an àirde gach crìdh' tha fo bhròn  
Is i an làmh a bheir misneach sa thuigeas gach clisgeadh  
Bheir freastalan duilich na beatha-sa oirnn'.

Na fàg sinn mar bhaile agus cuimhnich an t-searrag  
San tuirt thu gun taisgeadh tu innte na deòir  
Tha iad lionmhor gu deimhin ach nad àm-sa bidh foghar  
Do bheannachaidh againn is deàlraidh tu oirnn'.

Chan e bàs idir deireadh na sgeòil ach an toiseach  
Far an tèid sinn a-steach co' riut 's tu a shiabas na deòir  
Gu beò thobraichean uisge bheir an t-Uan sinn;  
Thar tuigse nam beò air an talamh tha a' bheannachd nad chòir.

Tha sinne a-nis sona ged tha sinn air toiseach  
Bidh muinntir an t-saoghail nan deann às ar dèidh  
Is aig Là mòr na h-Aiseirigh dùisgidh sinn uile  
Is bidh beath' a bhios beannaicht' gu sìorraidh air nèamh.



# HOW ARE YOU DRESSED?

Why would anyone be drawn to come along to church? This is a question that is often on our lips just now. Not because there are particular problems in the church, but because we have a new church in King William's Town. The church family has been there for quite some time and has been meeting in the main Dumisani classroom. But in the last couple of months their new church has been completed and they have now moved in.

The area they have moved into is a prime evangelistic area. They are in the centre of a large community of new houses – houses aimed at young families. What potential for outreach and church growth! The church's facilities – by rural South African standards – are very good. It is quite a large brick-faced church – not one that is easily missed.

## OUR CHURCHES SHOULD BE LIKE A MAGNET FOR GOOD IN THIS WORLD OF DARKNESS.

So what is the problem? I don't know! It is easy to criticize. The church has so much to offer, so much to tell others about God's grace and saving power. They have a message of hope to deliver in a country wrecked by crime, poverty and illness. There are people in the church full of passion for their Lord and Saviour and wanting to reach out to those around.

But I also think they – along with most of the churches - have more than one millstone tied around their necks: millstones that are a legacy of the past. Take the church uniforms, for example. There is no clear understanding of how they came about. Some say that the missionaries of the past introduced them to prevent people coming to church wearing clothes that had connections with ancestral worship. Others say that missionaries had shown the people pictures of large American church choirs, and the people thought that this was how they should attend church. Whatever the reason, it is a good leveler. You cannot tell at a glance who has money or status. No one needs to worry about what to wear or whether they can 'keep up with the Joneses'. But increasingly there is a move away from the uniformed churches. Younger people are not so interested in joining the more traditional uniformed church; and whatever the good points of a uniform may be, if they become a stumbling block to others, we need to question whether they are appropriate.

If we were to look at our churches from the outside (and here I am talking about the Free Church in Scotland as well as in South Africa and beyond), we may find many things that are habitual rather than biblical, and are stumbling blocks to non-Christians. The

Bible's teaching is very clear that we should not be doing anything that would prevent others from coming to Christ.

Are we dressed in righteousness (see Ephesians 6:14), or are we dressed in the traditions and customs of our society and church?

We are often so used to our patterns of worship, routines going in and out of church, where we sit, even the looks on our faces, that we no longer see them as they are.

We should look at what might prevent people from coming to our churches, but we must also look at what will draw people in. I am not saying here that we should provide what people would like, but we should provide what is scriptural, honest and true. Our churches should be like a magnet for good in this world of darkness.

What should the priorities be for a biblical church? A place where people can hear God's words through the clear preaching of the Bible; worship that enables people to express praise to God in a manner that they can understand and that is acceptable to God; a community in which the Lord's Supper and baptism are given their rightful place; a place where Christians are united in love and fellowship and encouraging one another: a place where Christians are able to identify and use the gifts that God has given them; a community that is committed to reaching out with the gospel to their own community and far beyond.

## IT WOULD DO US NO HARM TO BE A 'SECRET SHOPPER'

In many ways the church in South Africa is very different from the church in Scotland. It is not a subdivision of the church in Scotland. It has developed its own character and is independent from the ruling bodies of the Free Church of Scotland. So on the surface the problems may appear different, just as the solutions may appear different. But at the heart of the matter, the issues are just the same. We can't always equate church growth with numbers attending. Some churches will provide what people want in the same way that a social club will adapt to current trends at any cost. But when a church truly is developing and reaching out into the world around them with God's good news, it is because they are following the teachings of God. When a church stagnates and dies, it is often because the desire to follow God's teachings has become secondary to tradition or human desire.

It would do us no harm to be a 'secret shopper' and to go into our churches and try to see them through the eyes of someone new to the church. I think we might learn something and realize what an amazing God we serve – who loves us despite our frailties and gives us wisdom and understanding when we are ready to listen.

Jenny Wilson



# EEFC SUMMER CAMPS

**JOANNE MORRISON** TELLS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE AS A LEADER WITH *EASTERN EUROPE FOR CHRIST*

Following a talk given at our YF about the work of EEFC, two friends and I decided to help out with their camps this summer. I was so excited about leading at a camp where I could meet new people, experience different cultures, and most importantly, share the Gospel - with the added bonus of travelling to exciting, new (sunny) surroundings!

## **I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND EEFC CAMPS TO ANYONE (OF ANY AGE) AND WOULD URGE YOU TO CONSIDER LEADING ONE THIS SUMMER!**

Having very little knowledge of Eastern Europe, we were relieved to hear about the training day in Perth, which we attended long before the camps took place. The training day sparked our enthusiasm towards two particular camps, Hódmezvásárhely (or 'Hodmez') and Mahanaim. The 'Hodmez' camp was held in a small town in the southeast of Hungary; Mahanaim, however, was situated in the remote Transylvanian mountains!

The camp in Hódmezvásárhely was in a great location. The accommodation itself was very comfortable and had plenty of room for the large group of 60 campers and 20 leaders. We had a spacious area outside where all the talks, meals and games were held. Nearby there were lots of shops, cafés (a Tesco!!), and the school where we taught our daily English and Bible classes.

Each day after leaders' devotions, breakfast and the morning talk, we would walk to the school to begin our lessons. Sharon and I were teaching the beginners' class, and thoroughly enjoyed our week with the group. The campers were mostly aged around 13. It was great fun to prepare the two English lessons and watch as, without fail each day, our lesson plans altered entirely!

We had the privilege of discussing the Bible with our class each afternoon. All the talks throughout the week were looking at the Parables. I sometimes worried about keeping our young group interested without compromising the Gospel message. However, the Lord was so faithful to us. It was such a comfort and encouragement to be reminded as we taught that God was in control, it was Him who was speaking to these kids, and His perfect voice would never be stifled by our feeble words.

Mahanaim was full of different challenges and blessings. We were in a very remote location, living in picturesque wooden huts right in the heart of a Transylvanian valley. With no home-

comforts (like electricity, flushing toilets or running water) we felt a lot more reliant and focussed on the Lord; the beautiful surrounding creation was a constant reminder of His omnipotence.

These campers were a bit older, nearer 15, and seemed harder to reach. It was a smaller camp, though, and by the end of the week the campers felt open enough to ask about God and share experiences with us around the campfire. We were thrilled to learn that two girls professed faith in the Lord while at camp.

Looking back over my two weeks at camp, there are so many things to thank the Lord for. We were kept safe through an amazing time of fun, friendship and fellowship. I am especially thankful that we were blessed at both camps with fantastic teams of leaders. Not only did we develop relationships with campers and Hungarians, we made lasting friendships with other Scottish Christians. I would highly recommend EEFC camps to anyone (of any age) and would urge you to consider leading one this summer!

## **EEFC CAMPS**

**Share the Gospel and teach English in Eastern Europe this summer**

Every summer EEFC run week-long camps in Central and Eastern Europe to help the local church in their ministry to young people.



The main focus of the camps is teaching the Bible and English language. They also include plenty of activities, sports, outings etc. The aim is to provide a fun, enjoyable holiday for young people in a Christian environment. There are great opportunities to share your faith, help with language practice and build relationships.

For details of the Training Day and Camp dates, see the website below.

For more information contact:

Camps Coordinator  
Tel: 0844 3570 222  
Email: [camps@eefc.org.uk](mailto:camps@eefc.org.uk)

**[www.eefc.org.uk](http://www.eefc.org.uk)**

Charity number: SC017918

# NURSING IN MOYOBAMBA

**MAIRI CATHERINE MARTIN** UPDATES US ABOUT HER INVOLVEMENT IN THE SAN LUCAS CLINIC

With a blizzard outside my window, it's hard to remember a summer in the southern hemisphere without a shiver and a sudden longing to be back there.

The San Lucas clinic in Moyobamba had many troubles last year. With a deficit in the funds that they so heavily rely on, they had to lay off some staff; they simply couldn't pay them. For a while the work of the clinic was in limbo, and gradually they looked for a few qualified doctors and a nurse to take over from those who had left. When I arrived in the clinic at the end of July, half the staff I had worked alongside were no longer there, and those who were there had twice as much work to do. I paired up for the month with Elvira, the new community nurse. It was great to be able to explain to her the ways I had worked with the community development team in the past and share ways we had encouraged the communities to take on and develop our ideas.

With work having been started in a 'new' community, we planned trips to visit the people of Nuevo Jerusalem (New Jerusalem) each week to take classes, primarily with the women and children. In the past I was teaching nutrition and hygiene; this year I gave basic emergency training to the town's appointed First Aiders. It was great to have a responsibility specific to nursing, and to be given the opportunity to improvise and teach basic medical knowledge to people who don't have information regarding these subjects available to them.

The clinic plans to build a water system in New Jerusalem, a task they have achieved in numerous other communities. Raising funds for this work forms part of the 2008-2009 WFM project, alongside two other health-related proposals in two other countries. The benefits of having a water system in these communities are innumerable, the most



*The Pastor of New Jerusalem with his daughter Aracelly*

pressing being the associated decrease in disease and infection rates demonstrated in communities with water already installed. Pray for this work, that the population will get access to basic running water, something we entirely take for granted.

I was somewhat coerced into the role of playing piano at church during my stay. The congregation had bought a beautiful new electric piano but had yet to find a pianist! Not the easiest of tasks with some unfamiliar songs, a distinct lack of practice (on my part) and frequent repetitions of choruses without sufficient warning; it was nonetheless enjoyable to be involved again with church life in Moyobamba, to see familiar faces again and visit church families and friends, both old and young alike.

Coming to the end of my nursing degree in the next few months, I plan to stay and work in Scotland for the time being to gain experience in different clinical areas here at home. After that, if opportunities arise, I'd love to go back to South America to live and work wherever God wants me to be. Don't get me wrong, I don't limit the geographical possibilities to just South America, but being familiar with the culture and language of a specific continent does help!

It's often hard to know what God would have us do. Where should I live? Who will I be with? What about work? How do I find out what my future holds?... What if in place of worrying (as we are so easily inclined to do) we look instead upon the uncertainty as a welcome challenge, an adventure, and a reminder of our need to ever rest in *Christ's* keeping, as we search with great anticipation for what God has in store for our lives? Our Father in heaven can do great things with us, but only if we truly allow Him to take control, putting aside personal plans and vain hopes in favour of what He would have us do. Let's never lose sight of the awe-inspiring power and imagination of a God who gives purpose and meaning to our lives, even in the little things.



*Mairi Catherine with some of those who attended a hand-washing class*

# A VISIT TO SAN LUCAS

**SARAH FRESHWATER, WHO WENT OUT UNDER THE LATIN LINK MEDICAL ELECTIVES SCHEME, TELLS US ABOUT HER WORK**

My trip to Moyobamba, Peru was part of my medical studies. We had the opportunity to go to a hospital or clinic anywhere in the world and see healthcare in whatever form it took. I chose Peru, as I wanted to see the stunning scenery and practise my Spanish with the South Americans. My inquiries took me to the San Lucas clinic in Moyobamba in the highland jungles, at 900 metres altitude.



*Measuring height, weight and arm circumference*

I arrived in the town and realised quickly that only a handful of people spoke English, and from that point on my Spanish improved rapidly by necessity. I sat in on consultations at the clinic and was involved wherever possible.

My medical project required me to measure the nutritional state of children, and this led a group from the clinic, with both British and Peruvian clinic workers, to make several trips up to remote villages and get to meet some remarkable people. There were generally no electricity or sanitation systems, and only occasionally reliably clean water supplies. Some of the clinic workers had already done work in some of these villages, installing latrines and sharing the gospel with the people. During my time there, we began to make more trips to certain villages, and started a programme of teaching basic hygiene and first aid and educating people on growing vegetables to improve nutrition. We also made plans to dig clean wells for the inhabitants, which are now in progress.

In such a short trip I cannot say I achieved great things, but I made friends, I swam under waterfalls, I crossed fast-flowing Amazonian rivers on flimsy rope bridges, I met gorgeous children and sang with them and hugged them and hopefully imparted some of God's care and love for them. I got to see the work of the San Lucas clinic within the town and out to the villages where the need is great, and the enthusiasm and passion of the workers there. For a while I was immersed in a community doing good in a Peruvian town, and I can say there is much opportunity for God to work and mission to be done.

INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH LATIN LINK? SEE THEIR WEBSITE FOR AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITIES:

[www.latinlink.org/opportunities.asp](http://www.latinlink.org/opportunities.asp)

## Women for Mission Annual Meeting

**Thursday 21st May, 2pm  
Presbytery Hall, Free Church College,  
Edinburgh**

The programme will include:

- News of work in Peru, South Africa, Romania and Glasgow
- An update on our 'Health Matters' project
- Reports on what we've been doing during the past year
- The launch of our new project
- Time for tea and fellowship together
- A creche

We will also have a live video link to Stornoway.

There will be a bus running from the North.

For further details, please contact

**Mrs Marie Mackenzie,  
Suainabhal, 5 Darroch Way,  
Alness, Ross-shire, IV17 0SD**

Tel: **01349 883 236** (evenings)

E-mail: [marie.mackenzie@yahoo.com](mailto:marie.mackenzie@yahoo.com)

**If you are free, please join us.  
We would love to see you!**

## Smartie Tubes Reminder



Please remember to send the collected money by the end of April to :

**Mrs Mairead Morrison,  
1 College Court, Thurso, KW14 7QQ,**

Please send this by cheque,  
made payable to WFM.

# DUMISANI CORRESPONDENCE COURSES



THANKS TO **SHELLEY LOMBARD** FOR TELLING US HOW THE MONEY RECEIVED FROM OUR PROJECT 'LITERATURE FOR LIFE' HAS BEEN USED TO SUPPORT THE DUMISANI CORRESPONDENCE COURSES.

## Could you give us a brief overview of the Correspondence Courses?

Correspondence Courses are a very important part of what we do here at Dumisani. For many of our students currently studying with us, this was where they started. Many of the folk using our courses are unable to come to College because of where they are situated - living far out in rural areas where transport is a problem as well as finances. About a hundred of our Correspondence students are in prison, so this serves a very vital role in their growth as believers. This area of study is headed up by Norman Reid. We have a series of four courses – *Know your Bible, Know about God and His Salvation, Know How to Live the Christian Life, Know Paul's Letter to the Romans* – each containing 10 lessons.

These were first launched almost thirty years ago in the days when printing was done manually on a duplicating machine. In the English language these courses have recently been completely revised and published in a new format as an attractive A5 booklet produced on our new digital copier. Each 20-page booklet contains one lesson and acts as a workbook. The student studies the material, fills in the answers and then mails the booklet to us. We correct it, record the mark and return it to the student together with the next lesson. These books are corrected by Elizabeth Ross.

However, as far as Correspondence Courses in the Xhosa language are concerned, we are still using the old edition produced a long time ago. We just keep photocopying the old books resulting in a poor quality product. We have been hard at work computerising and upgrading the Xhosa edition. This work was almost completed by Ronald Christie before he returned home. He had been working with a number of good Xhosa translators but there is still some work to complete before we will be able to produce a completely new set of courses in Xhosa. Thank you for your generous support. Pray that we may be able to complete this project soon.

## Are you able to share with us any responses from correspondents?

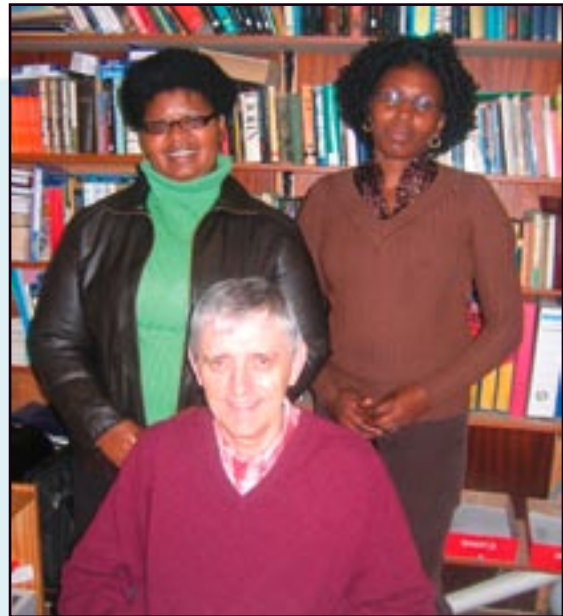
Here are some excerpts from letters received from prisoners:

*'I am very much blessed as a prisoner because if it was not because of my incarceration I would not have known you ... thanks again on behalf of all the inmates who are positively benefiting from this ministry.'*

*'... these lessons ... keep me in the presence of the Almighty, meditating on His Word.'*

*'I want to thank you for all your constant encouragement and support, understanding and guidance that you have shown to me. Today I am strong in the Lord because of you.'*

*'... you make me happy not to go through thinking I am in jail ...'*



Lelitha, Hombakazi & Norman

*it is that I am in Christ Jesus and I know through your preaching that Jesus Christ is my Saviour. I love Christ with my heart and my mind, my understanding, my bones and my soul."*

## What blessings and encouragements - perhaps discouragements - has Dumisani received from this area of ministry?

The blessing will always be the growth in prisoners' lives as they study God's Word. The letters we receive, as you can see, are such a blessing. Further encouragement is the financial support received from supporters around the world as they catch the vision and work of Dumisani. The main frustration is not having the manpower to complete the Xhosa booklets speedily.

## How has the money from the WFM project been used?

It has been used to print the booklets we send to prisoners and other students. The prisoners are not charged anything for the course and because most of our students are prisoners we are not receiving any money for the booklets. This money allows more students to do the course. Other students are charged R10.00 per course. We buy the paper and pay for the printing as well as the postage for each booklet sent.

## Could you give us some items for prayer?

1. Pray that we can get the Xhosa booklets completed and computerised.
2. Pray for the students, that their lives would be changed and enriched by their studies.
3. Pray for Elizabeth, Hombakazi and Lelitha as they mark and read letters received from students, especially the prisoners, as they are lonely and often need someone to talk to.

# THE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS YOU WILL EVER KNOW

**MALCOLM MACLEOD** FROM SHAWBOST REVIEWS *18 WORDS* BY J.I. PACKER (CFP, 2008)

J.I. Packer takes eighteen key words from the Bible and spells out the main thoughts linked with them. Instead of introducing new words and new theology jargon, he reminds us of the need to use what he calls 'God's own vocabulary'. Becoming a Christian is entering into a new life; there is a new world to be discovered and a new language to learn. Packer works through the eighteen key words in a way that gives a succinct and accessible summary of the gospel.

Our first need in life is to learn about sin. For, he says, 'if you have not learned about sin, you cannot understand yourself, or your fellow men, or the world you live in, or the Christian faith. And you will not be able to make head or tail of the Bible.'

The work of redemption is the work of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 'When you state the gospel you take a path up a mountain: and the trinity is both the name and the nature of the mountain you have under your feet the whole time. Salvation is through faith in the Son whom the Father has sent down to be lifted up in sacrificial death, and through being born anew of the Spirit.'

The grace of God is 'the key that unlocks the New Testament'. The wealth of grace is presented as follows: redemption as a costly rescue from jeopardy; regeneration as the necessary complement of redemption; election of sinners from which flows their redemption, regeneration, faith, and final glory; and the preservation of saints, as God keeps in Christ those whom he has united to Christ by faith through the Spirit.

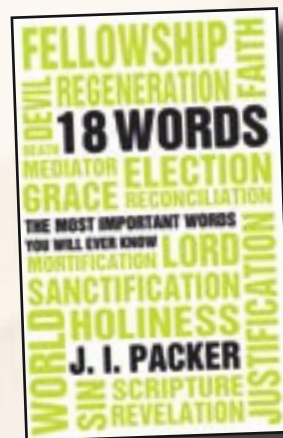
The idea of reconciliation is the sum and substance of the gospel. Reconciliation replaces alienation, hostility, and opposition with a new relationship of favour, goodwill and peace. The Son of God is the Mediator; He is 'the man in the middle'. He has links with both sides; He sympathises with both; both trust Him. This is the good news: 'everything in the gospels is so angled as to highlight this mediation theme. The knowledge of one's justification is the basis of all true religion. True religion does not begin till the question presses: how may I get rid of my sins? And it exists only in those who know that the answer is: not by seeing what I can do for myself, but by putting my trust in Jesus and in what he did for me'. It is God's fundamental act of blessing, for it saves from the past and secures for the future.

Sanctification denotes the state of being dissociated from the practice of sin and devoted to the life of Godlikeness. A life so separated from the practice of sin is man's due response to God as his God, within the covenant relationship. 'The Christian's holiness, like his Master's, is his living out of a relationship to the world of men whereby he is in it without being of it. This requires both separation and identification, both detachment and involvement.'

The mastering of death is the central theme of the gospel. The 'one secret of inner peace and living to the full is to be

realistically prepared for death – packed up and ready to go'. An endless hell can no more be removed from the New Testament than an endless heaven can. 'This is why physical death (the first death) is so fearful a prospect for Christless men; not because it means extinction, but precisely because it does not mean extinction, only the unending pain of the second death.'

In the process of giving an explanation of the key words, Packer engages and interacts with some of the 'perplexities' facing the Church today. The doctrine of the trinity is dismissed by many Christians as a difficult and unimportant abstraction. But Packer insists that, if we do not assert the trinity, what is lost is the gospel itself.



**I HIGHLY  
RECOMMEND THIS  
BOOK TO READERS  
OF EVERY AGE  
AND EVERY LEVEL  
OF CHRISTIAN  
EXPERIENCE.**

At the same time, the doctrine of sin has been secularised – the word has ceased to convey the idea of offence against God, and now signifies only a breach of accepted standards of decency. 'Belief in the devil has seemed to be on the way out; the Bible is no longer fully believed, the gospel is no longer thoroughly preached, and post-Christian paganism sweeps through the world like wildfire'. The evident importance of mortification of sin makes the longstanding neglect of it among Christians look both sad and odd. He claims that this neglect is due to the 'the shallowness of Christian understanding and experience in these days'. The world would see a great deal more practical godliness than it does if Christians today knew more about grace.

The doctrinal teaching of the book is a welcome addition to our understanding of theology. We ignore at our peril the difficulties facing the Church, highlighted in association with this teaching. A careful reading, along with a readiness to expose ourselves to the teaching and to the issues raised, will help to realise Packer's hope that the 'sketches of biblical themes will subserve the Spirit's double purpose of constantly leading us to love and adore the Christ of Scriptures, and to amend our lives by their light.'

I highly recommend this book to readers of every age and every level of Christian experience.

## New Arrivals at the Free Church Bookshop

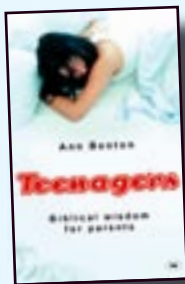


**1-2-1 Discipleship: Helping One Another Grow Spiritually**  
CFP, £5.99

This book by Chrstine Dillon, who works in Taiwan as a church planter with OMF, aims to explain what the vital act of discipleship is and provide practical guidelines for discipling others.

**Finally Alive**  
CFP, £8.99

This book by John Piper clearly unpacks the truth, the necessity and the process of the new birth.



**Teenagers: Biblical Wisdom for Parents**  
IVP, £7.99

The book of Proverbs points to wisdom as the key to health, happiness and prosperity. Ann Benton points out that the job of parents is not first and foremost to make their teens successful, but to make them wise.

**Your Questions Answered: A Reply to Muslim Friends**  
EP, £4.95

Muslims and Christians can agree on many things. They would agree that it is important to have a sincere faith. They would also agree that it is important to seek the truth, as it has important consequences. Many Muslims have preconceived ideas about Christianity. They have not had the opportunity to find out what Christians really believe. In this book, E. M. Hicham draws on his own search for truth in order to help clear up these misconceptions. He carefully and compassionately addresses some of the key questions raised by Muslims when considering the Christian faith.



### Free Church Bookshop

15 North Bank Street, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH1 2LS  
0131 718 4141 [bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk)

[www.freechurch.org/bookshop](http://www.freechurch.org/bookshop)

**Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.' Isaiah 59:1**

- Wed 1** The Scottish Bible Society celebrates its bicentenary this year. Pray for God to be glorified through the events currently being planned, including a Songs of Praise broadcast, an art exhibition, and Edinburgh Festival events.
- Thur 2** The Spring Conference starts today. Pray that those attending would know God's presence, and that there would be great unity and enjoyment in the fellowship.
- Fri 3** Govanhill's Communion weekend begins today. The speaker is Kenny Macdonald, formerly of Rosskeen. Please pray for a special blessing on their fellowship and teaching.
- Sat 4** Partick is having a Passover outreach meeting for their Jewish friends. Over the years, they have found these festival meetings to be fruitful. Pray for a good attendance of those they wish to reach, and for the evening's speakers.
- Sun 5** This is the first full day of the boys' golf camp. Ask that there would be safety for them and that the boys would be learning about God while enjoying themselves.
- Mon 6** Dornoch Free Church is holding a children's holiday Bible Club until the 10th. Pray for the children to be touched by messages from the Bible, and for good contact to be made with their parents.
- Tues 7** Today give thanks to the Lord for all the things He has provided for you day by day – your health, food, shelter, loved ones, and church family. Truly He is faithful.
- Wed 8** There is a Christianity Explored taster course tonight, led by Rico Tice, on the OM ship *Logos Hope*, currently visiting Leith. Pray that many would come and that they would be prompted to think seriously about the Lord.
- Thur 9** Remember those who work in hospices. These can be very sad and difficult places, but they can also be full of hope. Pray that Christians who work there will be able to point patients toward that hope, if only through their own loving actions.
- Fri 10** Many churches are involved in outreach at this time. Among them is the annual Easter Pageant in Princes St. Gardens and ecumenical outreach in Perth. Pray that through these means God would be pleased to bring souls into His kingdom.
- Sat 11** Remember the Queen as she draws nearer the end of her reign, and pray that she would ever grow in assurance of God's love and truth, and would encourage her successors to look to these things.
- Sun 12** Today is Easter Sunday. Pray that Christians around the world would be able to remember Christ's resurrection in safety, and enjoy the peace and confidence we have in His life.
- Mon 13** This month's theme is Barack Obama. Today pray for the American president, that he would be increasingly attentive to God's "still, small voice" and would follow His guidance during his term in office.
- Tues 14** The *Logos Hope* leaves Leith today. Pray for safety and blessing for her crew, and that those who heard the gospel would continue to think on the Lord's things.
- Wed 15** Nairn Free Church has a weekly Wednesday night Youth Club, which is very encouraging at present. Pray for the labourers' efforts to be blessed with abundant fruit.

**Thur 16** Today pray for the sung worship in your congregation, that the Lord would bless it to be heartfelt, lovely, and pleasing to Him.

**Fri 17** Next Friday, the churches in and around Inverness will hold 'Roots', a monthly meeting for teenagers. They are encouraged by the numbers attending, and would appreciate prayer for this interdenominational work.

**If you have any requests for prayer or praise for the June Prayer Diary, please send them now to Dayspring MacLeod: 0131 226 5286 or dayspring.macleod@btinternet.com**

**Sat 18** Remember Callanish Free Church in Lewis, as they celebrate Communion on the third Sunday in April. Ask that the people would be full of love for Him who gave Himself for them.

**Sun 19** Rev. Duncan Macleod will lead the Presbytery of Edinburgh and Perth's Gaelic service at 3pm today. Pray that all Gaelic services throughout the country will be blessed to many.

**Mon 20** Pray for Christians who serve in the police force in the UK, that the Lord would keep them safe as they fulfil their duties, and that they would always have the ideal of God's justice in mind as they go about their work.

**Tues 21** The Free Church College students are now preparing for the end of their academic year. Pray for those who will be going on placement this summer, and also for those who are graduating, that the Lord would lead them to the right congregation.

**Wed 22** Remember the vacant congregation of Rogart as they meet for their prayer meeting. Ask that they would be able to 'build each other up' in the absence of a minister.

**Thur 23** Tomorrow Dr Tony Sargent will be speaking at a Supper Meeting at Perth Free Church. Please pray that these meetings would encourage unity among the Perth churches, and be a source of blessing to any unconverted people who attend.

**Fri 24** Govanhill are holding a fundraising meal today for this year's WFM project. Pray for an enjoyable time for them and for real benefit to come to the project.

**Sat 25** Today take time to confess before God the sins of our nation, and to intercede for its people.

**Sun 26** Remember Dumbarton Free Church, which is vacant since Robert Sinclair retired in February. Ask that they will flourish despite the vacancy and will wait patiently for the Lord to send them a new minister.

**Mon 27** Pray for your minister or interim moderator today, asking that he would be able to rest in the Lord even in the midst of his work and responsibilities, and would be daily refreshed.

**Tue 28** Pray for Partick Free Church's weekly drop-in. Over the years they have handed out hundreds of tracts. Ask that those who come in for coffee would find a spiritual home in the church.

**Wed 29** It is easy to forget that our Christian lives are ones of invisible warfare. Pray that the Lord would keep you from temptation today, guarding your heart against the devil's wiles.

**Thur 30** Please pray for the Scottish Bible Society's bicentenary appeal for Brazil. The Society hopes to raise £200,000 to provide a multifunctional bus for use in the northeast of the country. The bus will provide medical and dental healthcare as well as spiritual support to local people.

## THANKS FROM AFGHANISTAN

David,

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the many people who were in touch with Aileen and myself during 2008. As we serve the Lord with the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders here in Canterbury, we have been constantly encouraged by many in the Free Church and it is something we greatly appreciate.



This was particularly the case last year when the Battalion deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan, from April - October. While at times it was a difficult experience, it was also an immense privilege to minister to our soldiers in such a challenging environment.

I know that during the deployment there were many prayers offered on our behalf. Thank you for remembering and for praying. You were more encouragement than you could know.

Yours Gratefully

**Rev Colin Macleod  
Canterbury**

## A CHANGING CLIMATE

Your Dec. 2008 article, 'A Changing Climate', was excellent in its enunciation of biblical principles about creation. I disagree with the second half—'The Science of Climate Change'. While it may reflect consensus thinking, it is nevertheless on shaky scientific ground. The late Michael Crichton (of *Jurassic Park* fame) said:

**'A CHANGING CLIMATE', WAS EXCELLENT IN ITS ENUNCIATION OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ABOUT CREATION. I DISAGREE WITH THE SECOND HALF**

*Let's be clear: the work of science has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Science, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In science, consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus. And furthermore, the consensus of scientists has frequently been wrong. As they were wrong when they believed, earlier in my lifetime, that the continents did not move. So we must remember the immortal words of Mark Twain, who said, 'Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.'*

**Elizabeth Flanagan**

## AFFINITY BAN?

Dear Mr Robertson,

The title you give to your report on the Affinity chairmanship is inaccurate and tendentious. David Meredith was no more 'banned from becoming Affinity Chairman' than John McCain was banned from becoming US President: he was not elected. The circumstances may have been controversial, but that does not excuse such a misrepresentation of the truth.

### **THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND WAS ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH EVANGELICAL COUNCIL (NOW AFFINITY), AND IT WOULD BE A MATTER OF GREAT REGRET TO MANY OF US IF IT WITHDREW FROM MEMBERSHIP.**

You state that the Free Church 'does not and cannot work with bodies that deny the very truths which are the core of the gospel.' Many friends of the Free Church are sad that you cannot see that the Joint Statement, with its mutual commitment to co-operate as far as possible in the advancement of the kingdom of God, involves just that; the Church of Scotland having indeed, by dint of a number of Declaratory Acts chipping away at its commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith, denied 'the very truths which are the core of the gospel.' The Joint Statement cannot be taken as merely a commitment 'to work in evangelism with like-minded evangelicals wherever they are found', as I believe Dr McGowan of the Church of Scotland has cogently observed.

The Free Church of Scotland was one of the founding members of the British Evangelical Council (now Affinity), and it would be a matter of great regret to many of us if it withdrew from membership.

With Christian greetings,

**Peter Beale**  
(BEC/Affinity Chairman, 2002-4)

## EDITOR'S RESPONSE

Whilst we welcome Mr Beale's assurance that Affinity wants the Free Church to remain part of it, we are surprised at the rest of his comments. It is not helpful to accuse us of a misrepresentation of the truth. As Mr Beale knows, the Affinity Council is a representative council that elects its chairman in the same way that a committee does. It can hardly be compared with a mass public election in a democracy! David Meredith was proposed and recommended as chairman. The ONLY reason he was eventually not elected was precisely because he is a minister of the Free Church, after objections from, amongst others, the

FCC representative, on the grounds that the Free Church was a compromised body. No one questioned David Meredith's abilities, personality or gifts, which are eminently suited for the post and would have brought a great deal to Affinity. He was rejected solely because he is a minister of the Free Church. Quite how Affinity think that they can ban our ministers from taking office because we are compromised, whilst asking to remain and pay our not insubstantial dues, escapes us. It is as much a puzzle as when Affinity managed to allow the FCC to continue as a member of a body devoted to Christian unity, whilst the FCC were taking another member of that same body to court and claiming to be it! The inconsistency and mystery deepens even further when the reason given that we were banned is because we apparently work with bodies that deny the very truths that are the core of the Gospel. Even more incredibly, Dr Andrew McGowan, a minister of such a body (according to Mr Beale), is cited in support of that view. Does this mean that Affinity will not recognise those who go to HTC because some of its lecturers belong to, and the course is recognised by, a body that, according to Mr Beale, 'denies the truth of the Gospel?' Will FIEC churches who work in Gospel partnerships with Anglican churches now be banned from being office bearers in Affinity? Is Mr Beale aware that the Free Church made precisely the stand that we would not work with congregations that deny the fundamentals of the Gospel, whilst many congregations within Affinity happily work with such 'compromised denominations'?

It would be amusing if it were not so sad. On the one hand we are denounced by some evangelicals in the C of S because we state we will only actively work with congregations that share the same Gospel; on the other we are denounced by the separatists precisely because we are seeking to work with such congregations in a mixed denomination. Apparently this is okay in some mixed denominations (such as the Anglican Church) but not others (such as the Church of Scotland).

If Affinity wants the Free Church to remain, then perhaps they could provide us with the reason why. What is the point of Affinity? Grandiose mission statements are not what we need. Practical action and biblical consistency, rather than the murky world of church politics, is what we would like to see. Perhaps an apology for the shameful way the Free Church in general and David Meredith in particular have been treated would be a good start?

# SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

*Slumdog Millionaire* is a most unusual film. A British film made for a fraction of the cost of a Hollywood blockbuster, it nonetheless managed to win eight Oscars this year, including best picture. This despite the fact that it contains no well-known stars and includes as two of its lead actors Rubina Ali, aged nine, and Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail, aged ten, who actually are children from the slums of Mumbai. Moreover, half the film is in Hindi.

Many readers will have the same cynical nature that we do, about anything that becomes as hyped as this film has. And yet, in this case, the hype is deserved. It is a truly astonishing film that manages to combine ugliness and beauty, comedy and tragedy, social comment and drama. And like all good films, it raises questions that every Christian should ponder.



The film is the story of Jamal Malik, an 18-year-old orphan from the slums of Mumbai, who is about to experience the biggest day of his life. He is only one question away from winning the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire* when he is arrested on suspicion of cheating. How can a young boy from the slums of Mumbai possibly have known all the answers to the questions? In a brilliant storytelling device, the film shows how Jamal was able to know the answers because each of the questions related to an episode in his life. It is the story of the slums, of inter-ethnic and religious violence, of child exploitation, of Latika, the girl he loved and lost.

One question that underlies the whole thing, though, is why he is on the show at all? Without giving away the ending, which is one of the best we have ever seen, the answer all lies in what Jamal values.

Watching this film is a very strange experience. It does not easily fit into any of the oh-so-comfortable genres of Hollywood. It is not a chick flick/action thriller/romantic comedy/social commentary/avant garde/docudrama or 'good guys versus the bad guys'. It is all of these and more. Those who have read *White Tiger* will recognize the depressing and disturbing picture of human depravity and corruption amongst the poor of India's slums. What they will not recognize is the redemptive theme that runs through the whole film. Some might argue that that theme is trite and unrealistic, but from the Christian perspective, we are once again reminded of the need for all human beings to have redemption. There is a sense in which we are all 'slumdogs',



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trapped in a web of human corruption and poverty. And for the Christian the unrealistic aspect of the film is not that the 'Good News' within it is so unbelievable, but rather because it is so small. We actually have a greater and more unbelievable Good News. The difference is that ours is no film, no 'feel good' story. It is the Truth. It is for real.

Another interesting aspect is the way in which the question of fate and our destination is raised. The film has an interesting take on fatalism and destiny (karma) – just look at the question asked at the beginning, and answered at the end. Again, from a Christian perspective, it is interesting to see how the biblical doctrine of predestination differs from the Eastern notion of karma and fatalism.

It is also a fascinating idea that we answer life's questions according to our experience. This is undoubtedly true – which is why our answers are always so incomplete and weak. What we really need is to know the answers as they are revealed to us in Christ. Certainly we need experience, but without revelation, that experience will only ever be limited and blind.

*Slumdog Millionaire* is beautifully filmed, brilliantly acted and a superbly told story. It reminds us of the desperate need of many human beings trapped in the despairing cycle of urban deprivation. And it reminds us even more of the desperate need of all human beings, lost in a black hole of sin and despair, from which only the Greatest Love can ever extract us. It is not Karma, Fate or Luck that is our redemption, but Christ. The question is not 'who wants to be a millionaire', nor even 'who wants to be loved', but rather 'who wants the riches of Christ?' Who wants to be a Christian?

**The Editor**

