

THE MONTHLY RECORD

March 2009

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HOLINESS IN THE DARKNESS

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HATRED, HOLLOWNESS AND HOLINESS

AS WE REMEMBER THE HORRORS OF THE HOLOCAUST, WE REFLECT ON THE HYPOCRISY OF OUR OWN SOCIETY AND HOW WE NEED A FRESH VISION OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD IN ORDER TO PREVENT SUCH THINGS HAPPENING AGAIN

THE HATRED

It's Holocaust Memorial Day and I am sitting manning a stall at the University of Dundee to encourage awareness of this horrific event in our recent history. There are posters on the stands beside me, and a host of leaflets and flyers on the desk. And yet perhaps only two or three people have even bothered to stop and have a look. Hundreds have walked by. Of course everyone will say they are against 'that sort of thing'. Of course no one wants genocide or hatred – or at least that is what we want to think – when we can be bothered to think. But there is something seriously wrong. Not just in the complacency of the passers by, but also in the apparently smug self-righteousness of those of us involved in the 'Stand up to Hatred' campaign. We are the Right Ones. We know the Truth. We are the active soldiers for what everyone recognises as decent and good and tolerant. We campaign against hatred. And yet there is something hollow and shallow about it, even as we sincerely fight for our cause.

THE HOLLOWNESS

When you read the material that is handed out, something is not quite right. Yes, it is true that 'the evils of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance are still with us. We categorise, stereotype, discriminate, exclude, bully, persecute, attack - because of race, religion, disability, sexuality. We damage and are damaged as a result of our refusal to accept our common humanity.' I believe that statement – which is why I am happy to hand it out. However, I do not believe that our society believes it – nor even the organisation that produces the material. For example, I am handing out material about the horrific death of David Morley, a barman in London who happened to be homosexual and who 'was believed to be the victim of a homophobic attack'. No one in their right mind would condone such a senseless act of violence, nor should anyone wish harm on someone because of their sexuality. Yet I have a couple of problems with associating this 'hate crime', as the literature calls it, with Holocaust Memorial Day. Why?

Firstly, it is only a short step from condemning violent homophobic attacks (which we should do) to condemning those who dare to think differently from the absolutist standards of our current elite as homophobic and therefore equivalent to Nazis. Our society tells us over and over again, through soap operas, government spokesmen, the education system, and the media, that homosexuality is perfectly normal and acceptable. I happen to believe that the Bible is right – that just as sex outside marriage is wrong, so sexual acts between people of the same gender is

'unnatural, degrading and perverse' (Romans 1:24-27). I believe that all human beings including myself are sinful and that homosexual sin is no worse than any other sin – but it is still sin. And for that belief I will be discriminated against, banned and possibly even sued and put on trial. The irony is that the absolutist 'might is right' philosophy of the Nazis is not being espoused so much by those who dare to disagree with the prevailing establishment view, but rather by those who in the name of tolerance practice a fundamentalist intolerance. Dare anyone disagree, and the thought police will soon be on to this heinous hate crime.

WE ARE ALL SINNERS IN NEED OF REDEMPTION. BUT THAT DOES NOT ALLOW ME IN THE 'NAME OF LOVE' TO JUSTIFY WHAT IS WRONG, AND TO CALL PURE WHAT GOD HAS CALLED PERVERTED.

Is it not absurd that by teaching the Bible I am in danger of being charged with 'hate crime' and equated with the Nazis? Is it not ironic that in this Brave New World the Orwellian prophecy of hate crimes has become a reality, and that the world now thinks (though it was ever thus) it is ok to hate Christians who actually believe the Bible, and to discriminate against them, in the name of anti-discrimination? The Bible teaches me that I am to love all human beings, whatever their sexuality, that I am not to regard some types of sin as more heinous than others, and that I am not to regard myself as being in any way better than someone else. We are all sinners in need of redemption. But that does not allow me in the 'name of love' to justify what is wrong, and to call pure what God has called perverted.

The antidote to the horror of the Nazi genocide is not the hollow and often hypocritical actions of those who would seek to make and judge 'hate crimes'. In fact, there is a great danger of just exchanging one form of human intolerance for another – just as in Nazi Germany it was easy to blame the Jews for all the ills of society, so in our growing fundamentalist secularist culture we are increasingly seeing that Muslims or evangelical Christians are portrayed as the Root of all Evil. The answer to the Holocaust is not to be found in the spineless moralism of whatever group happens to be dominant in the society at the time. Strangely enough, the answer is to be found in hatred and holiness.

HATRED

Firstly, we are to hate evil. Not excuse it. Not justify it. And not try to explain it away. We are to hate it. There is an incredible scene in *Schindler's List* where Schindler tries to justify the actions of the sadistic camp commandant by suggesting that he is only behaving this way because he is under stress, and because of the pressures of the war. In the light of the commandants shooting Jews for sport, it seems, and is, a shallow and pathetic excuse for such evil behaviour. In the same way it is astounding that there are people who argue that there is no such thing as evil. Richard Dawkins puts it very starkly in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*: 'In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, or any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.'

The trouble with the atheistic anti-God secular philosophy is not that it turns all of its proponents into Nazis. Thankfully, most atheists live inconsistently with their philosophy. And most of our Western Atheists are in fact Christian Atheists – wanting the fruit of Christianity whilst rejecting the roots. The problem is that once the philosophy of the blind, pitiless, indifferent universe without good or evil is adopted, there is no basis for hating evil and loving good. How can you hate what does not exist? That is why the atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell stated 'Dachau is wrong is not a fact.' He thought it was wrong. But that was just a feeling. But for the Christian, 'Dachau is wrong' is a fact. We hate the evil of the Holocaust because it was real – not because it was a passing feeling or temporary fashion of philosophy. 'God is dead,' said Hitler's favourite philosopher, Nietzsche. 'We have killed him and the whole of Europe is filled with the stench of his corpse.'



HOLINESS

But God is not dead. He is holy. And in His holiness He hates and abominates evil. 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong' (Habakkuk 1:13). If I, as a sinful, impure human being, with a limited vision and a part-blinded conscience, can still feel hatred of evil, then one can only imagine the hatred of an absolutely pure, omniscient God, who sees into the very core of our heart and being. I may have a sense of the Heart of Darkness – God knows it. Absolutely. And in Christ He has been there. He has carried it.

God's holiness is awesome. It is pure. It is beautiful. The trouble is that sometimes those who are meant to be the 'holy ones' of the Lord neither understand nor reflect that holiness. We have reduced it (and by implication, the Holy One) to a series of trivialities associating holiness with a type of clothing, a 'peculiar' language, a certain tone in preaching, a set of cultural and moral shibboleths, ecstatic gibberish, a false humility and a narrow and distorted view of both God and man. Eugene Petersen speaks of the holiness revealed in the book of Revelation as 'a holiness that is neither cramped or distorted, but spacious; an illumination that goes beyond the minimum of showing what is true by showing it extravagantly beautiful; a nourishment that is the healthy feeding of our lives, not the frivolous adornment of them.'

ONLY THE ATONEMENT OFFERED BY CHRIST AND HIS ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE FOR SIN HAS THE POWER TO BREAK THE DARKNESS AND SET ME FREE.

That is why we need holiness. Without holiness we will not see the Lord. And without holiness we will not really see the evil. And here is the frightening thing: when I am a moralistic relativistic humanist I can see, at least partially, the evil that others do and rightly be horrified by it and campaign against it. But it is ultimately hollow. A game with no winners. But when I see the holiness of the Lord, His brightness and purity show up the ugliness and the evil, not least in my own heart, and like Isaiah I cry, 'Woe to me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty' (Isaiah 6:5). I search for and find atonement, forgiveness and peace, not in my darkness but in His light. Only the atonement offered by Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice for sin has the power to break the darkness and set me free.

And that is why, coming back from manning the desk at the Holocaust Memorial Day, I sat down and watched yet again the whole of *Schindler's List*. For me it is still the most profound and moving experience. It ripped me to shreds. The tears flowed, the anger burned within and my heart turned to worship. 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' If this were not true, then this world is the hell of the blind pitiless universe. But, thank God, it is true. I long to see the King in His glory. How my heart burns within me! And how I long to serve Him and to tell others of Him. Holy is His name.

The Editor

MOTHER CHURCH

IN THIS ARTICLE **JAMES MACIVER** (KNOCK FREE CHURCH, LEWIS) EXAMINES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH AS THE MOTHER OF BELIEVERS.

'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.' (Isaiah 66:10-11)

The image of the church as the mother of Christians is perhaps not now easily recognised as relevant compared to the time of Isaiah, or even in apostolic times. After all, Israel was a covenant community, a people and nation in covenant with God, making the concept of the united theocracy as a mother to believers meaningfully appropriate, compared to our situation where we find a multitude of denominations, many with their own distinctive features and often living in stark isolation from others.

Certainly the concept of the church as the mother of believers is open to distortion and misapplication, such as in Roman Catholic tradition where the authority and teaching of the church have practically been placed on a level with that of Scripture. Yet the biblical emphasis on the church being the mother of believers, in passages like Isaiah 66:7-11,

is of permanent significance and encloses much valuable teaching for every generation of Christian. In circumstances of the church's fragmentation into so many denominations, it serves as a reminder of the essential unity and wholeness of Christ's redeemed people across denominational divides.

FOR THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO ENTER INTO LIFE UNLESS THIS MOTHER CONCEIVE US IN HER WOMB, GIVE US BIRTH, NOURISH US AT HER BREAST ...

Cyprian of Carthage (ca 251) stated, *'He cannot have God as a father who does not have the Church as a mother.'* In his *Institutes of Religion*, the Reformer John Calvin wrote, *'Because it is our intention now to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title "mother" how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.... Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah 37:32 and Joel 2:32 testify.'*

A CARING MOTHER

The first thought in addressing the biblical data here is that we are confronted with *the ideal of the church as a caring mother*. Calvin's statement quoted above refers to the 'visible church', meaning the church as we see it, made up of professing believers, rather than the church as God sees it, the church 'invisible', made up of all who are His elect people. Most people will associate the word 'mother' with loving care. If we are honest we (especially fathers!) will confess that it is mothers who teach children to speak, how to behave, the difference between right and wrong, how to make choices in life and many other things besides. The bond between a mother and child is special and strong, beginning in the womb and carried through into adulthood.

Bearing and giving birth, in a spiritual sense, is true of the church also. It is not, of course, that the church converts, justifies or sanctifies sinners; only God can do that. But it is within the church, in the sense of being incorporated into the body of the church, that these great spiritual developments take place. This is why Calvin was so emphatic that *'there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.... Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or*



any salvation. Even if someone who has never had any part in the church is converted, whether at home or on the bus or wherever, that person is immediately incorporated into the church by the very fact of conversion and will be added to the membership of the visible church somewhere by baptism. It is quite contrary to the operation of God's grace when anyone claims that they have become a Christian but prefer to be a Christian at home or on the beach rather than with the fellowship of God's professing people.

This is why it is so important to remember that evangelism is not just about conversions; it's about having people incorporated into Christ's church, having them come under the loving care of a spiritual mother. Getting people to 'come to church' is obviously a good thing, but 'becoming part of the church' is really what matters. Whether that will be in a congregation meeting in a house, a cathedral or a traditional church building is not the point. The church is not the building but the people. Wherever God's people are engaged in biblical worship, preaching, the sacraments, fellowship, and discipline, His church exists, and a fundamental aspect of its existence is to mother the children of God. Our aim is to bring people under that mothering care.

LOVING MOTHER CHURCH

The second main feature of this passage is the emphasis on *the attitude of the children under the mother's care*. Isaiah is addressing in particular those who love Jerusalem and were at that time mourning for her. A loving mother deserves gratitude, respect and love in return. The church requires no less from her children. In our love for the church we defend her reputation, protect her interests, and uphold her authority, as children would do for a natural mother. This is not simply a matter of us loving our own denomination. We are to do that, certainly, but ultimately we belong to the church, not to a denomination. Our love for the church, then, goes out beyond the borders of the Free Church or whichever denomination we belong to.

GETTING PEOPLE TO 'COME TO CHURCH' IS OBVIOUSLY A GOOD THING, BUT 'BECOMING PART OF THE CHURCH' IS REALLY WHAT MATTERS.

But we are also to mourn over the church when she is seriously ill. Isaiah had to contend against massive decline among the covenant people of God in his day. Mother was seriously ill, which is why Isaiah speaks here particularly to those who love her and mourn for her. We do not have to look very far to find evidence of our mother being ill today. Whenever we know of doctrinal defection, failures of discipline, sins welcomed as acceptable conduct, divisions, dissension, and strife, our mother is seriously ill! Along with this (maybe even because of this!) we are very aware of the ineffectuality and weakness of the church in the face of the world. But how bothered are we? Concerned, yes, but enough to make us *mourn*? It should be so if we love her as we should. We need to feel the pain of this and so mourn as we would over our natural mother were she seriously ill! Look at how Psalm 102 begins with a description of



the psalmist's personal anguish and pain and how he goes on to reveal that his grief is caused by concern over Zion. Though she was lying in ruins of rubbish and stones, even these are precious to him. But he longs for restoration and looks forward to God's building up of Zion, when He shall reveal himself in His glory. This is mourning and longing constrained by nothing less than love for God and His church.

But even though Isaiah shows they have cause to mourn, he also calls them to rejoice with Jerusalem! It seems something of a contradiction to be mourning and rejoicing at the same time. Isaiah is certainly carrying us toward the New Testament age in these details; yet the principle of rejoicing over our belonging to the church is relevant always. We are to *enjoy* the privileges God has given us in belonging to His church even in times of decline. Verses 12-14 expand on this by giving the reason why they can rejoice; God is going to fill the church with His peace and it will flow out from her. This has been fulfilled in Christ and in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the church since Pentecost. We in the church have access to this peace and to the abundant comforts contained in it. We can drink it abundantly in the Word and sacraments, what Isaiah called being 'nursed and satisfied from the consoling breast' of our mother, the church.

We are often too easily distracted from the core elements that ought always to make us rejoice - the preaching of the gospel, biblical worship, the fellowship of God's people, the supremacy of the gospel and God's unchangeable promises for His church. Isaiah sees this rejoicing as the way to being 'nursed and satisfied' so as to come to 'drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance'. We often do not get comfort from the gospel because we are so preoccupied with our immediate circumstances that we fail to take advantage of the abundance God has deposited in His church.

This image, then, of 'mother church' should constrain us to think that as members of the visible church, children of this spiritual mother, we should all be fully involved in and committed to the whole life of this church on earth while looking forward to the future glory of the church that God has in store.

'The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.' (Psalm 115:12-13)

ON THE FRONTLINE



2008 WAS AN EVENTFUL YEAR FOR FREE CHURCH MILITARY CHAPLAINS **COLIN MACLEOD** AND **PATRICK DENISO**. COLIN SAW ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE ARGYLL AND SUTHERLAND HIGHLANDERS, 5TH BATTALION IN THE ROYAL REGIMENT OF SCOTLAND, IN THE HELMAND PROVINCE OF AFGHANISTAN. PATRICK, LESS WELL KNOWN TO *MONTHLY RECORD* READERS, IS A GRADUATE OF DUMISANI THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AND A FREE CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA CHAPLAIN CURRENTLY SERVING WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

JOHN ROSS ASKED BOTH MEN TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY UNDER FIRE. COLIN WAS ABLE TO RESPOND, BUT PATRICK, WHO SEEMS BEYOND E-MAIL CONTACT, HAS NOT YET REPLIED.

CHAPEL IN THE DESERT

When Colin joined the Army in 2005, he and Aileen knew that frontline deployment was highly likely. Far from being deterred by this thought, it was to support troops in such conditions that had first drawn Colin to Army chaplaincy work. The Argylls, based in Howe Barracks, Canterbury, Kent, were off to Helmand Province in Afghanistan for a six-month summer tour of duty. Colin knew that this would prove a challenging experience in every way, but as this is what the Armed Forces do, you accept it as part of your job.

Preparation started almost immediately. The Battalion went to Belize for a six-week exercise and UK training stepped up a gear. This demanding phase came to a head when desert kit was issued, signalling that departure was imminent. Chaplains don't carry weapons; their kit is service and hymn sheets, Bibles to distribute and Communion material. Among Colin's equipment were Bible medallions with the Ten Commandments on one side and a simple gospel message on the other. This kit he stowed into a pouch that zipped onto the side of his Bergen, always ready for personal encounters and services.

On 10th April, the Argylls stepped off the plane into the burning heat of the Afghan desert. They had arrived at Camp Bastion, a tented city with air-conditioned accommodation housing over 2000 personnel. Here troops have internet access, TV, gyms and phones, but in the Forward Operating Bases conditions are quite different. Water supply is a problem until wells are bored, the food is not so good, and the swarms of flies are inescapable, but you just have to get used to it and make the best of it.

Once in Afghanistan it suddenly hits you this is for real. As an infantry unit, the Argylls were to dominate the ground

and deny the Taliban freedom of movement. That meant repeated contact and many tense moments. Over the months in Canterbury and in Belize, Colin had shared the men's general conditions and risks, building friendships and winning trust. In Afghanistan, in Colin's opinion, 'There is simply no substitute for being there, so my intention was to be forward based; this opens the door for meaningful opportunities for witness. But as chaplains are non-combatants and would quickly become a liability if things turned bad, it is not always right to tag along. I had to remember they were soldiers doing a job and I was their minister doing mine.'

CHAPLAINS DON'T CARRY WEAPONS; THEIR KIT IS SERVICE AND HYMN SHEETS, BIBLES TO DISTRIBUTE AND COMMUNION MATERIAL

Altogether, the Battalion had 14 battle casualties evacuated to the UK during the tour. One of the earliest was their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel David Richmond, who was shot in the leg during an operation near Musa Qala. The chaplains also had to deal with the fatalities that occurred. 'At such moments,' Colin wrote, 'the reality of soldiering came home to us all. The services held to repatriate the dead were deeply emotional. Huge crowds attended to pay their respects, eulogies were read and laments played on the pipes, commemorating another young life lost. The tragedy of it all left you drained. These times often led to a quiet word and a prayer with close friends of the soldiers killed. Just being there to offer such support was very important.'

Attendance at services varied throughout the tour, with men coming who never would at home. Hardly a day passed when someone didn't start a conversation about God, Christianity or the Church, and it was a joy to share Christ and explain the gospel. The care of God was evident in answered prayer for many situations that could have been much worse than they turned out to be. Simply telling the troops that many people were praying for them was a very important witness in itself; all were appreciative, some more than others.

'THE TRAGEDY OF IT ALL LEFT YOU DRAINED. THESE TIMES OFTEN LED TO A QUIET WORD AND A PRAYER WITH CLOSE FRIENDS OF THE SOLDIERS KILLED. JUST BEING THERE TO OFFER SUCH SUPPORT WAS VERY IMPORTANT.'

Meanwhile, back at home in Howe Barracks, Canterbury, Aileen was looking after the family and keeping the home running. I wondered what it was like for her and was told that it can be very difficult for families when troops are away. There may be long spells when, for operational reasons, it is not possible to phone. This news vacuum is filled by rumours, and there is always the fear of something bad happening. Speaking for them both, Colin commented that separation was the hardest thing to deal with. Although 10 days' leave during the 6 months helped, for both Aileen and Colin, his safe return with the Battalion was fantastic! Colin arrived at home on 20th October to find Aileen and the children enjoying the half-term holiday. The Argylls received the freedom of the city of Canterbury and welcome-home parades were held in Dumbarton, Alloa and Stirling.

Both Colin and Aileen were deeply aware of the prayers of Free Church people. Now the Afghanistan tour is over, Colin asks us not to forget to pray for Christian ministry in the Armed Forces, where 'many of our soldiers have little or no concept of Jesus'.



Colin Macleod

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

Half a world away, somewhere near Goma in the North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, FCSA chaplain Patrick Deniso is doing for men of the Southern African National Defence Force what Colin sought to do for the British army in Afghanistan. There has been no news from Patrick since he left for the DRC at the same time as Colin returned home.

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) is the largest UN peacekeeping operation in the world with some 17,000 troops, but has been accused of ineffectiveness in the east of the country. The thousand soldiers of the South African Army are a significant part of MONUC, yet are rarely mentioned in the South African media. On 23rd December, the UN Security Council unanimously renewed MONUC's mandate for a further year and tasked it to give priority to protection of embattled civilians.

According to the BBC, the five-year war has claimed an estimated three million lives, either as a direct result of fighting or because of disease and malnutrition. It has been called possibly the worst emergency to unfold in Africa in recent decades.

In early November humanitarian agencies declared the situation in Goma, in the DRC's North Kivu province, to be catastrophic. Tens of thousands of refugees have been forced to flee into the bush; many are ill, wounded, and lacking food, clean water and shelter during the rainy season. The health and lives of many children are especially at risk.

Michael Graham of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Genocide Prevention Initiative reported that in a field of sharp volcanic rock are thousands of tiny huts made of banana leaves and the orange plastic sheets given to each family by aid workers. But, after a nearby battle, the Congolese army looted the camp, robbing residents of their food and plastic sheeting. A few miles up the road, government soldiers are pounding rebel positions with attack helicopters and mortars. Yesterday they took back the town but will lose it again next week.

Jeanette, a 24-year-old refugee from Masisi district, is soaked every time it rains, along with her family and handful of possessions. She is hungry, afraid and angry. Graham adds, 'The sound of exploding shells mixes with afternoon thunder; only those who live or work there can tell the difference. But if the afternoon thunderclouds bring rain, as they do nearly every night during the wet season, Jeanette and her family will lie awake with a puddle in place of their cardboard bed. Across the camp thousands will suffer the night quietly, and wake together to a morning of uncertainty.'

Somewhere in the rain-soaked Congo forest, in more comfortable quarters, are the blue-helmeted South African troops, and with them is Patrick Deniso. Although we do not have much to go on, let's remember Patrick in our prayers, as he seeks to witness to the men under his charge, and for his family back at home, knowing that what is unclear to us is plain to God.

Free Church Holiday for Adults Carronvale House, Larbert

Come and enjoy relaxation, good fellowship and fun in Larbert with trips to local places of interest.

Dates - Saturday 4th to Saturday 11th July 2009

Cost - £185 per person,
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Hosts and Hostesses
Douglas & Katie MacKeddie
Calum & Margaret Macdonald

Booking Form

Name (Mr, Mrs, Miss)

.....

Address:

.....

Post Code

Tel

Accommodation:

Please book early if you require a single room as they are limited. There will be a supplement of £20 for single occupancy.

Do you require transport from Inverness? Yes/No

Please send booking form & £30 deposit
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Mrs K MacKeddie
Free Church Manse
Seaforth Place
Maryburgh
Ross-shire
IV7 8DP

For further information, including transportation to and from the holiday, please contact:

Douglas or Katie MacKeddie
Tel: **01349 861281**
E-mail: **douglas@mackeddie.wanadoo.co.uk**
or **katie_mackeddie@fsmail.net**

Book early to avoid disappointment.

SCOTTISH FRIENDS OF L'ABRI

On 7 March, Dr James Paul from L'Abri Greatham is coming to speak on the topic 'What in the World is Real? Some of us live as if the only real things are hard facts; others as if reality consists of their own interpretations, thoughts and feelings. How can we live in an integrated reality which includes both facts and meanings?' This meeting will be at Strathblane church hall (opposite the Parish church on the A891 Strathblane Road by the Kirkhouse Inn junction) from 10.30 a.m. – approx. 2 p.m. The price is £5 including lunch – if you are interested in attending, contact **Alison Carter (Secretary to Scottish Friends of L'Abri), 16 The Grove, Musselburgh, EH21 7HD.**

EUROPE AND ABORTION

London, 14 January 2009 - Church leaders and pro-life groups in individual European Union countries must work to make the right to life the top political issue, says the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC). SPUC's call was made following today's vote in the European Parliament to approve a resolution calling on the European Union (EU) to promote abortion and same-sex unions throughout the EU. The resolution, authored by Giusto Catania of the Italian Communist party, is based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, part of the Lisbon treaty, despite the fact that neither the charter nor the Lisbon treaty have been passed into law.

Anthony Ozimic, SPUC political secretary, commented: 'The resolution passed today is soft-law pressure for abortion to be made a right in every EU member-state. The resolution violates national laws on conscientious objection to abortion and on public funding for abortion. The resolution calls for the recognition of a so-called right to abortion - yet not one international treaty or human rights court has recognised any such right. Abortion is the most contentious issue at United Nations conferences, and any attempt even to imply a right to abortion creates heated controversy between national delegations.

'Religious leaders and pro-life groups throughout Europe must shake off their complacency about the EU and mobilise religious believers for pro-life action. The message everyone must hear is that the right to life is the most important political issue, because the right to life is the indispensable foundation of all other rights. Failure to act will mean that countless millions of unborn children will die because of the EU's promotion of abortion both inside and outside Europe.'

FORTROSE GIFT

The Deacons' Court of Fortrose Free Church express sincere gratitude for an anonymous gift of £250 towards their building fund.

Duncan Gordon

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

Back in 2001 the Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) congregation in Melbourne had its first contact with refugees from southern Sudan. In 2005, Rev Tut Wan Yoa became associate minister to Dr Rowland Ward, and since then typically 200 refugees, about half of them children, have met in a borrowed church for an afternoon service.

Our search for a suitable property to house the work bore no fruit until November 2008, when we were approached by an independent Baptist church that was closing down and offered us their modern building at a fraction of its value. Situated in the central SE suburb of Mulgrave, it is about 11 miles from each of our current Melbourne centres (Narre Warren, Glen Huntly and Knox). Contracts were signed, possession given, the car park and landscaping upgraded, and on New Year's Day we held a thanksgiving service. Work still to be done includes the addition of three classrooms, which will provide reasonably adequate facilities.



The four men in the front row of the picture are Rowland Ward, Tut Yoa, Sjirk Bajema and Andres Miranda, all united in the faith but of different ethnic backgrounds. Mr Bajema, of Friesian descent and formerly of the Reformed Church of Mangere (Auckland), is to be inducted as minister of the Narre Warren congregation on 17 January in succession to Irishman George Ball, who moved to the Manning River PCEA last May. Mr Miranda is an ordained Presbyterian minister of Chilean background who joined us in mid-2008.

We are determined that the work will demonstrate that Christ's people are called to be the light of the world, also in their bridging the gulf that so obviously divides those of different ethnicities in many situations today. Regular English morning services are planned, as well as services in other languages at other times as may be appropriate.

Rev. Dr Rowland S Ward
Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

CHRISTOPHER HARRIS ELDER, BURGHEAD



The congregation of Burghead were deeply saddened by the death, on October 27th, 2008, of their friend and only remaining elder, Christopher Harris.

Chris was born in Derby on November 21st, 1944. At the age of five he moved to Hong Kong, where his father was serving as a pilot with the Royal Air Force. Chris received part of his formative education at boarding school in Germany and later joined the Air Force, training at RAF Halton. His first posting was to RAF Kinloss, and it was during his time there that he met Netta More, from Burghead. Chris and Netta were married in 1964 and were blessed with the birth of two sons, Andrew and Christopher, of whom they were immensely proud.

During his career with the RAF, Chris served in The Gulf, Germany, and throughout the UK. He was a remarkably talented radar engineer who discharged his obligation to Crown and Country admirably, and he was awarded the British Empire medal by the Queen. He retired from the RAF in 1985 and worked for a time as a television engineer. Chris often spoke fondly of times, in many a home, when, called to repair a broken TV, the way would open for him to introduce his Friend ... the One who was abundantly able to 'mend' broken lives. More recently Chris was employed at RAF Kinloss.

Chris possessed a unique blend of admirable qualities. He was very well organized, so his day was arranged methodically and productively. He had the kind of motivation that was an example and inspiration to others. His cool, calm and pleasant demeanour and charm endeared him to so many. The Christian faith and the church occupied a primary place in his life. His spiritual awakening came in 1986, and the joy and zeal which often characterises the early years in the life of faith remained with him. Chris became a communicant member in Burghead in October 1986 and was ordained an elder in May 1989. Wholeheartedly, his time, energy and means were devoted to Christ and His cause. No minister, or congregation, could have wished for more loyal support. Chris is sorely missed. He is now with the Saviour he loved and served so faithfully. May the Lord uphold Netta, Andrew and Christopher, and their respective families, in their sorrow.

JC Abernethy



The **2009/2010 Free Church Year Book** will be available shortly. To order your copy please contact the Free Church Bookshop on **0131 718 4141** or email **bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk**

Cost = £4.50 per copy, plus postage

BUILDING FOR JESUS - IN NORTH UIST

The 1st of January 2009 marked the first worship service for the Free Church congregation of North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray at their new location in Carinish. The service itself was a joint service with the neighbouring congregation of South Uist and Benbecula. As well as folk from both congregations, other friends attended to mark the occasion of the opening of the building as a place of public worship. Rev. Iain MacAskill, minister of South Uist and Benbecula Free Church, led the congregation in prayer, and the minister of North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray Free Church, Rev. Ewen Matheson, preached from Genesis 28:16-17.

Since the congregation took possession of the former Carinish Inn on 18th November, work progressed immediately on the building to transform it into a place of public worship for the congregation. Work on the former dining room, lounge, and reception areas commenced immediately to enable its use as soon as possible as a place of public worship. The former dining room has now been converted into a sanctuary for public worship, with comfortable seating and a new pulpit kindly built and gifted by Point Free Church. The reception areas allow for a welcoming environment for the congregation.

THE FORMER DINING ROOM HAS NOW BEEN CONVERTED INTO A SANCTUARY FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

As the building was a former inn and until recently in use, the car park and external areas have required minimal work so far. The car park is tarred and enables access for those less mobile to the front door. Additional lighting, fencing and a cattle grid are all that is required for the car park.

The first phase of the work has been largely cosmetic and has been completed quickly. However, the next stage will take longer and see the transformation of the former hotel bedrooms into a manse accommodation (which will be self-contained), and the former public bar into a flexible space for congregation activities. Adjacent to the former public bar is a full working kitchen, which needs minimal attention prior to its use.



This new location for the congregation offers many advantages. The congregation is now centralised into one place of worship, rather than the two places recently used. In fact the congregation previously had four different locations: Berneray, Sollas, Paible, and Grimsay. The congregation was badly affected by the schism of 2000, and lost possession of the church and manse in Paible. There is also the advantage of the accessibility of the building. People in the congregation who previously had great difficulty in getting in and out of the old buildings now have the advantage of ramps, a car park, and a warm, comfortable worship environment.

The new location of the Free Church in Carinish brings the congregation in close proximity to the most historically significant ecclesiastical location in North Uist: *Teampull na Trionaid*, where John Duns Scotus is believed to have studied.

The congregation is a typical small Free Church congregation, which has been blessed with having two Free Church ministers come from it: Rev. Iain MacAskill (South Uist & Benbecula) and Rev. Kenneth Stewart (Dowanvale), both of whom were able to be at the opening of the building for public worship on New Year's Day. The congregation are indebted to Rev. Iain MacAskill for his leadership during the time of vacancy, and also his vision to see this building as the answer to the accommodation problems of the congregation. The resultant media attention and local discussions on the change of use of the building gives the congregation the opportunity to challenge misconceptions concerning the church.

The congregation has sold its church properties in Sollas and Grimsay, and has the mission house in Grimsay up for sale to help finance this project. We are also grateful to the Free Church Trustees for finance. The congregation are presently publicizing their urgent building appeal fund. This fund will be utilized to pay for the work on the building and for the repayments to the Free Church Trustees. Contributions to the fund from friends of the congregation would be warmly appreciated, and should be addressed to the congregational treasurer: **Mrs Margaret MacLean, 11 Knockintorran, Bayhead, Isle of North Uist, HS6 5ED.**

We would also like to request prayer support for the congregation and the new ministry. We would ask for prayer that the building would be used by the Lord to build up His kingdom in North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray.

I HAVE ALZHEIMER'S

MRS EDITH BOYLE, WHO LIVES IN DUMFRIES, WAS INTERVIEWED IN 2005 WHEN SHE WAS 67, REGARDING HER RECENT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. WITH HER PERMISSION, EXCERPTS FROM HER INTERVIEW WERE REPRODUCED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISTIC LEAFLET FOR MARCH/APRIL 2005.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Let me start at the beginning. For some time I had been wondering what I could do with myself. I really needed something to do; maybe something would turn up. Then for a few weeks I hadn't been feeling well, and at last I decided to go to the doctor. 'How are you?' he asked.

THE NEWS

And then he just looked at me – staring at me; I thought he had taken a turn. After a while he said to me: 'Do you know, Mrs Boyle – you may have Alzheimer's.' I looked at him, and I thought: is he alright? Am I hearing right? Now I didn't know a lot about Alzheimer's, but I knew it was not a very good thing to get; and you don't get better. He referred me to a specialist who confirmed that I had this condition.

I went home, took off my coat, made a cup of tea and sat down. And I felt the Lord was going to speak to me; I felt that the Lord came out of heaven and sat beside me. And He spoke right into my mind: 'Edith, don't worry about having Alzheimer's, because I'm going to use you. There are so many people in the world with Alzheimer's and they're frightened of it. What you will pass on will be helpful to them. As you love me, you'll know that I'm with you.' Hamish, my husband, came in and asked what I had been doing. I said that I had been with the Lord for the last hour.

I HAVE NEVER FELT SO WONDERFUL IN MY LIFE; MY WHOLE LIFE IS IN THE LORD'S HANDS.

MY JOURNEY BEGINS

A few days later I was at a meeting and we were asked if anyone had anything to share. I went forward and the Lord opened my mouth and I said that I had got Alzheimer's. And so I started out on my journey of sharing Alzheimer's with other people. I know that some people are very ill with it; some people have encouraged me by saying it will get worse! I have never felt so wonderful in my life; my whole life is in the Lord's hands.

On Sunday I went to church. I thought: 'You don't know what I've got.' Afterwards, with a cup of tea, someone asked how I was - you look very happy. 'Well,' I replied, 'I've been to the doctor and learned I've got Alzheimer's.' 'You can't! It must be a mistake! You appear to be so well and full of joy.' I said: 'When you've got Christ in the vessel you laugh at the storm.'

DOWN DAYS

On one occasion, working in the kitchen, I thought: 'Why Lord, Why? Why have you given me this?' And then the Lord



Edith and her husband Hamish

was right beside me – He said that the devil was troubling me. 'I'm here all the way.' One day I was very down. I prayed about it. 'Lord, I don't know why I feel like this.' And the Lord came to me: 'Always remember this – I'm here; I will not leave you.' One evening I was sitting in church; it had been a down day, realising that I will not get better. And then the Lord was there; I felt that I could go to heaven; it was like being in heaven. And He said: 'Go into the world and tell others about me and always remember that I'm right beside you.' It was an amazing experience. He was so alive to me.

HERE I AM

When I went in to see the consultant, she said: 'You seem to be handling it well.' I replied: 'I'm not handling it alone. I'm a Christian – the Lord's with me and if He wants me to have this for His purposes, then I'll praise Him.' When the consultant finished she said: 'Shall we pray together?'

I know that I've got a very bad memory. And people sometimes say 'this is terrible'; it's doom and gloom! But the Lord allowed me to have Alzheimer's and He is using me. What did Jesus do? He went to the cross. His experience was infinitely worse than mine – yet He did not complain. The Lord is speaking to me through all this. When I go out I say: 'Lord, if you want to use me, here I am.'

Nearly four years later, the foregoing account was read aloud to Edith and her husband Hamish. Hamish commented: 'Sometimes it is all very upsetting as you care; one must live in day-tight compartments.' And Edith commented: 'Nothing has changed. Some days I feel down, and then other days I know that the Lord is with me. After all, when Christ is in the vessel, you laugh at the storm!'

WHAT IS JESUS DOING IN THE LORD'S SUPPER?

A REVIEW OF *THE LORD'S SUPPER* BY REV. DR MALCOLM MACLEAN (MENTOR, 2009, 272 PAGES)

It is always good to see books appearing by Free Church authors; and it is especially good to have books written to enable us to better understand our worship and practice.

But this new book on the Lord's Supper will have an appeal far beyond the Free Church of Scotland. After all, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is common ground among Christians everywhere – we may disagree on whether to sing psalms or hymns, use ancient versions or modern, or when to sit, stand or kneel, but in the powerful, deafening silence of eating bread and drinking wine, we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Of course, different traditions argue over the Lord's Supper too. Does anything happen to the bread and wine in the process of observing the sacrament? How is the presence of Christ related to the elements used in the sacrament? Is the Lord's Supper merely a memorial of the past, or does it convey grace to the person who shares in it? What is a sacrament anyway?

And how often should Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper? Every time they meet? Every Sunday? Twice, three times, or four times a year? Should baptised infants participate in the Lord's Supper the way circumcised children in the Old Testament kept the Passover?

WE MAY DISAGREE ON WHETHER TO SING PSALMS OR HYMNS, USE ANCIENT VERSIONS OR MODERN, OR WHEN TO SIT, STAND OR KNEEL, BUT IN THE POWERFUL, DEAFENING SILENCE OF EATING BREAD AND DRINKING WINE, WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST

What about Communion 'seasons'? How biblical is that notion? Can we justify the old Highland practice, still observed in parts of the church, of having communion twice a year in our own churches, but up to twenty times a year by attending other churches? What about the distinction that has come into our liturgy of advertising 'major' communions as over against 'in-house' communion?

These questions are not unimportant, and show just how far we have travelled since the day that Jesus transformed an ancient Old Testament ritual into a gloriously simple New Testament one. Malcolm Maclean's research into the biblical, historical and practical issues of the Lord's Supper makes this one of the most important books to appear this year.



For Dr Maclean, this has been, by his own admission, a labour of love. He says in the opening line of the preface that 'This book is an expression of my search for my spiritual roots, or at least an important aspect of them – the Lord's Supper, and of the benefits I should be receiving from it.' His search takes him into the Bible, into our Scottish church history, and into our practice, with which Dr Maclean engages critically and positively.

Dr Maclean's review of the New Testament material begins, as one would expect, with a description of Jesus' last week on earth, and the meal He shared with his disciples on the night in which He was betrayed. By carefully studying the material in the Gospels, he stresses the important features of the last supper: that the supper anticipates and depicts the death Jesus was to die, reminding the disciples too of their relationship to Him. By observing the Supper after His departure, they would have a memorial of His work for them, to be observed in the context of their fellowship with Him and with each other.

We then study the Lord's Supper in Acts, and see how the early church continued these practices. Dr Maclean brings out the natural, spontaneous way in which the early Christians broke bread together, often in their own homes, discussing the significance of the bread-breaking as they did so.

The Pauline letters do not deal with the Lord's Supper in great detail, but Dr Maclean highlights the important points: Paul regards the Supper as communion with Christ and a sign of the unity of believers. It is a separating ordinance, requiring individual self-examination, the absence of which can become a reason for God's chastisement. Ultimately, the fulfilment of the Lord's Supper is in the Messianic banquet in Heaven.

The second part of the book reflects the author's interest in church history in general, and in Scottish church history in particular. Dr Maclean explores the Reformed understanding of the Lord's Supper, and shows how differences of approach and interpretation characterised the leading European Reformers. He examines the view that the elements become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) and that they accompany these elements (consubstantiation). He looks at Zwingli's view that the supper was bare memorial.

He then turns to Calvin's more wholesome interpretation of Scripture, in which Calvin emphasised a real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, through the action of the triune God:

The Spirit ensures that there is real communion between Christ and believers as they receive from Christ the benefits he purchased for them on the cross. It is important to stress that Calvin affirmed the necessity of the believer's faith being active, in the sense of receiving from Christ, during the Supper (p. 60).

Calvin's insistence that the words of John 6 about eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood are important in our understanding of the Supper has led to disagreements between later Reformed thinkers. Yet there is no doubt that Calvin's thinking in this area had a profound effect on recovering a robust, biblical view of the Sacrament, and of Christ's presence in it.

The book then considers the history of communion practice and theology in the Scottish lowlands and then in the Scottish Highlands. These four chapters are rich with historical reference, and discuss the teaching of the Scots and the Westminster Confessions, as well as the views, among others, of Robert Bruce (who may be regarded as the father of the Scottish communion season), James Durham, Thomas Boston, John Dick, William Cunningham and John Kennedy.

Among the positive features of Highland communion seasons, Dr Maclean lists the following: prayer, the 'fellowship meeting', preparation, gifted preachers, 'fencing' of the table and table addresses, the exercise of church discipline, and the fact that many Highland revivals focused on communion seasons. He analyses the following negative aspects: the infrequency of communion, the loss of the identity of the 'local' church, and an association of assurance with participation. There is a fine discussion (pp. 159-166) on this theme.

The final part of the book is entitled 'The Lord's Supper today', and looks at the practical issues that are raised in any consideration of the Lord's Supper and its administration. First, Dr Maclean discusses the liturgical aspect of the Supper. How should a service of worship which includes the Supper be conducted? Is there a case for evening communion (it is a supper, after all!)? And what is the significance, if any, of using

non-alcoholic juice instead of wine for the sacrament? There are some fine suggestions for planning a communion service in this section.

Secondly, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in connection with the sacrament is discussed. This again is a fine piece, which shows how Christ ministers to the participant through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The book concludes with discussions on the place of children at the table, the preparation of the pastor, and the preparation of the people.

One of the emphases I particularly appreciate in this study is on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. That is to say, its primary focus is not on what we do, but on what the Triune God does: '*the Lord's Supper* is primarily an activity of Christ in feeding his people, and then secondarily an act of his people in remembering him' (p67). To put it otherwise:

The Lord's Supper is an occasion when the Lord Jesus feeds the souls of his people, thus making the meal a means of grace. Their eating literal bread and drinking actual wine symbolise that throughout the meal the Lord is providing them with spiritual food (p172).

Perhaps if we appreciated this more – Christ's desire in sharing the feast with us is to feed us by enabling us to feed upon Himself – then we would have a more robust theology of the Lord's Supper and a deeper appreciation of this precious blessing.

Dr Maclean's book is an important and timely study of a central element of our religious worship. I trust that many will read it and think about it, and that we too, like the early Christians, will demonstrate our faith by a spontaneous and loving commitment to the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, prayers – and breaking of bread.

Iain D. Campbell



INTRODUCING ... PORTREE FREE

IT IS THE METROPOLIS OF SKYE, ITS BEAUTY ATTRACTING THOUSANDS OF TOURISTS; IT IS A PLACE WHERE THE SUN ALMOST ALWAYS SHINES, THE PEOPLE ARE WARM AND WELCOMING, AND ITS NAME MEANS 'THE PORT OF THE KING'. PORTREE IS CERTAINLY WORTH A VISIT, BUT WITH ALL THE NEW HOUSES THAT ARE BEING BUILT HERE, A MOVE TO SKYE SHOULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED – AND WHEN YOU COME TO STAY, A CERTAIN CONGREGATION WOULD LOVE TO SEE YOU. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO **PORTREE FREE CHURCH!**

WE ARE A CHURCH WITH A GROWING CONGREGATION

Portree is often considered an old and well-established congregation in the Free Church, but really we are a fledgling congregation more akin to a church plant. The age profile of the congregation shows a healthy mix. We have a good number of 'mature' men and women, but we also have a large number of children: about 50 between Bible Class, Sunday School and crèche. There is a team of five dedicated teachers and a host of others who help with the crèche. Attendance on a Sunday can vary; on a good day it can be about 140 but more usually just over 100, and the evening service usually has an attendance of about 60-70. The membership slowly but steadily grows; currently there are about 60 on the communion roll, but as you would expect in a church-plant-type situation, many are young in faith. We have two experienced elders and five deacons. To serve the needs of the congregation there are the usual activities including prayer meetings, a ladies' Bible study, men's fellowship, a YF, and a Just for Starters group for new or young Christians.

WE ARE A CHURCH WITHOUT A CHURCH

This is not a complaint. Every Sunday for the past nine years, we have worshipped in Portree Primary School. Without a big pulpit we have seen progress; without a building of our own we have known blessing. Being deprived of bricks and mortar meant the focus was more on Christ, and the

BEING DEPRIVED OF BRICKS AND MORTAR MEANT THE FOCUS WAS MORE ON CHRIST

understanding of what church was became people and not pews. We talk about going to 'church' on Sunday, and without contradiction we call it 'school' on Monday. We have a fantastic janitor for whom nothing is too much trouble. We have endless Sunday School rooms and brilliant crèche facilities. There is a good-sized gym hall where we can gather for worship, and kitchen facilities at our disposal. Most importantly, when we meet together, we are family.

WE ARE A CHURCH WITHIN A CHURCH

The congregation feels a strong denominational attachment; we see ourselves as very much part of a wider church body. For that reason we want to play our part in contributing to the church, but we also look to the denomination for help and support. For a time there was a real feeling of isolation, but in recent years we have been very grateful for the encouragement and support we have received. We also see ourselves as being part of the Church of Christ in Portree. There are nine different churches in the village (yes, nine!!) where our brothers and sisters in Christ worship, and we are united to them. We enjoy an especially close relationship with the local Church of Scotland. Every year we hold a



CHURCH



children's holiday club together, and more recently we shared in a New Year's night service. Portree Church of Scotland have also been an invaluable support in fellowship and in providing (free of charge) their building for us to conduct funerals and weddings.

WE ARE A CHURCH IN A COMMUNITY

Portree is a changing and growing community. There is a population of about 3,600, which is forecast to grow significantly over the next five years. There are major housing developments in and around Portree to accommodate the increasing population. The congregation is involved formally and informally in a number of community activities such as Young Carers, YMCA, Drug and Alcohol Forum, Mental Health Association, Lifeboat, Fire Service, Witness Support – the list goes on, for we believe that we are called to serve our community in the name of Christ. Portree is a microcosm of all the things that you would see in any other community. There are many fantastic things going on, but there are also many problems. The credit crunch affects Portree, and people fear for their jobs and their future. There are social problems caused by drink and drugs. There is abuse. There are family problems. It is in this community that we live and love and want to show the greatness of our Saviour.

WE ARE A CHURCH WITH CHALLENGES

We have a vision; a vision of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Christ is Lord. That vision presents us with our challenges.

First, we have the challenge of a building project. We have outgrown the school where we worship. We are limited in the service we can give to the community because of the lack of facilities available to us during the week. We have a dream of building a community facility/church in the middle of a new development at the edge of the village. There are plans for hundreds of new houses there and we want to be at the heart of it. We have been granted a substantial piece of land to develop this project in conjunction with Portree YMCA. At

the moment we are awaiting outline planning permission. If that is granted, then the hard work begins. Not least is the challenge of financing such a project. We already have a substantial loan for our new manse, which will take many years to repay. The prospect of raising in excess of a million pounds for a new building is daunting, but...

A GROWING CONGREGATION PRESENTS THE CHALLENGE OF NURTURING YOUNG BELIEVERS OF ALL AGES

We face the challenge of growth. A growing congregation presents the challenge of nurturing young believers of all ages. We also want to see more people coming into the congregation from every part of the community, 82% of which attend no place of worship. We, like everyone else, face the challenge of outreach and evangelism.

We face the challenge of leadership. In the long term, we need to train and develop leadership for the congregation. At the moment the leadership functions well and harmoniously, but we need to prepare for the future.

We face the challenge of change. We have changed and are changing, but we want to change without compromise. We want to relate to the Portree of today, presenting the gospel to the people of today in a way that is relevant today, but at the same time holding on to the unchanging gospel of our Lord.

We face the challenge of prayer. We often hear others tell us that things are going well in Portree, and it is true that we have experienced a measure of blessing; however, it is not as is often reported. We are very vulnerable. There is activity, but we want to see real spiritual strength and growth. We want to see conversions, we want to witness professions, and we want to see a people and a community impacted by

the love of Christ. We are not there yet. For it to happen we need to meet the challenge of prayer. For that reason we are attempting to set up a network of prayer in the congregation at the moment, but we also need the prayers of the wider church so that with the Spirit working, Portree really would become the Port of THE King.

Donnie G MacDonald



JOHN ALEX, CATHERINE, ALI AND EILIDH MACCRIMMON

We are John Alex and Catherine MacCrimmon. Both of us are 'Sgiathanaich' and were brought up in the same township,

living within 1.5 miles of each other. After leaving school we both lived away from Skye for approximately 6 years. John Alex worked in Edinburgh and I studied in the Borders. In 1995 we married and in 1996 we had our son Ali. Within a year of Ali being born we had decided to move back to Skye, and in 1998 we had our daughter Eilidh.

Both of us attended the Free Church as we grew up. I continued to sporadically worship in various churches during my teens, but John Alex rarely attended.

God was working in our lives and it became increasingly clear that, to bring up children in the knowledge of Christ, we would need to practice what we preached! After some searching out churches we attended Portree Free Church in 2001. On arrival we were warmly welcomed and felt very at home from that moment on. Rev Kenny MacDonald, the Interim Moderator, was very encouraging, and we soon became regular worshippers. The church met our needs with Bible-based preaching, a crèche, Sunday School and fellowship.

In June 2001, I professed my faith by being baptised along with Ali and Eilidh. Then in 2003 Rev Donnie G MacDonald was inducted as our minister, and the following year John Alex came to know the Lord as his Saviour and professed his faith. We then had the privilege of witnessing our son Ali profess his faith in November 2005.

Within the Portree church, we have every opportunity to grow and develop as Christians. We are preached the Gospel clearly and faithfully each week. With the excellent Sunday School and the YF and Just for Starters group, our family can grow up being encouraged in their faith. It is a privilege to be members in such a family of God.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:
www.portreefreechurch.org.uk

DONALD JOHN AND MARY MACDONALD



We are Donald John and Mary MacDonald, born and bred in Skye and brought up in the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian

Church respectively. We have worshipped in the Portree Free Church since our marriage in 1958, firstly under the ministry of Rev Norman Macleod, which was indeed a very enlightening time for us and our five children, Alexander, John, Katherine, David, and Jane. Donald was a building contractor in Portree, along with his brother John Peter, for fifty years, but has now retired. I professed faith in 1969 and Donald professed at the end of 2000 and became a Deacon in the congregation in 2005.

THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED CLEARLY IN SINCERITY AND TRUTH

Rev Kenny MacDonald was our Interim Moderator after the heartbreaking division in 2000, when we had to start worshipping in Portree Primary School, but he made our church a welcoming church with a great spirit of fellowship. More joy followed when Rev D G MacDonald came to us in 2003. The gospel is preached clearly in sincerity and truth, presenting Jesus as the only name under heaven whereby we are saved. The Sunday morning service is broadcast on the local radio station, Cuillin FM, and reaches a wide community. We pray that many from the greatly increased population of our village will be blessed through this ministry and will gradually join the church. We already rejoice to see so many young parents and children, and children from the community and the outlying districts, listening intently to their minister and friend, and so excited as they march out to their Sunday School classes, where there is a devoted team of teachers and helpers.

In addition to those involved in the Sunday School, there is a host of volunteers from the congregation who help out as minibus drivers and are on the rotas for teas, snacks, crèche and door duty. Our minister and his wife Debbie also unstintingly serve in the congregation and in the manse, and we all enjoy their family of five.



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

DON'T WORK TOO HARD!

Birbeck College, the University of London, have ordered a lecturer to attend a disciplinary hearing because he offered extra free tuition to students. Dr Bernard Casey offered the students an extra session after the University cut the course from 24 to 22 weeks. The University, which has an extraordinary amount of administrative staff and is reducing teaching staff, want to consider 'the detrimental effect' this extra free tuition could have on students!

JADE GOODY TURNS TO 'GOD'

Jade Goody is perhaps the most 'celebrated' of the cheap celebrity culture exemplified by *Big Brother*. The 27-year-old was recently diagnosed with cancer, and in January announced her 'turn to God'.

'I've always thought there's a God although I've never been a churchy kind of person, but now I think, why not go to church? I've got a version of the Bible which is easy to read and I look through it when I'm feeling down. It really helps. And I've always prayed but now I do find it helps. Maybe the big man upstairs thinks, she's a tough cookie, she can handle this.'

We wish Miss Goody all the best with her illness, but above all we pray that she would really come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and then perhaps she would realise the folly of making God into 'the big man' who relies on us to 'handle things'. The God of the Bible knows we cannot handle things. When to come to an end of trusting in ourselves, it is only then that we really experience His gracious help.

SLEEP

Big Bird (Sesame Street), Black Sabbath and Christine Aguilera were apparently used to torture prisoners in Iraq by keeping them awake. We can feel the pain! One of the big research areas just now is sleep. Sleep allows the brain to recover. Sleep sifts the masses of stimuli so that we can start afresh the next day. We practice during sleep. Lack of sleep is linked to mental illness, obesity, and depression. Sleep deprivation literally kills. Thankfully we rejoice that 'The Lord gives his beloved sleep'.

Prospect Magazine – January 2009.

KAKA – THE £100 MILLION CHRISTIAN FOOTBALLER

Ricardo Izecson de Santos Leite, better known as Kaka, was a major factor in AC Milan defeating Liverpool in the Champions' League final. One memorable scene afterwards was of him revealing his t-shirt, which boldly stated 'I belong to Jesus'. He also has the words 'God is faithful' stitched into his boots.

'My family, and my belief in God and Jesus, are the things which determine my life. I do want to live my life in the right way, and live my life close to God.'

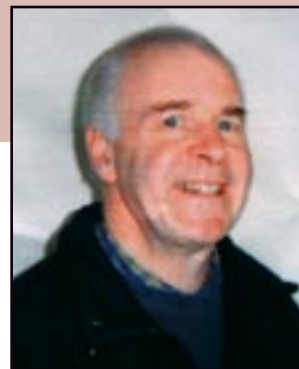
The Bible is his favourite book and he is not ashamed to admit that he remained a virgin until he was married to Caroline Celico. He turned down the offer to move to Manchester City for £100 million. Again we wish him well, although in the wider sense we cannot but marvel at the perversity of a world in which 1,000 jobs were lost in Manchester in the same week that £100 million was offered for Kaka.



LOCAL CHURCH EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND

PART TWO: DEVELOPING A LOCAL MISSION MENTALITY

MARTIN ALLEN CONTINUES HIS LECTURE ON LOCAL CHURCH EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND. IN PART ONE MARTIN HAD ARGUED THAT MISSION WAS THE MAP OF THE BIBLE, THE CENTRAL HERMENEUTIC. NOW HE CONTINUES...



Jesus' words in Matthew 28 in the Great Commission do not appear to have been in the forefront of the church's mind as a rallying cry for worldwide mission for almost eighteen centuries. Until 1792, that is, and William Carey's famous sermon, published as a tract and entitled 'An enquiry into the obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathen'. No short snappy sermon titles in those days! Carey did not use the term Great Commission in his tract, and the title for the last paragraph of Matthew's gospel, with which we are now so familiar, does not appear to be used by the Christian church until the last 100 years or so. Now this partly explains why, in our understanding, the marks (the notae) of the true church in the Reformed tradition omit that of its worldwide mission. So what are we for in the church? It's a very important question.

A similar one you may recall was once asked of Mark Twain's Huckelberry Finn, by Joanna. She had heard that in her uncle Hervey's church in Sheffield there were no less than 17 clergy, although they didn't appear to do much except 'loll around, pass the plate, one thing or another, but mostly they do nuthin.' 'Well what are they for?' she asked. Huck replied, 'why they're for style, don't you know nuthin?'

What are we for in the church? What are the marks of the true church? The legacy of the Reformation passed on to us to this very day, as seen in our ordination services, highlights three.

First, the true preaching of the Word. Second, the true administration of the sacraments; and third, the true discipline of the membership. Were the Reformers right with these three marks? Well yes, up to a point, but only up to a point. The late David Wright, evangelical historian, in his last published work, pointed out, 'These marks originated in the special context of the sixteenth century and in a quite specific ecclesio-political setting in early modern christendom. Integral to that setting was competition between different claimants for recognition as the true church by the civil authorities and the community at large.'

How did the Reformers miss one principal biblical mark of the true church? Three out of the four gospel writers end their gospels with the Risen Lord's commissioning of His disciples to worldwide mission. Actually, four out of four gospel writers, if you accept the longer ending in Mark. If this is so and if the King and Head of the church defines the church's role so explicitly and the Holy Spirit records this so comprehensively, then how can we omit this as a true mark of the true church in any age; namely, mission to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age?

The New Testament writers have used an interesting word for the local church, have they not?—namely, *ekklesia*. There were apparently a large number of words available in the Hellenistic world to describe religious groups of people who were drawn together by a common quest for salvation. The New Testament writers selected *ekklesia*—the secular word for the assembly to which every citizen is summoned and expected to attend. So the church, the assembly of God, is that to which all who will belong are summoned without exception and summoned not by the town clerk but by the living God. Summoned, that is, to do His bidding. *Ekklesia* then is really a missionary term and the church must make sure that the summons goes out, is heard, understood, and received by the whole world or that patch of earth in which we find our church located. Martin Luther once said, 'If you can't make the whole world holy, do what you can! Do what you can.'

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN GOD'S INTENTION FOR HIS PEOPLE - NAMELY THAT THEY BE OUTGOING AND OUTWARD LOOKING.

So there are some biblical foundations and theological perspectives, which, I would argue, identify and compel a congregation to evangelise in the local patch of Scotland in which it finds itself.

MISSION PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

I have four principles and in each case I have used New Testament verses as pegs on which to hang them. In each case the examples of practice are almost exclusively drawn from my own experience in the community of Chryston on the North-Eastern edge of Glasgow.

(1) Firstly, develop missionary mentality within the congregation. Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 read literally, 'Going therefore disciple all nations.' The principal verb in the Great Commission is 'disciple' and the object of the verb 'all nations', including presumably the nation of Scotland, the population of Scotland and the particular cultures and subcultures of Scotland in the specific locality of our churches. Three participles in these verses amplify the main

instruction 'disciple'; namely, going, baptising and teaching. It's the participle 'going' I want to emphasise here. The going is not an imperative. It is an assumption. Going is what God's people do. It's always been God's intention for His people - namely that they be outgoing and outward looking. Yet paradoxically, we are so often nowadays inward-looking in the Christian church, and consciously or unconsciously we adopt a siege mentality, probably because of living in a complex secular culture.

So how can we develop a mission mentality in this difficult 'present age' as opposed to a maintenance mentality? The difficulty for evangelizing today is connected, it seems to me, with the indifference to and boredom with the Christian message on the part of the masses. They think they know it but they don't; they think it has been tried but it hasn't; they think it's good advice, but it is good news. So there are reasons around for maintenance modes, but not sufficient reasons to disregard the mission mandate and the mission mentality that does with it.

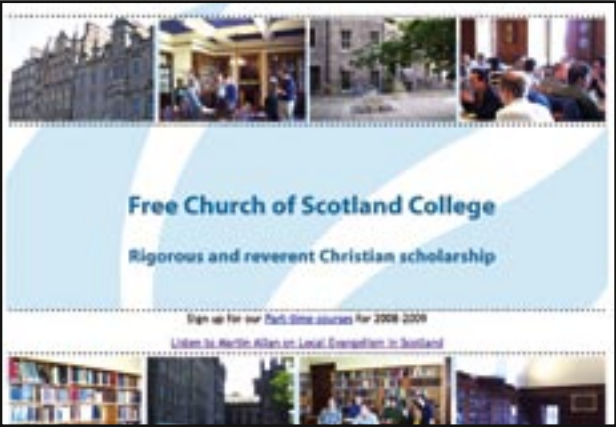
HE BELIEVED THAT EVERY NEW CONVERT AND MEMBER SHOULD BE GIVEN AT LEAST ONE JOB TO DO IN THE CHURCH

A starting point for developing this mentality might involve the explicit and continual underlining of the congregation's purpose. The leadership might beneficially adopt a congregational mission statement that reflects, in measure, the Bible's map. Mission statements are not so much in vogue now as a number of years ago. I'm in favour of them as long as they are preached on in a series of sermons to the congregation, as long as they are printed on all church literature and then imprinted on all the thinking of the various church organizations, and as long as the purpose

statement is short enough to be transposed onto cards which should be distributed to church members so that they can view it and remember it constantly. A number of years ago we adopted a purpose statement, as we called it, of 13 words: 'To see unbelieving people become mature followers of Jesus Christ within the church.' So underline congregational purpose. That's a start.

More difficult is the next stage in developing the missionary mentality, and that is in mobilising the membership. The minister of Barclay Free Church in Edinburgh in the 1870's, James Hood Wilson, had to deal with communicants' classes of 40, 50 and more during the time of revival. He believed that every new convert and member should be given at least one job to do in the church so that he or she could 'own their part in the congregation and its purpose'. We tried to follow that at Chryston. However, our principal way of mobilising the living membership for mission was to send them out on visitation programmes. For ten years we would visit a fifth of the parish every September following a letter being sent through the post to the homes concerned. Training meetings were held beforehand and visitors were encouraged to talk not about the church but about Jesus, and invitations for special meetings were to be handed out. Each year someone came to profess Christ as a result of the visitation mission. But the great spin-off was in cultivating a missional attitude among the visitors and the congregation as a whole. The year before I left, just under 100 visitors were trained and sent out to visit 2,000 homes with a range of leaflets concerning events to which people of various age ranges could be invited. An understanding of the Great Commission to disciple the nations, it seems to me, will cast us back on the Lord's own discipling ministry recorded earlier in Matthew's gospel and in particular the priority He gave to training His inner circle. Mobilise the membership.

THIS LECTURE WILL BE CONTINUED IN THE APRIL EDITION.



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ÀM TREABHAIDH

Tha mi air a thighinn chun a' cho-dhùnaidh gu bheil naidheachd nan nèamhan an-còmhnaidh math, agus gu bheil naidheachdan an t-saoghail-sa brònach. Ged a tha amannan sònraichte prìseil againn air thalamh, chan eil annt' ach 'amannan' agus an uair sin thig atharrachadh air chor-eigin. Ann an Tìr an t-Sonais chan ann mar sin a bhitheas. Cha tig briseadh air Saorsa, air Moladh, Soillse no Fois.

Anns an t-saoghal-sa, tha na h-amannan dorch a' treòrachadh ar n-inntinnean gu Solas, Soillse agus Soilleireachd. Chan e seo àite-còmhnaidh. Chan ann den t-saoghal-sa e. Buinidh e do Dhia Fhèin. Far am bi Esan bidh Solas agus Soillse.

Is e àm treabhaidh a th' anns a' bheatha-sa-mar mhìosan an earraich. Bidh daoine a' ruamhar ann an talamh fuar, agus a' cladhach gus am bi e na thalamh freagarrach anns am bi mòran a' fàs. Nach eil an Cruithear a' dèanamh seo ri talamh fuar ar cridheachan— 'le frasàn nì E tais.' Le iomadh freastal tha sinn air a treòrachadh gu Dia Fhèin, agus chun a' bheatha a th' Annsan. Cha tig sinn gu deònach glè thrìc agus is iomadh cladhan eile anns am bi sinn a' lorg adhbhar ar beatha an toiseach ach cha toir aon dhiubh sàsachadh. Bidh sinn an-fhoiseil gu bràth gus an tig sinn gu Firinn agus Solas Dhè.

Air an làimh eile, tha naidheachd nan nèamhan glòrmhor, gun do bhàsaich dara Pearsa na Trianaid gus sluagh a shaoradh o dhaorsa. Cha ruig na h-inntinnean againne gu bràth air na dh' fhuiling Esan airson gum biodh seo comasach. Bidh sluagh a' Chruitheir gu bràth ga mholadh airson an saoradh.

Mar sin, nuair a thig àm dorch le naidheachd dhorch eile nar n-eachdraidh, togamaid ar sùilean gu Mac Dhè ann an tiugh dhorchadas gus am biodh sinne air ar teàrnadh. Le boillsgeadh de na fulangasan Aige-san, cha bhi anns na dh' fhuilingeas sinn air thalamh ach nì gu ro bheag.



Mar chuimhneachan air deagh charaid, an t-Ollamh Urramach Iain Fearghastan nach maireann.

Air-ais gu mo dhaoine
Don bhail' far nach dùisgear
Aon teaghlach gu là
A' chruinneachaidh mhòir.
Dùinidh ar sùilean
's gabhaidh fois gus an ùin'-sin
san cluinn sinn guth trompaid
is Ainglean le ceòl.
Bidh losa Fhèin cò'riuth'
Is gluaisidh sinn còmhla
Don dachaigh a dh' ullaichear dhuinn
Fad ro thìm.
Suidhidh aig bòrd sinn
Aig bòrd bainnse - 's sinn còmhla
a-nise le farum, le aoibhneas is ceòl.
Bidh taingealachd spioraid san òran a chluinnear
Don Tì chruthaich sinn uile
's a shaor sinn le deòir.
Cha bhi nì ann nì buaireadh
No chuireas mun cuairt sinn
Le egal, le cràdh no le anmhainneachd feòl.
Dh'fhàg sinn iad uile
Gu sìorraidh 's cha ruig iad
Am bail' tha cho sònraicht'
Is e a' deàlradh le glòir.

Nam biodh fhios agaibh air thalamh
Air èarlais glòir tìr a' gheallaidh
Dhèanadh sibh dicheall is spàirn
An tìr nam beò.

Bha beatha air thalamh
Glè mhillis aig am'an
Ach an taca ri sonas
Bha e mar cheò
Mar sgàile -ach a-nise
Tha an là air briseadh
's bidh sìorraidheachd romhainn
ga leantainn le deòin.
Gu beò thobraichean uisge
Cha bhi dìth oirnn'
's cha ruig sinn
gu bràth air na chosg e
do Mhac Sìorraidh na Glòir.
Ach rinn Esan an obair
Is gu bràth bidh ann moladh
Is toileachas 's aighear
San teaghlach le glòir
Uil' aig an dachaigh
Gun bhàs is gun ghalar
Nach beannaichte beatha 's nach
Beannaichte glòir.
Bidh sinn uile ann còmhla
Ach is E Crìosd am Fear-iùil
Ris an coimhead sinn uile
Ann am baile nam beò.

A NATION CHARACTERISED BY HOLINESS

There is a lot of activity these days around King William's Town, mostly by people wearing yellow t-shirts. Over the last couple of weeks there have been many political rallies in our area by both the ANC and the new political party, COPE. The Eastern Cape is a strategic area within the politics of South Africa. Strangely enough, both parties have adopted yellow as their colour, so from a distance both groups look the same. Hopefully the same will not be said of their politics.

Whichever party is elected in the next elections, they will have a big task on their hands. Our country has many problems – most of which cannot be solved overnight. Many of the problems are materially based: poor or no sanitation in homes, no running water, inadequate electricity supplies, poor health service and problems in many schools. Every day we read of problems stemming from a godless society: child rape, murder, the rapid spread of HIV through selfish attitudes to sex, fraud, and theft.

In many ways South Africa is standing at the crossroads. It has come a long way since democracy. Despite the often negative image that South Africa has, much has been achieved and the amount of stability that it has is credit to some very humble, visionary people. The clearly marked path that led to change seems to be petering out and a new highway needs to be built. I sometimes get the feeling that as a nation we are standing in front of a multitude of signposts. We are reading the signs and, with a puzzled look, we are each pointing in different directions. We have some big decisions to make: decisions that will continue to mould and shape our country and the future of our children. And we need your help. Please pray for our politicians, those in positions of power and those with the right to vote.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2:1,2)

This picture of peaceful and quiet lives, in godliness and holiness, is the complete opposite of much of what has happened here in the past. There has been such bloodshed and oppression and bondage to practices that are not in keeping with God's commandments.

And yet there are pockets of vibrant peace in our land. South Africa is not a land devoid of godliness and holiness. I have met some amazingly godly people, who are not willing to compromise on holiness. Their words and actions leave all who meet them in little doubt that they walk close to God and this undoubtedly has an impact on the communities that they live in. But too often holiness is compromised. Little lies are seen as excusable because of what they might

achieve. Sometimes God's people keep quiet in the face of sin because they are not prepared with their spiritual armor and weapons. Words and actions are used to tear people down rather than to build them up. But there is hope!

However, that hope can only be realised if God's law is central in our lives and in our country.

'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them' (Eph. 5:8-11).

Holiness may seem poles apart from the world we live in – and of course it is. But we must never give up. We must get on our knees, humble ourselves before God and plead for our nations and our leaders, for our church leaders, for the parents in our land, for our teachers, for our police. But as we plead we must also be aware that we ourselves might be part of the answer to our prayers. Are we prepared to stand firm in the sea of unholiness?



I love our South African flag. The message of God's good news is written all over it.

The yellow reminds me of the streets of heaven, which are paved in gold (Rev 21:21, John 14:2).

The black reminds me of the problem caused by the darkness of sin. All men have sinned (Romans 3:23). God cannot let sin into heaven.

The red reminds me of the blood of Jesus, who died for our sins. Jesus is the only one who can save us from our sins and make it possible for us to live in heaven with God one day (John 3:16).

White reminds me of clean things. The darkness of sin disappears when Jesus comes into our hearts. We need to repent of our sins, and believe that Jesus alone can save us from our sins (1 John 1:9, John 3:36).

Blue reminds me of the sky. God will keep His promise to save us and take us home to be with Him in Heaven eternally. Green reminds me of growing things. As Christians we need to keep on growing (Psalm 1:3-4, 2Peter 3:18).

So when I see a yellow ANC or COPE t-shirt, I pray for God's saving power in the life of its wearer and pray that South Africa will one day be a nation characterized by holiness.

Jenny Wilson

BIBLICAL SEMINARY OF COLOMBIA

MANUEL REAÑO INFORMS US ABOUT HIS WORK AND LIFE IN MEDELLÍN.

This last year, for the seminary, has been one of much work, but also of much blessing and seeing the 'glory of God'. On the 21st of November we held our annual graduation ceremony, and it was very special to see 23 of our students obtain their diplomas and go out into the ministry after five years of study.

Let me tell you about just one of them. Nelson Buitrago, (pictured on the right) grew up in a very violent area of the city of Medellín. Those were times when the Medellín drug cartel and other criminal organizations were running rampant with their destructive ways. Nelson was susceptible to the lure of fast money and the gang life, as were all of his neighbourhood friends. However, because of his love for soccer, he joined a sports club that turned out to be a ministry founded by one of our seminary professors. The Gospel, presented to him by this ministry, literally saved his life, and he is presently the only one alive of all of his former friends! Nelson, after having found life in Christ, joined a local church and became a youth leader, and later was led by the Lord in 2004 to prepare himself for the ministry, and that's how he came to our seminary. Now he is back in his old neighbourhood as an associate pastor, preaching and teaching the Word of God!



Please do pray for him and for all of our graduates who have gone out into the ministry! God is multiplying the work of Christ through these trained disciples.

We have also been blessed by seeing God's timely financial provision. Continue to pray with us for the financial support of the seminary, though, as it is a crucial aspect for maintaining our ministry.



Graduates

We are still hard at work at seeing several academic projects come to fruition, such as an advanced theology programme in partnership with the Baptist Seminary of Cali, and a new programme on Family Development. We are awaiting approval by the city of Medellín's Secretary of Education for a Certificate programme that will focus on Human Development in Education.

The worldwide economic and financial crisis is hitting supporters of the seminary, and it is also reflected in the somewhat dwindling numbers of students. However, the seminary is growing in what it offers educationally, exploring another official programme to go along with theology (family development), as well as other non-formal programmes; in this way it expects to attract a larger number of students. There have been faculty members with severe family problems and sometimes it looks as if it is all about to fall apart. However, the joys and rewards of this ministry largely compensate for these and other anxieties

This year we are praying for a new class of 40 students. The church still needs to recognize the importance of having biblically and theologically trained leadership.

We hope this brings you a little encouragement to pray for us as a family and for Colombia. Thank you for your loving support along the years, which we have been too slow and inefficient in acknowledging and thanking you for ... and we can't but apologise for that, as anything else we might say would sound like a feeble excuse. So if you still feel like praying for us, here's a summary:

- For Paty; she's nearly finished her specialisation in Family Therapy, and we're still waiting to see if it will become a Masters degree. She's thoroughly enjoying it, and applying much of it in her counselling work.
- Catalina's studies, and that she can develop an understanding of her overall call in life.
- Cristina's transition as she leaves school and makes the big decisions she needs to make, and that she can find the proper career in the right place.
- Benji: that he can develop a strong commitment to all he does, and wants to do (that's a big challenge for a 14-year-old) ... and that that commitment includes and gives a strong priority to spiritual matters.
- Manuel: that he can cheerfully and graciously fulfill his responsibilities, and that the times when they seem unbearable become shorter and less frequent.
- Colombia: for the release of those still kept hostage, and for their families, who spend so many tough years not even knowing if their loved ones are alive or dead.
- That the Colombian church can bear a visible and Bible-based witness to a sick society.
- The seminary: that the Lord may bring those new students He is calling to serve Him, for its finances, and for the new projects.

A 40-YEAR-OLD IN AFRICA

HAVING RECENTLY CELEBRATED HER 40TH BIRTHDAY, **MARSALI CAMPBELL** LOOKS BACK AT HER TIME IN UGANDA.

Since I first came to Uganda in 2001, I have wondered how best to share the reality of life and work here, to give an honest yet balanced picture of the great times and challenges. As I write I am so relaxed and rested, sitting on my friend's verandah overlooking the River Nile. It's peaceful and the only movement or noise is from the spectacular array of bird-life, or from an occasional fisherman meandering down the river. I have been very busy with a combination of challenges – catching up with many folk all desiring some of my time, medical work, car problems, and much more. I was feeling so stressed and just overtired as I struggled to sleep well with so many adjustments and different places I was sleeping.

As a Christian, my life belongs to God and my desire is to know Him more and to bring Him glory in ALL that I am and ALL that I do – whether that is in Scotland or Africa. I do realise that I make so many mistakes along the way and yet I love having a purpose, a hope that gives my life such meaning. Despite all the things that I have encountered and struggled with in the past two months, indeed these past years, I LOVE the work that I feel blessed and privileged to be a part of here in Africa.



An update on things at DP – the rehabilitation process for more than 30 of our resident kids has taken place. We hope and pray that this transition in their lives will be successful and they will be settled quickly. For some, it is the first time they will have lived with family members, as they spent their whole childhood on the streets. They have found a place of refuge and safety at DP, and yet our hope for all our children is for them to be resettled back with families and in communities. Because of limited resources, we are unable to recruit new kids from the streets next year, so will remain with around 30-40 resident kids in the Home.

However, there is still much work to be done on the streets. In my health work I also work in the slum area with families from the streets, doing a variety of things like teaching about health, family planning, hygiene and sanitation, HIV and STDs and also helping in some emergency situations. I also work with Juliana, a nurse from a fellow organisation

called Tigers Club, which has a drop-in centre for street boys; we sometimes do clinics together. Juliana and I also try to visit the remand centre twice



a month to do health clinics for the kids there. Since I first started in that area in 2002, we have seen such a variety of numbers, varying from 100-800 street kids there.

As I mentioned before, I have restarted some language study. I feel it makes such a valuable contribution to my life and work here, building relationships with my neighbours and friends, the DP team, the clients, and of course my kids!

Another area that we would really value prayer for is our older teenagers going into independent living. The government does not allow us to have resident kids over the age of 18, and many of these youth do not have existing relatives or the situation is not suitable for resettlement. Some will live alone (only boys); some are in cluster homes (boys and girls), especially suitable for our teenage girls; some are studying in secondary education or in vocational skills training; some have had children, so balancing their responsibilities as mothers and students is not easy at times! We hoped to have a workshop/camp for all of them (about 60) in December, which would educate, encourage and motivate them to make good life choices.

Thank you so very much to all those who have helped recently and over the years towards the health costs here at DP – I simply could not do what I do without your support. Your aid helps so many – paying for medicines for the hundreds of kids I see at clinics, paying for dental services, HIV testing and care, eye tests and glasses, splints and wheelchairs for disabled kids, and operations for injuries or emergencies. My heart overflows with thankfulness to each of you. If you are able, please continue.

AS ALWAYS, YOU ARE WELCOME TO WRITE TO ME AT mcampbell@aimint.net

OR CHECK OUT THE WORK OF DWELLING PLACES AT www.dwellingplaces.org

A VOLUNTEER IN PERU

STEWART JOHNSON FROM SOUTH UIST TELLS OF HIS EXPERIENCE AT COLEGIO SAN ANDRÉS

If you've got absolutely no Spanish, never lived away from home and have little teaching experience, volunteering in Colegio San Andrés in Lima, Peru would not be the obvious choice. However, although all of these circumstances applied to me, in September 2008 I was preparing to swap my quiet island life on North Uist for the bustling city of Lima ...

In February 2008, I was unsuccessful in obtaining a place in my first choice university course: PE teaching at Edinburgh University. Although this door was abruptly closed, I immediately sensed that God would open another door for me, a door that would eventually broaden my horizons and cause me to be involved in His work overseas. Over the next few months, the opportunity arose through my minister, Rev. Iain Macaskill, to apply for a short-term voluntary placement at Colegio San Andrés. Straightaway I believed that this was what God wanted me to do, and this helped me face the challenges presented by such a trip.

So, on Thursday, 18 September 2008, I left British shores with plans to introduce others to God and to increase my own faith in the process. I was told that I could help teach English and also a little PE, which I was looking forward to; yet I was very nervous nevertheless. I arrived off the plane, looking worse for wear after the gruelling 12-hour journey, and the first sight I saw was the beaming smiles of the Bailey family. I immediately felt at ease. The plan was to stay with them for a few weeks until I felt comfortable enough to move in with a Peruvian family. During my time with them I came to realise what a kind, welcoming and humble family they are.

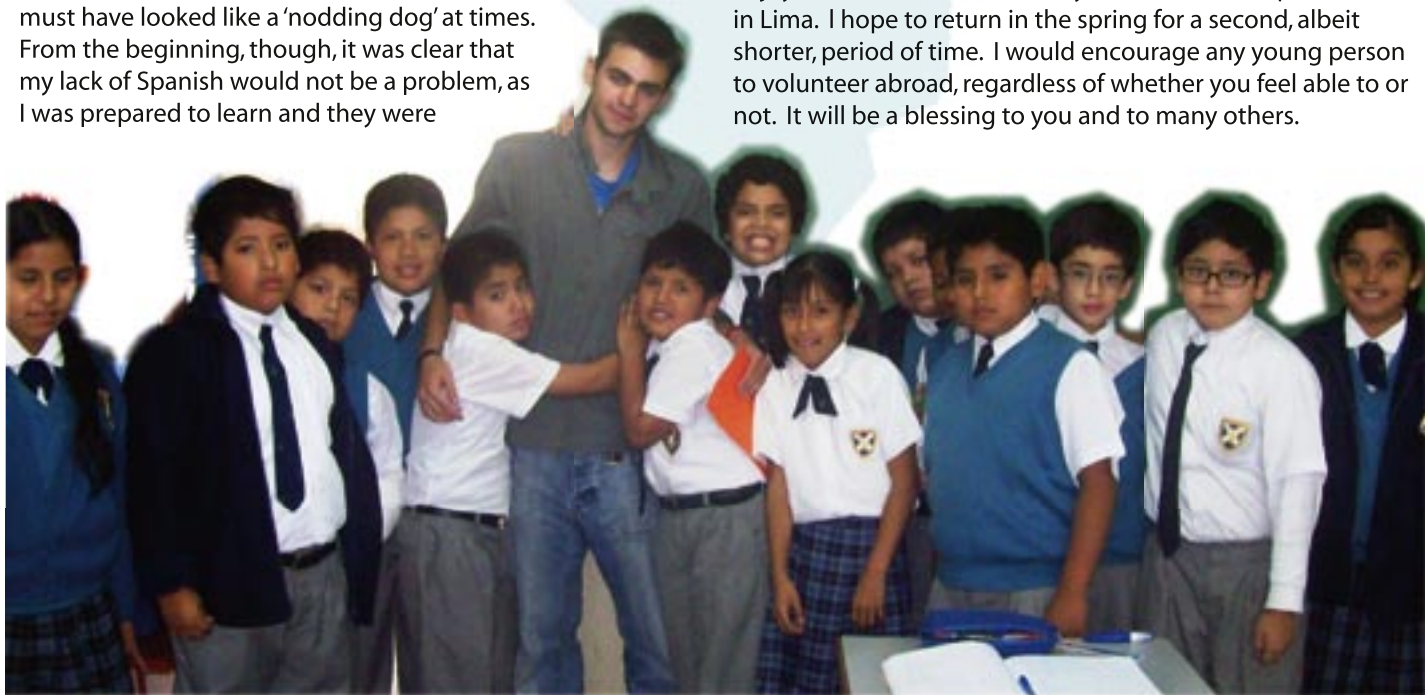
My first day of school was the Monday after I arrived, and I was introduced to all of the teachers, who were very friendly and seemed pleased to have me in the school – although I am not quite sure what their initial impressions of me were, as I could not understand a word of Spanish and must have looked like a 'nodding dog' at times. From the beginning, though, it was clear that my lack of Spanish would not be a problem, as I was prepared to learn and they were

prepared to use as much English as they had to in order to communicate with me.

The highlight of my time in Peru was the children at the school. They were warm, appreciative and affectionate, and I will never forget them. The school age ranges from 3-17, and I was to teach English to primary 3 upwards. This involved reading with them, correcting their work and speaking with them in general. I worked in the school 5 days a week and was also able to assist in some PE classes. Each school day begins with assembly and prayer, which is refreshing. Even though I couldn't always understand what was being said, I could sense that it was a special and blessed time as there is always a presence around God's Word, no matter what language.

When I became more familiar with the culture, area and language, I moved in with Mr Jorge Arevalo (a primary 3 teacher at San Andrés) and his wife Lili, who are a wonderful family and were extremely kind to me. We had to overcome challenges such as the language, my intolerance of some Peruvian delicacies and my unhealthy obsession with yoghurt. During this time, my Spanish improved significantly and by the time I left, I was able to converse to an extent in the language. Jorge and Lili are a truly Christian couple who are committed to Scripture Union and to their local church. I was fortunate to have the experience of helping at two Scripture Union camps in Chosica and Kawai (about one hour and two hours outside Lima respectively) while I was there. I was able to attend their church every Sunday, where I saw a completely different, more expressive style of worship, which allowed me to appreciate the diversity of Christ's church.

On 12 December 2008 I landed in a chilly Edinburgh and was grateful to be safely back. Although I missed Scotland in general and my family and friends greatly, I thoroughly enjoyed and am thankful for my three months' experience in Lima. I hope to return in the spring for a second, albeit shorter, period of time. I would encourage any young person to volunteer abroad, regardless of whether you feel able to or not. It will be a blessing to you and to many others.



CURRENT PROJECT UPDATE

THIS MONTH WE FEATURE SOME OF THE CREATIVE FUNDRAISING VENTURES THAT HAVE BEEN TAKING PLACE. WE WOULD BE GLAD TO HEAR OF OTHER ENTERPRISES FROM GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS.

HEALTH MATTERS 2008/2009

Many thanks to all of you who have contributed so far - the total at the time of going to print stands at £8,954.47. We do value your support, especially during these times of 'credit crunch'. Our treasurer, Mairead Morrison, would also like to thank all the many anonymous contributors who have sent donations either directly to her or via the Free Church Offices.

DESK CALENDAR FROM LOCHBROOM



To raise funds for WFM, Lochbroom Women for Mission produced a desk calendar, featuring a different church with accompanying Bible verse on each page. The response to our request for pictures and verses

was tremendous and we want to thank every church that responded.

The churches that appeared in the final copy were: Lochbroom and Coigach, Back, St Peter's Dundee, East Kilbride, Edinburgh - Buccleuch and Greyfriars, Elgin and Forres, Falkirk, Glasgow - St Vincent Street-Milton, Harris, Knockbain, Poolewe and Aultbea, and Prince Edward Island - De Sable.

We have been happy with the outcome and hope to produce another calendar in 2010 to include the other churches that responded.

Gwen Thompson

CD FROM CAITHNESS

As part of our WFM fundraising initiatives, the ladies of the Castletown WFM recently embarked on a project a little different to the norm. We decided to create a 'product' that we thought would be inspirational, unique and welcome. Our idea was to produce a CD with a variety of psalm-singing and Scripture readings. Having asked our neighbouring congregations to support us, we were delighted that 24 folk turned up for the practice sessions, with 21 available for the actual recording session. Howard Stone led us through all the psalm-singing, helping us with phrasing, diction and dynamics. The outcome we were hoping for was that of good congregational singing, and the final product exceeded our expectations. The practice sessions were a time of real joy and fellowship one with another. The project brought together a really wide age range of singers - our youngest was twelve and our oldest was seventy-something!

The recording was done in September at Castletown Free Church by a local professional who recorded everything in one memorable and lovely evening.



We would like to thank the folk who came to support us practically - and thank also those who couldn't manage but who supported us prayerfully. It has been an enriching experience for all of us involved and our hope is that our CD will bring comfort, hope, peace and joy to all who listen to it.

We DO have a few CDs left! They are priced £7 and can be purchased from either: **Mrs Christine Stone, Free Church Manse, Castletown, Caithness, KW14 8TP** or **Miss Ann Manson, 'Ruthers', Lyth, Caithness, KW1 4UD**.

If you would like to receive a CD, please make cheques payable to Orlig, Watten & Bower Free Church and add £1 for postage and packaging.

Christine Stone

SILENT AUCTION AT ST VINCENT STREET-MILTON



The ladies of St Vincent St-Milton held a Silent Auction in order to raise funds for this year's WFM project. We asked people to offer their skills and talents, which ranged

from cooking a meal to DIY, and from cooking an American breakfast to car washing! We then asked people to bid, and the winners of each bid were announced at a coffee morning.

This venture was well received and the response was very successful.

Kathmar Dow

PLEASE SEND ALL PROJECT MONIES BY THE END OF APRIL TO: **MAIREAD MORRISON, 1 COLLEGE COURT, THURSO, KW14 7QQ**. THANK YOU.

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

Amounts received by Central Office towards Congregational Target Figures. The first figure is the total for January to December 2008 and the second is the total for the same period in 2007.

Northern	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Assynt	7,513	4,733
Eddrachillis	2,980	4,660
Clyne	14,351	14,783
Bonar Bridge	16,981	15,003
Dornoch	17,374	26,700
Fearn	12,071	16,140
Golspie	18,100	19,500
Helmsdale	15,028	15,248
Lairg	7,695	8,001
Lybster	5,700	5,520
Olrig, Watten & Bower	13,375	17,500
Rogart	4,100	2,152
Rosskeen	63,283	67,951
Tain	37,814	37,780
Thurso & Reay	26,000	24,600
Tongue	321	327
Farr	1,100	2,500
Strathly & Halladale	428	943
Wick & Keiss	3,305	13,041
Total	267,519	297,082

Inverness, Lochaber & Ross	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Acharacle & Strontian	1,455	2,111
Ardnamurchan	1,676	2,308
Burghead	23,500	22,000
Dingwall & Strathpeffer	41,600	38,500
Elgin & Forres	14,938	13,797
Fortrose	28,401	28,336
Fort William	19,000	18,000
Glenurquhart	15,021	13,031
& Fort Augustus		
<i>Inverness</i>		
- Free North	117,872	118,731
- Greyfriars - Stratherrick	64,805	64,025
Kilmallie	34,844	36,989
Kiltarlity & Kirkhill	8,471	3,166
Badenoch	10,501	10,169
Knockbain	37,470	35,000
Maryburgh	19,600	18,650
Killearnan	14,366	13,960
Nairn, Croy & Ardersier	540	360
Resolis	14,029	12,329
Urquhart	23,851	23,000
Smithton-Culloden	85,200	85,308
Urray & Strathconon	45,000	43,500
Total	622,137	603,269

Edinburgh & Perth	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Aberdeen	115,233	121,457
Dundee	34,185	40,171
<i>Edinburgh</i>		
- Buccleuch	70,000	75,000
- Leith	30,664	31,523
- St Columba	28,600	28,500
Falkirk	24,973	20,973
Kirkcaldy	25,255	23,500
Dunfermline	4,488	0
Livingston		
<i>London</i>	26,155	21,430
- City	41,386	50,447
- Cobham	15,403	13,400
Perth & Pitlochry	23,604	23,118
St. Andrews	9,383	6,466
Total	449,328	455,986

Glasgow & Argyll	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Arran	9,700	9,046
Ayr	27,845	29,274
Bishopbriggs	17,222	21,000
Campbeltown, Tarbert & Islay	18,251	24,109
Coatbridge	21,709	21,688
Cumbernauld	20,000	20,000
Dumbarton	14,481	19,109
Dumfries	16,000	14,800
Dunblane	25,000	23,000
East Kilbride	15,301	14,630
<i>Glasgow</i>		
- Dowanvale	112,000	106,000
- Govanhill	24,335	24,478
- Partick	37,131	26,795
- St Vincent St	57,300	52,400
Greenock	4,591	4,482
Dunoon	3,871	3,346
Strachur	800	700
Kilwinning & Saltcoats	11,500	11,625
Lennoxtown	23,800	23,762
Lochgilphead & Lochfyneside	20,073	20,059
Mull	6,731	6,891
Coll	1,000	378
Oban	26,388	25,680
Paisley	10,525	10,213
Total	525,554	513,464

Western Isles	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Back	117,751	102,714
Barvas	39,005	35,701
Callanish	43,782	46,473
Carloway	39,767	36,932
Cross	60,500	60,335
Harris	14,212	13,820
Kinloch	42,732	45,280
Knock	61,140	54,580
Lochs	56,000	55,550
North Tolsta	28,068	29,409
North Uist, Grimsay & Berneray	24,385	22,434
Park	30,568	30,495
Point	38,206	38,729
Scalpay	21,574	21,892
Shawbost	44,643	42,120
South Uist & Benbecula	18,883	17,385
Stornoway	289,000	300,253
Total	970,214	954,101

Skye & Wester Ross	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec
Bracadale	13,770	13,062
Coigach	7,684	11,011
Duirinish	22,439	20,264
Gairloch & Kinlochewe	16,164	15,653
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	26,448	19,356
Lochalsh, Glenshiel & Glenelg	9,953	10,167
Lochbroom	24,000	27,500
Lochcarron	23,500	23,000
Plockton & Kyle	24,044	24,950
Poolewe & Aultbea	33,109	36,901
Portree	22,833	22,968
Raasay	2,409	2,001
Sleat & Strath	15,004	16,771
Snizort	7,701	10,624
Total	249,057	254,228

Private Donations etc	2008	2007
	Jan - Dec	Jan - June
Livonia	0	0
Charlottetown	356	947
Eastern Charge	0	0
Evangel. Pres. Church	19,609	475
Private Donations	46,641	23,005
Pres. Church Australia	3,686	109,276
Total	70,292	133,703

Grand Totals	Jan - Dec 2008	Jan - Dec 2007	Percentage Decrease
	3,154,102	3,211,833	-2%

New Arrivals at the Free Church Bookshop



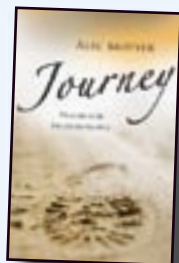
The Lord's Supper
CFP, £10.99

'Malcolm Maclean's study of the biblical basis, historical development and practical administration of the Lord's Supper in our churches is a rich blend of scholarly analysis and pastoral insight. The question of what

Jesus is doing in the Lord's Supper rather than what we are doing challenges the subjectivism that drives much of our practice, and restores a much needed emphasis on the Supper as a means of grace. This study is highly recommended.' Dr Iain D. Campbell

Journey: Psalms For Pilgrim People
IVP, £8.99

Psalms 120 – 134 are described as 'Songs of Ascents'. They recall the journeys of pilgrims from all over the land up to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of the Lord. And as the people walked, they sang. God's people today may not make quite such a journey but, as Alec Motyer contends, in living the Christian life we have all embarked on a pilgrimage of the heart.



I Stand At the Door and Knock
Zondervan, £9.50

This book contains forty timeless devotions from Corrie ten Boom. She shares with us the lessons of a life lived with integrity before God and encouraging us to trust in Him.

In His Hands: Reclaiming Your Life After Tragedy
Ambassador, £7.99

This is a story of hope that will move you. Share in this journey of discovery and experience the power of faith. Capture the uplifting attitude of Leslie Ostrander which she uses to overcome injury, tragedy and despair.



Free Church Bookshop

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0131 718 4141 bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk

www.freechurch.org/bookshop

'I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.' Psalm 40:8

- Sun 1** Today wait upon the Lord. Pray for your own congregation, that the hearers would have a real eagerness to hear from the Lord, and that the minister would be open to His Spirit.
- Mon 2** Free Church Camps are gearing up for the summer. Pray that all the necessary leaders and cooks would be found in good time.
- Tues 3** Remember those who work on the sea – as fishermen, RNLI volunteers, sailors, and other jobs. Pray that they would be kept safe and would see the power and majesty of the Lord in the maritime world around them.
- Wed 4** Pray for the leaders in the European Union as they make decisions for our wider society, and especially pray that they would have wisdom to deal with the current economic crisis.
- Thur 5** Remember Neil MacMillan as he facilitates the new strategy for the church. Pray for him to have wisdom, passion and sensitivity as he helps struggling churches look at their options.
- Fri 6** Donald Macleod's final 'Lecture in the Faith' at Falkirk Free Church is today. Pray for blessing to come through his speaking.
- Sat 7** Today give thanks – for God's good creation around us, and for the freedom to worship Him in this country.
- Sun 8** Dingwall & Strathpeffer celebrate their Communion today. Pray for them to have a clear view of Christ's glory and His sacrificial love for them.
- Mon 9** There are many Christian organizations involved in serving the destitute and homeless. Pray that their love would show people a glimpse of Christ.
- Tues 10** Psalm 122:6 invites us to 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem'. Pray that leaders would intervene to stop the violence in Jerusalem and Gaza, and especially ask for the safety of our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East.
- Wed 11** This month's *Record* focuses on holiness. Pray that our denomination would exhibit holiness in all its ways, and that you yourself would do so as an individual.
- Thur 12** Pray for the men in your congregation, that they would be wise and active spiritual leaders in the church and in their own families.
- Fri 13** Some of our Free Church College students are nearing the end of their time studying. Pray that they would hear the Lord's voice guiding them as they begin to minister to congregations, and that He would also prepare their families for a new lifestyle.
- Sat 14** Pray for the staff of *The Monthly Record* and the other Free Church magazines, that God would use us, and that we would be attuned to what He wants to say through us.
- Sun 15** Remember today the vacant congregation of Greyfriars – Inverness. Give thanks for their willingness to send John Ross to South Africa, and ask the Lord to provide for their needs.

If you have any requests for prayer or praise for the May Prayer Diary, please contact Dayspring MacLeod now. E-mail: dayspring.macleod@btinternet.com or call 0131 226 5286.

Mon 16 Our world can be scary and unpredictable. Pray that the Lord would keep our country safe from terrorist attacks and other tragedies such as school shootings.

Tues 17 Remember the work of the Scottish Bible Society as it seeks to spread God's Word, and also Christian publishers in the UK, that they would bless our country through their work.

Wed 18 Remember the Child Protection co-ordinator in your church. They have a heavy and thankless task, but it's very important for keeping our children and vulnerable adults safe.

Thur 19 Pray for the organizations in Scotland and the UK that offer support to those who are experiencing unplanned pregnancy. Ask that volunteers would receive encouragement and support as they help women and families look at options that will glorify the Lord instead of taking lives.

Fri 20 The Youth Conference starts today in Lendrickmuir. Pray for a weekend full of fellowship, teaching and spiritual growth. Remember Kenny Stewart as the speaker, and ask for safety as those attending return home on Monday.

Sat 21 Skye and Wester Ross are having their annual trip to Fairburn Activity Centre for 48 primary children from throughout the Presbytery. Pray for them to have a good day and come closer to the Lord.

Sun 22 Today is Mothering Sunday. Pray for the mothers, young and old, in your congregation, and encourage them today.

Mon 23 Pray for the primary and secondary school students in your congregation and in the Free Church, that they would learn at a young age how to be salt and light to their peers and teachers.

Tue 24 Remember Princes Charles and William, our prospective future rulers, and ask the Lord to draw them to a closer walk with Him so that they may be good leaders. Pray also for harmony in their family.

Wed 25 The Lord said that in Him, 'you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:29). Lay any worries you have at the foot of His cross, and accept His rest.

Thur 26 Remember Christians who work with those with addictions. South Uist and Kilmallie are two congregations involved with this work, as well as May Nicholson's work with Preshal in Glasgow. Pray that they may offer addicts hope of a New Life.

Fri 27 Only one week until the spring conference! Ask for a time of refreshment for all those who attend, and for the Holy Spirit to inspire the speakers.

Sat 28 The Gaelic Camp, the first camp of the season, starts today. Pray for both children and leaders to enjoy their time and to grow in the Lord.

Sun 29 A team of ten people are coming over from Dornoch's sister church in Virginia, USA, to help with Dornoch's second annual Children's Holiday Bible Club. Pray for safety as they travel, and renewed unity with their brothers and sisters in Scotland!

Mon 30 Rev Gordon Matheson has recently been inducted to Sleat & Strath. Pray that the congregation will be blessed by him and Dolina, who are to marry this summer.

Tue 31 Many of our Presbyteries will be meeting tonight. Pray for all of them, that our local leaders would make good decisions, with God's Word foremost in their minds.

EDUCATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Sir,

It is hard to see which of the many thought-provoking articles in your December 2008 edition deserve the most comment. Certainly, as regards education, it is hard to see how teachers can get on with what they were trained for (and what they are supposed to be specialists in) when they have to fill in so many pieces of paper just to satisfy the curiosity of big government.

SURELY THE HEIGHT OF ABSURDITY MUST BE A SITUATION WHERE THE SCHOOL NURSE CAN SUPPLY THE PILL WITHOUT HAVING TO TELL PARENTS, BUT IS REQUIRED TO GET PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR CHANGING A PLASTER

Regarding the undermining of teachers' disciplinary authority, it is important to bear in mind that teachers, like children, are sinners, and the temptation to use one's superior size and loudness of voice as a substitute for reasoned argument can be too great for some. I myself can recall examples of attempts to explain why one genuinely misunderstood a teacher's orders being invariably cut short with a snapped-out 'You don't think!' And surely the height of absurdity must be a situation where the school nurse can supply the Pill without having to tell parents, but is required to get parental permission even for such a trivial matter as changing a plaster - yes, even when the pupil understands perfectly well what it is for!

But what is harder to understand is the sheer rigidity of the state system. The moment a child reaches its fifth birthday it is deemed ready for formal education, regardless of whether the boy or girl is actually ready for it. On the Continent, and it is strange that your German writer could not have pointed this out, the authorities are more flexible in particular cases, with starting before six years of age being quite unusual, and deferring start till 8 or even 9 not unknown. Strange as it may sound, the children manage to catch up with remarkable speed.

Small wonder, then, that more and more parents are opting for independent schooling, or even home schooling. The latter is supported by an organisation called Education Otherwise, which keeps home schooling parents in contact. In the USA this is a very big thing; according to *USA Today*, January 5, 2009, as many as 1.5 million children in the USA are home schooled, though some do attend school part-time for subjects that their parents cannot teach them. Top of the list for reasons given were concern about the school environment, and a wish to provide the children with religious and moral instruction.

Regarding climate change, hasn't CO2 been too much of a convenient whipping boy? Yes, it is a greenhouse gas, BUT, it is a) denser than air, b) water-soluble (hence washed down by rain), and c) taken up by green plants in photosynthesis.

And while this rise of sea level cannot be dismissed lightly, nor can flash floods from intense downpours, I do find it odd that the water authorities here in England seem quick to slap drought orders on unfortunate farmers. In Coventry, where I grew up, one house I lived in had a rainwater tank that took in runoff from the roof. Has no-one ever thought of installing flood drains where flooding is a regular occurrence? Simply bore a hole down to the aquifer, then put in successive layers of fine sand, coarse sand, then gravel. This would require a geological survey, but surely it would mean floods could be harnessed, instead of simply running off into the nearest river. Each of those articles almost requires an article in itself for criticism, but I won't overload your church paper!

Yours faithfully,

Barry Gowland, Milton Keynes

INFALLIBLE? INERRANT?

Recent correspondence in *The Monthly Record* has caused me no end of grief.

Arguments abound as to the true doctrine of the Free Church of Scotland. Should the scriptures be regarded as inerrant, or infallible, or both? My own answer to the conundrum is: 'Neither'. I am also uneasy about the use of the term 'The Word of God' being applied, unequivocally, to the books of the Old and New Testaments.

Don't get me wrong. I am not for a moment doubting that God can, and does, speak to the faithful - and others - through these sacred writings, nor that they are - and should be - normative for Christians. But the term 'The Word of God' seems to be used in those very scriptures to denote something [or Someone] other than those scriptures themselves.

I AM UNEASY ABOUT THE USE OF THE TERM 'THE WORD OF GOD' BEING APPLIED, UNEQUIVOCALLY, TO THE BOOKS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

It seems useful to differentiate the various meanings of 'The Word of God' that we find in the scriptures. The primary meaning is that God speaks, and in so doing, accomplishes that which He intends. 'By the word of the Lord were the Heavens made,' declares the Psalmist; and we know what he means - that the divine fiat or Word is that which brings about the creation. And God said: 'Let there be light, and there was light.' We are all familiar with the term: 'No sooner said than done' - and of God alone is this actually true. God speaks in Creation. He also speaks to the conscience, as we can see in many places, from the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis onwards. And he speaks prophetically through his chosen servants: 'The word of the Lord came unto...' Moses, and Elijah, and Jeremiah, among many other prophets. But the chief revelation comes with Jesus, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, and who became flesh and dwelt among us. Thus we have the Creative Word, the Prophetic Word, the Incarnate Word - and they are all one, and

all made flesh in Jesus.

The scriptures provide us with a record of those comings of the Word - in creation, in judgement, in salvation - and are as such to be treasured, much like a collection of photos and cine-film of ancestors and friends long departed. They serve to bring those loved ones back into our present, much as scripture brings the saving acts of God into our present. Thus it is appropriate to follow the liturgical reading of scripture with the declaration: 'This is the Word of the Lord' and to respond 'Thanks be to God.'

But to imagine that the actual text of scripture is either 'inerrant' or 'infallible' would seem to border on the idolatrous, if not the blasphemous. We know enough about textual criticism to realise that no single manuscript of any biblical book comes to us exactly as it left the pen of the author. For one thing, it has been copied - not infallibly; and probably redacted - not uniformly; and then translated - not inerrantly. But as a whole, the scriptures still speak authentically of the acts of God in history.

The word of God certainly comes through the sacred texts, but it is not simply to be equated with those texts. After all, only God is inerrant and infallible. His servants are rarely - if ever - either. And it is His fallible servants who have given us the scriptures. But the Incarnate and Living Word is our Advocate with the Father; and ultimately it is He alone who cannot fail.

This is the Word of the Lord - Thanks be to God.

Daniel O'Hara, England

EDITOR'S NOTE

Daniel raises some very interesting and important points. Perhaps other readers of *The Monthly Record* might like to answer his points - which are so widely accepted within so much of modern Christianity.

We would simply just like to point out that the traditional understanding of the Church Fathers, Catholic Theologians, the Protestant Reformers and most of the Church of Christ up to the present day is that the Scriptures have come to us from God and are therefore inerrant. They are God-breathed and God does not breathe error. Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). It is all very well to speak of the Word of God as being something greater or even other than the Scriptures. When God spoke in Genesis One and everything came into being, He did not cite Scripture. When Christ is spoken of as the Word, we do not mean He is a book. But it is also perfectly legitimate and logical to refer to Scripture as the Word of God. If God has not spoken, then how can we possibly know the Word? And if God has spoken, which of us would dare to say that He has spoken error?

But we leave others to write in and continue this discussion with Daniel. Why is it right to call the Bible the inerrant Word of God?



Brother and Sister Walker



Irene Stevenson

SOUL MUSIC

The iPod/iPhone is a marvellous invention. Combined with iTunes, it allows one to download almost any kind of music in the world. So it was that one Saturday afternoon, having read a review in *The Daily Telegraph*, I downloaded an album entitled *Como Now - The Voices of Panola Co., Mississippi*. It has been my constant companion ever since.

The album was recorded on the 22nd of July 2006 in Mt Moriah Church, in Como, Panola County, in the heart of rural Mississippi. The producer, Michael Riley, had heard of this rural county, which had a tradition of everyone singing. In the 1940's and 1950's recordings had been made of the singing, which was done in the cotton fields and the church. The cotton fields have gone but the church is still going strong – and the singing is an integral part of it.

Riley put an advert in the local paper and asked singers to come to sing at the church that hot July Saturday afternoon. The Como Mamas, The John Edwards singers, Mary Moore, Brother and Sister Walker, Della Daniels and Ester Mae Smith, Irene Stevenson, The Jones Sisters, and Rev Robert Walker all duly obliged. The result is an album of extraordinary power, emotion and worship to the Lord.

It's pretty raw. There is no piano. No guitar. Just human voices. And what voices! Pure. Emotional. From the heart. As you listen you get the sense that this is not performance, but worship. The sleeve notes tell us that 'Folks in Como believe that God's word is "anointed". That is, the more His word is raised in song, the more blessings He can bestow on all those who hear it. Most congregations here make little distinction between performers and observers. In Como, everybody sings and everybody prays.'

Ester Mae Smith has an incredible voice. She grew up as the daughter of a sharecropper, picking cotton. It was a rough and brutal life. She says that the emotion in her voice comes

from her thankfulness to God for having delivered her from such a tough life. It shows.

Brother and Sister Walker are in their eighties, having been married for over 50 years. *I Can See So Much* is one of the first songs they ever sang together, and listening to them sing it today is an extraordinary and beautiful experience. Their son, the Rev Robert Walker, grew up in this musical family and learned as child to play a variety of instruments. Riley remarks that during the recording he sat at the back of the church, not saying a word. After much coaxing from the rest of the congregation he eventually stood up and made his contribution, *I Can't Afford to Let My Saviour Down*. Riley records, 'When he finished, nobody in the church said anything for a long while. His voice is deep and dark and resonant like his father's. But there is also something vulnerable in it that makes it very different. I think that the rare combination of power and humility in his voice is what makes his one and only contribution on this record so distinctive and important.'

For me the most moving and powerful song on the album is Irene Stevenson's *If It Had Not Been for Jesus*. It is a song of personal testimony that she wrote herself. She started singing when she was eight years old, but she did not become a believer until much later, and then she understood the real meaning of the songs she was singing. 'Real religion,' she says, 'is something beautiful that happens in church when folks don't allow things to get in between themselves and the worship of God.' She believes that people in church today rely too much on instrumental accompaniment, which can get in the way of real worship.

This music is not easy listening. It is not background muzak. It is heart and soul music. Worship music. It drives you to pray and praise and tears. It encourages you as you return from a discouraging church meeting or feel the pressures and burdens of the world and the evil one. And it makes you long for the ability and freedom to sing with such heart and soul. If you want to hear real, passionate, powerful soul music that reaches into the very depth of your being, this would be hard to beat. You can get it on iTunes or on good old-fashioned CD.