

THE MONTHLY RECORD

February 2009

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GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

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WELCOME TO THE FEBRUARY RECORD

One of the good signs re *The Monthly Record* in the past few months has been the level of feedback. Many of you have been writing in with constructive criticisms and positive suggestions for articles, follow up etc. Many many thanks. One such letter came with a heartfelt plea –

'I would like to share a concern I have on my heart. Some of our elderly and 'shut in' members of our congregations do not get adequate visits from office bearers or friends in the churches they have attended and supported; this applies also to the discouraged and the lonely. I would like to encourage us all to consider giving more time to this time-consuming but rewarding work.'

With this heartfelt plea we strongly agree. Hence the theme for this month's *Record* – **Growing Old Gracefully**. The caricature of elderly 'religious' people as often presented in our soap operas (Harold in *Neighbours*, Dot in *Eastenders*, and Mrs. Mac in *Take The High Road*), as interfering killjoys out of touch with the realities of life, is one that has done a great deal of harm. In contradistinction to this, one often finds that the liveliest and most stimulating people in the Church are some of the elderly. I recall one lady who wrote me, gently indignant at a throwaway comment made in one article, in which it was suggested that just because someone was older they would be more resistant to change. As this good woman pointed out – *'there are those of us who have been waiting for change all our lives'!*

ONE OFTEN FINDS THAT THE LIVELIEST AND MOST STIMULATING PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH ARE SOME OF THE ELDERLY.

This month's *Record* includes our own 'Mrs Mac', who kindly agreed to share some of her experiences and thoughts; a report of a fascinating debate on Physician Assisted Suicide; Dr Martin Leiper explains how palliative care works; and Jenny Wilson reflects on growing old gracefully. We also continue the debate on the Church in the Highlands; meet the indomitable Iain MacAskill; have part one of Martin Allen's excellent address on evangelism; and issue a challenge and competition re Calvin, and include the usual Gaelic, *From the Frontiers*, Prayer Diary, Feedback and News.

NEW FEATURES

There are a couple of new features this month. Firstly, 'Public Eye' is a page devoted to bits and pieces of news and comment that may have just passed you by. If you notice anything that could be shared with the wider readership, please pass it on to us. Secondly, the leadership of the church is vital – so we begin a new 'Elders Page'. This is not just for elders but for all of us to pray that the Lord will provide us with suitable men to lead the church in these confused times.

FASCIST DAILY?

The Free Church Offices recently received an interesting phone call from a company wanting to advertise in our magazine. The only trouble was that they thought it was called Fascist Daily! As one of the office staff commented – either they got their database mixed up or they've been talking to our more conservative readers!

CHRISTIAN VOICE?

We are becoming somewhat tired of the media citing the so-called *Christian Voice* as the response of Evangelical Christians to the issues of the day. *Christian Voice* are not the Christian Voice of British Christians. They represent no church, have a membership that could fit in a phone box and are led by a self-publicist whose ability to embarrass the Church of Jesus Christ is matched only by the daftness of the publicity stunts he engenders on behalf of the Gospel!

WHAT CHRISTIAN IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD WANT THE ADVERTISING STANDARDS AUTHORITY TO RULE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD?

The most recent example of this is their threat to take the atheist bus campaign to court on the grounds that they could not prove there was not a God. The atheist bus campaign was an object of ridicule and embarrassment for many atheists with its inept and somewhat pathetic slogan, 'there is probably no God, so stop worrying and enjoy life', but sadly *Christian Voice's* Steven Green has come in and managed to make Christians look even more pathetic and inept. What Christian in their right mind would want the Advertising Standards Authority to rule on the existence of God? It is doubtful whether Mr Green will go away, but could we at least plead that Christians are not taken in by this nonsense, and that journalists avoid the temptation of easy copy (and ridicule) and instead ask what the Church really thinks?

GO FIGURE

Private Eye pointed out the following contradiction: Government explanation for the economic crisis? – reckless overspending by consumers using borrowed money they could never afford to pay back. Government solution for the economic crisis? – reckless overspending by Government using borrowed money they could never afford to pay back.

If only the government were prepared to listen to biblical principles and use some sanctified common sense. We would suggest the story of Joseph as a good place to start.

Read, enjoy, think, respond, pray and act,

David

MEETING MRS MAC

THE RECORD HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF INTERVIEWING **MRS MARILYN MACRITCHIE**, WIDOW OF THE REV. MURDO MACRITCHIE OF STORNOWAY. THE FOLLOWING IS AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW, WHICH TOOK PLACE ON 18 DECEMBER 2008.

Thanks for agreeing to do this interview. Could you let the readers of *The Record* hear something about your background?

I was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1931. I grew up in a Christian home. The Church we went to was the PCUSA and I was very involved in the music there (I studied music). I remember the Sabbath afternoons as being special – my parents, aunts and uncles would often gather and talk about the Lord. I came under severe conviction of sin when I was a student and feared that I was going to die before I was saved. I was even scared to cross the railway line! One day I picked up the Bible and read, 'come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden'. I knew then that the answer was Christ.

How did you become connected with the Free Church?

I was asked by a neighbour to the only Free Church congregation in the USA – Detroit. The minister visited and asked if I would teach the congregation some psalm tunes. I learned to love the psalms. We married....

You married the minister?!

Yes. We had three children and then he was called to Stornoway in March 1966. There was real culture shock but everyone was so good to me. I was really privileged to meet and enjoy so many of the Lord's servants. We witnessed a revival in spring 1971 and another one amongst school children around 1973. My husband died in 1983. In God's providence I stayed on in Stornoway. It's true that as you get older you long for your roots. I am very content here though. It's good to have family around. The Lord has been very good. I sometimes think that I have been most blessed by the Lord in His providence.



How do you find being an older person in the Church?

Change comes. We have to move with the changes that come to society but not compromise the Gospel. If we are stuck... Sometimes our attitudes have a lot to do with conditioning. People need to think for themselves and not just think that all change is bad. For example, we are so hi-tech in society now...one change I do not like is that we seem to have lost something of reverence in our worship...we are a little too worldly. We are dealing with a Holy God.

That's interesting. This week I received a letter from another 'mature' lady who was expressing that same concern. She was referring not so much to the style of worship but rather the attitude and the lack of holiness.

Yes, we have brought the Lord down to our own level. We have freedom in Christ.

It is a freedom to be holy....

Yes, exactly.

What do you think the attitude of the Church is to the elderly? Are you treated with respect or do you think you are regarded as a nuisance?

Up here there is a lot of respect for older people. Not as much as there used to be. It was natural to listen to older people and have them as mentors. But not now.

IT'S TRUE THAT AS YOU GET OLDER YOU LONG FOR YOUR ROOTS. I AM VERY CONTENT HERE THOUGH

I think that that is part of the wider culture. I was speaking to a retired missionary from the Far East. He stated that Eastern young people will always listen to an older person, gather round and ask questions. But here, the young just want to tell you their opinion first. Which is why the Chinese will probably be the leading civilisation in the 21st century!

The old people need the young for energy and enthusiasm and the young people need the old for experience - but I'm an American and I don't have the same baggage that a lot of people might have here. There is too much traditionalism. The Roman Catholic Church says, get a child until they are seven. I think there is a lot of conditioning that has gone on; there has been a lot of damage. There has been too much emphasis on the Law, rather than on the Gospel and liberty in Christ. Everything was black and white when we know that there is a lot of grey.

You mention enthusiasm as a quality of the young. I remember an elder, Bill Henry, who in his eighties was one

of the most enthusiastic people I have ever met. If there was one thing you could say to the Church about older people, what would it be?

Don't confuse maturity with grace. Also I think that there is a lack of organisation in office bearers. I remember Murdo being concerned about this and asking each of the elders to visit ten people and report back to him. There has to be systematic visitation. People should be 'sent out' by the Church to visit the elderly. I think there is a place for deaconesses – where women serve and help – especially with other women. I don't think it is just the men who can pastor and serve in that sense.

THERE IS THE ATTITUDE THAT WE ARE JUST RIDING ALONG, HAVING DONE OUR BIT AND SO WE CAN SIT BACK. THIS IS NOT RIGHT

What a great idea! And what would you say to encourage the older people in the Church?

On the whole, older people seem to have slipped into apathy. There is the attitude that we are just riding along, having done our bit, and so we can sit back. This is not right. We should be mentors. There is so much for us to do.


I remember listening to a sermon by John Piper where he speaks of a couple who retired in Florida. They had their boat and spent their retirement collecting seashells. He was quite scathing of that attitude. Surely we can serve the Lord in a better way?

Yes, I can think of several retired people who use their gifts and money wisely for the service of the Lord.

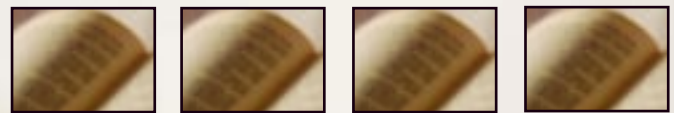
Mrs MacRitchie, thanks for speaking to us. The Church is privileged to have older people such as yourself. May we learn to live and work together for Christ's glory.

.....

I remember the emotions associated with the lingering death of my mother many years ago. Our love for her was so powerful; her love for life was so powerful. But I know that even a word, even a hint from one of us, that she was being a burden, would have seen her ask to go early. It would have looked like voluntary euthanasia, but it would have been something far more sinister.'



**- Peter Jensen, *The Future of Jesus*
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GROWING OLD BIBLICALLY

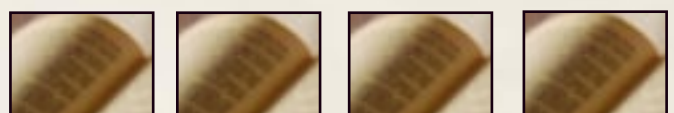
READ ISAIAH 40

One of the curses of modern consumerist society is that the marketing gurus seem determined to create or exacerbate the 'generation gap'. One of the less attractive fruits of the 1960's is the cult of youth and the subsequent view that old age is something to despise and if possible even avoid. The Who sang, 'hope I die before I get old'. Having sown the wind, we now reap the whirlwind. Often the elderly are treated with disrespect, regarded as fools and as being little more than a drain on society. Little wonder that those of us opposed to physician assisted suicide see the potential for enormous harm and destructiveness in this attitude.

The Bible's attitude is so different. The passage we have just read recognises the fragility of all human life. *All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field (v.6). Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall (v.30).* The cult of eternal youth is a lie. The view that the elderly are 'past it' is a vicious and vacuous arrogance. There is only One who is eternal. There is only One whose power never fades and whose wisdom and goodness is all encompassing. *The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom (v.28).*

All human beings are made in His image – in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. This means that we will treat all human beings with respect – especially the elderly. We will rise in their presence, acknowledge and listen to their wisdom and avoid patronising them. In the Church we revere and care for the elderly. Our particular concern is for the widows and those who are left with little support in this life. For the Church to forget or sideline the elderly is a denial of the Faith.

Those of us who are older need to ensure that our hope is in the Lord. Only then will we renew our strength, soar on wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint. As the day of our departure draws ever nearer we will find that, though outwardly we are fading away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. The hope that is in us will shine out in such a way that those who are younger will long for the day when they too can know the Lord in such a deep and intimate way. It was the martyr Polycarp who, after being asked to recant his faith in Christ, announced, 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?' Is there any greater testimony than to remain faithful to Christ, even in old age, when others fade?



THE RIGHT TO BE KILLED?

PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE DEBATE

In 2005, Jeremy Purvis MSP introduced a Private Members' Bill into the Scottish Parliament, calling for a change in the law to allow Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) for those with a terminal illness. This attracted the support of six other MSPs. In January 2008 he tabled another motion calling for the legalization of PAS but could gain the support of only one other MSP. On 26 March 2008, Margo MacDonald, Independent MSP for Lothian, made an impassioned appeal for a change to the law on assisted dying. Ms MacDonald has Parkinson's disease and *'doesn't want to burden any friend or doctor but wants to be able to end her life in case she has the worst form of Parkinson's'*. It was in this climate that I believe God encouraged me to organise a large-scale public debate under the motion *'This house believes that Physician Assisted Suicide should not be legalized in Scotland'*. This debate took place in the University of Dundee on Monday the 27th of October 2008 with the participants as follows:

Politics	Gordon MacDonald (Public policy officer for Care Not Killing Scotland, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Scottish Liberal Democrats for East Renfrewshire)	vs	Jeremy Purvis MSP (Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, author of <i>Dignity with Dying</i> consultation paper (2005))
Medicine	Dr Martin Leiper (Consultant Palliative Care Physician, Roxburghe House, Dundee)	vs	Dr Libby Wilson (Friends at the End (FATE) (expert in end-of-life decisions & counselling))
Ethics/Law	Dr Calum MacKellar (Director of Research for the Scottish Council of Human Bioethics)	vs	Dr Alasdair Maclean (Qualified in Medicine and Law, expert in end-of-life decisions, University of Dundee School of Law)
Theology	Rev David Robertson (Minister of St Peter's Free Church, author of <i>The Dawkins Letters</i> , Chaplain at the University of Dundee)	vs	Prof. Paul Badham (Professor of Theology and Religious Studies and Director of the Alistair Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, patron of Dignity in Dying)
Chair	Prof. Martin Pippard (Consultant Haematologist and Dean at Dundee Medical School)		

Over 350 people of varying backgrounds attended, and the pre-debate vote showed that the overwhelming majority supported the motion.

Jeremy Purvis began by attacking the perceived 'pure' argument (i.e. that those holding to the sanctity of life should not impose this view on others). He then went on to argue that it was favourable to allow patients to retain control towards the end of their lives. In response to the question *'Why should doctors have to do it? Why not employ a state executioner?'*, Mr Purvis replied, *'We permit you, as a doctor, to shorten life; we permit you under the law to withdraw food and hydration and medical treatment if you use your judgement. That is an execution.'* He also asserted that the safety measures would be entirely sufficient to prevent medical malpractice. Gordon MacDonald contended that this was unrealistic.

Dr Leiper spoke about the doctor-patient relationship being of utmost importance and revealed that he gets about one request for PAS a year. However, this request is often later withdrawn by the patient. Significantly, he argued

that the option of PAS gives the doctor a lot of power in the consultation setting: *'PAS would be bad care and make patients feel unsafe under a given doctor's care.'* Dr Wilson responded by arguing that the role of the doctor is to help patients *'meet their health wishes'*. She does not believe that the role of the physician is to preserve life, as it is an entity afforded to other biological entities, such as *'plants'*. She also asserted that it would strengthen the doctor-patient relationship.

In the third round, Dr MacKellar centred his argument on the dignity of human life as the distinguishing characteristic of human beings. He argued that this would be lost if doctors were to help patients to die. Dr Maclean responded by clarifying some terminology before going on to accuse the opposition of hypocrisy by saying that on one hand they withdraw treatment knowing that it will cause death, while on the other hand resisting PAS.

In the fourth round, Rev David Robertson forcefully refuted the 'pure' argument put forward by Jeremy Purvis in the first round while explaining that exceptions do not make effective



on the cross dying the worst death in the history of mankind, should He have asked John to end it for Him?

The post-debate vote was again overwhelmingly supportive of the motion.

At an interview for entry to medical school, I recall being asked, 'What is the most basic and important aspect of medicine?' The answer is trust. But the legalization of PAS would profoundly and permanently alter the nature of the doctor-patient relationship. When doctors kill, the casualty is trust. But this is the logical outworking of a society that has turned its back on God. Unless doctors believe that they will one day give an account of their treatment of their patients, then they are rationally more corruptible. Indeed, PAS may be done for the doctor's benefit instead of the patient's.

After the debate, Libby Wilson had this to say: 'It really comes down to whether you believe in God or not.'

David W Jack
Medical Student, University of Dundee
Christian Medical Fellowship - Dundee Student Rep

DVDs OF THE DEBATE ARE AVAILABLE FOR £3 EACH. TO ORDER A COPY PLEASE EMAIL: cmfdundee@googlemail.com

laws. Professor Badham argued that PAS should be legalized because: 'Jesus taught that we are to "love....your neighbour as yourself"' He also said, 'God's love works through doctors ... to help patients get back to a worthwhile life ... and this should extend to helping someone die.' Further, he said, 'Death is not to be resisted but embraced.' Interestingly, Prof Badham believes that the doctrine of Hell is incompatible with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. However, Rev Robertson was emphatic in his deconstruction of not just Professor Badham's aberrant use of Scripture, but also most of what had been said already. He ended by asking whether, when Jesus was

POSITIVE POINTS ABOUT PALLIATIVE CARE

DR MARTIN LEIPER ADDRESSES THE QUESTION OF HOW WE CARE FOR THE DYING. HAVING WORKED IN THIS FIELD FOR MANY YEARS, HE IS WELL QUALIFIED TO GUIDE US IN THIS IMPORTANT AREA.

The universal human problem of suffering and death are not things we talk about much these days. However, in the last few months of 2008, these subjects were all over the newspapers, BBC Scotland and Sky TV.

In December the independent MSP Margo MacDonald's TV programme 'I'll die when I choose', urging that the euthanasia debate should be re-started in Scotland, was repeated on Panorama. Sky TV showed actual footage of the physician assisted suicide (PAS) of a British man at the Dignitas charity in Zurich, Switzerland.

Almost unnoticed in the popular media was the launch of MSP Rosanna Cunningham's Proposed Palliative Care (Scotland) Bill, urging that Scottish Health Boards are required in law to offer palliative care to all who need it, regardless of diagnosis.

As a nation we don't like to talk about suffering or death, or for that matter, palliative care. It is simply too scary. So what does the Christian do with all of this?

Suffering and death problems are fundamentally spiritual issues, and the answer, albeit at both a simple and an extremely deep level, lies in the fact that our God died and suffered and rose again for us.

Physician assisted suicide seems an easy answer at first, but it is really bypassing the problem of life and death and suffering.

Palliative care in itself is not the answer to any spiritual problem. Sometimes palliative care or hospice care is portrayed as making death ok. The Bible plainly tells us that

death without an acceptance of Christ is bad and not ok.

However, it is our duty as Christian people to journey along the road with those who face a life-shortening illness. Knowledge at least of the existence of palliative care skills can help ease the situation.

WHO Definition of Palliative Care

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. Palliative care:

- provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms;
- affirms life and regards dying as a normal process;
- intends neither to hasten nor postpone death;
- integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;
- offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death;
- offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient's illness and in their own bereavement;
- uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling, if indicated;
- will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness;
- is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.

Hospice is a word used first for Christians on pilgrimage, then in the 1960s given a new and modern meaning by Dame Cecily Saunders, who started St Christopher's Hospice in London. As a Christian, she created a building devoted to excellent care, symptom control and psychological support of those who are dying. In recent usage it means a service, usually charitable, which includes home care, day care and education. In Scotland, hospices and NHS palliative care units provide similar care.

IT SURELY IS THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO JOURNEY ALONG THE ROAD WITH EACH PERSON WHO FACES A LIFE-SHORTENING ILLNESS.

When you visit someone who is ill, don't worry about what you will say. Rather, listen and be guided by that person. Be guided into the depth and length of the subject matter. This is the skill of 'being there'. The day you visit may be a day for superficial discussion of the weather, but the next day may be different. It is tempting to wade in with a Bible verse or Christian platitude. Hold off. Pray. Wait to be invited; then the time will be right. People don't care what you know until they know that you care.

Palliative Care may be needed early in an illness. Scotland is moving away from a concept of terminal care and towards palliative care of physical, psychological and spiritual issues early in the course of an illness. There is no reason that symptoms cannot be addressed even while disease treatment is being given.

Palliative Care is not only for those who have cancer. It seems fundamentally unjust that one person affected by cancer gets empathy, grants, specialist nurses and hospice care while another with heart, lung or kidney disease seems to get a lot less. This seems another case of the patient having 'the wrong disease' – scarcely their fault. The recent

Scottish Government Policy document *Living and Dying Well: A national action plan for palliative and end-of-life care in Scotland* lays great emphasis on the idea that palliative care should be extended to all regardless of diagnosis. This is supported by the British Heart Foundation, Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Parkinson's Disease Society, and many other similar organisations.

Palliative Care is about maximising the life that is left. Now that may seem daft at first. However, listening and understanding who a person is, rather than



what disease they may have, can lead to setting unique personalised goals. Once cure is no longer an option, a person starts to consider what is really important to them. This can never be predicted or prescribed for an individual. It may be just one night's sleep or it may be reconciliation with a long lost son or daughter, or on the other hand, just to taste a particular ice cream again. Setting realistic goals, then delivering on them, is the key to good palliative care.

Good palliative care can be delivered at home. Palliative care is not just about hospice. Scottish GPs and their community nursing colleagues are enthusiastic about caring for people at home. If it is what is wanted, it gives these professionals great satisfaction. The trick here is to talk about care in advance and to enable a person's wishes to be clearly stated. Scottish GPs are being encouraged to practice anticipatory care and prescribing so to avoid surprises and crises. Despite this, 60% of our population still die in hospital.

Advance directives are not the same as euthanasia. We are all entitled to refuse treatment for a good, a bad or no reason in common law. An advance directive or living will is a formal way of expressing our preferences and choices. Nothing illegal can be requested. Indeed, it is a good opportunity for patient and GP to plan ahead. These documents do not need a lawyer and should be stored with the GP and sent for inclusion in case notes in the local hospital.

The modern use of strong painkillers for cancer pain improves life. Painkillers like morphine used for pain do not shorten life. Indeed, if required, they can be used safely for months and years. There are no brownie points for holding back on analgesics in case they are needed later. When used against chronic cancer pain, these drugs do not produce addicts or start drug-seeking behaviours. On the contrary, most patients minimise their use of painkillers to a level that enables them to function best.

Palliative Care Services do not perform euthanasia. The World Health Organisation definition states that palliative care 'intends neither to hasten nor postpone death'. Painkillers and sedatives are only increased to deal with pain and agitation. They are not automatically increased to hasten death. Indeed, the doctrine of double effect, where drugs are used for intractable pain when doctors know that they may hasten the end, need not be invoked in skilled palliative care. Those persons requiring higher doses of painkillers do not die sooner.

Hospices offer rehabilitation. It is a surprise to many that not everyone dies in a hospice. In fact, 40% or perhaps 50% get home. The popular perception is that hospice care means giving up or accepting defeat. Once visited, it is seen that hospices and palliative care units (NHS equivalents) are at the same time realistic and positive places. Of course, some patients do need a place to die in comfort and safety, and that is offered as well.

Palliative Care is provided in hospitals. Most Scottish hospitals either have a full-time specialist palliative care team or are visited regularly by palliative care specialist doctors or nurses. Whilst moving to home or to hospice may provide a more peaceful environment, if someone needs support during treatment in hospital, they should get it.



Dr Martin Leiper - Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Tayside and former chairman of the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care

Palliative Care is for everyone. It is a sad truth in Scotland that the Inverse Care Law applies to our whole health system, including palliative care services. The law states that those who need the care the most access it the least. This is true of social deprivation, geographical isolation or belonging to an ethnic minority. Palliative care services are striving to make themselves more culturally relevant. Palliative care is not just for posh people.

In summary, it surely is the duty of Christians to journey along the road with each person who faces a life-shortening illness. It is a fundamental way of showing God's love. Not all of us have nursing skills, so just how we do this will vary. It may be letter-writing or phone calls. It may be practical help with food preparation. Or indeed, some have the skill of listening and then witnessing when invited to do so. Not all can be nurses, and there was only one Mother Teresa.

It behoves us to know a bit about palliative care, especially when many folk are scared to find out about it. Those who advocate euthanasia and choice of when to die cloud the issue with both praise for palliative care and misinformation about it. It is doubly important to be informed when insufficient resources in palliative care in Scotland may inadvertently promote the legalisation of euthanasia.

To find out more about palliative care services in Scotland, consult the website of the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care, or for local information, contact your own general practice.

Finally, when I look at the word hospice, I see it contains the letters needed to spell hope.

FREE CHURCH MINISTER BANNED FROM BECOMING AFFINITY CHAIRMAN

Richard Underwood, General Secretary of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches has been appointed as Chairman of Affinity in highly controversial circumstances.

The management committee of Affinity had originally nominated Rev. David Meredith of the Free Church as the new Chairman, but this met with objections from Rev. David Fraser of the Free Church Continuing, as it was alleged that the Free Church were engaged in illegitimate ecumenical relations with the Church of Scotland following the joint statement of both churches in May 2007. As a direct result of this allegation, it was decided to put another candidate against Mr Meredith, and Mr Underwood then became the choice of the Affinity Council.

A connected issue was the editorship of the Affinity theological journal, *Foundations*. It had been agreed that Rev. James Eglinton, a Free Church minister and PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, be invited to edit *Foundations*. This appointment was delayed until after the issue of Chairman was settled. Rev. Eglinton has subsequently declined the invitation.

The issue of the Free Church's continued membership of Affinity is now the subject of discussion within the ecumenical relations committee of the Free Church. It is clear that Free Church officers are being treated differently by Affinity as a direct result of the joint statement. A decision on continued membership may be taken by the 2009 General Assembly. It is understood that a number of bodies are now considering their position within Affinity.

It is ironic that the Free Church is one of the most conservative voices within Affinity, holding to a strict subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The question exposes a number of fault lines within Affinity at the present time. Affinity has a number of Anglican churches involved as partners through various gospel partnerships and their relationship with Affinity must now be in doubt. The position of the Free Church with regard to mixed denominations remains the same as it always has in that it delights to work in evangelism with like minded evangelicals wherever they are found. It does not and cannot work with bodies that deny the very truths which are the core of the gospel.

Free Church Youth Conference 2009

Lessons for the Heart:

The Life of David

Dates: Friday 20th - Monday 23rd March

Location: Lendrick Muir SU Centre, near Kinross

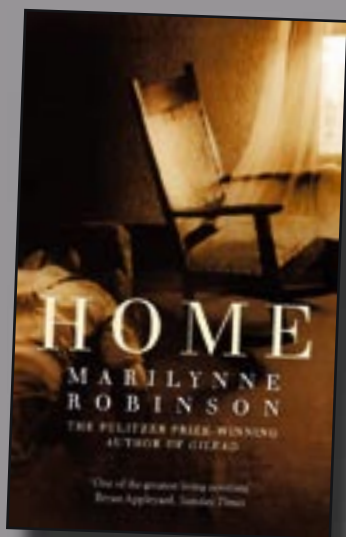
Speaker: Rev Kenny Stewart, Downvale

Cost: Students £42, Workers £50

Seminar topics include: Christianity & Politics, Money & Materialism, Prayer, A Rough Guide to Joshua, Faith & Science, A Christian Response to the Media

For more information and a booking form, visit www.freechurch.org/youthconference or contact matthewjamesford@gmail.com

'For her, church was an airy white room with tall windows looking out on God's good world, with God's good sunlight pouring in through those windows and falling across the pulpit where her father stood, straight and strong, parsing the broken heart of humankind and praising the loving heart of Christ. That was church.'



**Marilynne Robinson
from her novel, *Home***

Islands Study Conference

Harris Hotel, Tarbert, Isle of Harris

24th to 26th April 2009

Speakers

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Missionary Speaker - To be arranged

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ALEXANDER MACIVER ELDER, LOCHS



It was with a great sense of sadness that the news of the death of Alexander MacIver was received in the community of North Lochs on 20th March 2008. Mr MacIver passed away at the age of 84 years, having been in hospital care through illness for the last couple of years of his life.

Alexander MacIver was born in 1923 in the village of Leurbost. He was one of a family of three siblings – accompanied by a brother, Kenneth Daniel, and a sister, Bell. His brother was sadly lost in action in 1942. Mr MacIver grew up as an unassuming man within the closely-knit village community of Leurbost and was never one to put himself to the fore. Of quiet disposition, Aligean, as he was known locally, was a man of industry and strength. He spent some of his adulthood working at hydroelectric schemes on the mainland. The majority of his working life was with the Harris Tweed industry, as a Harris Tweed weaver for many years and as a mill worker until he retired. His physical strength was well known by his fellow workers in the mill, especially when it came to carrying and tossing bales of wool single-handed! He befriended all who came into contact with him.

Being a regular church-goer from an early age, the Word eventually found root in his heart and he expressed to a friend his desire to attend the local prayer meeting. To their mutual surprise, this desire was shared and followed up. As a Christian, Aligean was exemplary in his character as one brought from darkness to the light of the gospel and in his faithful attendance of the local meetings of worship. He was a popular neighbour both to those who were sympathetic to the gospel and to those who were not. He walked humbly with his God.

Aligean was elected to the office of deacon in the congregation of Lochs in 1968 and to the eldership in 1976, the latter office being offered to him unexpectedly due to the sudden death of another man. He adorned both offices with dignity and diligence. As a man touched by the grace of God, Aligean was a man who lived for and near his Lord. Not only was this obvious when called to lead in public prayer, but also in his living, and demonstrated particularly by the warm, Christian welcome extended to all who came through the door of the church at Crossbost, especially the young. As God's providence would have it, he remained unmarried all his life. Latterly, illness took its toll, and whilst in hospital it was apparent to visitors that the enemy was busy trying to take from him what he could not. However, he was at the end a man at peace with and in touch with His Lord.

We commend his widowed sister Bell and her daughter Mary and family to the Lord's grace as they remember one loved by them, who loved them much and whom the Lord has now taken home to be forever with Himself.

A MacLeod

CHURCH IN THE HIGHLANDS

THE FOLLOWING LETTER FROM **ROBERT MACLEOD** IS IN RESPONSE TO THE NOVEMBER EDITION ON THE HIGHLANDS. IN ADDITION TO OUR RESPONSE, WE ASKED **ALEX J MACDONALD** TO TELL US ABOUT THE VISION HE HAS FOR THE HOME MISSIONS BOARD.



As a Highlander living and working in central Scotland, the words of Colin Raye resonate with me: 'I laugh, I love, I hope, I try, I hurt, I need, I fear, I cry. And I know you do the same things too! So we're really not that different, me and you!' They remind me that there is no real difference between the humanity of the north and that of elsewhere. In the context of the Church's mission, they speak

to me of our common need and responsibility. Therein lies my problem, or is it one of perception? Do we, in all our talk about strategy and concern for the whole of Scotland, really mean that within the Free Church?

I appreciate the unique problems of the Highlands and Islands. I appreciate the reality that there are no simple answers and that in the future some painful decisions will have to be made.

However, is the present leadership and agenda of the denomination genuinely concerned for Tongue, Tobermory, Wick and, if it were in the Highlands, Dumfries - along with too many others to mention? That's why I use the word perception. We talk the talk! We've talked for years! Words and ideas I hear today, I heard 17 years ago when we commenced our Church Plant in Falkirk! Yet, what is it that too many ministers struggling with very limited resources and support are both hearing and seeing? I also ask what it is that a not insignificant number of our most loyal supporting members and adherents are hearing and seeing. I do not believe they are blind to the decline and the challenges that they face - but it seems to me we are having them hear and see strategy - that causes deep concern.

IS THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP AND AGENDA OF THE DENOMINATION GENUINELY CONCERNED FOR TONGUE, TOBERMORY, WICK AND IF IT WERE IN THE HIGHLANDS, DUMFRIES?

The new proposed financial changes will stretch many Deacons' Courts. I believe some of our most loyal and sacrificial givers are already disillusioned. We already have (but I think it will become more apparent) too many battle-weary ministers. Are we right in adding to their fragility in giving the impression that the problems of the Highlands and Islands are in part their failure? Is it only our people in the Highlands and Islands that require to 'repent and change'?

The increasing emergence of five-year contracts (I can speak because I took one on) with no employment guarantee at the end - humanly speaking - must make some of our future students consider their leading. Further, there is the existence (debate apart) of certain congregations with ancillary workers and assistant pastors and the capital expenditure on new churches, primarily in the south, including renovations and refurbishments. It might also be added that our media and denominational management, to some, comes across as nepotism - the same 'shakers and movers'! Do not misunderstand, we need such, but surely we need to be sensitive to the impression - one I'm not convinced is helpful to the overall strength and wellbeing of the denomination.

As a frequent visitor to the north and one who has preached extensively in the last 18 months throughout Scotland, the reality is that we are in difficult days - days that call for decisive leadership and action. However, I'm convinced it's not about listening to the Macedonian roar only, but also to the Macedonian cry of rural Scotland! After all, 'we're really not that different, me and you'.

Robert Macleod
Chaplain, NHS Forth Valley

EDITOR'S NOTE

We appreciate Robert Macleod's point that perception is important. The perception his letter gives is that *The Monthly Record* called for Highlanders only to repent and change, and that the majority of church-building expenditure is taking place in 'the South'. However nowhere in the November edition of *The Monthly Record* was it suggested that only Highlanders need to repent and change. The cry was for all of us. Nor was there any attempt to set Highland against Lowland, urban against rural - indeed the whole point of the articles was to prevent such a sad attempt at division.

As for 'the capital expenditure on new churches' being 'primarily in the south, including renovations and refurbishments', we checked with the Offices and found that this statement is somewhat misleading. Apart from Dundee, current building projects include North Uist, Lochbroom, possibly Fortrose, and Smithton-Culloden, none of which fits the description of a southern urban centre. If we are going to comment on the current situation, then let us make sure that we get our facts right and that we avoid playing the division card, which only appeals to people's fears and prejudices. In a Scotland which is suffering from a 'famine of hearing the words of the Lord', we need to unite in seeking to bring that word.

The Editor

A RESPONSE FROM THE HOME MISSIONS BOARD



When I was asked to take up the Chairmanship of the Home Missions Board, I had to think twice, and then think twice again! It has a huge remit, ranging all the way from Youth Camps, Sunday Schools and Road to Recovery projects to church planting, how ministry is organised, and what ministers get paid.

In the end I decided I could not refuse the exciting prospect the work of the Board offers, and I must say I have enjoyed the first few months of the work, in spite of the wide remit and the various difficulties.

WE ARE NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF CLOSING CHURCHES!

One of the priorities of the Board is to ensure that the way our ministry is organised is as effective as possible. As is now well known, part of the pressure here is to put the finances of the Church on a better footing. We have been struggling to make ends meet for a number of years. However, much more important, in my view, is the challenge of reversing the decline in strength and vitality in recent years. In this connection I want to stress what we are about and what we are not about.

We are not in the business of closing churches! I have been very concerned to hear that some believe we want to manage decline, particularly in the Highlands, and that we have even closed churches. This is not the case. There have been retirements and resignations of ministers (as there are in the normal course of things), but that does not mean that those congregations are closed down! Because one particular ministry comes to an end in a place, it does not mean that we are abandoning the spiritual wellbeing of that community. We may have to find alternative kinds of ministry in some places, but we are not about to abandon large swathes of the Highlands to paganism!

In addition, I think we must reject the 'one size fits all' approach. The solution will not always be the classic one-minister-one-congregation model. It may be a linkage with another congregation. It may be a team ministry. It may be redevelopment. It may be an assistantship arrangement with another congregation. It may be electronic ministry. But we will try to find an approach that will suit the situation and the community. It will be 'horses for courses'.

Also, nothing will be done in a draconian way. Everything will be done in consultation with the people on the ground. I have made it a priority to visit already as many as possible of the congregations for which we are responsible. The perception has arisen that decisions were taken in 'Edinburgh' by 'faceless people' who had not visited the

situation and seen firsthand the difficulties, challenges and opportunities. I wish to ensure that is not the case.

It should be recognised that the Board is made up of representatives from all the presbyteries: Rev. Malcolm Macleod and Mr Malcolm Mackay (Western Isles); Rev. Angus J. Howat and Mr Campbell Brown (Glasgow and Argyll); Rev. David Meredith and Mr James Macarthur (Inverness, Lochaber and Ross); Rev. Alasdair I. Macleod and Mr Iain Gill (Edinburgh and Perth); Rev. Ian M. Allan and Mr Donald Mackenzie (Skye and Wester Ross); and Dr James Skinner (Northern). Angus Howat is the Clerk and Evan Macdonald (Glasgow) is Assistant Clerk. If people have concerns about the work of the Board, they can contact their local representative or contact myself directly.

Part of the remit of the Board was to appoint a Development Officer for one year to help, encourage and strengthen congregations, with the aim of assessing if this post could be made permanent. Several names were considered, and the Rev. Neil MacMillan (Kirkcaldy) was appointed for 9 months, spending 80% of his time on Board work and 20% on the congregation. A large part of his work will be taken up with supporting three 'hub' congregations. These are not necessarily large, strong congregations, but simply ones who wish to develop and help to pass on what they have learned to others.

Please pray for Neil, the members of the Board, and those who help with the varied work under our care, that God would lead us and use us in the building up of this branch of His Church for the good of our communities.

Alex J MacDonald
Convener, Home Missions Board



THE HERMENEUTICS OF SEXUAL INSECURITY

Recently, the American news magazine, *Newsweek*, carried a cover story by a lady called Lisa Miller on the Bible and gay marriage. In the course of the article, Ms Miller did make some very good, if rather obvious and long-established, points, such as the fact that modern conceptions of marriage and family are, in significant ways, different from those we find in the Bible.

What was interesting was not so much these long-established points, but the way in which she then used the Bible to justify gay unions. Indeed, that she used it at all should give pause for thought: this is no 'the Bible is junk, let's move on' piece. It is rather more sophisticated (and less intellectually consistent) than that and offers a taste of what is to come, I suspect, in the evangelical world, with the erosion of notions of biblical authority that have been witnessed within our ranks over the last few years.

Ms Miller tries to offer a hermeneutic for understanding gay marriage as biblical, claiming that it has been misread on this issue. Not original with her, of course, though she acknowledges that her case is not built on any particular texts. Quoting Walter Brueggemann, the case for gay marriage 'is not generally made with reference to particular texts, but with the general conviction that the Bible is bent towards inclusiveness'. She also claims that '[w]e cannot look to the Bible as a marriage manual, but we can read it for universal truths as we struggle towards a more just society'. So confident is she of her own approach that she goes so far as to say that 'Religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all, then, but in custom and tradition (and, to talk turkey for a minute, a personal discomfort with gay sex that transcends theological argument)'. Her opponents are therefore unbiblical, hidebound, and psycho-sexually insecure.

THOSE WHO LACK A ROBUST DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE, AND A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW SCRIPTURE SHOULD BE INTERPRETED AND USED, ARE GOING TO BE FIGHTING AN UPHILL BATTLE TO MAINTAIN BASIC MORAL STANDARDS

Numerous thoughts came to mind as I read the article. Her reference to 'universal truths' is intriguing, given the cultural relativism which otherwise really pervades the entire piece. The 'universal truths' to which she refers seem to be rather oriented towards very recent, and pretty specifically Western, attitudes to homosexuality. One cannot help feel that 'universal truths' here seem to mean 'modern Western ideals'; and, putting her thoughts together with Brueggemann, it would seem that, while she regards individual passages of the Bible as teaching one thing, the overall thrust of the Bible apparently teaches something different. The whole runs counter to the sum of the parts.

This raises the whole issue of how and why the Bible is



Carl Trueman

authoritative, and how it should thus be interpreted. This is surely where the battle is going to be engaged in the evangelical church and its institutions, and this is where the fault line is going to open up. It is very clear that those who lack a robust doctrine of scripture, and a clear understanding of how scripture should be interpreted and used, are going to be fighting an uphill battle to maintain basic moral standards even within the church.

Of course, while she claims that conservatives merely read their own tradition and sexual insecurities into the biblical text, it would appear she does the same, even while glossing her position with the veneer of 'universal truth'. Thus, she uses David and Jonathan's friendship as paradigm (or potential paradigm) for homosexual relations (again, not original with her). This tells us more about today's world than about that of David: in our deeply sexualised society, the language of 'love' and 'sex' have so coalesced as to be virtual synonyms. She also notes that, although conservatives argue the friendship of David and Jonathan is purely platonic, it is rather (her contrast, not mine) a story about friends who stood together in tough times with the disapproval of a powerful parent. Personally, I'm not sure why that can't be covered by the notion of platonic friendship. But to add bad taste to logical fallacy, she then gratuitously concludes, 'What David and Jonathan did or did not do in privacy is perhaps best left to history and our own imaginations.' If that is not an unwarranted eisegesis of contemporary concerns into a biblical narrative, then I'm not sure what else could possibly qualify as such. Apparently, even close male friendship must now be connected to the categories of sex. What a dirty-minded world, where a man cannot apparently love another man without falling under suspicion of a sexual relationship, whether consummated or not. How long before using language of intense love towards my two sons will place

me under suspicion of incest? Her comments here, with the apparent need to find sex everywhere, raise the question of just who exactly it is who is really sexually insecure. But then, Ms Miller, by her own account and unlike her opponents, takes the Bible seriously and has access to these 'universal truths' that allow her to read the Bible properly, while conservative religious types like myself are hopelessly trapped in our insecurities and traditions.

IT WILL REQUIRE COURAGE, A WILLINGNESS TO BE DESPISED BY THE WORLD, A FIRM THEOLOGICAL GRASP OF THE TRUTH, AND A BURNING LOVE FOR PEOPLE, ALL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE LOST

Behold the future. The piece is prophetic because, at a time when the full weight of the opinion-forming social media is behind the normalisation of homosexuality as acceptable, challenges such as this are clearly going to be coming thick and fast. I grew up in some ways as the precisely hidebound, unthinking traditionalist on sexual morality at which Ms Miller takes aim: everyone knew homosexuality was wrong (even if only from a basic anti-gay bigotry), and so there was no need to mount arguments against it either in the church or the wider society. That is not the world of my children. They need to be given reasons as to why their gay friends are following a lifestyle that is dirty and sinful; and those reasons need to be well-thought out, calm, and articulated with Christian grace and love. At the level of theological education, this means that the issue of biblical authority and interpretation needs to be very carefully addressed. For example, Ms. Miller's implicit contrast of individual passages of the Bible with its overall message raises the very legitimate interpretative question of how these things are related; church and colleges and seminaries need to make sure they can give a thoughtful answer to that one, or the Ms. Millers of the world are going to take them to the cleaners. At the level of leadership, it will require courage, a willingness to be despised by the world, a firm theological grasp of the truth, and a burning love for people, all people, especially the lost.

The article ended on a note with which I wholeheartedly agree, however, at least on the surface. She quotes a pro-gay priest as saying, 'if Jesus were alive today, he would reach out especially to the gays and lesbians among us'. Amen. So he would. But surely not with the tawdry bauble of passing social acceptance; rather He would reach out with the love of the Father for those who are unlovely, offering them life in abundance - not through some intense but illicit orgasm, but through the forgiveness and newness of life that comes from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even as the church must dismantle erroneous hermeneutics and defend the authority of scripture, so she must also reach out with the love of the gospel to the dirty, the immoral, the things that are not, with the light of the gospel. For such were some of us. But with what does the Christ of Ms Miller reach out? A piece of paper? Middle class domesticity and respectability? The promise of a few years of companionship? A tax allowance? Perhaps some great sex? And then what?



FINANCE MANAGER

A vacancy has arisen for a Finance Manager in the Church's Central Offices, located in Edinburgh.

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THE AFFABLE REVEREND

Photographs by William Urquhart



THIS ARTICLE BY **KEITH MACKENZIE** APPEARED IN *THE WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS* ON THE 26 SEPTEMBER 2008. IT IS USED BY KIND PERMISSION.

It may not be one of the traits more commonly associated with a Free Church minister from the Western Isles, but Iain MacAskill does a mean line in self-deprecating humour, as he reveals when recalling an earlier encounter with a journalist based in the Central Belt.

After they had spent a short period of time together, he was moved to ask the curious scribe what he imagined he would encounter when dispatched to the islands to interview a local cleric. "Taliban", perhaps predictably, came the reply. But in the article that followed the sceptical hack was quite happy to admit his own clichéd ideas had been proved wrong, and it's not difficult to see why when you meet this affable Uist-based reverend.

He is in reflective mood as he sits within An Caladh, the transformed former Ministry of Defence social club in Balivanich that is now the centrepiece of a multi-agency project which helps with the rehabilitation of islanders with drug and alcohol problems.

"If you say Iain MacAskill, Free Church minister — immediately you have a caricature," says the man who has been the driving force in the project's work over the past decade. "It's our own fault and you are always battling against that image but we are trying to address it."

What he's also now trying to confront, however, are problems that have proved the scourge of many an island community throughout his lifetime. Tackling the ravages of alcoholism has become something of a personal mission for this former British Airways worker, since his own life took an unexpected change of direction close to two decades ago.

Iain MacAskill grew up in Lochmaddy but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he returned home to work after completing his senior schooling in Stornoway in 1979 — opting for a job at Balivanich airport instead of going to university. People knew me as Iain BA — not Bachelor of Arts but British Airways," he

says. "But it proved to be good training for the work I'm doing now as you got to know a lot of people from the community, both from the north and the south.

"I had to be a jack of all trades — well, apart from flying the plane that is. We were trained in the ground work, loading, check-ins and reservations. It was a good chance to see the world too as you could get free flights."

Along with a colleague he also launched "Ask," a successful car hire business which still operates to this day.

"The Ask came out from MacAskill and the motto was if you're looking for a car just ask," he recalls. "But that grew and grew and while I was doing that I got really busy, and I was asking myself do I stick with BA or concentrate on the new business."

"IF YOU SAY IAIN MACASKILL, FREE CHURCH MINISTER — IMMEDIATELY YOU HAVE A CARICATURE"

As it turned out, however, his focus in life turned as a result of the woman he had employed to manage the blossoming business. As he explained — and, like many a football fan, his life is recalled in a series of seasons and not years — his Damascene moment arrived shortly after he had arrived home from the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

"We employed this lady to run the business for us. She was fantastic, really good at what she did, and she also happened to be a Christian so she asked my wife to the Free Church in North Uist. I went under duress, and I sat upstairs. I didn't want people to see me," he adds.

"But I would say I had a conversion experience right there that night which is really unusual. I spoke to my wife about it and it turned out she had had felt the same experience."

After wrestling with his future for a period, he eventually

arrived at the decision to leave BA after 13 years of service, although he remained committed to maintaining a life within his native islands. "It didn't take long for the word to go around — 'the big man's got the curam,'" he remembers. "I felt a call to some sort of full-time work but I never thought it would be as a minister. By that time I was about 30 or so and I also noticed you had to do Hebrew and Greek and this sort of stuff — I didn't think I could do that."

As it transpired, a couple of former teachers at Sgoil Lionacleit would come to his aid with Greek, and also with Gaelic. His knowledge of the biblical languages — completing a distance learning course in Hebrew through the University of Aberdeen — combined with his status as a mature student, ensured graduation from the Free Church College in Edinburgh would be possible in three years, and with that his mind was made up. "It was then a matter of selling the business, which looked impossible as the military had just pulled out of the Uists and people were worried about the economy of the place. "But then Neil Macdonald, who has Creagorry Motors, came to see me. He gave me a computer, as he was getting new ones in, and said maybe you'll need that for your studies. But I'd also like to ask if I can buy your business? That was a great weight off my mind."

In the meantime, another enterprise had been hatched in Iain's mind — he and Ann had purchased the former church building in Lochboisdale in South Uist. "It was being used as a store at the time but we thought it would be good if it could be used as a church again in the future, although at the time we bought it there was no thought that I might one day be the minister in it." And it would be to South Uist that he would return — holding services for the small congregation within Southend Community Hall for five years before he was eventually able to realise his ambition to refurbish the former church building.

His work as a minister, though, in his frequent hospital visits, had increased his determination to establish a network of support for those struggling to cope with addiction. "I had a real burden for people with alcohol problems — just through visiting the hospital in Daliburgh at that time. It was

a revolving door, the same people were going in and out all the time." The initial programme, entitled "Road to Recovery", simply involved a series of group meetings led by the church, and similar groups have since been established in Inverness, in Fort William and in Lewis.

The Caladh Trust would follow from these simple roots, working closely with alcohol and substance misuse workers, statutory agencies, and doctors to create a network of support. The centre — which includes a cafe, squash court and meeting rooms — opened in 2005, and the Rev MacAskill sees such schemes as vital in the church's 21st-century role.

"It's good that people can see the church doing social ministry instead of just opening the door on a Sunday and expecting people to come in," he says. "I think these days are past. It's about being accessible and people seeing that you are sincere. "Some people think you have a secret agenda — 'I'm only going to help you if you read the Bible or whatever' — but we're just here to give help. If they do get involved in the spiritual side then that's fine, but it's their choice. A lot of people we help haven't been near a church, or they go to another church.

"We don't label the folk coming, but they are from all backgrounds. It's not just restricted to people who look like they have a problem — we do a lot of work one-to-one with folk no one knows about.

"They can be teachers, ministers or doctors."

The centre, through a scheme which will contribute part of a wage in an attempt to get reluctant employers to take a chance on recovering addicts, has also helped create employment chances. Lack of employment is often a contributory factor in the downward spiral to addiction, he said. It's the perception of failure, though, which often persists among those who have stayed on the islands that is often to blame too, Iain believes.

"I still think it is worse in the Islands and Highlands — I don't know if it's seasonal affected disorder or genetic or what," he said "Some people will say it's the doom and gloom of Calvinism, although I don't go along with that because a lot of the guys I knew (who have become affected by addiction) were really quite jovial characters," he adds.

"But a lot of people I've come across who are struggling are those who maybe didn't get the opportunities. There is maybe a generation now in isolation, they maybe stayed at home, never achieved and perhaps just went downhill after that.

"In a bigger place you can try to do something else. Here you are just stuck. You get labelled, so people think of themselves as useless. They lose self-esteem. They question what's the point.

"A lot of them have great gifts and talents but no one will employ them now so it's great to see people getting help."

How, then, does he believe attitudes can be changed in the future? Again his solution could be viewed as conflicting with some of the old stereotypes, as he cites traditional music and sport as just two obvious alternatives to the Scottish drinking culture.

"There's nothing wrong with booze — but it's all the excesses and trying to change the way people think, breaking that circle, that is needed."

He is under no illusions as to the difficulty of that task, but his attitudes of conciliation rather than outright condemnation seem like a refreshing start.



PUBLIC EYE

THIS IS A NEW MONTHLY FEATURE IN *THE MONTHLY RECORD*, WHERE WE LOOK AT BITS AND BOBS FROM THE WIDER WORLD WHICH YOU MAY NOT HAVE NOTICED. OR IT MAY BE THAT YOU HAVE NOTICED AND WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH A WIDER AUDIENCE. IF SO, SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO: edrecord@blueyonder.co.uk

LESSONS FROM KAREN MATTHEWS

Now that the tabloid dust has settled from the Karen Matthews case, it is perhaps time to reflect on what it tells us about our broken society. One cannot help but feel some sympathy for Karen Matthews, although the crime she committed was horrendous (for those who have forgotten already – she arranged the kidnapping of her nine-year-old daughter so that, after many tearful appearances in the media, she could then, through a ‘friend’, claim the reward for finding her).

SHE IS NOW BEING DEMONISED BY THE VERY CULTURE THAT TAUGHT HER THOSE VALUES

Karen became pregnant at 19, has had seven children from five or six fathers, has never had a job, never married and relies on state benefits to pay for her drink and cigarettes. So why have sympathy? Because she is now being demonised by the very culture that taught her those values. If you encourage people to be lazy, if you encourage the view that sex is little more than a recreational pastime (for example by handing out condoms to children in school and urging ‘non-judgemental’ attitudes to casual sex – whilst of course encouraging judgemental attitudes to smoking, bullying and racism), and if you define the purpose of life as getting money, then how can the culture which does that condemn a woman who takes it to its logical extremes? It is not just Karen Matthews who is guilty of sin.

EXECUTIVE PAID £1M A YEAR TO CUT POVERTY



Richard Laing, the chief executive of CDC, a government-owned business set up to alleviate poverty in the developing world, is now being paid nearly £1 million per year (the British Prime Minister is paid £187,000 per year), whilst the average ‘wage’ of his senior executives has reached £435,000. Edward Leigh, chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, said the salary was ‘ridiculous’. On behalf of the poor

and those working with them – often for a very low salary – we would like to add ‘sick, immoral, unjust and grotesque’ to that.

GOD’S JUDGEMENT ON THE ENGLISH?

‘I hesitate to sound like one of those Protestant divines who saw in outbreaks of the plague God’s justified vengeance on a sinful people, but as I looked into the crude red faces of those men in their bully-boy Saturday-night uniform of short sleeved shirts not tucked into their trousers, exuding lager fumes and arrogant in their inalienable right to make a nuisance of themselves, I could not help but think that no other nation has ever more deserved a prolonged period of economic hardship and utter misery. The slump is indeed God’s wholly accurate and justified judgment upon the English.’

- Theodore Dalrymple’s reaction after being woken by English ‘tourists’ in Amsterdam
The Spectator, 8 November 2008



MARY POPPINS GETS IT RIGHT

*A British bank is run with precision
A British home requires nothing less!
Tradition, discipline, and rules must be the tools.*

*Without them....disorder! Chaos
Moral disintegration!
In short, we have a ghastly mess!*

(Mr Banks from *Mary Poppins*)

A GREATER THREAT THAN TERRORISM

'As much as the threat of terrorism, we should all fear the collapse of morality in public life. The blatant refusal of those in positions of power to accept responsibility – and instead hang in there for the golden handshakes persistently awarded for failure – is a damning indictment of a society that has lost its way. In the same way that Obama must face and attempt to repair the wholesale collapse of financial institutions, we must admit to the collapse of our collective morality and the abolition of what we could once justly boast was our history of liberty.'

- Bryan Forbes, *The Spectator*, 22 November 2008

BAD PARENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR BRITAIN'S DECLINE

And finally – Frank Field, the maverick Labour MP, has done it again. He has told the truth. According to Frank, British society was at its most peaceful in the 1950s but has now been ruined by violent crime caused by bad parenting.

BRITISH SOCIETY WAS AT ITS MOST PEACEFUL IN THE 1950S BUT HAS NOW BEEN RUINED BY VIOLENT CRIME CAUSED BY BAD PARENTING.

Marriage rates are the lowest on record, gun crime has doubled in the past ten years and Britain has one of the worst drugs records in Europe. The government responded by stating, 'We all know that children don't come with an instruction manual and that parents need support at certain times.' And the government's solution? The usual one – throw money at it. 'We are investing around £250 million in local services for parents.'

Perhaps when the government and the rest of us realise that the problem is more than skin deep and that money is not the answer to everything, we might make some progress. Until then we need to remember the biblical maxim:

Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.

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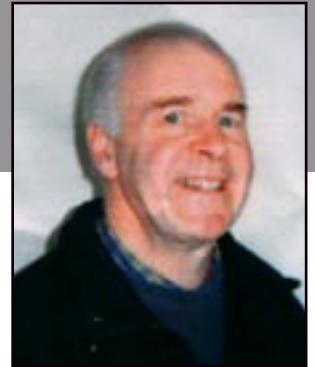
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Book early to avoid disappointment.

LOCAL CHURCH EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND PART ONE: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

REV. MARTIN ALLEN IS A RETIRED CHURCH OF SCOTLAND MINISTER. THE FOLLOWING IS AN EDITED TEXT OF THE MACMILLAN LECTURE HE GAVE IN THE FREE CHURCH COLLEGE IN OCTOBER 2008. THE REST OF THE LECTURE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN MARCH AND APRIL.



The title I've been given is 'local church evangelism in Scotland'. My focus therefore is on the mission and outreach of the Christian congregation set in a particular locality. The original title suggested was 'inner city evangelism in Scotland', of which I have no knowledge at all, first hand or any hand. However, the locality where I was minister for over 30 years was on the fringes of Scotland's premier city (premier in size, let me hasten to add) and so what I have to say about local evangelism is set within a largely urban context. I am therefore thinking with you about the mission of the local church of whatever size, even one very small. Let us remember the Lord never promised to be present where two or three thousand were gathered together, but two or three actually, as the gospels record.

'THE REDISCOVERY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AS THE PRIMARY AGENT OF MISSION HAS LED TO A FUNDAMENTALLY NEW IMPETUS FOR EVANGELISM.'

David J. Bosch, in his seminal work *Transforming Mission*, published in 1991, quotes the work of Barrett and Reapsome, who calculated that there have been 788 global plans to evangelise the world since the beginning of the Christian era. Perhaps quite a few more were added to that number in connection with the millenium, 8 years and more ago. Bosch advocates that the church should start in mission by thinking locally, not globally. He writes: 'The rediscovery of the local church as the primary agent of mission has led to a fundamentally new impetus for evangelism.'

Some Biblical Foundations

Here I am drawing heavily from the work of the Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright and his latest extensive book, *The Mission of God*. His thesis is that God's Mission to the world is a central hermeneutical key for understanding the whole Bible.

We may speak, he says, not so much about the biblical basis of mission but rather the missional basis of the Bible. Now this is a bold claim. He concedes, 'one would not expect to turn the other way round any phrase that began, "the biblical basis of...". There is a biblical basis for work, marriage, etc., but work, marriage, etc., is not what the Bible is all about.' But, he argues, Mission consistently IS what the Bible is all about.

The Bible's Map

I like to think of Mission as the Bible's map. To put it this way is to indicate a rough and ready map. The map of the London Underground is a rough and ready map. The iconic diagram showing the intersection of colored lines which indicate the various underground tubes is not a comprehensive map. It does not detail every twist and turn of the rails. But the map distorts and omits to clarify and simplify the journey through London. To say the map of the Bible is God's mission to the world is NOT to indicate a comprehensive atlas of the Scriptures. It does not show you every twist, turn and theme in the unfolding story of salvation, but it does clarify and simplify the journey through the Scriptures and remind us what the Bible is about.

Where does the Church fit?

So where does the church fit into this map and God's mission to the world? In another book, his commentary on Ezekiel, Wright says there are two complementary truths in this regard. One, God runs the world for the sake of the Church. Two, God calls the Church for the sake of the world. We need, he says, to fix our mission to both poles of this biblical dynamic. The Church's role then, to go out to the nations with the message of salvation, has always been God's intention from the beginning. The Great Commission (Matthew 28) is not a new one. It is as old as the Hebrews' Bible and the first book of that Bible, where the Lord commissioned Abraham with the words 'I will bless you, and you will be a blessing and all peoples of the earth (all nations) will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3).' And in the fulness of time after the unfolding of centuries, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), takes essentially the same commission of Genesis 12, and in Matthew 28 reshapes its focus in Him, and says to the representatives of His Church down the ages, 'As you go, disciple all nations'; that is to say, go and be a blessing with a capital B to all the peoples of the earth.

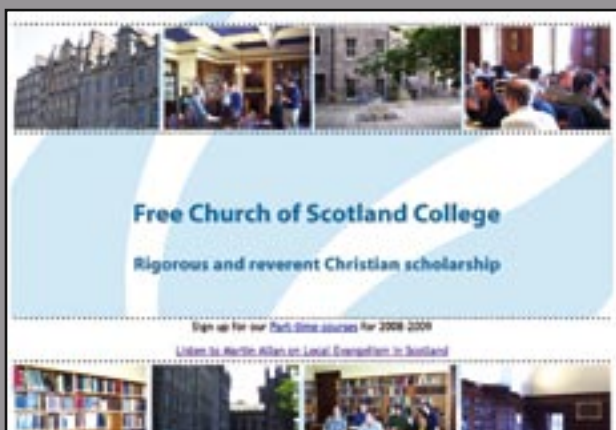
Luke likewise at the end of his gospel (his first volume) shows how the Old Testament Scriptures which point inexorably to the Messiah also point to the good news going to the ends of the earth. 'This is what is written: repentance and forgiveness will be preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:46-47).' The overall structure of the Acts expresses this same viewpoint. Mission begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome; from the heart of the faith of Israel (the temple) to the heart of the world (of all nations). And the Apostle Paul

significantly views this same horizon in his great missionary exposition of the gospel in Romans. He begins and ends this epistle with the summary of his life's work as being aimed at achieving 'the obedience of faith among all nations' (Romans 1:5 and 16:26). And this latter reference and phrase at the very climax of the letter occurs as that which is rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures ('through the prophetic writings') and ordered in the mission of God ('through the command of the eternal God'). The mission of God IS the map of the Bible. It's what the Bible is all about, from cover to cover and beginning to end.

SOLOMON ASKS GOD TO DO FOR FOREIGNERS FROM ANOTHER NATION WHAT GOD HAD NOT AT ANY TIME PROMISED TO DO FOR HIS OWN CHOSEN NATION ISRAEL

Solomon's Prayer

Among the many, many Old Testament texts to support his thesis, let me direct you to a striking one which Wright describes as 'possibly the most marvelously universalistic passage of mission in the Old Testament': 1Kings 8:41-43, Solomon's dedication prayer for the temple. In it Solomon prays that the foreigner who does not belong to the people of Israel, but who comes and prays towards the temple, might be heard so that 'you the Lord would hear and do whatever the foreigner asks of you'. That is to say that Solomon asks God to do for foreigners from another nation what God had not at any time promised to do for His own chosen nation Israel: 'whatever they might ask'. Hence the newness of the promise Jesus made to His disciples (the new Israel, Mark 11:24). And the consideration with which Solomon seeks to persuade God in 1 Kings 8:43 is equally impressive: 'so that all the peoples of the earth (all nations) will know your name'. So the biblical foundation for the raison d'être of the local church, namely its evangelism, lies here. I have become convinced that the Bible's central hermeneutic is arguably God's mission to all nations.



PART TWO OF THIS LECTURE WILL BE PUBLISHED NEXT MONTH. YOU CAN ALSO LISTEN TO THE LECTURE ONLINE BY VISITING:
www.freescotcoll.ac.uk

Free Church Spring Conference

Friday 3 April - Sunday 5 April 2009
 at the Aviemore Inn

Speakers and Topics

Rev Iver Martin

Stornoway Free Church

'The Church - The Body and The Building'

Dr Michael Bird

Highland Theological College, Dingwall

'Paul, the Apostle of the Impossible'

Missionary Speaker

Sandra MacDonald, OMF

Conference assembles for dinner on Friday evening and disperses early Sunday evening. Anyone who wishes to stay until Monday can book through the Booking Secretary and pay the extra cost directly to Aviemore Inn (B&B: £35 Twin, £55 Single).

The Conference Fees are as follows:

Adults: £125 per person for 2 nights sharing a twin/double room (Single Occupancy £160)
 Children (5-15yrs) sharing a room with 2 adults: £35
 Children (0-4yrs): free of charge
 Single Adult sharing with child, 0-4 years: £160
 Single Adult sharing with child, 5-15 years: £190
 Children in their own room: £60
 Day Visitors: £25 (no dinner) or £40 (including dinner)

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If possible I wish to share a room with: _____

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I would appreciate a lift to / from * the conference if possible.

I would be able to offer a lift to / from * the conference.

**Delete as appropriate*

Full payment will be required by Friday 6 March 2009 to secure a place at the Conference (This also applies to Day Visitors). Please make cheques payable to *The Free Church Spring Conference* and forward with Booking Form to:

**Miss Janice Ballantyne, 3 Erracht Road, Inverness,
 IV2 4RE. Tel: 01463 237875
 or e-mail joejan.ballantyne@btinternet.com**

CLAISNEACHD

Ann an seadh spioradail tha buidhre air a' chinne-daonna air fad. Chan e cor aon duine a th' ann. Tha dlùth cheangal eadar buidhre agus beatha. Ma tha sinn a' cluinntinn, tha sinn air a thighinn beò agus tha eòlas againn air beartas na beatha a th' ann an Crìosd, agus agus air beartas na beatha a tha Aige dhuinn. Gheibh sinn bhuaithe uisge, fion agus bainne.

B'è facail beannachaidh a labhair Dia ri sluagh an t-saoghail an toiseach. Tha seo a' sealltainn cridhe Dhè, agus sin mar a tha a chridhe fhathast.

B'è Facal Dhè a bha a' toirt beatha do dh' Adhamh agus do dh' Eubha. "Chan ann le aran a-mhàin a bheathaichear duine." Gu mì-fhortanach thòisich iad a' cluinntinn guth eile. B'è sin guth na nathrach. An-dèidh seo, cha chuala iad guth an Athar anns an aon dòigh a-rithist. Ruith iad air falbh agus thàinig bàs nan eachdraidh. A-nis, tha e doirbh guth a' Chruitheir a chluinntinn.

Tha sluagh Israeil mar gum biodh a' gabhail àite Adhaimh agus tha an Cruithear a' tòiseachadh a-rithist le Israeil. Cluinnidh sinn Facail Dhè ann an leabhar Ecsodus. "Èistidh sinn agus nì sinn gach nì a labhair E." B'è eachdraidh an t-sluaigh-sa an eu-comas a bhith a' cluinntinn.

Tha am fàidh Isaiah anns an ochdamh caibideil thairis air an fhichead a' dèanamh na tha e ag ràdh cho sìmplidh sa b'urrainn dha—mar neach-teagaisg a tha a' teagaisg clannsgoile a tha glè òg.



SEANFHACAIL

CHO TANA RIS A' GHAOITH EARRAICH.

CLANN NAN CÀIRDEAN, IS MAIRG A RACHADH EATORRA.

Ann an dà fhicheadamh caibideil tha e a' smaoinneachadh air an là an-dèidh a' bhraighdeanais nuair a chluinneadh iad.

Tha sinn a' coinneachadh ri òglach Dhè a thigeadh agus a chluinneadh guth Dhè. B'è seo losa. Chuala E Athair fad na h-ùine. Cha do rinn guth na nathrach a' chùis Airsan. B'È an aon Ti a thug buaidh air.

Na anmhainneachd b'è Facal an Athar a bha ga bheathachadh. Sheas Esan far an do thuit Adhamh.

Eadhon air a' Chrann dh' fhuirich E anns an àite-sa agus guth ag ràdh, "Mas Tu Mac Dhè thig sìos bhon Chrann." Dh' fheumadh Esan a bhith air a bhruthadh agus anns an àite-sa

a bhith buadhach ag ràdh, "Athair, maith dhaibh chan eil fios aca dè a tha iad a' dèanamh."

Chaill E co-chomann ri Athair do bhrìgh gun do ghabh E mo bhuidhre-sa air Fhèin. Eadhon anns an t-slochd dhorch-sa bha cofhurtachd Dha ann am Facal Dhè anns an-t-salm, "Mo Dhia, mo Dhia cuim' thrèig Thu mi?" Cha do thuig E seo a-riamh mar a thuig E aig an àm ud, agus thuig E seo ann an dòigh nach tuigeadh neach eile gu bràth.

B'è Facal Dhè. Chuala E Facal Dhè anns an àite èiginneach-sa.

Mar Chrìosdaidh, tha facal ann dhut-sa airson gach suidheachadh anns am bi thu. Is urrainn dhuinn cluinntinn air sgàth na rinn E dhuinn air a' Chrann. Bheir E dhuinn an èisteachd a bh'aig Crìosd. "Èistibh agus mairidh bhur n-anam beò."

Is e èisteachd an cladhan a bhios Spiorad Dhè a' cleachdadh. Nach fhaod sinn a bhith a' frithealadh mheadhanan agus gun sinn ag èisteachd ri guth an Athar.

Ach nach math gur e E Fhèin a nì ath-bheothachadh agus neartachadh agus gur E a stiùireas sinn uile làithean ar beatha.

Taing don Urramach Eachainn Moireastan airson an raon-sa fhosgladh a-mach dhuinn ann an Siabost.

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

One of subjects that I have taught this year is Creative Entrepreneurship.

'What has that got to do with theological education?' you may well ask. On the surface – not much. It is a module prepared by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and is a compulsory subject in any North-West University degree. So why am I teaching it? The answer is simple - because no one else wanted to!

It has actually turned out to be a fascinating course. I have enjoyed every minute of it and have learnt so much about human nature, the church and our ability to change. The main thrust of the course is being aware of what is around you, looking for areas which need to be improved, finding out what the actual problem is and not just the symptom of the problem and then finding creative ways to deal with the problem.

We aimed to apply all of the coursework to the church context. It was a very useful exercise and I hope that we are all better for it. One lesson which we studied looked at consumer moods – so we of course looked to see if we saw any evidence of them within the church and if so what effect they had on the life of the church.

The list of consumer moods we studied were:

- Cocooning – The desire of people to stay at home with close friends and family.
- Fantasy adventure – People's search for adventure and extreme sports.
- Small indulgences – These are people who like to be noticed and they regard certain items such as specialty coffees and ice-creams as status symbols.
- Egonomics - People want to be treated as individuals.
- Cashing out – People decide that they have had enough of city life.
- Down-aging – People want to look young for as long as possible.
- Ninety-nine lives – People's lives are becoming increasingly busy with less spare time.

A particularly interesting 'consumer mood' which affects the church in both a negative and positive way is 'down-aging'. Today, seventy is definitely the new sixty. On the whole, people are remaining active and involved for much

longer. This is, in many ways, great for the church. Obviously there are more people hopefully willing and able to take part in the day to day running of the church as well as outreach events. Valuable experience remains in the daily functioning of the church. This will often mean a greater mix of age groups working together, which can have a positive impact on the life of the church. Older people could nurture, encourage and train

younger people. The body of believers could be more united and work as a body should. But, without due care, there is potential for problems in this trend.

As people are less likely to feel the need to step down, younger people may not have the opportunity to grow into situations. It is often easier and faster to do a job yourself than to show someone else how to, and stand back and watch as mistakes are made.

It is also possible that necessary development is not allowed to happen. For instance, how many times have we heard the words, '...but it has always been done that way. Why change now?' There is often a call for the 'good old days,' without the acknowledgement that those days brought their own problems.

ON THE WHOLE, PEOPLE ARE REMAINING ACTIVE AND INVOLVED FOR MUCH LONGER.

Among the amaXhosa churches as well as the church world-wide, we find this an area of friction. The youth of the church want a more prominent role within the church. They see aspects of church life where they believe change is needed, but they often don't have the experience or the understanding of the scriptures to be able to lead with wisdom. At the same time the older members, fearing that the youth may tear down all that is precious to them, hold tight to the reins. No compromise is reached – no understanding of the other's viewpoint is sought. Often both groups treat the other with suspicion, and where there is a great opportunity to operate as a body with many complementary functions, they try to ignore other parts of the body and pretend that they don't exist.

The Bible clearly does not exclude any age of people.

1 Timothy 5:1 says, '*Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers.*'

1 Timothy 4: 12-15 says, '*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching ... Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.*'

I like that idea of progress. We must see Bible-based progress in our churches. If we hamper the progress of the gospel because of our age, then we are out of step with God's teaching. Maybe we need to look at ourselves in the mirror. Are we trying to retain our youth and cling to our position within the church? Do we see our identity being linked with an ideal age or role within the church? Or are we growing old gracefully, accepting the marching on of time, and training those who follow us so that they can continue to build on the firm foundations of what we have started?

Jenny Wilson



WELCOME HOME!

A REPORT ON THE HOMECOMING OF RONALD AND MORAG CHRISTIE

On Friday, 28th November 2008, friends from different congregations met in the Govanhill Free Church, Glasgow, to welcome home Rev Ronald and Mrs Morag Christie upon their retirement from their work with the Free Church in South Africa.

The evening began with a period of worship conducted by Rev Kenneth Boyd, Minister of Govanhill. He gave an interesting address based on the several welcomes the Apostle Paul received in the course of his ministry, showing that although not all homecomings may not be easy or what we might want to expect, yet where the love of the Lord is, there is always a warm welcome. The Christies were welcomed home in Christian love.

THE CHURCH WAS WELL SERVED BY THIS FINE COUPLE.

Mr Ray McCabe, a senior elder in the Govanhill congregation, spoke of the time when Ronnie was the minister of Govanhill Free Church before he went to South Africa. The congregation suffered a deep sense of loss when the Christies answered the call from the International Missions Board to go to South Africa, yet they showed a real willingness to let them go because of the nature of the Call. Mr McCabe assured the Christies of a warm welcome back into the active membership of the congregation since they have decided to settle in Glasgow (They had remained on the membership role of Govanhill in the category of 'non-active' members, a description not particularly appropriate as far as Ronnie Christie is concerned!).

Rev. Billy Graham recalled the occasion twelve years ago when friends gathered to give thanks to God for Ronnie and Morag's willingness to go to serve the Lord in the Dumisani Theological Institute, a work that the Grahams had had to leave because of medical problems. Now friends were gathered to give thanks to the Lord for all that Ronnie had accomplished during those years in South Africa, for most of the time in Dumisani but latterly involved in work directly related to the Free Church in South Africa. Ronnie had proved an excellent Principal of Dumisani when he had to take over that responsibility and was an equally competent writer of materials for the Administration and Church Courts of the church.

Morag had a most fruitful ministry among the women and girls, especially in the King William's Town District of the church, as well as with the Bible Women and Sunday School teachers. She was President of the Women's Christian Association of the King District for several years and her leadership there was greatly valued.

The Church was well served by this fine couple.



Ronald Christie addressed the gathering, and, commenting on the way in which mention was made of the various stages of his ministry, he was reminded of a Xhosa funeral when several speakers addressed the people on the different stages of the dead person's life! However, Ronnie was very much alive and looked forward to being able to continue serving the Lord in his retirement. He noted that his retirement was not just after twelve years in South Africa but after forty years in the ministry, having served the Lord in the church in Peru, Wick, Govanhill and latterly South Africa. He acknowledged the gracious ordering of God's Providence in all of these areas where he and Morag had been privileged to work.

The Christies were presented with gifts on behalf of the International Missions Board and the Church.

Warm thanks were expressed to the ladies who had prepared an excellent supper, which was enjoyed by all and which brought a pleasant evening to a satisfying close!

Billy Graham

News & Information

MISSIONARY BECOMES A DOCTOR

On Thursday 27 November, Donnie Smith was awarded a PhD in Theological Education from SETECA (Seminario Teológico Centroamericano) in Guatemala, the title of his thesis being (translated) 'A Reconsideration of the Chronological Reference System for the Ancient Near East'.

The degree was awarded at the Lima Evangelical Seminary



by Paul Sywulka, who was at the Seminary leading a training course for Directors of Theological Education. Congratulations to Donnie on this achievement after many years of diligent study.

Any questions on the dating of Exodus or the kingdoms of the ancient near east, please refer to Dr Smith!

FEBA UK

Feba UK is a Christian charity which enables the broadcasting of radio programmes within Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This article has been reproduced with permission from FEBA.

The majority of Feba's ministry is still with short wave radio, which, despite its name, really goes the distance. 'Short wave beams go round the curvature of the earth,' says Frequency Schedule Engineer Richard Whittington. 'These "giant strides" of short wave are known as "hops", and given the right frequency a one-hop broadcast can reach up to 2000 miles, and two-hops, 4000 miles.'

But it's not only in terms of the miles covered from transmitter to receiver that radio goes the distance. Radio is the main form of communication in many of the countries we broadcast to, especially for people isolated by war, natural disasters or lack of resources. Radio reaches people in countries where political, social or religious barriers make it difficult for individuals to learn about alternative views or ideas – including the Christian faith. In places where illiteracy is high, radio speaks to people who cannot read or write.

Radio has to go the distance because it's a long-term process, not a one-off event. It requires long-range planning, long-term prayer and financial support, long-term ministry workers, and long-running programmes. Peter Philips, Co-ordinator for Central Asia Ministry, comments: 'The beauty of radio ministry, in Central Asia or anywhere else, is consistency. A listener can return any day of the week to find his or her programme, and it may take months or years for there to be evidence of change in that person's life.'

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR LONG-TERM STAFF

Richard Whittington, with 30 years of service, says: 'I joined Feba in 1978 in the Seychelles to work at its transmitter station, using my technical skills to help spread the Gospel across the radio waves, and over the years, my hands-on work of transmitter maintenance gave way to scheduling frequencies. Today, I serve with Feba UK in Worthing as Frequency Schedule Engineer.'

In November 1988, newlyweds Jon and Elma Hargreaves left for their first term on the Seychelles, where they were both involved in English programming and Jon in the daily news broadcasts to India. In 1995 they relocated to Central Asia to focus on developing Feba's work in the region, and in 2003 Jon took on his current role as International Director based in Worthing. 'After twenty years in radio,' Jon says, 'I'm still convinced it is a powerful tool to influence people for the Gospel.'

Stewart Coombs started with Feba UK as an Accounts Assistant in 1988, back in the days when computerised accounts began. As he moved into Supporter Relations and the years passed, he saw more opportunities for computers. He designed a new application from the ground up (called Foundation) for tracking all donations,

supporters' interests and mailings. Today he oversees the interworking between Foundation, email servers, web servers and more to keep Feba UK's data systems working efficiently and economically. Stewart says: 'It's been a privilege to have been partnering with God for so long in His ministry—the longer I've been here the more I've appreciated how important it is.'

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Feba Board members and the executive staff members who are involved in setting ministry strategy as they seek God's will.
- People to join Feba as prayer supporters to keep the ministry's foundation firmly planted in prayer.
- People to hear God's call to become financial partners in the long-term process of sharing the Gospel of Christ through radio.
- Pray that God will grant special wisdom and blessings on Richard, Jon and Stewart as they continue their key roles in ministry with Feba UK and partners around the world.

We are grateful to the many supporters who have joined with us from the beginning to pray and give regularly to Feba's ministry. Many are going the distance with us, ensuring that the process of broadcasting the Gospel across the airwaves continues.



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PLANTING IN PERMAFROST

FREE CHURCH COLLEGE GRADUATE **RUSSELL PHILLIPS** AND HIS WIFE **OXANA** TELL OF THEIR WORK IN SIBERIA.

Novosibirsk is a Soviet-style city in the plains of western Siberia (same time zone as Delhi). Begun as a settlement for workers on the Trans-Siberian railway in 1893, it is now home to some two million Russians and others, a major centre for business and in the top seven cities of this vast country. Like the rest of Russia in the past twenty years, Novosibirsk has undergone the instability of perestroika and the fall of the Soviet Union, economic boom in the new millennium and now the global financial crisis.

Our connection with the city goes back to when Oxana studied economics here from 1993 and Russell came as a British exchange student in 1995. We were married in Edinburgh in 1999, where Oxana worked for Deloitte and Russell worked as a translator and church worker, training at the Free Church College in 2000-3. We finally returned to Siberia in 2004 with our then six-month-old daughter, Sophia – since joined by Kiera and Tanya .

In Novosibirsk we work with the Evangelical Christian-Baptist denomination ('registered Baptists') – the largest protestant denomination in Russia. In the first four years our focus was threefold: student outreach, local church ministry and training pastors and others. Russell has been heading up a ministry to reach the student population with the gospel, with Oxana in a supportive role. Together with a team of staff workers and volunteers we hold meetings and undertake pastoral work, sharing the gospel with young people aged 17-25. Russell has been an assistant to Russian pastor Andrey Melnikov, focusing on preaching, teaching small groups, leadership development and pastoral work. Oxana has been leading the ministry to under-5s. Training pastors has involved teaching a church history course at the local seminary, as well as preacher training and Bible teaching in other settings.

Back in the UK for an extended break this past summer we reassessed our priorities and refocused our efforts. About a year previously we had begun a project to plant a new Baptist church in the city: a congregation near our flat and also near to the biggest concentration of students in the city. We decided that in order to take this project forward, this must become our main priority.

Arriving back in September 2008, we set about moving forward the church plant. As our existing church merged with another congregation, we sensed that the time was right. Within two weeks we found excellent premises – a Lutheran church building ideally located, suited to our needs and available for an afternoon service. We gathered together those interested in joining the core group and began to hold weekly meetings to pray and plan. We held the first service of our new church on 19 October and were delighted with the attendance: 37 people, including half a dozen non-Christians.

We have now been meeting for seven weeks. Services last 1 1/2 hours and include prayer, congregational singing,



Russell and Oxana with Sophia, Kiera and Tanya

a children's talk, two sermons, choral music and poetry. Attendance has kept up: from 35 to as many as 50. Every week there are non-Christians in the congregation and already two young students have publicly professed faith. The congregation includes all age groups from pre-schoolers to pensioners, with lots of 20s and 30s (both married and single), but also noticeably fewer school-age children and middle-aged people (40-55).

Looking to the future, we need to strengthen the core group of believers and develop various ministries with a view to formally being constituted as a church in the near future. Meanwhile we are looking for ways to reach out to the surrounding community. Please remember our work in your prayers.

News & Information

FIONA CHRISTIE'S LIBRARY PROJECT

A big thank you to everyone who has sent books for the library project. Four parcels have arrived and I know that more are on the way. The books have been very thoughtfully chosen, allowing me to set up a useful reading scheme.

UPDATE FROM COLEGIO SAN ANDRÉS

As of 9 December 2008, 43 new pupils have enrolled for the new term at Colegio San Andrés. This marks a significant turnaround for the school and is a great encouragement for every member of staff. Please:

- Give thanks for these new pupils
- Pray for God's blessing for all pupils and parents connected to the school
- Pray for Clive Bailey, Headmaster, and his wife Ruth
- Pray for every member of staff in their work and witness at the Colegio

CALADH CRAFTS

THIS MONTH WE FEATURE THE CALADH CRAFTS GROUP OF SOUTH UIST AND BENBECULA FREE CHURCH. THANKS GO TO **PEIGI TOWNSEND** FOR THIS ACCOUNT.

Tell us a little about yourselves.

We began to meet as a craft group about six years ago. Our aims were three-fold: to inform and to fund-raise for mission, to provide a focus for social interaction among our own people and to encourage folk to use their God-given gifts to His glory. It was a joint initiative with Penny Macleod who was serving in North Uist at the time.

We operate under the authority of the Kirk Session, who have always encouraged and supported us. We are grateful to An Caladh, to our congregational treasurers and also to Mrs Nan Ferguson (Western Isles WFM group) for her advice and encouragement.

Caladh Crafts meets fortnightly from October to May - on Friday lunchtimes at An Caladh in Balivanich. We have lunch in the café and then go through to the Prayer Room where we craft away in peace for an hour! We commit all of our meetings to God in prayer and seek His blessing on those who are serving Him in different contexts. The folk who attend our group come from the two Uist Free Church congregations and also other local congregations. We have a core attendance of about a dozen folk.

What range of crafts is involved and what happens to the finished products?

Most of our folk are keen knitters, but over the years we have had a mix of quilting, card-making, crochet, cross-stitch, machine-embroidery, quilting, glass-painting, tating and beading. We sometimes organise crafting demonstrations. The finished products are sold to raise funds for mission. We sell some goods at An Caladh from week to week, at mission evenings and at WFM Days Away in Aviemore or Stornoway. In the months leading up to Christmas, we knit goods for the Blythswood shoeboxes.

How has your group been enriched by meeting and working together in this way?

We have been enriched by informal conversation, by companionship and by seeing folk using their gifts to advance the work of the gospel. Because our group is cross-generational (20 plus to 90 plus!) we all learn a lot from each other and our biblical understanding of the Christian body has been strengthened.

Has the profile of mission work been raised among you?

Mission had a high profile in congregational life before the craft group was ever formed. However, I suppose we have helped in some small way to maintain that profile, by organising mission evenings in addition to the craft activities. Over the past few years we have been very privileged to have visits from most of the Free Church missionaries – and

also from workers with other Christian organisations. These visits have inspired and encouraged us and put our local challenges into some sort of perspective.

What challenges have you faced?

It is tempting when faced with local need to lose sight of the global and to want to hold on to our committed workers. The idea of being a sending church and of tithing our personnel can sometimes be more challenging than that of tithing our wages. It is also tempting to cut back on missionary giving when there are pressing financial needs at congregational level. I suppose, if we're honest, we have met all of the above temptations and more. However, it would be selfish and unloving of us not to share our resources with those across the world who suffer on a daily basis because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Have you any tips for groups who might wish to follow your example?

Modern day Scotland is a mission-field. We must be prepared to reach out to include and integrate folk who may have had little or no church involvement in the past.

Also, many folk who have long walked faithfully with the Lord are now less physically active and may feel quite lonely and isolated. However, they have much to offer the younger generation and it's important that they are involved as much as possible in all aspects of congregational life. Transport issues are also very real and help with lifts is appreciated.

I think it was the Rev. Ronald MacKay who, when Moderator, suggested that the Church should make more use of lunchtime meetings. Lunchtime works well for us – it suits young mums and it means that folk who work can come along during their lunch-break.

What else? Keep on going. Persevere. Don't worry too much about numbers. We are a very small group, in a very small community, doing very small things - but we know that the Lord Himself values the smallest of actions done in His Name.

What do you have planned for 2009?

God willing, we hope to host an Indian evening early in the year. Rev. Iain MacAskill and his family spent a couple of weeks in India last October and they hope to share some of their experiences with us. We anticipate raising some money that evening to help with the WFM Health Matters project. We hope to have an update on the work of Colegio San Andrés, where Stewart Johnson from Carinish has been serving as a short-time volunteer. As before, we look forward to welcoming some of our missionaries at different times throughout the year.



BEING AN ELDER – A DUTCH PERSPECTIVE



KEES RIENKS, AN ELDER FROM OUR SISTER CHURCH (THE LIBERATED) IN THE NETHERLANDS, REFLECTS ON THE ROLE OF THE ELDER TODAY.

In the Netherlands, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get a sufficient number of elders in the flock of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is the same in Scotland?

The cause could be that the official duties in the Kirk Session become more onerous. There is a trend that the Kirk Session is trying to do too much. It has the duty to initiate, to think out and control all activities in the congregation, which results in a lot of administrative and other work for each individual elder.

The lack of men who want to be elders is perhaps also because of culture. There is a decrease in spiritual life and a lack of a sacrificial attitude, now that we live in an 'I-self' culture. The earlier priorities were 'church – work – family'; in today's culture, it is now 'family – work – church'. Previously it was 'family' time that came under pressure; now it is 'church' time.

The problems in the congregation seem to be bigger as well. And many in the congregation seem to have a 'the church will provide' mentality, rather than seeking to be part of that provision.

All the above means that it is increasingly difficult to get men with the time and willingness to be elders. Therefore, in the Netherlands, there is a reconsideration of the office of ministers, elders and deacons (however, in this article we address the elders).

What does the Bible say about pastoral care?

- It is the responsibility of the congregation to admonish, comfort and help each other (2 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Thess 5:14 and 2 Cor 1:4).
- It is the responsibility of the elder to lead in this, but not to do all the work. The congregation has to learn anew their vocation in respect to other members, as to other people too. Ephesians 4: 11,12: 'It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...'

In the Netherlands, when elders are ordained, a formula is read which contains a description of the elder's responsibilities.

The main points are:

Organisation

- Together with the minister they have to lead the congregation and provide pastoral care;
- They take care that what happens in the congregation shall take place in peace and good order;
- They have to be careful that there is no proclaiming heresy.

Pastoral

- They have to visit the flock of Jesus Christ faithfully (that means a minimum of one official house visit per year, reporting to the Kirk Session – and after that one or more personal visits, with the aim to comfort, to admonish and to teach the family, so that there will be built up a good 'trusting and belief relationship').

Personal

- They have to inquire into the Scriptures zealously and practice themselves in the service of the Lord.

But what do we see in practice?

THE KIRK SESSION HAS THE DUTY TO INITIATE, TO THINK OUT AND CONTROL ALL ACTIVITIES IN THE CONGREGATION

What is missing in this formula is that '**preparing**' God's people is not mentioned. 'Prepare' means: to find out the different gifts which the Holy Spirit has given to every member and then urge that member to set the gift for the use of the congregation, so that it will grow in love and zeal for the Lord.

Where now?

- Review and change the tasks of an elder from performer to leader (perhaps to learn by courses).
- Give particular elders the responsibilities for which they are gifted. We need to recognise that different elders have different gifts. The Holy Spirit has given to every person different gifts and possibilities.
- Make the congregation conscious of its first responsibility.

So the elder should stimulate the members, both individually and in groups, and especially give biblical support in mutual pastoral work, helping each other, care for the sick, preparing evangelical work, prayer groups, etc. The elder does not have to do it all himself.

FEBRUARY

'LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN YOUR HEARTS, SINCE AS MEMBERS OF ONE BODY YOU WERE CALLED TO PEACE. AND BE THANKFUL.' - COLOSSIANS 3:15

- 01** Thurso Free Church has their Communion today. Please pray that God would be exalted in their worship, and that a sense of rest and gratefulness would prevail.
- 02** Today pray specifically for wisdom and God's guidance for your own MSP (or local representative, if you are outwith Scotland). Trust that God can still change your nation.
- 03** God has a special concern for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. Let's pray for them all, starting today with the orphans. Ask that they would find their Father in the Lord. Pray also for those who are estranged from their parents, for God's peace to come to their relationship.
- 04** Today remember those who have lost a spouse, that they would have their comfort in Christ, and would still praise Him for His goodness to them.
- 05** Pray for refugees in this country, and also for any people you know who are living away from home. What can you do to help them not to feel lost or lonely?
- 06** Take time to pray for your spouse or closest friend, giving thanks for them and asking God to work abundantly in their life.
- 07** Falkirk Free Church started a Children's Club in November 2008. Several children are now attending from outwith the congregation. Please pray that they will come to know Jesus early in their lives.
- 08** Let's celebrate our unity with our brothers and sisters across the sea! Livonia Free Church, Michigan, starts their service at 4pm UK time. Pray at that time that their service would be blessed.
- 09** Today give thanks to God for His Word. What verse or concept there has touched you especially in recent days?
- 10** This month's *Record* focuses on growing older. Pray for the elderly in your congregation, that they would be honoured and served by younger folk in the church, and that the Lord would draw them closer to Him in these years.
- 11** Pray for the Christian Unions and meetings in our schools and universities, that students would be encouraged to look into the things of God, and to share the Good News with their peers.
- 12** The Free Church Spring Conference will be held from 3-5 April in Aviemore. Please pray for speakers Iver Martin (Stornoway FC), Dr Mike Bird (HTC), and Sandra Macdonald (OMF), that their words will be blessed and will bear fruit among those who attend the Conference.
- 13** The final-year students at the Free Church College are now writing their dissertations. Pray for them to have self-discipline and clarity of thought, and to learn through this experience.
- 14** On this St Valentine's Day, pray for Christians who struggle with being single – that they would be conscious of the presence of the Lord, their First Love.
- 15** Remember Stornoway Free Church, which celebrates Communion today. Ask for a truly blessed season there, with a sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and Christ's glory.
- 16** Pray that the Lord would protect the sanctity of human life by strengthening both the people and the politicians against the idea of legalising euthanasia in Scotland.
- 17** Remember those, especially in your congregation, who work in the medical or social care professions. Ask that they would know refreshment in their stressful jobs, and that they would have opportunities to speak of God's love in their work.
- 18** Pray for the deacons in your congregation, that they would fill their responsibilities cheerfully and wisely.
- 19** If there is anyone with whom you do not get along, show your love by praying for them. Ask for unity and humility to prevail in relationships within the Church.
- 20** Give thanks that the Free Church Camps are now in their 50th year, and pray that the Lord would prepare the hearts of the children who are now booking their camp for the summer.
- 21** Today ask Christ for the grace to see Him more clearly and love Him better. How wonderful that we can ask His help even concerning our imperfect love for Him.
- 22** Pray for Free North in Inverness, that the Lord would give them a minister. Also remember Rev Ronald MacKay and his family during his illness.
- 23** Dr Colin Dow has been asked to become Chaplain of Anderston Primary School in Glasgow. Please pray for the children and families connected with the school and wisdom for Dr Dow as he decides how best to fulfil this role.
- 24** Remember the ongoing conflict in Palestine and Gaza, and ask for wisdom for all the leaders concerned, that they would submit to God's peace that passes all understanding.
- 25** Pray for any who may be considering applying to train for the ministry at the Free Church College. The fields are white to harvest – ask that God will send workers to our Church!
- 26** The recession continues. Pray that people will find their fulfilment in the things of God, rather than pining for the material luxuries they can no longer afford.
- 27** Falkirk Free Church inducted four new deacons in January. Pray that they would bear their office with grace, and would be a great blessing to the church.
- 28** The Youth Conference committee are having their last meeting today to finalize arrangements for this year's conference, and would appreciate prayer for wisdom as they meet.

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

New Arrivals at the Free Church Bookshop



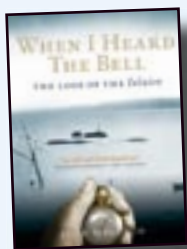
The Unusual Suspects: 25 Jewish People Defy the Final Taboo
CFP, £6.99

This book by Richard Gibson demonstrates that Jewish people today are coming to know Jesus and finding true fulfilment in their lives.

Systematic Theology Vol. 1: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church. The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity
CFP, £22.99



'Professor Douglas Kelly's eagerly awaited Systematic Theology exceeds all expectations. He weaves together a rich tapestry of biblical exegesis, historical reflection, critical engagement and contemporary application; while standing in mainstream Reformed theology, he is not afraid to engage other traditions. 'This first volume is a comprehensive introduction to discussion of God's self-disclosure, Triune being, transcendent majesty, and covenant relationships.'
Iain D. Campbell.



When I Heard the Bell: The Loss of the Iolaire
Birlinn, £16.99

The loss of the *Iolaire* remains the worst peacetime British disaster at sea since the sinking of the Titanic. Yet, beyond the Western Isles, few have ever heard of what is not only one of the cruellest events in our history but an extraordinary maritime mystery – a tale not only of bureaucrats in a hurry, unfathomable Naval incompetence and abiding, official contempt for the lives of Highlanders, but of individual heroism, astonishing escapes, heart-rending anecdote and the resilience and faith of a remarkable people. In the first English account and on the ninetieth anniversary of the 'dark ship', John MacLeod tells the story of the *Iolaire*, the astonishing commitment of the people of Lewis to the war against the Kaiser, its sickening end, and the way of life the disaster effectively destroyed – a tipping-point, he argues, in the overthrow of an old human economy, and an event that deprived the Isle of Lewis of an entire generation.

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BIBLICAL STRATEGY?

David,

As ever, the November edition of *The Monthly Record* is very stimulating. I would like to comment on some of your observations in the Meditation Moment on Acts 19:8-10.

Some years back I attended a conference at which two leading evangelical scholars, Howard Marshall and David Wright, had a friendly disagreement on whether it was appropriate to talk of an early church strategy to prioritise the cities in their evangelism. From memory, Howard Marshall favoured the idea, while David Wright disagreed – but my memory may not be right on this detail.

In any event, if two eminent scholars disagree at this point, it would be hazardous to set it up as an assured biblical principle. There are a few such principles to be found in the New Testament – e.g. (i) the priority of the Jews before the gentiles (Rom 1:16); (ii) Where pioneer evangelism is concerned, to target areas where the gospel has not been heard (Rom 15:20-21). This will surely include both the highways and the byways of this world (cf. Luke 14:23).

IF TWO EMINENT SCHOLARS DISAGREE AT THIS POINT, IT WOULD BE HAZARDOUS TO SET IT UP AS AN ASSURED BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE

But I doubt if targeting cities falls into the same category. Of course, we should be aware of modern demographic trends and modern arteries of communication, and use them to the best advantage of the gospel. That is, however, a mark of practical wisdom rather than a clearly defined biblical principle.

It may also be significant that Acts 19:10, which tells of the whole province of Asia hearing the gospel, takes the form of a result rather than a purpose clause. In other words, it was the outcome of the uncommon freedom Paul enjoyed in Ephesus that the gospel was so widely spread. It was not the fruit of some human strategy.

Graham Keith, Ayr

AFRICANS AND ACE

Sir,

In 1964 the then Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that England needed missionaries from Asia and Africa to convert the natives back to Christianity. One of his clergy, after summing up England as a 'heathen, pagan, idolatrous land, whose gods are bingo, soccer, horses, and the pools' (to which one has to now add the National Lottery and the girls on 'Page Three') suggested that if any such did come, they would be so horrified by what they saw that they would conclude that the country was past praying for. In a similar vein, more

recently, Dr Ali Mazrui, a learned and scholarly Muslim from East Africa, remarked in a TV interview how 'prudish Victorian missionaries' came to that part of Africa and got the natives to put clothes on; today, he said, their descendants came and went to the beach, proceeding to take theirs off! No wonder your African folk long to get back home, though with inflation in Zimbabwe running at nearly 600 trillion per cent, the economic safety of here draws many.

As for another article I spotted about today's children being morally destroyed by the education they get, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that home schooling is still legal in the UK and it's growing! Quite a few Christian parents use it, and recently my attention was drawn to the ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) program that actually takes the child, academically, to the level of the old English General Certificate of Education. If any are interested, they can be contacted at info@christian-education.org, and their website is www.christian-education.org. Their address is: Christian Education Europe Ltd, Maranatha House, Unit 5, Northfield Close, Shrivenham, Swindon, Wilts. SN6 8HL.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Gowland, Milton Keynes

A CHANGING CLIMATE

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your open invitation to comment on the recent Climate Change article. For me it was a disappointment. I understand the article itself was a summary of the report adopted by the General Assembly and, in all fairness, Dr Dow has produced a very accurate summary. Ultimately the content of the report itself is what is so disappointing.

The report states that we have been given the mandate to subdue the earth. This is not correct. Adam and his wife alone were given such a mandate, but at the Fall they lost both the right and the ability to fulfil it. After the flood, when God reiterated to Noah and his sons their duty to fill the earth, the mandate to subdue it was conspicuous only by its absence (Compare Gen 1:28 and Gen 9:1-2).

The report also assumes that God's curse of the earth is still operative. God did not curse the whole world, only the ground. That curse found its fulfilment at the flood when the whole face of the ground was destroyed by water. Afterward God could say to Noah, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake' (Gen 8:21). The curse no longer exists and will never return. There is, of course, a principle of decay inherent in the world since the Fall (Rom. 8:21), but this is not the same thing as the curse.

I am also disappointed that the report accepts, without qualification or criticism, the Uniformitarian view that the earth is hundreds of thousands (or millions) of years old. Have we, as a Church, now officially accepted this long-age hypothesis? I am certainly not alone in believing the simple testimony of the Bible, that the age of the world from creation to Christ is little more than 4,000 years. The

report ought to have acknowledged the differing views in this area rather than seeking to impose its own. How can we be convinced of the report's conclusions when there is widespread disagreement on the underlying principles?

Theological questions aside, with so much dispute and uncertainty surrounding this whole climate change craze, is it really wise for our Church to jump aboard the bandwagon? Better to leave predictions and policy to the scientists and politicians to whom it belongs or we may end up looking stupid when the current prevailing opinion turns out to be nonsense.

John Forbes, Lairg

A WORD OF THANKS FROM KILTARLITY

I would like to extend a word of thanks to all the Free Church members and congregations (and beyond) who contributed to the appeal that was mentioned in *The Monthly Record* many months ago. Our coming to Scotland has been a walk of faith from the first step. After I had applied to do doctoral studies at Highland Theological College in Dingwall, we had more questions than answers about how we could afford the three years of tuition and study. Just months before we were to fly to Scotland, the Lord opened up the preaching position at the Kiltarlity Free Church, which has provided a home for my family to live in. Fundraising in America and Australia provided for much of our first year's tuition and living.

Our time at Kiltarlity Free Church has been a blessing as my wife Eleanor and I have sought to share our lives with the church. I hope that they have benefited from my preaching and the Bible studies we have led. We have found the saints there to be gracious hosts. We hope that, by the time my studies are finished, we will have made life-long friends in Christ.

As the Lord told the children of Israel they would take the land 'little by little' and 'not all at once' (Deut. 7:22), we believe the Lord has been providing for us 'little by little' and not 'all at once'. This has tested our faith to not worry about tomorrow and trust that He knows our needs before we even ask Him. Yet as each year has passed, we have seen Him help us in a variety of ways, most of them unexpected. After I came back from a trip to the USA in August, Joanie MacLennan informed me that they had raised all the funds for my tuition for 2008. What praise to our God as He used churches and individuals whom we have never met to give to the fund. Some of the gifts were large and some small, but all would be pleasing to the Lord. Our prayer is that the Lord would abundantly pour out an overflowing blessing to all who gave.

In Christ,

**Andrew Matthews, Permanent
Pulpit Supply, Kiltarlity**

THE CALVIN CHALLENGE

2009 marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Whilst we do not wish to engage in the kind of hero worship that creates Protestant Saints, there is no doubt that John Calvin was one of the greatest minds, best Bible expositors and most influential leaders of the Christian Church. His influence is still felt today – nowhere more so than in his greatest work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Therefore we would like to issue all readers of *The Monthly Record* a challenge – why not set yourself the goal of reading *The Institutes* during 2009? It is a large book – the McNeil edition has two volumes which run to 1500 pages. But who said it was going to be easy?! (You could always cheat and get the abridged 272-page Baker edition edited by Tony Lane and Hilary Osbourne.)



Ten reasons to read *The Institutes*:

1) It is one of the world's top ten most influential books. If you want to understand much of where Western society has come from, you need to read this book.

2) It is a spiritual feast for your soul. Calvin is the theologian of the Holy Spirit, the glory of Jesus Christ, and the sovereignty of the Father.

3) It is wonderfully heartwarming. Calvin (perhaps because of those who write about him and those who claim his name, but more often than not because of his enemies) is often portrayed as a cold and heartless logician. Nothing could be further from the truth. He is a warm and enthusiastic believer, who delights in the beauty of Christ. Cold it is not.

4) It is biblical. Not just a book about the Bible, but a book that teaches the Bible. Calvin is probably the best exegete that the Church has produced since Augustine.

5) It will help you to know God better. Yes, there are hard bits, and controversial bits, but the vast majority of *The Institutes* is simply about the knowledge of God.

6) It is relevant. Yes, there are some historical bits that are dated and not immediately relevant to our situation today, but these are few and far between. Apart from Packer's *Knowing God*, I cannot think of a better book about God outside of the Bible. Actually, come to think of it, *Knowing God* was inspired by *The Institutes*.

7) It is one of the best books on apologetics and evangelism. Even today. Calvin shows how to deal with so many of the problems and issues that we are asked about.

8) It will stimulate you to prayer and to service. Theology is about knowing God. And how can we know God without worshipping Him? But how can we worship without knowing Him?

9) It is meat. This is not an easy read. Beautifully written, logical, clear and concise though it is, there are still parts where most normal human beings will struggle to keep up. But that should not put us off. We are dealing with massive

and deep subjects – why should we object to our minds being stretched and exercised? Instead of 'brain training' on the Wii, why not train your brain through reading *The Institutes*?

10) If you read it and write *The Monthly Record* a letter (or article) reviewing *The Institutes* and giving us your thoughts, we will give the best review a free copy of the hardback McNeill edition (worth £40!). All such reviews are to be sent to us by the end of the year – whatever your age, denomination, gender, nationality or religion! We will publish extracts from the best of them.

WE WILL GIVE THE BEST REVIEW A FREE COPY OF THE HARDBACK McNEILL EDITION

And to whet your appetite, some quotes from the book itself:

'In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners.' - Book 2:7:8

'Yet in the first place, wherever you cast your eyes there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness' - Book 1:5:1

'We must be reminded that there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word. He could not separate one from the other any more than we could separate the rays from the sun from which they come.' - Book 3:2:6

Take it. Read it. And write us....