

# THE MONTHLY RECORD

December 2008

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## EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Johnathan Keenan | Alan Fraser | Bill Baird | *Toxic Childhood*

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It started early this year. Christmas adverts began in earnest at the beginning of November. By the time you get this, the commercial 'festive' season will be in full swing. Very little to do with Christ or His birth. Never mind the fact that we have indebted ourselves into a credit crisis; our governments are determined that we should spend more, and what better time to do so than Christmas? Perhaps we could offer some contrary advice. Let's not get into further debt this Christmas. Let's not use it as an opportunity to overindulge. Instead let us seriously think and meditate on what the coming of the Son of God into the world really means. The incarnation is, apart from the Cross, the most astonishing thing ever to happen on this earth. It is right to celebrate it. And it is surely even more right to seek to bring the real story of Jesus to our neighbours, workmates, friends and family, at a time when in theory they are meant to be celebrating his birth. Whether it is through 'Christmas sermons', carol services, Christmas cards or just opportunities that come up in everyday conversation and through the media – let's make the most of every opportunity, for the days are evil.

**Let's not get into further debt this Christmas. Let's not use it as an opportunity to overindulge. Instead let us seriously think and meditate on what the coming of the Son of God into the world really means.**

As we reflect on the wonder of the Son of God becoming a human child, it is appropriate that the theme of the *Record* this month is children, and especially education. Johnathan Keenan reflects upon his time working in Scotland with some young people in the Free Church. From firsthand experience we know Johnathan to be an excellent youth worker, and his insights are particularly helpful. Dr Julia Droeber is a Free Church member who had the desire and vision to help Scotland's children by teaching. Things did not quite work out as she expected. You can read of her experience this month. Likewise, Dr Alan Fraser is a long-established teacher who has witnessed enormous changes in Scotland's education system. His article is a real call for us to wake up and pray and act about what is happening. Bill Baird of CARE tells us of their work in Scotland's schools; Carl Trueman and Jenny Wilson reflect on bringing up children; Irene Howat and Chris Nicholson (my fellow Free Church editors) of *Free* and *The Instructor* tell us about their magazines. We often complain about the lack of suitable material available for our young people. Please use both these magazines and distribute them wherever you can.

In addition to this, Dr Colin Dow summarises the Assembly report on Climate Change. For some reason this is a controversial topic amongst some Christians. Have a read of the article and if you disagree (or agree!) please feel free to write and let us know. We also have news items, profiles

of some of the new students in the Free Church College, the Gaelic article, *From the Frontiers*, the prayer notes, a couple of book reviews and feedback. Finally there is a review of *Toxic Childhood*. We hope that there is plenty for you to read, discuss, and be stimulated to prayer and action.

David

## Meditation Moment



### Read Acts 20:1-6

This is a fascinating insight into the dynamic life of the early church. Paul and Luke and their companions are in the midst of a very tense and serious situation. Paul is determined to head for Jerusalem, even though the likely result is imprisonment and probably death. On the way they stop at Troas, where a young man called Eutychus falls asleep as Paul 'talked on and on' (what encouragement to us preachers – people even slept through the Apostles' sermons!), and falls out a third-storey window, dies and is raised to life by Paul, who then has communion and continues with his sermon until dawn! After that they head for Miletus, where Paul sends for the elders from Ephesus and warns them about the 'savage wolves' that will come in and not spare the flock. There is much weeping and embracing.

Several days later they arrive at Tyre, where they stay a week with the disciples. Paul was warned not to go to Jerusalem 'through the Spirit', but they leave to continue on their way. And we arrive at the beautiful picture of verse five. All the disciples, and their wives and children, accompanied Paul and his companions out of the city to the beach where their ship was moored. Before they boarded the ship, they all knelt together on the sand and prayed. Men, women and children prayed together before saying their farewells. That picture speaks volumes. Not least in the fact that the children were involved. It has sometimes been the habit to encourage work amongst children because they are 'the church of tomorrow'. This is not good enough. Children are the church of today as well. They must know that they belong. They must know that even if they go to long evening services where they fall asleep (although preferably not out of third-floor windows!), they are warmly welcome. More than that, they are to do the welcoming as well – they are part of the body. In our worship, sermons and 'body life', we must do all that we can to recognise this particular part of the body. Let our churches be 'child friendly'; let us desire the best for them and educate them. Let us welcome little children, for the kingdom belongs to such as these.

# The *Ifications* of Youth Ministry

**Johnathan Keenan**, former Smithton youth worker, reflects on his time in Scotland

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.' These are the opening lines of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, and are an accurate summary of my life as a youth worker in Scotland. There is harmony amongst these variations that define for us the true reality of life. Ministry illuminated this truth beautifully for me as I assimilated into a culture not my own and began to love the young people who were significantly different than mine.

## The question of youth work then is, 'How do you change the music?'

It became apparent that the best of times were mixed with the worst of times. The age of wisdom and discernment would be challenged by foolishness and rebellion. As the youth ministry unfolded in Smithton, I began to notice certain trends that would challenge every conversation, every talk I gave, every event we held. The categories of *Authority*, *Amusement*, and *Apathy* were the overarching headings that were pregnant with implications that I (and the other leaders) attempted to address regularly by explaining the Gospel under the three '-ifications' (Justification, Sanctification, & Glorification).

Not every young person has authority issues, but the

foundation of postmodernism that floods our current age teaches that the acceptance of any ultimate authority is wrong. Traditional authority figures that once existed as a shepherding tool to guide society now exist to be challenged, ignored, or rejected. Life is not found in what is truth, but rather how life is experienced. How one feels, or what gives the most pleasure, is the gauge of purpose and meaning. Amusement is where truth is found. The results are a life of apathy that is unresponsive to ambition, that is summed up by the theme song 'I can't be bothered'.

If authority is the drumbeat of postmodernism, keeping the rhythm, then amusement is the baseline that offers the heart-pounding sound of experience; but all attention is focused on the lead guitarist of apathy, who sings about nothing and everything. Incorporate this sophisticated system with natural sinful teenagers, and what you have is the current pop band of the youth in Scotland.

The question of youth work then is, 'How do you change the music?' Our model that we employed in Smithton was to offer the music of the Gospel by rediscovering an avenue in youth ministry that seems to have been lost - teaching the Bible. The chords we strummed regularly were the sounds of *Justification*, *Sanctification*, and *Glorification*. These *ifications* become the drumbeats, the baselines, and the lead guitarists of the band, and when it is fully amplified, they become the beautiful harmonies of the Gospel.

Addressing the issue of authority was a balancing act between dismantling the young people's suspicions of my perceived agenda, while at the same time not encouraging



Switzerland Ski Trip 2007 (Smithton-Culloden YF & Carloway Lewis YF)



*Johnathan with some of the boys from Smithton-Culloden Free Church*

their idols of autonomy and self-love. I quickly learned that ministry was like a beggar, showing other beggars where he happened to have found some bread. Transparency gave me a trustworthy voice with the young people as I spoke of my own struggles and sinful tendencies. They soon realized I was a broken, dysfunctional sinner who needed the same Jesus I was preaching to them. Unveiling my heart was difficult, but necessary in gaining their respect and trust.

Kids today have almost become numb to the enormous stockpile of pleasure-seeking activities at their disposal. All kids struggled with the temptation of alcohol, drugs, and sex, though, in my opinion, technology has become the new substance abuse. This YouTube, mobile phone, Bebo-loving generation has lost the ability to communicate because they can amuse themselves in sheer isolation from anyone else. They don't need community as long as they have a computer screen. They don't need Youth Fellowship as long as their mobile phones have credit. However, as the kids discovered what it meant to be an image-bearer of the Triune God, they began to understand that they had a need for community because it was in their spiritual DNA.

**They don't need community as long as they have a computer screen. They don't need Youth Fellowship as long as their mobile phones have credit.**

As their understanding of the Gospel heightened, the immediate implication was safety, which they previously

found behind their computer screen. In the Gospel, they were accepted and loved regardless of who they were or what they had done. The freedom this brought transformed our once clique-ish youth group into a single fellowship of messy, broken sinners who were okay with each other. Our temptation to entertain the kids to death was quenched as we witnessed kids from all ages and backgrounds coming together just for the 'craic'.

## **Our main intention in youth ministry was pointing them to the Gospel**

The greatest challenge, however, was dealing with *Apathy*, which in my opinion is the cancer of the young people in Scotland. We attempted to rediscover a world and life-view that establishes the Sovereignty of God. Uncovering the divine drama of the Gospel and showing these kids how God has written them into His script was our response to their apathetic, 'I can't be bothered' attitude. When they heard that God was bothered about them, attitudes were changed and lives were transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our main intention in youth ministry was pointing them to the Gospel and showing them the relevance and beauty of a God who loves a sinful, messy, and broken world. It was indeed the best of times and the worst times, but more importantly it was a life-changing time as we witnessed God break into the hearts of many young people. The work is not done, and it is my prayer that the church remains bothered about the young people of Scotland.

# Secondary Education in Scotland – Taking Stock

by Alan J F Fraser

As a recently retired Depute Rector from a State Secondary school in Scotland, having previously had fifteen years' experience with a Christian school in Peru, it seems an appropriate time to try to offer a personal evaluation of secondary education in Scotland today. My experience in Colegio San Andres, Lima, gave me an opportunity to think through biblical teaching relevant to curricular, pastoral and management issues in education.

One of the more interesting developments was the formation of a middle management in the school, giving department heads freedom to lead in several curricular areas. Much good work was done by Scottish, Dutch and South American teachers in moving the curriculum forward. In my later years in Peru, a helpful cooperation between our school and a Swiss/German initiative to support Christian education led to the production of Religious Education textbooks for Primary and the setting up of a Teacher Training College.

This progress was not without its personal cost. In my first year as Head Teacher at the age of thirty, with the pressures that go with freedom and responsibility and additional stresses from an unsympathetic left-wing military government, personal and spiritual weaknesses were soon exposed. Psalm 119 became a lifeline to me as I grappled with financial matters (budgeting with galloping inflation), personnel issues, the usual personal and family crises, and the surrounding politics of car bombs, street riots and bullying officials. At this distance from it, all I can say is, with the Psalmist, 'It was good that I was afflicted.'

Much of what was achieved there is gratifying to look back



on, but it is also sobering to recognise the gulf between the vision and the implementation.

When I returned to Scotland I was more surprised than anyone to be given a job as Depute Rector in The Nicolson Institute. Room for making a personal contribution was much more restricted. However, with a supportive Rector, we developed school Assemblies that ensured there was biblical teaching and a formal recognition of God in the life of the school. There were continued opportunities to learn how to relate to colleagues, parents and pupils in a manner consistent with biblical norms. It was intriguing to see how the experience of coping with the political pressures in Peru became relevant to the new situation in Scotland.

## A Cursory look back

'A Curriculum for Excellence' is the great new leap forward in Scottish Education today. It has broad political support. It draws together the threads of a number of initiatives that were launched over the past decade with bewildering frequency. Each new focus emphasised different aspects of what schools should be aspiring to: a curriculum for all, certification for all, assessment for learning, better behaviour, inclusion, enterprise, lifelong learning, professional freedom and responsibility for the classroom teacher, etc. The new conditions for teachers brought in after the McCrone report, in which teachers were reminded that they all had pastoral responsibilities and could not regard themselves merely as purveyors of knowledge and skills within the confines of their own specialist subject area, are another important element in the educational revolution going on around us.

These initiatives, built on previous changes going back to my first years in education and before – raising of the school leaving age, comprehensive schools, standard grades, vocational qualifications, improved teaching methodology, looking after the interests of children with additional support needs – seek to adapt our schools to deliver meaningful courses to all ability levels and prepare all children to play a useful part in society.

These initiatives had much to commend them in principle, but with the usual shortfall in implementation, such as:

- Forcing young folk to stay on at school before appropriate courses were in place for them;
- Failure to deal with behaviour problems;
- Allowing a legitimate concern for quality control to degenerate into a league table mentality that disparaged anything that could not be measured, resulting in empire-

building in the area of assessment and promoting at times the certification of trivia;

- Shifting power from school to local and national administration, run by those who were increasingly out of touch with classroom reality, and who saw their role as that of challenging professional teachers to improve statistics – not always the same thing as improving learning;
- Diverting teacher time and energies from learning and teaching to bureaucratic tasks aimed at quality assurance;
- Encouraging teachers to stick rigidly to pre-packaged courses, undermining their confidence in their ability to teach to the needs of the pupils they know;
- Improved teaching methods (today's teachers are much better at imparting subject skills and knowledge) but a lack of consensus on the purpose of education and its wider aims of development of character. It is like having more skilful drivers on better roads, but with no clear idea of the purpose of the journey.

Unfortunately there is evidence that this bold new initiative of 'A Curriculum for Excellence' is running into the sands of educational bureaucracy. Evidence gathering for inspections and quality improvement gurus is proving wasteful of professional resources, oppressive, and demoralising for the people whose energy and skills must be harnessed if real progress is to be made.

### Values

A significant part of 'A Curriculum for Excellence' is the drive to strengthen values education. This is probably a response to the increasing, widespread concern over moral issues affecting the young. The basis for this new drive is the four values inscribed on the mace at the Scottish Parliament: Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, Integrity.

The recognition that our education system is becoming bogged down in curricular detail and paper-driven accountability mechanisms, and needs a further focus on values, is to be welcomed. We should never forget that it was highly educated individuals who devised and carried out the Nazi atrocities. It is also encouraging to note that our materialistic society, with its individualistic pursuit of power, money, image and instant pleasure, is beginning to recognise again that there is more to life than money can buy. Even in the area of national priorities there is a flickering flame of recognition for programmes that go beyond mere personal comfort, e.g. environmental concerns, relief of world poverty, and finding fulfilment in building a better society for all. However, there are a number of concerns.

1. Where are we to look for the moral authority to support this venture? One of the first casualties of modern and post-modern thinking was the concept of 'Authority', usually equated with authoritarianism and oppression. Yet without appropriate authority, there can be no universal values, only the rule of those who shout the loudest.
2. We live in a pluralistic society where Christians have become one among many competing voices in today's Scotland. The contemporary search for meaning is more likely to look to some ancient or modern mysticism than to the traditional message of the Christian community.
3. Relativism is often portrayed as the only route to a

tolerant society. However, in its arrogant rejection of all religious commitment, it refuses to accept that, by its own logic, it also is merely one viewpoint among many. Its ruthless drive to privatise morality is self-contradictory and, in the long run, intolerant of all other viewpoints.

4. Values are rooted in belief systems. These belief systems may be religious or nonreligious, forming a complex of ideas that determines the way people react to the world. As our society continues to drift away from its Christian roots, it is more difficult for people to understand biblical teaching. Moral values cannot exist apart from these more basic beliefs about what is true and, indeed, about the nature of truth itself.

**Is it too much to hope that our Education System might be based on Christian principles? It is certainly not too much to pray for.**

5. Values are learned in communities – families, churches, schools, local and global, real and virtual. Some of the traditional communities involved in transmitting values are seriously under attack.
6. Contemporary Scottish society still depends on moral values derived from our Presbyterian heritage. However, 'stowaway values' – relics of a bygone age – cannot survive long when separated from their roots. Traditional sexual mores and respect for truthfulness have been eroded alarmingly over the span of one generation. Will we live to see a day when the general revulsion for paedophilia turns to acceptance?
7. Moral values deal with inter-personal relationships. Central to the teaching of values is an understanding of what it means to be human. Meekness, servant leadership and finding joy in giving rather than receiving don't seem to have much place in today's individually assertive society.

Where does this leave the Christian community? It is difficult to see how values in education can be addressed without building on God's revelation of Himself. Is it too much to hope that our Education System might be based on Christian principles? It is certainly not too much to pray for. In the meantime, let us use every opportunity to impart beliefs to the young and the skills to enable them to defend their beliefs in a confusing marketplace of competing ideas. This includes all options for education for our children and others – Christian schools, home-schooling and working within the state system. Perhaps the fast-changing world of Information Technology will open up new approaches to Christian education. Whatever the tools available, one thing should be high on the agenda – co-operation with Christians across denominational boundaries. Bodies such as CARE and ACT give an opportunity for scarce resources to come together, enabling professional skills and experience to be harnessed to spiritual maturity for the advancement of the Kingdom of God in a hostile world.

# Scotland's Young People Today: A Probationer Teacher's Perspective

**Dr Julia Droeber** is a German member of the Free Church who recently decided on a change of career and went through her teacher training in Scotland. The following is an account of her experience as a probationary teacher and gives a vivid insight into Scottish education today.

'It wasnae me!', wee Josh calls out when I cast a stern look in his direction. A piece of rubber had just flown across the classroom. I had seen Josh flinging it. Rather than shout in such situations, I usually just stare disapprovingly and most children respond with an apology of sorts. Yet, Josh's reaction – an automatic refusal to take responsibility for his own actions (without even being explicitly accused of anything) – is emblematic for my experience as a secondary teacher.

After my initial teacher training in 2006/07, I was allocated a place as a probationer teacher in a secondary school in a West Coast education authority. Having lived, studied, and worked in Dundee and Aberdeen, I was not overly familiar with the area I was going to work in for the year. I must confess that it was not particularly encouraging to find out that the region was described as 'deprived' and the school as 'underachieving' and 'difficult'. But then again, I always love a challenge, so I packed my bags and moved from the east to the west coast of Scotland to teach Religious, Moral, and Philosophical Studies.

I need to point out that I had been rather naïve about teaching in Scottish secondary schools – I assumed that it would be similar to my own days as a pupil in a German school, or to the experience of my teacher parents. Little did I know that nothing would be further from the truth! It is also worth emphasising that my experience cannot be generalised, as the school I worked in was particularly

difficult, and the subject I taught (RMPS) was exceptionally hated by children and parents alike.

All these caveats aside, there are no two ways about describing my experience as probably the most difficult in my life. It might not come as a surprise to some that the behaviour of a very significant minority can only be described as extraordinarily challenging, including flying chairs and desks (fortunately not in my classroom, but in those of highly experienced teachers), not to mention swearing, aggression, and defiance on a day-to-day basis. I freely admit to not being the world's best disciplinarian, but even experienced teachers spent considerable amounts of time every single period "firefighting", or controlling the crowd, rather than imparting knowledge. An increasing number of children have become so disaffected with education that they do everything in their power to prevent learning from taking place – not only their own learning, but also that of 29 other children in the classroom.

The Government policy of inclusion means that these pupils have to remain in a mainstream classroom. A fairer Scotland? I find it a rather strange notion of fairness and inclusion when an absolute majority of pupils lose out on a decent education, because some children have no intention of letting anyone's learning happen. Having gone through a non-comprehensive school system myself, I think a case can be made for a non-inclusive school or classroom. As a teacher you tend to focus more on those pupils who are struggling, be that academically or behaviourally. The bright and well-behaved tend to go under-challenged and sometimes even fall by the wayside, as they 'get on with their work anyway'.

The icing on the cake in this respect seems to be the fact that the Government gives money to some of those staying on after the compulsory four years of secondary schooling, more often than not the disaffected. To me this speaks volumes about the value of education in this country. Having worked and lived in countries where families make extraordinary sacrifices to pay for their children's education, and where education is valued sometimes above life itself, the idea of begging children to stay in school, of paying them to do so, is the most telling expression of the fact that education has become totally worthless. The inflation of university degrees is only an extension of this state of affairs.

We had a police officer on campus. Apparently, this has improved pupils' behaviour considerably. I wonder what it was like before I came to that school.... Again, to me this is a symbol of where our education system is going. I was working closely with a colleague who was a guidance teacher.



Posed by a model

*"I usually just stare disapprovingly"*

She once said: 'We are expected to be social work, the police, parents, and mentors. And as an aside, we're teachers.' I find myself agreeing with a colleague who recently wrote in the University and College Union magazine, that a strong case has to be made for seeing education as 'valuing knowledge for its own sake'. I cannot see anything wrong in schools having a solely academic purpose. Raising children should be done outside schools, by parents and society at large. Yet, over the decades, the Government has successively taken away responsibilities from parents, families, and society, and passed them on to state institutions such as schools or the NHS. And now we wonder why there is such a glaring lack of parenting skills; why children get away with murder, when we are not allowed to touch them with a barge pole. Child protection and health and safety regulations require me as a teacher to get parental consent weeks in advance for even a trip to a church just around the corner (which would be quite appropriate with an RMPS class) or a quick fieldwork exercise with a geography class. These regulations have stifled any kind of spontaneity and fun in education.

I find this obsession with protection quite peculiar. In fact, it frustrates me no end. A friend of mine told me the following episode, which I think is very symptomatic: A group of British teachers visited a school in Finland (which tops all the lists in European education, by the way). There was a tree in the playground. The teachers asked when they would build a fence around it, as, surely, children must be prevented from climbing it. Their Finnish counterparts looked baffled. For them, it was all right for children to climb the tree.' And what about accidents?', the British asked. Indeed, there had been an accident just recently – a girl had fallen off the tree and had to be taken to hospital. With great satisfaction, the British teachers then wanted to know whether the girl's parents had sued the school. Again, baffled looks. 'No', the Finnish head teacher said, 'they thanked us for arranging for the child to be taken to the hospital.' I had always assumed that scraped knees, accidents, a broken arm, and getting dirty were part and parcel of childhood; that physically exploring your environment (rather than seeing it on the telly or in the virtual reality that is the internet) was the most successful way of learning as a child.

I cannot help but wonder if taking away every last bit of responsibility from the children (and their parents, for that matter), of regulating their every move and wrapping them in layer upon layer of cotton wool, is one of the main causes of the problems I experienced in that school. Whenever I asked children like Josh, whose favourite phrase was 'it wasnae me, Miss!', who was responsible for their behaviour, I got a blank look. Some quickly guessed that 'me' was the 'right' answer, but others gave me their second favourite response: 'Dunno!'. Quite frankly, I find it alarming that so many children have obviously never learned to stick up for the consequences of their behaviour.

This leads me on to another sort of responsibility. In an area where a considerable number of families have been living on benefits since the third generation, the idea of having to work for a decent living seems quite alien to many. Children grow up in a culture of receiving rather than contributing. They can tell you all about their rights (including the distorted notion of getting a council house when pregnant at age 14), but have absolutely no concept of social responsibilities.

Never in their wildest dream would they (or their parents) ask themselves what they could do to make this society a better one, but they know exactly what they need from the Government to become better off. Because it is their right. But I am digressing. The failure of the welfare system is another hobbyhorse of mine. And I have had to deal with the consequences of this failure in my classroom. Ironically, the recent Government initiative to introduce a new, overarching curriculum for three- to eighteen-year olds, the so-called 'Curriculum for Excellence', stipulates as its main aims to educate our children to become not only 'successful learners', 'confident individuals', and 'effective contributors', but also 'responsible citizens'. In the current climate, I must confess, I am rather pessimistic about any of these aims, except perhaps the 'confident individuals'.

**'We are expected to be social work, the police, parents, and mentors. And as an aside, we're teachers.'**

And here I enter another area of concern, one I feel very strongly about. Having lived in societies (e.g. in the Middle East and Central Asia) that are very closely knit, and where other people's worries, joys, and affairs are also your own, I am extremely disconcerted about the lack of care for others here. When a child in the streets of Amman (Jordan) or Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) misbehaved and the parents were not around, anyone would tell this child off. Not in a nasty way, but determined, because it represented everyone's next generation. In a sense, it would be my child as well as that of the biological parents, and I would be just as responsible for it. Admittedly, in these countries there is not such a huge marketplace of values as there is here, and the majority of people shared the same ideas of what is right and wrong. But this not only taught the child to respect others, they also learned that they cannot get away with anything anywhere, and this consistency gave them a great sense of security. Yes, this interference in other people's lives can go over the top, but I much prefer this care for others to the fierce individualism we have been cultivating in these parts. Little wonder, that so many children have absolutely no respect for others, when they are so neglected by all and never really taken care of. I think as a society we can be accused of child abuse on a massive scale – despite, or rather because, of all the child protection laws.

Don't get me wrong, I have enjoyed teaching some of the classes, and some of the children were really lovely and very bright. By far not every family in that area was disintegrating and failing, and I have met some truly wonderful people, especially in the Church of Scotland congregation that has "adopted" me for the year. But I am worried about these great children, because the current system is frequently failing them. They do not normally get the support they deserve to do even better than they do anyway, to excel. But, as a friend of mine suggested once, the Scottish seem to have a rather strongly developed sense of equality, to the extent that excellence needs to be avoided. I hope he was wrong.

## The Bible at the Olympics

During August our TV screens were dominated by the Beijing Olympics and Britain's welcome success in sports such as cycling, swimming, sailing and rowing. In the Paralympics that followed, our athletes performed even better on the medal table.

China provided magnificent venues and organisation, as well as great numbers of high-quality competitors. Less visible to us viewers and readers is the fact that the Bible was present!

Back in 1986 at Edinburgh's second Commonwealth Games, a commemorative New Testament was included in each participant's welcome bag. This summer Beijing hosted some 16,000 athletes and officials for the summer Olympics and a further 7,000 for the Paralympics – in addition to around two million visitors.

The Organising Committee included places of worship in the Olympic Village, and local Christians were available to man a chapel, as well as opening their doors to visitors in the wider city.

An edition of the Four Gospels in Chinese and English was printed at the Amity Press (which has recently moved to a new, larger site in Nanjing). 50,000 copies – bearing the official Games emblem – were shared between the Village chapel and churches in Beijing and other venue cities.

10,000 bilingual Bibles were also provided free. The United Bible Societies, which work with the China Christian Council and are partners in the Amity Press\*, commented: 'We believe that many at the Games will be reached and touched by the life-giving and eternal Word of God.'

\*The National Bible Society of Scotland had a continuous presence in China from 1863 to 1949, and then in Hong Kong and Singapore. In 1986, Rev Fergus Macdonald helped lay the foundation stone of the Amity Press, which opened in 1987 and this year celebrated completion of 50 million Bibles, most of them for distribution in China. For the past 20 years, Scottish Bible Society supporters have helped to provide

the paper that enables Chinese Bibles to be sold at a modest price accessible to rural believers.

## The Board of Trustees acknowledge with grateful thanks the following legacy:

£20,000.00 from the Estate of the late Sarah Macaskill of Norfolk for the Free Church of Scotland General Fund.

## Church Leaders Meet with First Minister

On Thursday 9 October, a group of Scottish church leaders representing all the major Christian churches in Scotland met with the First Minister, Alex Salmond, at the Scottish Parliament. This meeting with the First Minister has been a regular feature since the Parliament began, but this was Mr Salmond's first.

The content of these meetings is private, but it can be said that the church leaders felt they were well received and that a full and free discussion took place. It is extremely important that these meetings are held regularly, and Mr Salmond is committed to ensuring they do.

The church leaders had agreed, prior to the meeting, that they would call on their churches and the nation to hold a Day of Prayer and Reflection on St Andrew's Day, 30 November. The First Minister supported this and said: 'Our national day provides a great opportunity for all of Scotland's people to reflect on the kind of society we are and where we aspire to be. At this time of global difficulties I welcome the call for St Andrew's Day to be celebrated with prayer and reflection. This is something which can unite all of us in Scotland, whatever our beliefs, and I for one will certainly take part.'

**Alex J MacDonald**



Leaders and representatives of Scotland's churches meet with First Minister Alex Salmond

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## Spring Conference

3-5 April 2009  
Aviemore, Scotland

### Speakers

Rev Iver Martin  
*Free Church of Scotland, Stornoway*

Dr Mike Bird  
*Highland Theological College, Dingwall*

Sandra MacDonald  
OMF

Full details and booking form will appear in  
January and February 2009 *Monthly Records*

## Murdo MacLeod St Columba's



Murdo MacLeod died on 28 May 2008 after a long battle with ill health. He suffered severe residual back pain for many years and underwent major surgery, and in the last three years fought intermittent cancer, again with major surgery. Despite his pain and at times weakness, Murdo never complained, and bore his illness with patience, fortitude and characteristic faith. Although he suffered more than he would ever admit or anybody knew, his concerns were always for others, and even in his short stay latterly in the Marie Curie ward he remained uncomplaining.

Murdo was born in Scalpay, Harris in 1923 to a devout Christian home, the fourth child in a family of nine. He received his early education in Scalpay and further education took him to Edinburgh, where he studied at Heriot and Napier colleges, training as a technical teacher at Moray House College of Education.

On the termination of his studies in 1952, Murdo moved to Inverness, where he took up a teaching post and joined the Free North; it was while he was there that he made a public profession of his faith in his Saviour. He served as a Deacon, and precented in both Gaelic and English, in that congregation.

In 1954 Murdo married Patsy, whom he had first met in Edinburgh while they were both studying there. They were married in the Free North by Dr Collins.

In 1959 Murdo and Patsy returned to Edinburgh where Murdo took up a teaching post in the newly-founded Liberton High School, where he served until his retirement in 1988. There he taught Craft, Technology and Design and was also Principal in Guidance, the latter being a role for which he was eminently suitable. It is renowned that his practical skills were such that his students were in awe of them.

For the next 35 years Murdo served his Lord in St Columba's Free Church as a faithful and esteemed Elder and also as precentor, again in both languages. He was involved in both radio and television broadcast services. He was also the Sunday School Superintendent and a teacher for many years.

Murdo was a committed and devout Christian who demonstrated his faith in a quiet and unassuming way, but nonetheless with great effect. He stood out as a man of integrity, honour, wisdom and compassion, and his wise counsel was often sought and followed.

One of the ministers taking part at his funeral service described Murdo as being 'the most gracious man he had ever met', and that indeed sums him up.

Our sympathies are extended to Patsy, his devoted wife of 54 years, his son Donald and daughter Jean, and the extended family.

John MacRae

# Remember Your School Assemblies...?

*Whatever your memories, school assemblies are no longer what they once were. Bill Baird, manager of CARE for Scotland tells us more ...*



You may have mixed memories of school assemblies. Perhaps your head teacher used the assembly principally as an opportunity to hector the school about some misdemeanour? Possibly you remember inspired talks from the school chaplain? Or a less memorable and more reluctant address from a member of the school staff whose turn it was to lead the assembly?

Whatever your memories, school assemblies are no longer what they once were.

In educational jargon, school assemblies are now 'religious observance', and in 2005 the Scottish Government issued new guidelines on how religious observance (RO) should be conducted in Scottish schools.

The most fundamental change of emphasis in the 2005 guidelines was that RO was no longer to be 'of a broadly Christian character' (which was the requirement of the 1991 guidelines), but instead was to become 'community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community'.

**Forcing unchurched teenagers to participate in acts of worship transposed from a Sunday morning service is almost certainly not the most effective way to introduce them to the Christian faith.**

This form of words may suggest that RO has been transformed into some sort of vague, New-Age mysticism. But not so. The guidelines also recommend that Scotland's schools 'are encouraged to use the rich resources of Scotland's Christian tradition when planning religious observance', although with the qualification that 'it is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith stances'.

The key element of RO is that pupils should be able to engage with, and respond to, an event that focuses on the spiritual dimensions of human experience, with the recommended elements of that event being stimulus, reflection and action.

The current RO guidelines inevitably reflect a Scottish society in which the majority are no longer active churchgoers. Nonetheless there is a degree of ambivalence about the guidelines, which is in fact supportive of the Christian influence on Scottish life:

- RO may no longer be 'broadly Christian', but the Christian heritage of Scotland should not be ignored;
- Chaplains, although no longer taking Christian assemblies, should be partners in this aspect of school life and their faith position should not be compromised in anything they are asked to do.

So while we may regret the removal of the requirement for school assemblies to be predominantly Christian, we perhaps should be grateful to the Scottish Government that it has forced all of us to re-assess the nature of RO in schools. It is important that issues of spirituality are included in the school curriculum; indeed, when a school is inspected, its delivery of RO is one of the aspects of school life investigated by Her Majesty's Inspectors. However, in view of the current level of church attendance, forcing unchurched teenagers to participate in acts of worship transposed from a Sunday morning service is almost certainly not the most effective way to introduce them to the Christian faith.

## **What about the Church and RO?**

Most schools still welcome an involvement with one or more of their local churches, and there are many examples around Scotland of churches making a creative and creditable contribution to school life through the involvement of parents, chaplains, and youth workers.

One result of the new RO guidelines is that any church helping to deliver RO needs now to be more creative. The

challenge is to engage pupils in issues where they need to make an ethical judgement or to encourage them to approach a problem from a perspective they may not previously have considered.

The range of possibilities for inclusion in RO is almost endless. For example: international relations and world poverty, the economics of the health service, alternative theories to evolution, beginning of life and end of life issues, the role of the family, immigration and asylum, race, discussion centred round a story-line from a novel, film, or TV soap opera, the evidence for God.

In addition, methods of presentation need to be re-assessed. A conventional talk may be appropriate in some instances, but video clips, interactive discussion and a willingness to allow pupils to reach their own conclusions will all help to foster involvement with the topic.

### The informal curriculum

Although acts of worship may no longer feature as major components of a school assembly, the guidance encourages head teachers to make provision for pupils, parents and representatives of faith groups to have organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum – that is, outside normal school hours, such as at lunchtimes or after the end of the school day. This gives local church representatives and groups such as Scripture Union and Youth for Christ almost a mandate to operate in schools, and these are opportunities that could readily be initiated by the local church.

### What does it all mean?

The influence of the education system is vital in determining the nature of our society. If the Church is not participating in school life, there will be decreasing understanding of the transforming nature of the Gospel both individually and corporately.

Around 5% of children regularly attend Sunday School. Every child is required to be at school Monday to Friday. There is really no dispute about where the Church should be putting its resources.



School assemblies - the early years!

## Resources

For a leaflet listing resources on RO from The Stapleford Centre, contact:

CARE for Scotland  
Challenge House  
29 Canal Street  
Glasgow  
G4 0AD



Tel: **0141 332 7212**  
E-mail: **cfs@care.org.uk**

Damaris provides stimulating material focusing on current culture:

**[www.damaris.org](http://www.damaris.org)**

The public body Learning & Teaching Scotland have RO resources on their website, where you can also read the guidelines:

**[www.LTScotland.org/religiousobservance](http://www.LTScotland.org/religiousobservance)**

## Lectures in the Faith 08/09

***Christ According to St Mark***  
**by Principal Donald Macleod**

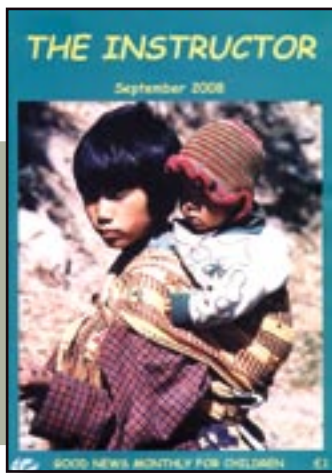
These lectures have been well attended in the past by people from a wide range of backgrounds. The lectures are free and would be of interest to anyone who wants to find out more about Jesus.

**Each lecture begins at 7.30pm and is held at Falkirk Free Church.**

### Dates:

5th December  
9th January 2009  
6th February  
6th March

**[www.falkirkfreechurch.com](http://www.falkirkfreechurch.com)**



# The Instructor and You

When you think about *The Instructor*, what do you think? Do you think back to your childhood, to searching for your name in the list of those who had sent in answers to the monthly questions? Do you think of more recent years and of Sandy and Ann's adventures and what you learned from them? Or perhaps your mind goes to the little display that went out to all congregations when *The Instructor* celebrated its centenary two years ago. I hope this short article will make you think a little differently, more along the lines of 'What can I do for *The Instructor*?'

Well, what can you do for *The Instructor*? First and foremost you can pray. Let me be specific. Please pray for the children who read the magazine. *The Instructor* is for the Church's children. It's not published just to keep them quiet on Sunday afternoons; it's published to tell them about Jesus, to send them to their Bibles in order to take part in quizzes and competitions, to combat the anti-biblical teaching they hear at school on the subject of creation, and to try to nurture in them an interest in mission overseas and here at home as well. That's a tall order for 16 sheets of A4 paper and that's why I'm asking you to pray for *The Instructor*'s young readers.

Please pray for those who contribute articles and artwork month by month, year after year. They come from various airts and pairts. Mr Donald Macleod (Dundee) has drawn pictures to colour for 12 years now. The editor should be awarding him a long-service certificate! Mrs Maria Wighton (Cumbernauld) writes stories for younger readers. Mrs Christine Stone (Castletown) produces puzzle pages, every one of them based on Scripture. Miss Susan Clyne (Tain) uses her artistic talent to present Old Testament stories in picture strip format. Please pray for them and for others who help from time to time.

Pray for the missionaries who assist with the annual Youth Project. They are busy people who undertake to provide an article and photo for *The Instructor* every month for a year in order to encourage the children to collect money for the cause they are promoting. And it is worth their work. Since I became editor in 1996, £106,977 has been raised for missionary work through the Youth Project. Take time to read that again. It really did say, one hundred and six thousand, nine hundred and seventy seven pounds! That money has gone to India, Kenya, Peru, Cambodia, South Africa, Eastern Europe, Russia and Uganda.

Pray that God will be glorified in every issue of *The Instructor*. Inside the folder in which I keep articles for each issue, I have a sheet that has GLORIFY JESUS in very large print. It's there to remind me that the magazine does not exist to entertain children, but to glorify Jesus. It's there to remind me that my job isn't to just to create a good-looking (I hope!), full-colour monthly magazine for children of primary school age, but to glorify Jesus.

What else can you do for *The Instructor*? Are you a Sunday School teacher? Collect the children's letters and drawings to send to me, and put them in the post. You have no idea

how many boys and girls tell me that they've written to me but their mums haven't posted the letter. Are you a writer? I'm waiting for you to post me something you've written for children. Are you an artist? Send me samples of your artwork. Are you an ideas person? Write and tell me what your ideas are. Are you a friend? Now, that's a whole different story.

**FRIENDS OF THE INSTRUCTOR** are people who commit themselves to praying for the work of the magazine regularly. For a very modest minimum annual subscription (just £10, imagine that!) they receive two news/prayer letters a year, plus one copy of *The Instructor* to keep them up to date. Some Friends give substantially more than the minimum subscription and their money helps towards the cost of the magazine as well as paying for the little gifts that I send to readers who write to me and for the postage that incurs.

If you would like to join **Friends of *The Instructor***, please send your name and address, plus a cheque for your subscription, to :

*Miss Anna Macdonald, 7/9 West Powburn, Edinburgh, EH9 3EN*

Those whose givings to the Free Church are Gift-Aided can have the tax reclaimed on their Friends' subscription if they let Miss Macdonald know that when they write to her.

Children like acrostics and, as adults are just children who have grown up, here's an Instructor acrostic for you.

Interest yourself in the children in your church.  
**N**ever give up praying, even when children stop attending.  
**S**how the children in your congregation that you care.  
**T**rust God for their salvation ... and keep praying.  
**R**emember those who have grown up and moved away.  
**U**se *The Instructor* as a gift by taking out an annual subscription.  
**C**onsider becoming a Friend of *The Instructor*.  
**T**ake away any dusty copies that are lying around your church!  
**O**rders *The Instructor* for a child you know  
**R**ead it yourself. It will remind you to pray.

What can you do for *The Instructor*? Lots!

**Irene Howat**

## Throwing Toys Out of the Pram

I recently had the pleasure of reading Albert R. Mohler's new book, *Culture Shift* (Multnomah) in which the President of Southern Seminary takes a long, hard look at aspects of modern American life and, in a series of short but thought-provoking essays, offers his take on issues as disparate as public law, education, and the war on terror. The book is distinctively American in many ways, not least because the various topics, such as those I have just listed, all have distinctively American faces that perhaps do not translate to other countries. Thus, when he writes about Supreme Court decisions, the insights are interesting but not directly relevant to other nations.

Some essays, however, easily transcend their immediate context. One such is Chapter 11, entitled, 'A Coddled Generation Cannot Cope.' In this, Dr Mohler takes aim at the way in which parents have developed the habit over recent decades of over-protecting their children. A generation is rising, he claims, which has been so coddled and protected by parents that it is incapable of taking its place in the real world but is doomed to remain emotionally dependent upon parents, and thus at a stunted level of emotional and psychological maturity.

### The indulgence of children is a form of idolatry.

The article is hard-hitting. As a professor and an academic administrator, I am quite used to the occasional student behaving like a five-year-old. Hey, I did it myself often enough when I was younger – but there is a new phenomenon which I have come across recently and which I do not recall from my student days: angry parent, threatening to sue when a child in their twenties has behaved like a four-year-old. When I acted like an immature idiot, I didn't dare tell my father, knowing full well where he would have come down on the issue; now it seems that blood is not only thicker than water, it also clogs up that part of the brain which sees the value in allowing children to grow up and stand on their own two feet.

Permanent, irresponsible adolescence permeates modern Western society, from those adults who spend more hours in the day on Xbox than they do talking to loved ones, through to those for whom the failure of a sports team is grounds for serious depression and even, in extreme cases, thoughts of suicide. At least in the West we live in a world where the battle simply for survival is, by and large, over, or at least not imminent: few of us do not know when and whence our next meal is coming; there are no famines in Britain and America as there have been in Africa; and ethnic cleansing is not something that many of us experience on a daily basis. We have plenty of material possessions and do not struggle in the way that even our grandparents may have had to do in the twenties and thirties. Yet we live in a world where anxiety levels are high, where suicide is not that uncommon, and where the national bill for anti-depressants is awe-inspiring.



Carl Trueman

Why is this the case? Mohler suggests, and I think he is right, that the coddling and over-protection of children has created a generation many of whose members have no sense of proportion, no ability to take responsibility for themselves, and no capacity for handling set-backs and contradictions. Just look at the blog world, where all kinds of crazy, extremist rhetoric is used about absolute trivia. Then just reflect on emails you have probably received, how rude and abrupt and extreme people are prepared to be electronically, compared to how sycophantic and spineless they often are face to face. The virtual world is a mirror of reality: a place where everyone demands to be heard on anything they want to speak about, yet where nobody has to take responsibility or face the consequences of their actions.

This coddling of children also explains why adults are so often childish. The indulgence of children is a form of idolatry. Yes, we are to love our kids and to care for them; but our primary function as parents is to raise them in a manner that allows them to take over from us, to become adults, to stand on their own two feet. But the Bible has some severe words for idolaters: Psalm 115, for example, makes it clear that those who make idols are doomed to become like them, and Romans 1 indicates that those who worship the creature rather than the Creator soon lose many of the characteristics that set human beings apart from other animals. It is no surprise, then, that a society that worships children is destined to remain permanently childlike in the worst sense of the word.

Sadly, the church is too often simply a function of the wider culture on this issue. If we are ever to be anything more than the emotionally stunted people that those outside the church claim we are, we must set our faces against this idolatry of the immature, put aside childish things, and grow up. Let your kids graze their knees; don't call the police when they tell you that the neighbours' son encouraged them to eat a worm; and teach them to take their bumps and bruises and grow up into the people God intended them to be. Amazingly enough, it will help you grow up too.

# A Changing Climate?

*The spectre of climate change, global warming and 'the greenhouse effect' haunts every newspaper and most current affairs programmes. There is no doubt that our climate is changing. But what does this mean to us as Christians?*



This article will, in the first place, lay out a biblical framework by which we can assess our role and responsibility to the created order. In the second place, it will give a concise analysis of the possible causes, the definite impacts and some basic precautions.

## [A] Biblical Principles

Dealing with 21st-century environmental issues requires the careful application of Scriptural principles. The created order is intimately tied up with God's purposes for the salvation of mankind and therefore follows the biblical pattern of creation, fall and redemption.

### Creation

#### 1. The Created Order is Good

Repeatedly, God proclaims that His creation is good (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Its goodness is reflected in its biodiversity, sensory appeal and plenty.

The Bible begins by asserting that '*God created the heavens and the earth*'. The origin of the created order is to be found neither in matter nor in nothing, but in God. Furthermore, God sustains all things by His powerful word (Hebrews 1:3). Since the created order finds its source and sustenance in God, we must conclude that it is valuable to Him and has an intrinsic positive value in itself. The first two chapters of Genesis, taken together with Psalm 104, force us to adopt a theocentric position, as opposed to either a biocentric (Eastern religion) or an anthropocentric (an abuse of monotheism) position. The Book of Job and Psalm 104 shed light on God's pleasure in His created order, helping us understand that the natural world is not merely for human use.

The created order belongs to God. As human beings we must not be so arrogant as to snatch ownership from its maker. Our relationship to the environment is therefore primarily a theological issue.

#### 2. Man is a Part of Nature and Apart from Nature

The heading of this section was famously coined by the Christian geneticist Prof. R.J. Berry. Mankind is part of the created order. He is created on the same day as the animals; he is created from the dust of the earth; he lives in the Garden. We cannot damage the created order without damaging ourselves.

However, mankind is also unique. God also makes man 'as' His image (Gen. 1:28). We are to regard ourselves as those

whom God appoints to rule in His stead. We are His stewards, set apart from 'nature' on behalf of the God who declares its goodness and finds pleasure in it.

#### 3. Stewardship does not mean *status quo*

Man is created and given three commands – fill, subdue and rule. Stewardship does not mean stagnant preservation. In the New Testament parable of the talents, the manager who merely preserves his talent is condemned (Matt. 25:14-30). God calls us to conserve and manage, not merely to preserve. This implies the careful management of habitats, but taken in connection with the other commands God gave to mankind (fill, subdue, rule), the function of the steward is to manage environmental change.

**We are His stewards, set apart from 'nature' on behalf of the God who declares its goodness and finds pleasure in it.**

#### 4. Dominion does not mean Domination

The anthropocentric view of many Christians has often substituted domination for dominion. God does not command us to act as tyrants or despots. Dominion implies responsible kingship (in the mould of King David and his greater Son Jesus – Psalm 72:8; Psalm 110:2).

In summary, therefore, we live in God's world. We are stewards of God's world. We will be held accountable for our management of the earth.

### Fall

The Fall of mankind through sin devastated the earth. God's curse of the earth means that 'nature' does not work as it should. Similarly, mankind's abuse of the created order is a manifestation of his sinfulness. Behind the creation narratives, the rest of the Pentateuch gives us the clearest teachings about God's concern for earth ethics. These include the Sabbath and Jubilee Principles of Exodus 20 and Leviticus 25, which reinforce our responsibility for good land management. Both practices promote biodiversity and restoration of the soil. The Pentateuch is full of 'odd' commands concerning the treatment of wildlife (e.g. Deuteronomy 22:6-7, 25:4; Exodus 23:19), many of which are concerned with the fruitfulness of species. For the prophets, the moral failures of God's people are reflected in the fertility and fruitfulness of the land (Hosea 4:1-3). Loss of habitat and ecological disaster are functions of mankind's sinfulness.

### Redemption

The New Testament reinforces creation teaching. The very

fact that we talk at all of the man 'Jesus' is testament to God's commitment to the created order. One common objection to Christian environmentalism is that since this world is doomed to destruction, we must focus only on our spiritual lives. However, God showed enough concern for the material to become material Himself. Christian pietism is no excuse for environmental sin. Romans 8:18-22 reinforces the function of the created order. At the present time, the whole creation groans because it was created to glorify God and yet, because of the sinfulness of mankind, it cannot fully fulfill its purpose.

## [B] The Science of Climate Change

Reading the daily newspapers and watching television makes us very aware of the warming of the climate not only in the UK but in virtually all parts of the world. The origin of Climate Change, and thus the warming of the planet, is the consequence of what is known as the Greenhouse Effect.

### Cause of Climate Change

Radiation from the sun passes through the earth's atmosphere. This energy passes through the atmosphere and heats the surface of the Earth. Some of that energy returns to the atmosphere, but not all of it makes it through a layer of gases that covers the earth like the glass of a greenhouse. The best known of the greenhouse gases is carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>. On average, about one third of the solar radiation that hits the earth's atmosphere is reflected back into space. Of the remainder, some is absorbed by the atmosphere, but most is absorbed by the land and the oceans, leading to the warming of both land and sea.

Over the last 250 years or so, since the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, as a result of burning of fossil fuels (gas, oil and coal), has steadily increased. The increase in the concentration of carbon dioxide has been exacerbated by the burning of forests, which results in the formation of more carbon dioxide. Records of the earth's previous climates reconstructed from ice cores confirm that the carbon dioxide and methane concentrations are higher than at any time for at least 650,000 years. This warming trend will increase the likelihood of more frequent and intense heat waves, droughts and rainstorms, as has been experienced recently in many parts of the world.

### Key Impacts of Climate Change

Some claim that sea levels are expected to rise by over 40 centimetres by 2080 because of thermal expansion of the oceans as the temperatures rise and because of melting of land ice. The Himalayan glaciers, which regulate the water supply to the Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Thanlwin, Yangtze and Yellow rivers, are believed to be retreating at a rate of about 10-15m each year. In a few decades this situation will change and the water level in rivers will decline, meaning massive eco and environmental problems for people in western China, Nepal and northern India. Glaciers are retreating in every part of the planet. Africa is expected to experience significant reductions in cereal yields, as are the Middle East and India. In some areas, water resources for drinking and irrigation will be affected by reduced rainfall or as ground water in coastal zones suffers from salination as sea levels rise. A report from Tearfund raises the spectre of hundreds of millions of environmental refugees and says the main reason will be the effects of climate - from droughts and

water shortages, from flooding and storm surges and from sea-level rise. The impact of climate change on some wildlife will be catastrophic even with little further change in the climate. Up to a third of land-based species could face extinction by the middle of the century (RSPB).

No one disputes that Earth's climate is changing or that atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased as a result of human activities. The concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide are higher now than at any time during the last 420,000 years.

**We have been given the mandate to subdue the earth. We must exercise our stewardship of the environment wisely.**

Overwhelming scientific evidence supports the conclusion that observed changes in the global climate are, in large part, due to human activities and primarily related to fossil fuel consumption patterns. Without urgent action to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the Earth will become warmer by 2050 than at any time in the last 10,000 years.

### Working to Reduce Climate Change

A major problem facing the world is how to generate electricity cleanly. Historically it has been generated in coal-fired power stations. This is a 'dirty' process, not just because of the enormous amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that is produced, but also because sulphur dioxide is produced, which is responsible for acid rain, as well as the fact it produces a lot of particulates. An alternative is to find ways of generating electricity that do not involve the generation of carbon dioxide, using sources that do not involve the formation of carbon dioxide. Such sources are referred to as renewables. Nuclear power can be used, but this is not popular with the public, though it does not produce CO<sub>2</sub>. There are a number of different types of renewable energy: wind power, wave and tidal power, hydroelectricity, geothermal energy, solar energy, biomass and use of biofuels.

Likewise, there is much that the individual can do to reduce their 'Carbon Footprint' – even things as simple as turning down their central heating slightly, filling the kettle with only as much water as they need, and ensuring that 'gadgets' are not left on standby can make a difference.

The topic of Climate Change has provoked much discussion in the media and continues to be hotly debated. This paper has taken the view that it must be taken seriously by the Christian church. We have been given the mandate to subdue the earth. We must exercise our stewardship of the environment wisely.



# New Students at the Free Church College

*It is good for us to know and to pray for the students at the Free Church College. We asked the new students to introduce themselves, and the following graciously answered our request.*

## Calum Smith

I'm a Lewis-man, brought up in a Christian home in Shawbost where I attended church regularly until I went to study marine engineering in Glasgow. When I went to work as an engineer in the merchant navy, my time at home on leave would not include attending church. However, the



Lord found me, and saved me by His grace at the very outset of 2002 by using people and circumstances to make clear His salvation offer. I became a member in the Free Church in Shawbost that year. I married Johan in 2004 and moved to the Barvas congregation, during which time the Lord's calling to the ministry was made clear. We have two girls: Joni (3) and Marissa (1), and are happy in Edinburgh engaging in the Lord's work.



## Rory Stott

My name is Rory Stott and I am South African born and raised. I have been in Britain for the last seven years, four of them in Inverness. While travelling I met my wife Kirsteen on the ferry to Stornoway and consequently started attending Smithton-Culloden Free Church. After being called into

the ministry, I began to preach God's word. My work in Inverness has included working with the homeless and people with addictions. Last year I completed the Access course at Highland Theological College and applied and was accepted as a Free Church candidate. The Lord is full of surprises!

## Martin Gustav Wessbrandt

I was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1985 into a nominal Lutheran family. Baptized as an infant and later confirmed in the liberal Church of Sweden, I never had the gospel explained to me until I read the Bible myself in high school. I was converted and joined an independent



evangelical church in Stockholm. As I learned more about the doctrines of the Reformation and saw the poor spiritual state of my country, a desire grew in me to work for the gospel in Sweden. After having studied the biblical languages at a Swedish university for two years, I am now very happy to be doing an individual study programme at the Free Church College.



## Iain Gibb

After 40 years working in IT (30 years with the same company), I was finally pushed out in May 2007. After prayerful consideration, I concluded that I should do something totally different with the time I had left. I could have continued with general involvement

in church and lay preaching, but realised I needed a specific challenge, and so signed up with the College. For various reasons, advanced education was denied me when I left school, and I count myself privileged to now have this opportunity, trusting that God will still be able to use me.

## Adam de Jong

Having worked in the financial sector in Holland, the US and the City, I started studying with great pleasure at the Free Church College three years ago. On that occasion my wife Dita and I moved to Edinburgh. Our three boys are working or studying in England and Holland.



We were initially members in what was then called Cole Abbey, commuting to London on Sundays. When after some years our southwest House Group had gained some stability, morning services were started in Cobham, and later this became a separate congregation, of which we are still members.

Having completed the 3-year course, I am currently studying for an MTh degree. Both of us enjoyed placements in an OPC congregation in the US and in Sleat Free Church, but what the future holds is as yet unclear.

## Donnie MacKinnon

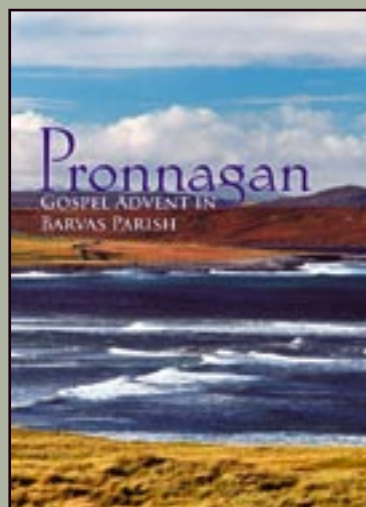
I was born and brought up in a Christian home in Lewis. Having left school at sixteen, I completed a four-year apprenticeship with a local electrical contractor. I deliberately sought out all avenues of enjoyment in the world, thinking I could escape the deep conviction of knowing that my life would only be fulfilled by having a relationship with God. I finally left Lewis to go offshore, hoping to leave the conviction behind, although it was there that God met with me through Psalm 139. Prior to my conversion, there were moments under the preaching of the gospel when I wanted to tell others about Christ. Afterwards, this became a reality, and the impression of my calling became clearer to me. After studying for a year in the college in Stornoway, I commenced my MA degree in Aberdeen University, which has now enabled me to enter the Free Church College.



Other new students are John Duffy, Oscar Nsubuga (*pictured left*), John Reid, Kwang Seok Chae, and Seok Hwan Hong. All are private students.

Enquiries about the Free Church College are welcome. Please contact the Secretary on **0131 226 5286** or e-mail [amacleod@freescotcoll.ac.uk](mailto:amacleod@freescotcoll.ac.uk)

## PRONNAGAN: Gospel Advent in Barvas Parish



**Editor: Calum I Macleod**

**Price: £6.00**

Rev. John MacLeod, minister of Barvas Free Church from 1922 to 1956, provides a broad-brush summary of the history and development of the post-Reformation church in Barvas and the impact of the Gospel in the wider parish and beyond. It is punctuated by a series of very interesting and, occasionally, amusing anecdotes, many of which revolve around several well-known 19th-century local 'characters'.

Everybody likes a good story, and a pithy anecdote enhances the experience. This bilingual book offers many such anecdotes. Some will be unfamiliar to a younger generation and perhaps forgotten by an older generation. The book aims to rekindle and revive the reader's interest in the rich ecclesiastical history of the Isle of Lewis and the many anecdotal fragments associated with its past. Indeed, Rev. MacLeod's somewhat quaint collection is arguably what makes 'Pronnagan' so enduring.

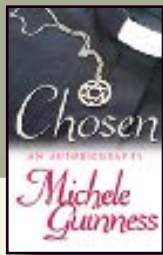
Available from the Free Church Bookshop  
or from:

**Mr Angus I Smith**  
**34 Lower Barvas, Isle of Lewis, HS2 0QY**

Tel: **01851 840248**

Email: [aonghasiain34@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:aonghasiain34@hotmail.co.uk)

*All funds raised through the sale of this book will go towards the Barvas Free Church Hall Fund.*



### **Chosen: An Autobiography**

**Michele Guinness**  
**Monarch, £8.99**

In a recent edition of *The Monthly Record* I noticed a book being advertised for sale in the Free Church Bookshop. The title was

*Chosen*, by one Michele Guinness. I remembered, as some of you may, a little book published about thirty years ago entitled *Child of the Covenant*.

I ordered *Chosen*, first published this year, and found that it was indeed written by the same lady. Michele tells how she came to see that she was far too young 30 years ago to be writing her autobiography! Now she has written an entirely new book, which not only tells how she became a Christian, but seeks to reclaim her Jewish identity, and the history of her family.

Over the years she has come to appreciate her Jewish heritage. Indeed, with the encouragement of her husband, she has researched her family history, which, like that of many of the Jewish diaspora, is a fascinating and moving story.

Her conversion to Christianity, or, as she herself would probably prefer to put it, her recognition and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, was certainly dramatic. As a teenager, she attended, with her school, the mystery plays at York and was confronted with the figure of Jesus crucified. This had a permanent and dramatic effect on her life. She sought to keep her new-found faith a secret from her family for some time, knowing how shocked her parents, particularly her mother, would be.

However, when she went to Manchester University, she joined a 'Free Church' youth group, where, in due course, she met the man who was to become her husband. She became a youth worker and he a teacher. Being married 'out' to a Christian was a weighty problem for her family to cope with, as the book dramatically recalls. Their loving family bonds managed to deal with this, but it was as nothing to what they – and she – experienced when he felt called to the Anglican ministry!

Her husband was duly ordained and began his ministry in a rundown Yorkshire mining town, and they have since moved around various parts of England. Michele is a faithful member of the Christian church, but is not uncritical of it, as she has come to appreciate aspects of her own Jewish heritage. The reader becomes very aware of the close and loving family ties that existed, and still exist, within her extended family, who come from different strands of Judaism.

She has made a practice of introducing each congregation to the richness and symbolism of some of the festivals of her Jewish heritage. In the course of doing this, she was duly shocked one day when one devout lady said to her, 'Isn't it lovely that your Jewish people sing our psalms too'!!

I found this book helpful and very enlightening as I came to understand more deeply, from Michele's insights as a

Jewess, the significance of some of the sayings and doings of Jesus, especially those centred around the Jewish feasts and festivals. After all, as she says, wasn't Jesus Himself Jewish?

Like secular books I have read by Jewish writers, Michele's racy style and humour are recognisably of her race, while her devotion to Jesus as Messiah and her Saviour is never in doubt. It is, in my opinion, a book that is enjoyable, richly informative, and well worth reading.

**Anne Graham**



### **You Can Change**

**Tim Chester**  
**IVP, £7.99**

This is a quality book. I loved it! I don't have much time to read books – but this is the kind of book that I would make time to read. It is a book that speaks directly into our times; it is soundly biblical but totally contemporary. The author also quotes great worthies from the past and breathes new life into their statements by his thoughtful and up-to-date applications.

It is a brutally honest, realistic and hopeful book. Tim Chester faces up to the condition of much of Western Christianity as flaccid and shallow. He reminds us that we have the responsibility, privilege and resources to be transformed into Christ's image and know victory over indwelling sin.

He takes the concept of holiness and drags it into the 21st century, making it as relevant as it ever should be. He does what every good writer, and preacher, should do – he takes God's unchanging Truth and boldly applies it to the greatest needs of the day, as he sees them. He does this spectacularly well.

Through the lens of scripture, he probes deep into the readers' hearts regarding their attitude to sin and desire to change. It often makes uncomfortable reading, in a spiritually healthy kind of way, as he uses the Truth to expose unhealthy motivations that often lie festering and unchallenged in our lives. It's a brilliant wake-up call.

It is a long time since I have read a book with so many memorable quotes – it was good to turn page after page and say 'that's exactly right – I wish I could have expressed truth like that!' Tim Chester has his finger on the pulse in the very best way.

He also has a very helpful reflection and personal change section at the end of each chapter, which reminds readers that the book has a very practical aim – to make a real difference in their lives. It achieved that for me.

The book is written with a pastor's heart, and I am convinced ministers will find it inspirational, but it is a book for every Christian, and I would have no hesitation in recommending it to all in my congregation and whoever reads this review.

**Derek Lamont**

# Free Magazine

As **Free** becomes a teenager, it's more important than ever to reach out to the Church's young people, who face difficult and challenging times. This is where you come in ...

My, doesn't time fly? In a matter of months, *Free*, the Church's magazine for teenagers, will be a teenager itself. First launched in April 1996, the magazine has seen a few changes over the years, with three editors (Calum Ferguson and Colin Morison were the first two in the hot seat), hundreds of contributors, an array of topics, and a variety of new looks. But through it all, *Free's* aims have stayed the same: to reach, encourage, inform and teach the young people of the Free Church of Scotland and beyond. Central to *Free* is the message of the Gospel.

Which of us doesn't remember our teenage years? Some of us with more embarrassment than others, possibly ... For myself, I wish I'd had access to a magazine like *Free* when I was that age. What a lot I could have learned, and how much wasted time I could have saved ... I confess that I'm full of admiration for our Church's young people. They are an enthusiastic lot, with drive and enthusiasm: they grasp opportunities, they volunteer abroad, and they get involved. They care about our world, about society, and they are spiritually aware, too. Yet they are living in a difficult age, where things - especially technology - move at speed. They are exposed to information that you and I would never have dreamt of at their age - and possibly are still ignorant of now. *Free* aims to redress the balance: to provide a Christian perspective on the things that concern young people today, and give spiritual guidance and encouragement.

One of *Free's* strengths, I believe, is its ability to give the Church's young people a sense of belonging. *Free* is their magazine, and we encourage readers to contribute in some way - whether they send in photos, write camp reports, or do book reviews. It's a place for them to share and come together, and it lets them know that they're part of a much wider family.

## Contribute

So far, so good. But where's this leading? Well, there's always room for improvement, and this is where you come in. There is a real need for more serious articles, Bible studies and news items to balance the lighter weight features. The loosely-named *Free* 'team' consists of the Editor, layout artist Catherine Pearson, proofreader and 'agony auntie' Dayspring MacLeod, and regular contributors Derek Lamont and Matt Ford. Why not join the 'team'? As editor, I would appreciate hearing from anyone who feels they could contribute to the magazine. You don't have to be a professional writer; you just need to have a love for God and a desire to reach out to young people. Anything would be considered: short and long articles, sound in Biblical truths and relevant to today's youth, news items from youth fellowships, individual testimonies, quizzes, upcoming events - all are welcome. Please don't wait to be asked personally - this is an open invitation to get in touch.



And we always need good photographs, especially for the cover, which has to be bright and appealing. Our budget doesn't stretch to the fees demanded by professional agencies, although thankfully there are a number of talented photographers within the Church who have contributed their services willingly - and we suspect there may be more! Our readers love to see themselves in the magazine - so take your camera to events, and share the photos with us, but keep them at a high resolution as it helps in the printing process.

Has something been happening in your church among the young folk? Please let us know. An event to advertise? Put a notice in *Free*. It doesn't have to be pages long - snippets are good, too, but remember that *Free* comes out every two months, which makes being current a little more difficult. Think ahead, and we'll do our very best to include what you send us.

## Promotion

Is there a Christian bookshop near you that would be willing to take some copies? Why not ask them, and volunteer to drop off a few copies every two months. Do you have marketing skills and time on your hands? Would you be able to promote *Free* outwith the church?

Are there young folk in your church or family who would appreciate *Free*? Why not take out enough subscriptions to cover everyone - with a few left over for their friends? (To subscribe, contact Emma at the Free Church Offices on 0131 226 5286.) Read the magazine yourself. It's a great way of keeping in touch with the younger folk in the church and what they're up to. You could also take on a commitment to pray for, or support in other ways, some of the many projects they're involved in.

Finally - and most importantly - please pray for everyone involved - for all of the *Free* 'team' and for the young people who read the magazine. Pray for the contributors, for the selection of appropriate articles; pray that the young people will read it and understand, and that it will make a real difference in their lives.

**Chris Nicolson**

(E-mail: [free@freechurch.org](mailto:free@freechurch.org) or call 01847 821608)

# Gràdh Dhè

Bha a' bhàrdachd àlainn-sa romham nuair a thill mi bho mo làithean saora. Taing mhòr airson seo a thoirt dhuinn ach an cuimhnich sinn còmhla air maitheas a' Chruitheir dhuinn tron fhàsach a tha seo. Is ann à Eilean Sgalpaigh a tha an tè a chuir a' bhàrdachd thugam agus b' i a seanmhair a sgrìobh na rainn-sa.

Tha an gràdh-sa cho làidir  
Bàs chan fhaigh làmh air no buaidh  
Na tuiltean cha bhàth e  
Oir is cuan e à lànachd bith-bhuan  
An dream a fhuair pàirt dheth  
Cha bhi iad dheth sàsaicht' nan cuairt  
's ann a' tòiseachadh tha e  
nuair ruigeas iad Pàrras le buaidh.

Tha an gràdh-sa cho dìomhair  
's nach gabh e le briathran a luaidh  
oir bha e aig Dia  
mun robh talamh, no grian ann no cuan  
bhon rùnaich an Trianaid  
gun tigeadh am Mac sìorraidh a-nuas  
a phàigheadh na fiachan  
's a ghabhail Air ìomhaigh a shluaigh.

Is gràdh e nach tomhaisear  
Chaidh e thar gach uil' eòlas gu lèir  
Rinneadh ìomradh le Pòl air  
Le Peadair, 's le Eòin mar an ceudn'  
Na mnathan fhuair còir air  
Chuir Muire gu sònraicht' e an cèill  
Is e a thug Rut is Naomi  
a-mach à tìr Mhoib le chèil'.

Do shluagh anns an t-saoghal  
Tha cuid ac' cho aonaicht' led ghràdh  
's gu bheil co-chomann a chèile  
don anam mar Bheteil gach lath'  
tha fulangas mìorbhaileach  
ceangailt' an dìomhaireachd gràidh  
nach tuig ach a' mhuintir  
don do dh'fhoillsich Thu Fèin e nad ghràdh.

Tha an eaglais san fhàsach  
ri gearain gach là air a truaigh  
is i beò air a' mhàna  
ga thional gach tràth thig e a-nuas  
ged tha truaillidheachd nàdair  
peacadh is bàs rithe fuaight'  
tha thu ag ràdh, "Tha i àillidh"  
's tu ag amharc oirr' an àilleachd an Uain.

Tha an eaglais a fhuair thu  
's a' chùmhachd shuas mun do dh'fhàg  
ach chum thu do shùil oirre  
a dh'aindeoin eas-ùmhachd don àithn'  
's tu ag innse cho coibhneil dhi  
oighreachd is saobhreas do ghràis  
's i agad cho mùirneach  
's gun deach thu don ùir air a sgàth.

Caidlidh i uairean  
Is fàsaidh i suaimhneach is mall  
Ach dùisgidh tu suas i  
Is thèid i air ghluasad air ball  
Dol mun cuairt anns na sràidean  
Ri faighneachd don phàirt a bhios ann,  
"Am faca sibh m'ailleachd?  
Tha cuspair mo ghràidh-sa air chall."

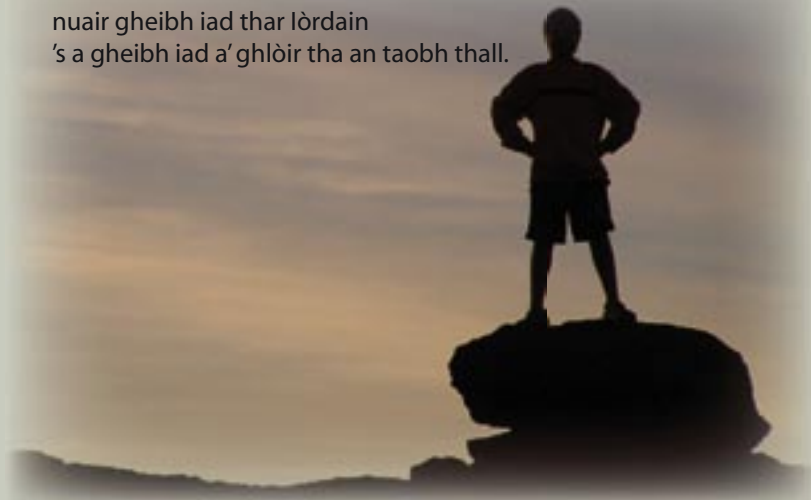
Is e am freagradh thug càch dhi  
"Carson tha do ghràdh dol na dhèidh  
Cò an Tì tha thu ag iarraidh  
Dè as coslas no ìomhaigh dha fèin?"  
"Tha e geal agus dearg  
ro-ionmhainn 's ro mhilis a bheul  
ma chì sibh E innsibh  
mar tha mi tinn às a dhèidh."

Is e an t-adhbhar gu h-àraidh  
Gun tug mi mo ghràdh dha cho mòr  
Gur E rinn ar n-àrach  
On chionta thug Adhamh uil' oirr'  
Tre bhith a' fulang nar n-àite  
Bàs a bha gràineil 's gach dòigh  
's nach do mheas E mar thàmailt  
mar ghabh E ar n-àite san fheòil.

Mur tachair dhomh fhaotainn  
Cha dual dhomh san t-saoghal bhith beò  
Tha nithean cho faoin dhomh  
An coimeas ri aonachd m'fhear-pòst'  
Ach thàinig E dlùth dhomh  
Le geallaidhean cùbhraidh a bheòil  
's bha m'anam cho taingeil  
's gun shil mi le aoibhneas na deòir.

Tha mise fo thùirse  
Às eugmhais do ghnùis iomadh uair  
Ach thig thu gun dùil riut  
Is thèid m'aignidhean ùrachadh suas  
Thug thusa dhomh tiodhlaic  
's chan iarrainn gu sìorraidh i uam  
gam chumail ag ùrnaigh  
's mo mhiann air an dùthaich tha shuas.

Tha an saoghal 's an Sàtan  
An tòir oirre a-ghnàth anns a' ghleann  
Ach bheir iadsan buaidh air  
a chionn 's gun do bhuaidh an ceann  
cha bhi cuimhn' air an truaighean  
's na buairidhean bh'aca san àm  
nuair gheibh iad thar lòrdain  
's a gheibh iad a' ghlòir tha an taobh thall.



## A Small Boy With A Big Job

Buhle's parents died of AIDS-related illnesses when he was just six years old. Even at that young age, he was labeled as a failure. 'He never concentrates,' he teacher said. 'He doesn't even try. He just sits there looking out of the window. He doesn't hear a word I say. He never laughs with the other children.' His report card showed a level 1 for achievement and no comment. The teacher didn't even want to waste her time. What did the future hold for Buhle? It certainly didn't look rosy.

'Look at this report,' Thandiwe said to her sister. Her son, as she called him, had scored level 4 in every subject – the highest level of achievement.

'You have worked so well with him,' her sister commented, looking at the pride and sense of achievement in her eyes. But the pride and sense of achievement were nothing compared to the love that she had for her son. A son not born to her. A son given to her when she herself was very young. The son of her late sister and brother-in-law – both of whom had died of AIDS-related illnesses.

'Buhle is so clever now. He is so happy. I am so proud of my son.'

There is hope. But imagine if Buhle did not have a loving and caring aunt to take care of him. Where would he be now? Stealing to get food? Being used by criminals, so that he could have a sense of belonging and purpose? Skipping school, because he could not see the value in it?

**If our education is not centered around the teaching of our Creator, then education can do more harm than good.**

And yet Buhle now has a sense of security and self worth. He knows that he must learn. He wants to learn. His aunty has spent time explaining to him that if he works hard, then he will be able to get work, so that he can provide for his own family one day. As he studies, he is learning how to avoid becoming ill like his parents. He is learning what is right and what is wrong and how he can stand up for the truth and not follow the crowd. He is learning what he needs to learn to be a useful member of society. He is learning what he needs to learn to achieve a sense of fulfillment out of life.

As we look around us at the state of our country here in South Africa, we see the downward spiral that poverty dictates. Many people are so poor that they cannot afford an education that will equip them with the necessary skills to earn a decent wage. Many people are unable to earn a decent wage, so their children cannot receive an education. The spiral goes on and on, gathering momentum as crime, lack of self esteem, and poor health all get caught up in it, leading to devastating effects not just for the family but for society.



Jenny Wilson

I remember a politician in the UK once saying that his government was going to focus on 'education, education, education'. I will make no comment on his performance in this score, but to say that I think that he did hit the nail on the head. Time, money and effort must go into education. It is the only way that a country can lift itself out of the tyranny of poverty and crime. But it is also true that if our education is not centered around the teaching of our Creator, then education can do more harm than good.

Take the UK, for example. Much money is spent each year on government initiatives such as health-promoting schemes. There is nothing wrong with that, I hear you cry. No there isn't, except when the education department is taking such a great role in supervising the health development of the child that parents are being deskilled. It isn't, except when sex education is being taught that is not in keeping with God's standard for our lives, or when young lives are being taught to tolerate and even accept as normal aspects of society that are far from God's pattern for our lives.

### 2 Timothy 3:15-17

*...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

What a treasure a Christian home can be: where education, rooted in the scriptures, is the beginning of learning about life. This education digs the foundations of life and cements the bricks of learning together. It keeps the rocky patches from disrupting our life, helping the child to make sense of subjects such as evolution and sexuality. It provides the work ethic so often lacking in today's society.

### Colossians 3:17

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

I long to see the beautiful face of Buhle as he grows up: to see him growing in knowledge, but more importantly, the knowledge that he is loved and has a place in God's plan for the world. A small child, but a big job. Are we prepared for what God has for us to do?

# 'A time to plant ...'

Neil White gives us an update on his time in Goli, Uganda.



Life in Goli, to some extent, revolves round the garden. The Alur love to talk about their fields like Brits talk about the weather. The rains came on time in late July and have continued steadily. This means work, much of which is done by hand. Major crops in the area are beans, cassava, maize, cotton, sesame and groundnuts. The picture below shows groundnuts (or peanuts) being planted. Working in pairs, the seed is planted by the 'top man' and covered by the 'hoe man'. Six people can plant 400m<sup>2</sup> in about 1 1/2 hours.

After planting, the next task is weeding, again all done by hand. Crops in rows are easier to weed. Farmers use 'intercropping' – planting different crops together – to maximise the use of the land. This also has the added benefit of reducing the amount of weeding required. Common combinations of crops are maize with beans, cassava with beans, or maize with groundnuts. It has been a real pleasure to be working alongside farmers, learning their techniques. I've always enjoyed getting my hands dirty!

## Food of the Alur

One of the things I've really enjoyed here in Nebbi district is the food. The Alur, particularly in Goli, enjoy a varied, healthy diet. For lunch, I like to eat local food. The staple food served at most mealtimes is called 'kwen'. It's a stiff porridge made with cassava flour and usually has some millet or sorghum flour added to give taste and colour. It forms the basis of most evening mealtimes, and in the Alur hymnbook, 'bread of heaven' is translated 'kwen of heaven'!

Also central to a meal is 'sauce' that can be made from a variety of ingredients, including meat, beans, fish or



Making kwen

groundnuts. When meat is cooked, it is normally in thin gravy so that the kwen can be dipped in it. Meals are normally eaten with the fingers. If chicken is served, the most honoured guest will be given the gizzard to eat! It's a real delicacy.

## Mairianna's Visit

Of course, one of the highlights of the last few months has been my fiancée Mairianna's visit to Goli. After a few days of orientation in Kampala, we headed up to Goli. Mairianna was to stay with another missionary family on the mission, the Moodys. She settled in very well to life in Goli, sharing my taste for the local food. She was able to help out at the Women's Vocational Training Centre by doing some teaching and discipling of the young women. We hope it will not be long before we are back in Goli together.

## Prayer Points

Please continue to pray. In Alur we sing 'God hears our prayers if you please!' and it is really true. The work here is built on a foundation of your prayers, so keep up the good work!

- Thank God for the opportunities I've had in reaching people with the message of Christian stewardship.
- Pray for the young men I'm friends with, particularly Robin and Andrew, for deepening of friendships.
- Pray for continued stability in NW Uganda and Eastern Congo.
- Ask God for wisdom for church leaders in Nebbi Diocese, remembering particularly Bishop Alphonse and his heavy workload.

## Deputation!

Yes, it really is that time already. As the next prayer letter will be issued in December and will therefore be my last for the time being, I'm now taking bookings for my deputation tour in the early part of 2009. If you would like me to speak about my experiences and about mission in Africa at your church, prayer meeting, mid-week, Christian Union, or any other type of meeting, please contact me with proposed dates from 15th January onwards. Please hurry as many people have already expressed an interest.

To arrange a meeting you can contact Neil White by e-mailing: [nwhite@aimint.net](mailto:nwhite@aimint.net)

# BINCO Colombia

**Noémie and Silvia**, volunteers from Switzerland working with Latin Link, give us an insight into BINCO from the point of view of a child from the neighbourhood.

I am 8 years old and live in Colombia, in the city of Medellín, which has a population of 2 million people. My neighbourhood is called Robledo Palenque and lots of children like me live here. Sometimes people don't have much time for us at home and we often play out on the street. My dad left us a long time ago and my mum has to work a lot because we don't have much money.

On the other side of the street there's a great place I really like: BINCO – Biblioteca Infantil Comunitaria (Community Children's Library). It's a library for children in my neighbourhood where we can read, write, play, listen to stories, do crafts, draw, sing, watch films, do homework and learn a lot. I go to BINCO almost every afternoon and I have made lots of friends there whom I can play with. BINCO is part of a Bible Seminary, so the students' children come to BINCO too.

Two young women from Switzerland have been working in BINCO since last November. They are called Noémie and Silvia, and they have told me that Switzerland is a country a long way away from Colombia. I think it's great that they have come so far to work with us. They lead the programme in the afternoons. At the beginning they couldn't speak Spanish very well but now they speak it very well! They came here with a missionary organization called Latin Link after doing their school leaving exams, and are going back to study at university really soon. I think they love it here in Colombia, which is obvious really, because Colombia is a fantastically beautiful country with really nice people.

Noémie and Silvia believe in Jesus and sometimes they tell us stories from the Bible. I don't know what is going to happen with BINCO because it doesn't have that much money and Noémie and Silvia will soon be leaving.

In the mornings, classes from local schools often go to BINCO to learn English with Noémie and Silvia or to listen to stories and play games.

Every now and then we do something special in BINCO. For example, one week we went on a 'trip to New York'. I really liked that because we learned a lot of English and because the leaders were dressed up as real flight attendants, pilots, bus drivers and waiters. So we flew to America in a 'plane' with our passports in our pockets, and we learned a lot about New York. At the end, we invited our parents to show them what we had learned. It was amazing for me to be able to go on a journey like that, even if it was imaginary, because I have never been outside my city.

Thank you for listening to me so and for being so interested, and I hope that you know more about BINCO now.



*Noémie and Silvia with some of the BINCO children*

## Mission Books

### ***Who Is My Neighbour?***

**Rosemary Harley and Martin Goldsmith**  
**Authentic £8.99**

Britain has always been a multi-cultural society. From Roman invasion to the present day, people from many nations, tribes and ethnic groups have landed on these shores. Not all come to settle and live; many visit, coming for further study, business purposes and sightseeing. As the races, cultures and religions of the world arrive on our doorstep, we are presented with exciting opportunities. The Christian is called to love his neighbour. To love someone we must understand them. What are their backgrounds? What do they believe? What are their problems and how can we help? Rosemary Harley and Martin Goldsmith tackle these questions clearly and practically, as we are challenged to witness to people of all backgrounds and religious faiths through our actions and attitudes.



# Lakhnadon Christian Hospital

**Mr Yohan Malche**, the administrator of LCH, shares the stories of two people helped by the Hospital.



Lakhnadon Christian Hospital



**My burden is shared**

Janki Bai Patel is a 30-year-old widow from a nearby village, who is HIV-affected. Her husband was a driver and he died of AIDS two years ago. She has three children (12, 10 and 8 years old) who are not affected by HIV. After the death of her husband, all the responsibility of home came on her shoulders. She stays with

her children and her mother, who is old and dependent on her. She has no relative who can help or support her, so she started working as a labourer to get money. When she came to LCH because of her skin rashes, she was diagnosed with HIV and treated for her illness. She was told about her illness and counselled, and the word of hope was shared with her.

Slowly, over a period of time, she has become bold enough to take care of herself, her children and her old mother. She also showed her willingness to join project staff for HIV/AIDS awareness training in different villages. Now she trusts in God for everything and is thankful to the staff of the mission hospital for their care and concern for her and her children. Her younger two children have been sent to a hostel for non-HIV children of HIV affected parents, where they will be looked after very well by a charitable society and will study in a good Christian school in Nagpur.

**New life every time**

Phool Chand Sahu, a 72-year-old man, is a farmer from a nearby village called Bharda. He often comes with a breathlessness problem, but after treatment he feels better. He appreciates the treatment and care he receives during hospitalisation. He also values our prayers for him during hospitalisation.



LCH staff

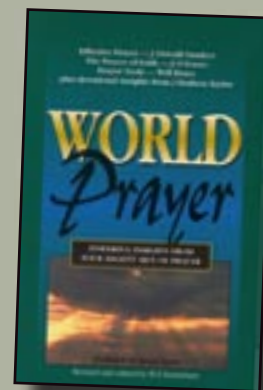
In his own words, 'I am surviving only because of the Christian hospital and by the grace of God. Every time I developed severe breathlessness, I felt that I would surely die. But each time I was helped by the hospital and was able to go back home with a new lease on life. This is nothing but the miracle of God in my life.' He has instructed every member of his family that whenever he is sick, they should only take him to the mission hospital and not anywhere else.

Once Mr Sahu was brought with severe breathlessness, and by the time he reached hospital there was no pulse and respiration. Relatives thought that he would surely die. But with the treatment he received, he recovered after a few hours. His family members were very happy to see him alive.

## Mission Books

**World Prayer**  
£3.99

Where are the boundaries of your world - your Jerusalem, your Judea, your Samaria? Let the visionary prayer of James Hudson Taylor, the practical prayer tools of Will Bruce, the life of abiding prayer of J. Oswald Sanders, and the prayer of faith of J. O. Fraser enlarge the boundaries of your prayer life to encompass the full scope of God's heart for the world. 'It is not happenstance that this book came when I was earnestly asking the Lord to teach me to pray. This, I find, is a significant part of his gracious answer.' - **Elisabeth Elliot**.



'These are rich, profound insights, gleaned from truly spiritual giants, into our greatest of all privileges: communicating with God. These great men learned on their knees, in the crucible of life, taught by the Word and the Spirit. God would have us learn from them. These biblical principles will change our lives, our circumstances, and the world.' - **Dr Bill Bright**

## Favourite Recipes

These cookery books have just been reprinted and are available to buy (£6 each) from:

**Mrs Anne Mackay**  
20 Ben Bhraggie Drive  
Golspie  
KW10 6SX

Tel: 01408 633975  
E-mail: [anne20benb@talktalk.net](mailto:anne20benb@talktalk.net)

or from:

**Free Church Bookshop**  
15 North Bank Street  
The Mound  
Edinburgh  
EH1 2LS

Tel: 0131 718 4141  
E-mail: [bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk)



For larger quantities, please contact:

**Mrs Christine Mackenzie**  
51 Rowallan Gardens  
Glasgow  
G11 7LH

Tel: 0141 563 5276  
E-mail: [f.c.mack51@ntlworld.com](mailto:f.c.mack51@ntlworld.com)

## Xhosa texts

*We are grateful to Alistair Wilson, who has sent us the following in response to the committee's request.*

Dumisani Theological Institute relies greatly on the goodwill and support of Christian friends throughout the world, including many women involved in the Free Church's 'Women for Mission' (WFM) organisation. We know that some were disappointed by the decision of the WFM Committee to bring to an end the practice of sending us in South Africa used Christmas cards with Xhosa texts stuck on them, and we do

not wish to see supporters frustrated in their desire to be supportive.

We recognise the goodwill that lies behind the sending of these cards, and this is, in many ways, more important to us than the cards themselves. Although the ultimate decision regarding WFM strategy lies with the WFM Committee, we would like to point out that we believe there are several ways in which women could help us that would be considerably more effective than the current practice. A typical parcel of cards costs in the region of £3-£4 in postage (while some have come in at £7- £8). At current rates of exchange that equates to more than a day's wages for many Xhosa people (50-70 Rand). The total postage cost for these parcels in a year can amount to some £150. While the cards that arrive are an expression of love and concern, and the attached texts are biblical, the pictures are not always particularly relevant for encouraging biblical literacy (and can in fact be seriously misleading - shepherds and Magi gather together around a child with a halo!). Yet we ourselves are able to provide a set of 40 excellent, reverent pictures and notes for Sunday School classes for 10 Rand (approximately 60-70 pence) per set, or we can send a prisoner a complete Xhosa Bible for 40 Rand, or we can provide a meal for our whole student body for less than 30 Rand.

May I suggest that WFM groups (or individuals) consider sending the money, which they would have spent on postage to South Africa of used Christmas cards, as a donation for one aspect of Dumisani's work? Perhaps WFM groups could gather to write a letter of encouragement to Sunday School teachers and send greetings to the children. If, of course, individuals still wish to send used Christmas cards, we will appreciate that expression of individual support, but we would wish to encourage creative thought concerning other possible expressions of support. Thank you for your partnership in this work.

## Fund-raising and Smartie tubes!

If you were at the Day Away you'd have received a tube of Smarties which we hope you've enjoyed eating, sharing – or giving away, if you're trying to avoid eating sweets! We suggested that by filling the now-empty tube with 20p or £1 coins we would have an effective and simple means of fund-raising for the project.

Once the tubes are full, individuals and groups should send the money by cheque, made payable to WFM, to **Mrs Mairead Morrison, 1 College Court, Thurso, KW14 7QQ.**



## Opportunity Knocks

*Our Day Away 2008 is over and the feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive. These photos are accompanied by some of the comments you made.*



*The arena at the Macdonald Aviemore Highland Resort*



*The main speaker -  
Nola Leach from CARE*

'We enjoyed the variety, giftedness and natural spontaneity (and preparedness) of all the speakers. It was realistic, challenging and inspiring. We'd love a Day Away every year but do realise the work involved.'

'Thought-provoking – now to action (D.V).'

'Very practical for all ages.'

'Found each of the talks most helpful and renewed my determination to make the most of every opportunity.'

'The talk from our main speaker was inspiring, presented frankly and with understanding of our weaknesses. Could have heard more!'

'Very able speakers who held our attention and were so encouraging in making us take every opportunity – indeed even to take risks.'

'Topics addressed the real concerns we have as Christians.'

'A very warm atmosphere.'

'Everyone mixed very well and was hugely friendly – a day to be remembered.'

'I'm thankful that you welcomed those of us who don't know many others. It made me feel part of things and I was glad I came.'

'Drama was first-class and brought the project aim alive.'

'Dramas were fun and thought-provoking, to-the-point and challenging.'

'An excellent mix of speakers, drama and singing.'

'The singing was lovely.'

'I enjoyed the music but would have appreciated the opportunity to have more singing all together.'

'Food was delicious!'

'Beautiful venue.'



*Retail opportunities help to raise funds for the project*



*The drama group in action*



*These ladies enjoyed their day!*



*Coffee time!*

**New Arrivals at the Free Church Bookshop**



**Banner in the West: A Spiritual History of Lewis and Harris**  
Birlinn Retail, £25; Offer, £20

Today the Long Island is, to many, Britain's 'last stronghold of the pure Gospel'; a place still defined by heartfelt religion – a community where, for instance, the threat of a Sabbath ferry service can still arouse considerable passion. In this sparkling account of island faith, award-winning journalist John MacLeod outlines the gripping religious history of this Hebridean community.

This is a story that has never been related before, by any author, from the dawn of this island community to the present day – the tale of a people as indomitable as their landscape and a faith as profound as the Hebridean sea.

**A Concise New Testament Theology**  
IVP, £12.99

This book is intended to provide a reasonably succinct account of the theology that comes to expression in the individual books of the New Testament and in the New Testament itself as a whole.

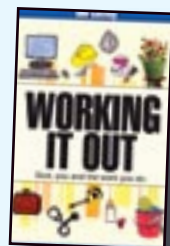


**Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For**  
IVP, £8.99

Gerald Sittser examines the 'one another' statements from the New Testament. Drawing on his own pastoral experience, he shows us what the love Jesus commanded actually requires of us.

**Working it Out: God, You and the Work You Do**  
IVP, £8.99

Finding purpose at work is one of the greatest challenges for people today. In this very helpful book, Ian Coffey helps us to understand how this can be achieved.



**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)

*'The eyes of the Lord your God are continually on [the land] from the beginning of the year to its end' -Deuteronomy 11:12*

- Mon 1** As we come almost to the end of another year, we are thankful that the Lord is still in control of our land and all others, and that He has promised to be with His people unto the end of the age.
- Tue 2** Many folk are affected by the current economic situation, and are in fear of losing their job or house. If there are any such in your congregation, pray for them now.
- Wed 3** Pray for the Strategy Committee, entrusted with planning for the future of our Church, and for the implementation of the Three Year Plan, which aims to meet the situation faced by the Free Church as it sees its own declining membership and at the same time tries to address the great spiritual need all around its doors.
- Thur 4** Kirkcaldy congregation hold a Community Drop-In every Thursday morning, and Andy Pearson, community worker, is on hand to offer help to any who have problems. They give thanks that the new extension is now in use. Please pray that this will prove to be a good ministry to the local people.
- Fri 5** Another in the series of 'Lectures in the Faith' in Falkirk will be held tonight. Prof Donald Macleod will speak on 'Christ according to St Peter'. Please pray this will be a blessing.
- Sat 6** The Portree YMCA Management Committee have set up a Saturday night café, and also offer support in other ways to any vulnerable youngsters. Please pray that some of them will be drawn to ask for help and that the leaders will have all the needed wisdom and guidance.
- Sun 7** Lairg, Maryburgh and Killearnan, and Lybster are having communion services today. Please pray that each of the preachers, members and adherents will meet the Lord and get exactly the blessing they need.
- Mon 8** Remember the Badcaul after-school club, the Connect group in Ullapool, and possibly an after-school club in Achiltibuie as they meet today.
- Tue 9** The International Missions Board meets today in Edinburgh. Pray that as they discuss reports from the delegates who have visited mission fields and deal with other business, they may make wise and informed decisions.
- Wed 10** With even more abortions and teenage pregnancies in Scotland each year, pray for the work of Amica, who aim to help those who are dealing with unwanted pregnancies. They also give talks in schools about pregnancy and abortion.
- Thur 11** The Youth Conference Committee are currently planning their weekend away in March. Please pray they would know God's wisdom as they plan seminars, speakers and fellowship groups for young people from a variety of backgrounds.
- Fri 12** Today Rev Finlay Mackenzie takes Morning Prayers in the Glasgow University Chapel and also has a lunchtime service there. Please pray for blessing to follow all these services for both students and staff.
- Sat 13** Pray for the Saturday Course being held today in the Free Church College with links to some other churches. Pray that all the students will learn more of the Lord's Word and be able to share with others in their congregations.
- Sun 14** London Cobham congregation are to have communion services today; the preacher is Dr Peter Naylor from Cardiff Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. Pray for a big blessing and for the building of relationships between churches.

# December Prayer Diary

**Mon 15** Pray for our Armed Forces in combat areas and pray for comfort for families who mourn for soldiers killed in action.

**Tue 16** Pray for the new Moderator Designate, Rev Douglas MacKeddie, as he thinks about and plans for the next General Assembly.

**Wed 17** Remember the churches in the Highlands and elsewhere who may be feeling despondent owing to declining numbers. Pray that the Lord would encourage them and help them to know how to reach out to those who so need the Gospel message.

**Thur 18** Pray for the work of Scripture Union and especially for those staff workers who are allowed to go in to schools to take School Assemblies, do RME lessons and support SU Groups.

*If you have any requests for prayer or praise for the February Prayer Diary, please send them now to Dayspring MacLeod: 0131 226 5286 or e-mail: [dayspring.macleod@btinternet.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@btinternet.com)*

**Fri 19** The first semester of the Free Church College ends today. As the students and professors take a break, pray for each one. Ask the Lord to prepare more young men to apply for the ministry of our Church next year.

**Sat 20** Many folk who only go to a church occasionally will be there tomorrow. Pray that, through hearing of how the Lord of Glory became a man, they may want to know more about why He came, and come to find Him as their own Lord and Saviour.

**Sun 21** Remember Leith congregation. In the evening they are having the last of six guest services that focus on encounters with Jesus – the title for the sermon is 'The good, the bad and the ugly'. There will be a meeting in the hall afterwards.

**Mon 22** Pray for Christians in non-Christian countries who use Christmas to witness for the Lord and to encourage others to come to believe in Him too. Ask the Lord to keep safe those who live in dangerous circumstances.

**Tue 23** Rev John de la Haye has resigned from the Wick congregation. Please pray for him and his wife Jane as they look for God's guidance for their future, and remember the Wick and Keiss congregation, now vacant.

**Wed 24** Let's pray today for our Queen and Prince Philip, Prince Charles, and all the Royal family, asking that they may be drawn closer to the Lord, and have His help in their lives.

**Thur 25** Pray for the many people who have no idea why Jesus came, but celebrate anyway. For ourselves, let's give God our heartfelt thanks for His indescribable gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15

**Fri 26** Remember our missionaries, no doubt missing family and friends who are far away at this time.

**Sat 27** Pray for any widows or widowers in your congregation. This can be a difficult time of year for some.

**Sun 28** On this last Sunday of the year, let's pray for our own local congregation, asking blessing on the pastor and his family, the elders, deacons and all who attend.

**Mon 29** Remember the many children who are in foster care and pray that they will be helped to lead stable and happy lives and find new life in Christ Jesus.

**Tue 30** At this time of year especially, let us be mindful of any vulnerable elderly folk we can help and to whom we can bring spiritual comfort.

**Wed 31** As we look back over the days of 2008, we thank the Lord for His patience and love! But also may we claim His promise of forgiveness to cover all the sins He sees all too clearly, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Feedback

### Sizing up Sizer

Dear David,

I was so pleased to read Ian Gill's response to the criticism of his book review, *Zion's Christian Soldiers* by Stephen Sizer.

Because of Ian's review I read the book, and was so encouraged to realise that I wasn't a heretic, because for years I had believed nearly everything in this book but had never heard anyone articulate it.

I had been unable to find the Bible backing up what seemed to be received wisdom in evangelical circles, namely that the State of Israel was a fulfilment of biblical prophecies.

If you dare to question some who believe this emphatically, you can receive some scorn or even aggression from some quarters.

Sizer explains that some of the American Middle East policy is based on that assumption, and it is vitally important that we are open to more than one view so we can pray intelligently and without bias.

This book is full of Scripture (in context) and intelligent argument, and makes one more thoughtful. It certainly helped me in my faith journey by making it clear that I am one of Abraham's children.

Yours sincerely,

**Irene Munro (Port Glasgow)**

P.S. I thoroughly enjoyed Ronald and Morag Christie's honest article 'A Lesson, a Regret and a Hope'.

### McGowan, Trueman, Simplicity and New Light

Dear Editor

The 'broadsword' is out. Men have fallen under its sway; Enns, McGowan, etc. Their reputation sullied. Their books not to be read. Their research rubbish. That is the problem with a broadsword; it is neither precise nor discriminating.

And what have these men done? Preached a different gospel (2 Cor 11:4)? No. They have dared to nuance the Old Princeton view on Scripture. How dare they! Never mind the scriptures, what about Old Princeton! That is not to say that tradition does not matter. In fact, Old Princeton is one of the greatest traditions. But

what proves the final judge on biblical scholarship? Is it a tradition? Is it even *a priori* 'canons of inerrancy' developed from a tradition? Although admitting that the conclusions of *a priori* reasonings may well prove correct, John Murray argues that they are never the arbiter in dealing with problems from the phenomena of the Bible:

'We may not impose upon the Bible our own standards of truthfulness or our own notions of right and wrong. It is easy for the proponents of inerrancy to set up certain canons of inerrancy which are arbitrarily conceived and which prejudice the whole question from the outset...it is what Scripture means that constitutes Scripture teaching' (John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol.4, 26).

My other problem with the Campbell-Trueman presentation of these issues is that they make the debate so simple. The Old Princeton view on inspiration is so simple. For example, when formulating our doctrine of scripture we should only use its self-witness (statements about itself). However, Charles Hodge, an Old Princetonian, while dealing with apparent discrepancies and errors in the scriptures, states that 'Our views of inspiration must be determined by the phenomena of the Bible as well as from its didactic statements' (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1, 169). This is something Enns argues for in his book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*.

Trueman's solution to these simple issues is also very simple; taking up our broadswords. However, this is all too easy in a Christianity that despises keeping the unity of the body of Christ (the Church). We should not follow this solution developed through the exegesis of a pop-song. I find the approach of Ridderbos preferable:

'When new light is cast on the Scripture, also through the investigations of historical science, the church has to rejoice, even though this may compel it at the same time to be ready to reconsider and redefine theological concepts related to Scripture' (Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and its Authority*, 35).

Blessings

**J Kirk**

## More McGowan

I have no desire to perpetuate our recent correspondence through the pages of *The Monthly Record* beyond saying that I unequivocally support any call, such as that issued by Carl, Finlay and Iain D. for a rigorous commitment to what the *Confession of Faith* felicitously calls the 'entire perfection' of Scripture. Whether those perfections are best described in terms of 'inerrancy' or 'infallibility,' or as Iain seems to prefer, both, is a legitimate debate for theologians. But what I find incredible is to attribute to Andrew McGowan a lesser commitment to the teaching of the Confession on this matter.

**John Ross**

## Trueman's Broadsword

Dear David,

Thank you for bringing to my attention the letter of Mr Kirk. As an educator and a Christian, I was dismayed to find out that I have apparently written in such a way that leads to the conclusion that reputations have been sullied, books are not to be read and research is rubbished. Thankfully, I resisted the temptation to resign on the spot and decided that, before I did so, I would just read again what I actually wrote. The following is, I think, germane to the issues: 'These men are no fools; they are learned, thoughtful and articulate; they cannot simply be dismissed with a wave of the hand'. Maybe I am old fashioned, but I would be rather flattered if my critics referred to me in such terms.

Much to my frustration, however, I confess that I was unable to trace the statement in my article (or in anything else I have ever said or written) which so much as implied that these men were not to be read, but I won't give up: I am willing to give a small prize to Mr Kirk or any other reader who can find it for me.

One thing I did omit to mention in the article: broadswords are dangerous weapons, only to be used in the theological world by those who have read with care and charity those with whom they then reluctantly come to disagree. Failure to do so can lead to self-harm and much embarrassment.

Yours sincerely,

**Carl R Trueman**

## And finally ... a word of appreciation

Hi,

Although not a member of the Free Church of Scotland, may I congratulate the Editor and all the contributors of your magazine, *The Monthly Record*. It is an excellent read and despite the many topics it is clear that Christ is central in the Church's teaching.

**John Simpson**



# Toxic Childhood -

*How the Modern World is damaging our children and what we can do about it.*

*Extensively researched, fluently written and easily read....a guidebook for parents, grandparents and all who care about present and future generations. - Tribune*

*As a teacher with 15 years' experience, I can only agree about the devastating effect our lifestyles are having on children today. Many of the chapters had me in tears! The book should be made compulsory reading for all politicians, health visitors, social workers, teachers and parents! - Julia Colley, teacher, Essex*

Sue Palmer is a writer, broadcaster and consultant on the education of young children. Her book *Toxic Childhood* is a well-written, deeply researched and brilliant analysis of the state of childhood in Britain today. Although not written from an overtly Christian perspective, it is a valuable insight into the world we are bringing our children up in, and would be helpful to any Christian parent. As I read it I found myself constantly murmuring 'Amen' in agreement.

Palmer's main thesis is that children in Britain today are suffering from 'Toxic Childhood Syndrome'. *In a global culture whose citizens are wealthier, happier and more privileged than ever before, children grow unhappier every year. From the disgruntled and discontented to the depressed and dysfunctional, we seem to be raising a generation with nothing to love but its attitude problem.* Palmer argues that this is not because of any one factor, but rather because of a multitude of factors combining together. After analysing each one, she then talks about how to 'detoxify'.

Her first chapter is a sobering one.

Palmer argues that we are just waking up to the realisation that we have been poisoning our children – feeding them a diet that is rich in sugar, salt, additives and the wrong sort of fat, but containing very little nourishment. Not only has this resulted in greater obesity, but also it has affected mental health, behavioural patterns and intellectual ability. She laments the decline of the family meal and the way in which so many families now eat in shifts, often in front of the TV, and then offers ways to detoxify our junk food environment.

The second chapter traces the decline of play. Age-old play activities have largely been replaced by a solitary screen-based lifestyle. Fear of 'stranger danger', fear of the motorcar, and sheer laziness have further added to a sedentary lifestyle. In addition to this, government policies on academic targets have reduced the importance and amount of time dedicated to physical education. We need to detox the great outdoors and let our children be free to roam.

Chapter three is a surprising one. Palmer asked a number of teachers what they thought most damaged a child's progress

at school. 'Lack of sleep' was near the top of the list. *Tiredness thus draws whole families into the vicious cycle of poor nutrition and lack of exercise.* There are several reasons why this occurs – electric stimulus such as TV, lack of a nap when younger, lack of a proper 'bedtime', and once again additives in food – especially caffeine. Palmer cites Jean Savarin, who in 1825 declared, *'It is the duty of all mamas and papas to forbid their children to drink coffee, unless they wish to have little dried up machines, stunted and old, at the age of twenty!'* Most parents do not give their children coffee, but do we realise how much caffeine is in the fast food cocktail and soft drinks?

In chapter four we move on to discuss the lack of language and literary skills in many modern children. Babies learn the 'dance of communication' from their parents, especially their mothers. But that is often interrupted. Busy lifestyles, day-care and constant noise affect the toddlers' ability to learn language. The replacement of the bedtime story by bedroom TV is another limiting factor.

In a brilliant chapter on the family, Palmer identifies many problems with what she calls the 'mommy wars', the role of fathers and the effects of divorce. *The hugely important lesson the developed world has to learn from the great sociological experiment of the last quarter-century is that bringing up children is not some sort of part time hobby. It's a real job: skilled, full time and personally demanding.*

Chapter six asks who looks after the children and questions the current thinking on the work/life/family balance. As I read this I could not help but think that our present Prime Minister and

British government would do well to read it also – before they again put all their eggs in the basket of persuading both parents to be 'economically active' by encouraging yet more external childcare.

The remaining chapters look at the role of the electronic village, the desire to have children as consumers, and the whole question of manners, before a final chapter on detoxing childhood brings some excellent advice.

Reading the above may give the impression that the whole book is designed to put parents on some kind of guilt trip and that it offers only idealistic and impractical advice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sue Palmer has written a gem of a book that is wise, supportive and gives great guidance. As she herself puts it: *In a complex contemporary culture, children are in greater need of parental wisdom, guidance and support than ever before.* As are parents. And in the common grace of God, we have been provided with a book that should certainly help us.

**The Editor**

