

THE MONTHLY RECORD

November 2008

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THE CHURCH IN THE HIGHLANDS

Is the Free Church abandoning the Highlands? | *The Shack* | Introducing Kilmallie

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Welcome to the November Record

This month our theme is the **Church in the Highlands**. The Highlands of Scotland is one of the most beautiful areas of the world and is an area that is associated in popular Christian folklore with revivals, godliness and a certain mysticism. Whatever the reality of these perceptions, we are certain that the commonly-held view that the Free Church is strong in the Highlands is now outdated and wrong, and the view that the Free Church is a Highland church is one that should not be defended. Having said that, it is the case that the majority of our congregations are currently in the Highlands and that we have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to bring the Gospel to this remote area of Europe. Therefore, in this month's *Record*, we focus on the Highlands.

In addition, we have reviews of three books, including the newest Christian publishing phenomenon, *The Shack*. We are also delighted that Calum MacDonald of Runrig fame gives his opinion of his fellow clansman's CD: Alex MacDonald's *Like the River* has been well received in quarters outside, as well as within, the Free Church. We particularly like his rendition of the *Tay Boat Song*. This month's *Record* also has news of the building work in Kirkcaldy Free Church, as well as the usual columns from Jenny Wilson and Carl Trueman, From the Frontiers, News and the Gaelic page.

Calvinism and the Credit Crunch: Given the panic and the turmoil in the markets, it would be remiss of us not to make some kind of comment on the current situation, which in one way or another affects us all. Despite being promised that the era of Boom and Bust was over, the fact is that, as we write, the entire capitalist economic system of the world is in danger of collapse. Doubtless it will be rescued, but at what cost? Years of deregulation, greed and the loan culture have left us in a perilous state. Adam Smith, the founding father of modern capitalism and a good Scotsman to boot, argued that if capitalism was divorced from its Judeo-Christian roots, it would not have the ability to free itself from succumbing to opportunism and greed. How right he was. The dealers in Wall Street called themselves "Masters of the Universe". What arrogance! What pride! They thought they could do anything and even managed to pay themselves \$38 billion (billion, not million) in bonuses last year. Lehman Brothers paid staff bonuses of \$8.7 billion in 2006. Their losses in 2008, up to the point they went bust, were \$6.6 billion.

Now our free marketers are sounding like Marxist socialists, wanting bank nationalisation. The trouble is that, rather than the socialist principle of public ownership of the means of production, we have the new ethic of privatised profit and nationalised debt – which means that the dealers and bankers can gamble with our money, pay themselves enormous salaries, and when they lose, they're bailed out by the taxpayer again. For them it is a win-win situation. For most of us, it's lose-lose. And for the poor, it's a disaster. Is it not extraordinary that Western governments struggle to give a pittance to eradicate world debt amongst the poorest nations, but when the money markets threaten self-destruction, suddenly a trillion dollars can be found? What our system needs is not another injection of taxpayers' money, but a good dose of biblical Christianity and the application of Christian principles.

And Finally...speaking of the credit crunch, the cost of *The Monthly Record* will be rising to £1.50 per edition as from January 2009. We have increased the number of editions from 11 to 12 and the number of pages from 24 to 32, and we feel that an extra £0.25 per month is good value. We hope you agree.

David

Meditation Moment

Read Acts 19:8-10



Paul arrives at the city of Ephesus, in what we now know as inland Turkey. After an initial encounter with a group of John's disciples, he begins to teach in the synagogue. This was his custom, to begin with the Jews and argue "persuasively" about the kingdom of God. The Word of God is never without effect – it either softens or hardens people, and in this case there was a hardening. Paul did not hang around. He left, took the disciples with him and had daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

Tyrannus ("the tyrant" – obviously a nickname!) was probably the equivalent of a lecturer in a modern university. His lecture hall would not normally have been used in the heat of midday, and it is possible that that is when Paul was able to use it. What is interesting here is the methodology used and the results achieved. There were discussions. And they were every day for two years. It is also interesting where this was done. In the city. The result was that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.

Think and reflect upon what this means. The early church had a very basic methodology for bringing the Gospel to a whole area. They aimed for the cities (Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Rome) and went for the public areas, first of all the religious and then the marketplace, the lecture halls and other public areas. Why? Because the cities were the centres of education, politics, commerce and the media. All Asia travelled to Ephesus or met and heard people who had done so. And then they travelled out from the cities to their home communities, taking these strange new ideas.

Instead of spreading himself thinly over all the villages and communities of Asia, Paul went to the cities and established churches there. These churches were not inward-looking defensive bodies, but outward-looking, bold and innovative. The Spirit used this to bring the Word to all. Is there not something that we can learn here? As well as our message being biblical, surely our methodology should be biblical? If we want the Gospel to reach the whole of Scotland/Britain/Europe, then perhaps we need to rethink our strategy and begin with the cities? Our aim is not to establish mega-churches, or rich suburban ones, but rather evangelistic powerhouses infecting the whole system with the Gospel message.

Highland Myths

Rev Kenny Macdonald is a hero of ours. One of the few men in the Free Church who really could be called an evangelist, he has done a wonderful work throughout his ministry despite, or perhaps because of, the most harrowing of personal circumstances. He is a legend. The issues he raises in his letter which we publish this month are so important that we asked a minister in the Highlands (**Chris Smart**), the convenor of the Strategy Committee (**Neil MacMillan**), and a Highland elder and chairman of the Board of Trustees (**James Fraser**) to respond to the points Kenny makes. You can read their comments after Kennys letter on page 6.

The whole process set us thinking about some of the myths that often exist in the perception about the Free Church and the Highlands. I write as someone who was brought up in Easter Ross, married a woman from Lewis and began my ministry in the wonderful town of Brora, Sutherland. The Highlands is my home area and the area where I first came to faith in Christ. I love Highland history and have had great fellowship in many Highland churches. If it was not too clichéd, I would say that my heart is in the Highlands!

Myth no.1: Highlanders are dumb - This is the stereotype so beloved by some of the Central Belt media: the Teuchter who is slow, dim-witted, inbred, religious and out of touch with modern sophisticated life. I have heard people express surprise that the Highlands had electricity, broadband and even McDonalds – apparently the ultimate mark of civilisation. There is little that one can say about such

thinking, other than expose it for the kind of racist ignorance that it is – even, or perhaps especially, when it is expressed in patronising and paternalistic tones.

The majority of Free Church congregations in the Highlands are small, elderly and slowly but surely dying out.

Myth no. 2: Highlanders are different – This is often said by those who want to create some kind of purist “Brigadoon” Highland ghetto and justify racism in another way. When asked to consider something new in the Church they state, ‘We don’t do things that way...it’s not Highland’. Far too often they identify the Gospel with one particular perception of culture, and as a result end up being incredibly ineffective in reaching out to the “White/Green Settlers” or other immigrants who form a considerable part of the modern Highlands. And again it is a myth. Of course there are particular cultural nuances, histories and traditions. But these vary considerably from area to area. They do not form a monolithic “Highland” culture and they are certainly not to be used to create a barrier to the Gospel. Whether we like it or not, culture is constantly changing. Young people in Portree are subject to the same influences as those in Partick. They are both more likely to be influenced by *Eastenders*, *Neighbours* and American culture than the local nuances of their own geographical area.

Myth no. 3: There is a distinctive Highland worship, piety and churches - This is taken as a given, mostly because of the Gaelic language. But outside of the special case of the Western Isles, Gaelic is no longer the normal day-to-day language of commerce, work and worship. The last native speaker of East Coast Sutherlandshire Gaelic died a few years ago. In 1900, Easter Ross Gaelic was spoken by 50% of the Tarbat peninsula. A century later, no one speaks it. I love Gaelic psalm singing – when done well, it is heavenly. But Gaelic style singing done in English is one of the worst sounds on earth. I was recently at a Free Church event in the Lowlands where the singing was slow, ponderous, dull, embarrassing and left me, as a Free Church minister, feeling, ‘this is weird - I don’t belong here’. Sadly, far too many people inside and outside the Free Church regard this as “Highland” worship.



Errogie Free Church, Stratherrick



Arnisdale Free Church, Skye

What about the distinctive Highland piety? This is much admired by outsiders who love the romantic view of the crofter sitting in his home reading his Bible and Spurgeon before going out to shepherd sheep, singing psalms and thinking theology. I remember being astonished to hear an English minister talking about 'our' Highland piety, and what 'our' people would like and were like. When people speak like that, it is generally romantic nonsense and usually spoken of with a misty-eyed fondness for the "good old days". Of course many areas of the Highlands had a (deserved) reputation for the hardiness and godliness of many of the people. But then, so, once upon a time, did Dundee and Dumbarton. Highland piety is no different from the rest of Scotland, including the danger of spiritual pride engendered in those who really think there is no one holy like them (we are "the last stronghold of the pure Gospel"), and the hyperbolic spiritual nonsense that those who have been brought up with "the language of Zion" use to cover the poverty of their own current spiritual condition.

God has called us to be shepherds not undertakers.

As for Highland churches – yes, there are churches situated *in* the Highlands. But they should not be *of* them. A Highland Church that is for Highlanders, whether in the midst of Glasgow or Golspie, is as unbiblical as a "black church" for black people or a middle-class church for middle-class people. Our aim should always be to be a biblical church that is open to all and seeks to reach all. Monocultural churches in a multicultural society may be a quaint means of preserving a particular culture, but they are not biblical. We are here to proclaim the Gospel and declare that the dividing walls of partition have been broken down, not build them up again.

When the Free Church began the church plant in Livingston, I remember a Free Church elder stating that it would not work because the Free Church was a Highland church that only worked in the Highlands. If we cannot proclaim and live the Gospel to all peoples, then we are not worthy of the name of Christ. The work in Rosskeen, led by Kenny Macdonald, was an excellent example of a church reaching out to the whole community.

One thing that we do need to repent of is not the under-provision of ministers and churches in the Highlands, but the over-provision. Even when I was in Brora I thought it was daft that the Free Church and the Church of Scotland both had ministers in Brora, Golspie and

Helmsdale – duplicating efforts, and in reality competing with one another. It was even more absurd that a place like Lochinver, with a population of some 800, had four churches and ministers all preaching the same Gospel. Our failure to deal with these kinds of hard questions (actually the questions were easy – implementing the answers required more guts and determination than we had) is now coming home to roost.

Myth no. 4: *The Free Church is strong in the Highlands* – This is a perception that we like to foster, but it is a false one. On the most optimistic reading, only 2.5% of the population in the Highlands actually goes anywhere near a Free Church. Take Lewis out of the picture and the situation is actually much worse. The majority of Free Church congregations in the Highlands are small, elderly, and slowly but surely dying out. When we went to Brora in 1986, we discovered a congregation of 30 people in a community of 2000. The option was grow or die – as it is for all Christian churches.

Myth no. 5: *The Free Church is declining in the Highlands because of depopulation* – There is no doubt that some areas of the Highlands have been severely affected by depopulation, and that this is a major factor that some congregations have to face. However, we also need to remember that this is nothing new and that in fact the Highlands (with the notable exception of the Western Isles and some of the more remote rural areas) is actually increasing in population. Of course many, if not most, of the young people leave for University and often never return. But that is not new, nor is it unique to the Highlands. City congregations often find a significant percentage of their population leaving every year. People movements are part and parcel of modern life and Gospel ministry. The sad fact is that we have largely been ineffective in outreach both to "natives" and incomers alike. And even with our "own" people we have struggled. The days when Highlanders coming to live and work in the city sustained city Free Church congregations have

gone. I recall one elder speaking of a thousand people being connected with the Govan Free Church, largely because of the shipbuilding. But now there are no longer the numbers to come from the Highland churches, and secondly, many of "our" people have little or no denominational loyalty and in some cases are actually desperate to get away from the Free Church. Typical of this is the young lady I met recently who, having gladly left the Free Church years ago when she moved from the Highlands, was somewhat surprised to find herself back in one and enjoying it.

Myth no. 6: The Free Church is threatening to withdraw from large areas of the Highlands, thus creating a spiritual desert

– This generally arises out of the misperception that there are "big city congregations" who are thriving at the expense of the smaller Highland congregations and that there is a central "pot of gold" in Edinburgh. The truth is that the Free Church is in no danger of neglecting the Highlands. The vast majority of Free Church resources (70%) are spent in the Highlands and Islands (10% of the population). Instead, by allowing the decline that we have – 50% drop in the number of members and adherents in the past 25 years, with only a handful of congregations closing – we are in danger of so weakening the Church that there may be nothing left at all. Bleeding dry those congregations (whether Highland or Lowland) that are seeking to develop, in order to allow a slow and leisurely demise of those that are dying, is the much more likely and disastrous scenario. We can live off the legends of the past by using the myths of the present to justify our actions. But such actions will only lead to the organised lingering death of the Church. God has called us to be shepherds, not undertakers. This does not mean, as is so often stated, that the Free Church should abandon the principle of the strong helping the weak. It does mean that we need to recognise our overall weakness and make sure that we actually have some strong so that they can help the weak.

The Truth – Myths should always be countered by truth. There are congregations in the Highlands who are reaching out, growing and developing. Kilmallie in Fort William is a

prime example of one such, and that is why we have featured it in this month's *Record*. We should be seeking to support and encourage such congregations – to aid where there is already a work going on. On the other hand, there are congregations that require first aid, even resuscitation. For that to happen, there needs to be willingness to change, repentance and involving those who can help. That is precisely what the new financial arrangements and the Strategy committee are seeking to do.

We also need to recognise the change in social, economic and technological circumstances. When the old Fearn Free Church was built, it was built not in Fearn but in the middle of a field. Why? So that everyone in the parish could be within two hours' walk of the church. Take a compass and draw a circle of two hours' driving time around that church now, and you would have dozens of evangelical churches and many Free Churches. It is supremely ironic that those who harp on about the godliness and commitment of the Good Old Days think it is too hard for people to be asked to travel 30 minutes in a car to attend a place of worship. They will gladly travel 90 minutes to go to Inverness to shop, but balk at going five miles down the road to a neighbouring church.

As for those who seek to ferment division between Highland and Lowland congregations (something Kenny Macdonald is not seeking to do), they deserve the warning from Scripture about divisive people. It is contemptible that for whatever reason, people seek to talk up division within the church and use ethnic, social and cultural distinctives in order to create disharmony amongst the Lord's people. We should have no time for either those who speak of Highlanders with contempt, or those who speak of Highlanders as though they were a special breed of saint. In Christ there is neither Highland nor Lowland. Let us get on with the work of bringing the Gospel to all the people of Scotland, and indeed to those beyond our borders. As Christians we do not recognise these artificial man-made borders. Christ is all and in all.

The Editor

The Deserted Highlands?

Dear David,

Has the Free Church abandoned scriptural teaching and Presbyterianism? Both stand for the principle that the strong help the weak. The recent Assembly decision regarding so-called non-viable congregations plunges our Church into an emergency situation. A quick look at finances shows that so-called non-viable churches send over £600,000 annually to the head office. If these "non-viable" churches decide not to send any money to head office, but to use it locally to employ a retired preacher or other available preacher from the USA or elsewhere – most already have accommodation available – how will the Church make up the £600,000 shortfall?

I was very disappointed and very surprised that there wasn't more discussion and argument on this crucial matter. Surely the discussion regarding the use of music could have given a little of its time to this life or death issue? The Highlands are rapidly becoming a desert as regards Christianity and church

attendance. A few faithful people still try to keep the church alive. A few faithful men do try to spread the Gospel and do try to feed the few starving Christians scattered throughout the Highlands – but they are so few and the task looks too much.

We surely don't need to cut off so-called non-viable parts of the body of the Bride of Christ. Do we not need to reach those parts with life-giving blood – the blood of Christ? The blood-bought flock of Christ dwells in the rural areas as surely as in the cities. The very glens of the Highlands whisper His name – the mountains and the seas declare His glory. There are people living in the Highlands. This is a Macedonian cry: please help us.

Yours sincerely,

Kenny Macdonald
Retired Minister, Golspie

Hope for the Highlands

Good leadership has to make tough choices. The Free Church is seeking to provide that role. Do we respond to the very real Macedonian cry to put a man in a Highland church for a 5-year appointment and spend at least £100K to reach a community of anywhere between 1,500-7,000 people, or do we listen to the Macedonian roar of the 40,000 – 100,000 in the cities and towns of the central belt? Sometimes the choice is as stark as that. Given that the Apostle Paul targeted cities, if we are serious about reaching Scotland, we have to go to where the majority of the population live.

I say this as one who ministers in the Highlands and loves doing so. While I acknowledge there are areas where we can have 4-5 ministers looking after a total church attendance of less than 100 people, we also have areas of growth. Recently two colleagues in the ministry called in. Between our three congregations, there have been around 160 new regular worshippers during the last four years. Much of that has been from people moving into the region. This illustrates the fact that the Free Church is not neglecting the cry in the Highlands. But neither must it neglect the 4,900,000 other souls that make up our nation. Recent Assembly changes are trying to provide the leadership that our denomination needs, and we would do well to heed it throughout the whole church.

**Chris Smart
Resolis & Urquhart**



Arnisdale Free Church, Skye

A Strategy for the Highlands?

Does the Free Church have a strategy for the Highlands? The answer to that is yes. However, the strategy developed for the Highlands is the same as our strategy for the rest of Scotland. It is clear that there is no simple answer to the problems faced by the Church in the Highlands or elsewhere in Scotland, for the underlying reality is the same everywhere: all of Scotland is a spiritual desert in need of Christ. Whilst this is the underlying reality, every situation is unique, with its own particular strengths and weaknesses, problems and opportunities. The changes proposed through the strategy process are intended to help congregations find their own answers to the unique situation that faces them.

As the Free Church of Scotland our overall strategy is clear: let's seek to win all of Scotland for Jesus Christ. That is a strategy for the Highlands and the central belt, a strategy that encompasses large, urban congregations and rural, small ones too. The committee responsible for guiding the strategy process for the Church hopes that its work will help to breathe new life into every corner of the land and to every congregation. There is no favouritism in this process towards big or little congregations, or towards north or south.

One of the great assets the Free Church has is its people. We have many gifted people scattered across the nation, with a real heart to do the work of the gospel and see the blessings of Christ shared with their neighbours and friends. The work of the Strategy Committee is to see that these people receive

the help, training and support that they need in order to be an effective witness in their communities, whether these are small rural communities or affluent urban ones. Imagine if the 5000 members of the Free Church could be mobilised to more fruitfulness in witness for the gospel – the results would be breathtaking and wonderful.

For this to happen certain things are necessary. There needs to be a willingness to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ the Saviour. If a congregation is not willing to do this there is little hope for it, no matter how large or small it is. There is also a need for local leaders with the vision to see outreach taking place. And in many situations there must be support from the wider denomination.

The support given to congregations cannot always be the provision of financial subsidies to pay for full-time ministry. The financial reality is that we cannot afford to provide full-time ministry for every congregation in the Free Church. But we are not going to be defeated by finances. We believe that congregations that cannot afford full-time ministry can continue to thrive.

One of the great Presbyterian principles we cling to is that of the strong helping the weak. As the church changes, the strong will continue to support the weak. This support cannot always be seen in cash terms, i.e. you pay for our minister. Instead, the strong can support the weak in the form of help with outreach work, prayer support, leadership training, forward planning, diaconal ministry and many other ways including preaching, whether by sending preachers or by DVD or video link.



Loch Ness from Dores

We also need to work with like-minded believers. If the Highlands and the rest of Scotland are to be re-evangelised, then we in the Free Church need to have the humility to realise that we will not do this on our own. If in some of our rural Highland communities there are two or three very small congregations of like-minded Christians, then it is to the benefit of all if they begin to work together more closely for the sake of the gospel.

As we seek to deliver the training and other forms of support needed by congregations, we have decided to begin by focusing on a small number; it is all we can manage. As these congregations are supported and helped, it is our hope that they will act as hubs, taking what they have gained and sharing it with other congregations around them. Any willing congregation can seek to act as such a hub. It is not a way of targeting resources at stronger congregations, but a means of bringing help to those who desire to move forward in the work of the gospel, large or small.

The strategy process is being managed in such a way that no congregation or situation has been overlooked. However, no strategy can foresee every eventuality, so we will seek to adapt and respond as other needs emerge. The strategy process is about enabling - enabling every congregation and every part of the church and its structures to engage in critical self-examination in order that we might all come to a greater obedience to the Great Commission. The hoped-for result is that we might all move forward together with a desire to see all of Scotland blessed by the gospel.

Neil MacMillan
Convener of Strategy Sub-Committee

Why the Current Funding System Must Give Way to the New

The Old and New Systems

The current percentage levy system is unworkable and will lead the Free Church into terminal decline. The facts are that (i) only 20% of congregations are considered to be "aid giving"; (ii) they contribute 50% of all remittances to central funds; (iii) almost 25% of remittances are received from just five congregations, and 35% of congregations with a full-time ministry do not meet the costs of employing their minister. The Church has a small number of larger congregations who are asked to support a large number of congregations that are small (and in many cases weak and declining) and to provide the bulk of the finance to support the central activities of the Church. The result is that the percentage of income levied on these congregations has reached a level

that threatens their future. Without strong congregations, all the weak will go to the wall and the Free Church will desert not just the Highlands and Islands but the whole of Scotland.

The new system proposes firstly that minimal congregations with ministry meet the full stipend costs of that ministry, set at £23,000. If they cannot do so, they may be selected for support as special cases, or alternatively by linkage, tent ministry or imaginative use of technology to share ministry with another congregation. Secondly, congregations are expected to pay an income-related levy to meet the central overhead and training costs of the Church. Thirdly, congregations would contribute a percentage of any remaining income towards central projects at home and abroad, including approved support for weaker congregations. The contributions levied would typically be reduced gradually over a three-year period, so that by the third year of operation only 50% of funding for Home and International Missions projects would be raised through levies and the remaining additional funding would be raised through project-led fundraising.

The Objections to the New System

Rev Kenny Macdonald is mistaken in his critique of the new system.

1. The principle that the strong helps the weak remains and can only work if there are the "strong" – we are trying to ensure that the strong remain supporting and that the number of supported congregations is financially manageable and strategically justifiable.
2. The figure quoted by Mr Macdonald is almost double our calculated figure. We do want all congregations to contribute; we have to be realistic, however, and accept that if a congregation can secure ministry within its envelope, then it may find another path to recovery.
3. The matter was given much careful discussion; it was presented to two Assemblies, all Presbyteries and had many hours in committee, and is being implemented over a three-year period.

The Future Vision

The Highlands and Islands is the historic heartland of the Free Church. We must address those parts that face declining and dispersed populations, as others do, with imaginative organisation and 21st-century technology. We must combine good teaching, prayerful diligence and the drawing power of project-led funding to support an ambitious programme of church planting, church recovery, and international mission. We must also chase the new centres of population within the Highlands and elsewhere. Without changing we will fail; we will bequeath not a Highland desert to our successors but a Scottish one.

James M Fraser
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Moderator Designate

The 2009 Moderator Designate is Rev Douglas MacKeddie, minister of Maryburgh and Killearnan Free Church.

Douglas MacKeddie was born to a large family in Edinburgh in 1944 and brought up in Fortrose until the age of 14. His final school year was spent in Balmacara and it was during this time that he was first introduced to the Free Church.



Most of his early working life was in the motor trade, having "served his time" as a coach-painter in Inverness, but later the opportunity came to become a sales representative with a multi-national agricultural firm.

He came under the influence of the gospel through the ministry of the late Rev Hugh G Mackay. It was during this time that he met Kathlyn Wilson and they were married in Inverness in 1968.

It was the late Rev Douglas MacMillan of Aberdeen who first suggested the pastoral ministry to Mr MacKeddie, and soon afterwards he engaged in a nine year preparation of study in Inverness Technical College, Edinburgh University and the Free Church College.

In 1982 Mr MacKeddie was ordained and inducted to the congregation in Maryburgh which became Maryburgh & Killearnan in 2002 when the two congregations were linked. Mr MacKeddie has enjoyed the past twenty-six years ministering to both congregations and the surrounding communities. He has served as a chaplain to three primary schools (Maryburgh, Conon-Bridge & Tore) and says himself the he "oves to share the gospel of Christ with old and young alike with an emphasis on a care ministry for the vulnerable".

Recently the community of Maryburgh elected him to be one of its community councillors. He also represented the community on the old School Boards until the inception of Parent Councils in Maryburgh, on which he continues to serve.

Mr MacKeddie has two of a family: Paul who is married to Kelly, and Fiona, who is married to Stuart, as well as a grandson, Samuel.

For relaxation Mr MacKeddie enjoys spending as much time as possible in the hobby of his life, gardening.

Iver Martin

Maisie's 100th

On 6 May 2008, Mrs Maisie Robertson, a member of the Dunoon congregation, celebrated her 100th birthday.

Around fifty of her friends and relations joined her at a local hotel for a birthday lunch, which contained a few surprises for Maisie. As well as her presentation of a card from Her Majesty the Queen, and an unexpected performance by a local piper, friends had also arranged a visit by Gerry McCulloch of STV's *Five Thirty Show*, which Maisie watches regularly. It was a real surprise for her to be visited by Gerry and also to appear on the programme a few days later!

Maisie still attends the church and regularly takes her place at both services on a Sunday and at the weekly Prayer Meeting & Bible Study. Until just a few years ago, she also took her turn on the church rota, providing meals for visiting preachers each Sunday.

A special midweek service was led by Graham Morrison of Glasgow, who preached from Psalm 18:28, one of Maisie's favourite verses:

The Lord will light my candle so
That it may shine full bright:
The Lord my God will also make
my darkness to be light.

To mark the occasion, Maisie was presented with a framed photograph taken on her birthday.



Pictured with Maisie are Graham Morrison, and Roddy MacLennan, elder at Dunoon and Strachur. Also pictured are Mrs Jessie Bray and Mrs Rachel Gollan, whose late husbands were previous ministers of the congregation.

We are sorry that credit was not given to Brian Averell for the photographs which accompanied the article about Dumbarton Free High's Centenary in the October issue of *The Monthly Record*.

Induction in Bon Accord

On the last Saturday of August, the Presbytery of Edinburgh and Perth met at 2.30pm with the congregation of Bon Accord Free Church, Aberdeen, to induct Rev David MacPherson as their new minister. Members and adherents of Bon Accord were encouraged by a good number of folk from other areas of the church in the south, north and west of the country.

Rev Derek Lamont, Moderator, led the presbytery and people in worship, and preached from Acts 14:23. The congregation of over 200 people listened attentively as he spoke on the ministry of the Word and church leadership. Such ministry is strategic, flexible, tireless and focused. It is effective as the minister exhibits a Spirit-dependence and a servant spirit. After Rev Neil MacMillan, Presbytery Clerk *pro tem.*, read the narrative of proceedings leading up to the day's event, and once the statutory questions were put and satisfactorily answered, David MacPherson was inducted to the charge and given the right hand of fellowship by members of Presbytery, together with ministers present from other presbyteries.

Derek Lamont then addressed first the new minister and then the congregation from Proverbs 4:23: 'Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.' He urged David to make being a minister of the Word his priority and to avoid being reduced to a congregational manager. Derek went on to encourage the congregation to help make Bon Accord a spiritual filling station rather than simply a preaching station.

At the close of presbytery proceedings, Fergus Macdonald, the last Interim-Moderator during the five-year vacancy, took the chair, and read messages of prayerful good wishes from the International Missions Board, Rev Robert Macleod and Rev Sandy Sutherland. Dr Ian MacDonald, Session Clerk, welcomed the MacPhersons to the congregation. He indicated that for David, Aberdeen is a homecoming, since he had studied there some 25 years previously, during which time he first made public profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a happy coincidence that David was following in the footsteps of his grandfather, the Rev Duncan Leitch, who had been minister of the congregation from 1929 to 1940. It was a particular joy that David had returned with Martha, his wife, and their three sons: John, Samuel and Joseph. Dr MacDonald was sure Martha's warm and vibrant personality would enliven congregational life. He continued: 'Clearly in our manse we have a family that is rich in resources for witnessing to the attractiveness of life in Christ.'

On concluding his words of welcome, Dr Ian presented to David a cheque from the Deacons' Court. Then Mrs Beth Maciver presented Martha with a large bouquet of flowers from the ladies of the congregation and assured her of a very warm welcome.

On assuming the chair, David thanked the congregation for the warm and generous welcome that he, Martha and the boys had received, and assured them of the readiness of the family to serve the congregation. Thereafter, Sandy Smith made presentations to Duncan Macleod and Fergus Macdonald, who had served successively as Interim-



The MacPhersons

Moderators. He thanked them for their diligence during the lengthy vacancy. This was followed by short speeches of greeting to the MacPhersons from Barry Douglas, Ministry Associate in Gilcomston South Church of Scotland, Chris Smart, Ferintosh, and Alex MacDonald, Buccleuch & Greyfriars. Next two brief video messages were played, one from Iver Martin, former minister of the congregation, who regretted he was unable to be present in person because of communion services in Stornoway, and the other from Eliderio Angulo, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Moyobamba, Peru, where David had previously served.

As a fitting conclusion to the event, the large congregation was treated to a sumptuous repast provided by the ladies of the congregation in the large hall downstairs, during which the MacPhersons met the congregation informally, and visitors renewed fellowship with friends in Bon Accord. The prayers of many throughout the church are that the new ministry may be greatly blessed.

Fergus Macdonald

Advance Notice

Psalmody Committee

CONFERENCE ON PRESENTING & CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Friday 1st - Saturday 2nd May 2009

Smithton-Culloden Church, Inverness

For presentors, potential presentors
and all interested in psalm-singing
nationwide.

Skye Festival of Psalmody

On a stunning, sun-drenched day in September with the Cuillin Hills etched against a blue sky, members of the Highland Harmony Singers from the Mainland, with their inimitable conductor Alistair Murray, arrived at the newly opened Portree High School. There they joined with the enthusiastic Skye members led by Mairi MacDonald. In all, there were 80 members in the choir drawn from several denominations throughout the Highlands, ready to praise the Lord together!

In the time between the rehearsal and the Festival, an amazing spread of savouries, sandwiches and cakes was provided by an excellent team of Skye ladies. The Skye men also helped with the stewarding, and a group of girls ensured that everybody had a programme.

By 3pm, the auditorium was well filled when the Chairman for the afternoon, Rev Ivor MacDonald, Staffin, welcomed the choir and the audience of at least 200 to the new school.

An excellent programme of singing psalms both familiar and new followed, with the audience participating in seven out of the seventeen items. Two of these were sung in Gaelic, preceeded by Norman Campbell, Inverness.

Also taking part were Rev Donald G Macdonald, Portree, Rev Daniel Sladek, Dunvegan, and Rev John de la Haye, Wick. A short Gospel message given by the Chairman, Rev Ivor MacDonald, centred on Psalm 40:3, 'He put a new song in my mouth, A joyful hymn of praise to our God.' It was a most apt choice for that afternoon.

He referred to the fact that humans were created to sing. Many people love to sing; schools and colleges have their songs, as do soldiers, football supporters and countless others. And The Bible clearly showed that God is a God of Song. Mr MacDonald gave four very telling examples:

In Job 38:7, God's description of the creation points Job to the fact that 'the morning stars sang together and all the angels of God shouted for joy'.

Moses, Miriam and the Israelites followed their deliverance

from the bondage of Egypt and Pharaoh at the Red Sea with a vibrant song of praise to the Lord in Exodus 15.

Mr MacDonald described the third reference as a gem of a verse tucked away in Zephaniah 3:17: 'The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.'

The final scripture he referred to was Revelation 5:12, describing the time when this world is over, and a new song echoes around Heaven: 'In a loud voice they sang: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.'

'He put a new song in my mouth, A joyful hymn of praise to our God.'

To sum up, Mr MacDonald encouraged us that no matter how dreadful we might think our singing sounds to ourselves and our family and friends now, if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we will have a new song in our hearts! Such a song will bring joy and gladness, as well as grace for strength and patience to cope with the trials of life that come to all.

The day couldn't finish, however, without a final spread of home baking, tea and coffee to sustain all for their homeward journeys, far and near! As the sun began its slow descent into the West, all who had entered into the spirit of the Skye Festival of Psalmody that day could sense they had experienced the blessing of God as they had united their voices to sing His praise in four-part harmony.

The co-operation of Miss Cath Macdonald, the Head Teacher of the new school, was greatly appreciated, and helped to make the Festival such a success.

The collection for the Barnabas Fund that afternoon raised an amazing £1,030.

Jane Graham, Inverness



Building for Tomorrow: The Three-Year Plan

The General Assembly... instruct the Sub-Committee (Strategy) to invite all ministers and office bearers to a church-wide discussion of the Plan and its implementation and instruct the Board to bring forward a report incorporating the detail of the Three Year Plan for approval by the October 2008 meeting of the Commission of Assembly.

- from the Board of Trustees Report Deliverance adopted by the 2008 General Assembly

Please do not stop reading! This conference was different, perhaps unique. Starting in January 2005, three rounds of Strategy conferences have been held. The first three conferences were for ministers and office-bearers; then, open to everyone, were two rounds of seven conferences each, in various parts of the country. A series of vision papers on various aspects of church life was issued. Presbyteries and church standing committees were informed and consulted. The event on Saturday 13th September 2008 was one of the final steps in what was an extended consultation about the future of our denomination. Over a hundred ministers and office bearers attended the Inverness conference, and many more were simply unable to come and submitted apologies.

The Three Year Plan, the culmination of all the discussions, was explained to all presbyteries in the weeks preceding the conference, with the one exception of the Skye and Wester Ross presbytery, which missed out on the presentation through unforeseen circumstances.

The level of consultation is probably unprecedented – the Inverness conference was Number 18!

So what happened at Inverness? We were asked to *use all the brain cells present* to decide if the basic concept of the Plan was valid and if the related proposed actions really covered the ground. We had to consider whether the pyramid, the key structure in the Plan, was a reasonable model.



A job to be done: On arrival, delegates were - without choice - divided into six groups to go into fuller discussion on the different levels of the pyramid. If we were allowed to choose, who would have gone for Finance or the General Assembly groups?! This hopefully led to more objective discussions than would have taken place if we were allowed to choose our favoured topics. Each group worked through its assigned area, assessing how it fitted into the Plan and what changes would need to be made. Do check the Free Church website for the plan – www.freechurch.org - there's just not the space to print it here.

The level of consultation is probably unprecedented – the Inverness conference was Number 18!

What emerged?

- There were very helpful new insights and suggestions for better implementation of the various levels of the Plan, and these, having been recorded by the group leaders, were reflected in the Plan presented to the Commission of Assembly on 1 October. If you are interested in the detailed reports from the groups, just e-mail the Clerk to the Strategy Committee at pmorrison5@ntlworld.com
- Only a tiny minority felt that it was all right to leave things as they are and not to consider policy or organisational changes. They had a depressing, though limited, effect on those around them. There was broad agreement that renewed thought was necessary to meet the situation faced by the denomination, but more importantly, for the sake of Christ's Kingdom in Scotland.
- Perhaps the greatest problem of the Plan was the terminology. We need better words than "hub", for example, because it gives the idea of a central church in control, whereas our basic concept is one of reorganising resources for mutual strengthening. A hub is useless on its own! Any suggestion for a better word?

Not trapped by lack of choice: The second group session was devoted to general discussion of questions of practical application under *Timetable for Action*. In this way, conference



Over a hundred ministers and office bearers attended the Inverness conference

members were able to discuss the practicalities of the Plan in their particular situations. These were the questions posed:

What would / could / should this mean for my fellowship?

How could it / what would make it work?

Would I be prepared to commit to a plan like this and encourage others to do so?

If so, why, and how would you do that?

If not, why, and what would need to happen to change your mind?

What emerged?

- Overall there was a realization that, in application, the Plan presented huge challenges, but also a practical framework for the way ahead.

- The Plan, although developed entirely separately from the new financial arrangements, gave a more positive context for their application.
- 'Unless the Lord builds the house' – a sense of the sheer futility in our efforts if He is not at the centre.
- The great need for prayer.
- The endless possibilities if the plans are undergirded by His grace, and if the creativity of thought displayed at the conference is channeled by that grace.

'It was a good day' and 'I felt we were really going somewhere' were the overall impressions.

The Commission of Assembly has endorsed the Plan. Let us go forward with renewed energy in the Work!

Peter Morrison

The welcome and hospitality of the ladies and gentlemen of the Greyfriars congregation was unsurpassable. Many thanks to them!

Free Church Youth Conference 2009

Lessons for the Heart:

The Life of David

Dates: Friday 20th - Monday 23rd March

Location: Lendrick Muir SU Centre, near Kinross

Speaker: Rev Kenny Stewart, Downvale

For more information contact fiona@tain.co.uk or visit www.freechurch.org/youthconference



Introducing: Kilmallie

Four years ago, an article appeared in this magazine with the opening words, 'Where's Kilmallie?' For those of you who cannot recall the article, the answer was, 'Kilmallie is just north of the West Highland town of Fort William.' Our church building is located in the village of Caol. It nestles in one of the most spectacular locations in Britain; Caol enjoys stunning views of Ben Nevis and equally stunning loch views. The church building is right in the centre of housing. The parish of Kilmallie also includes the villages of Corpach and Banavie.

Fort William and Lochaber is acknowledged as the Outdoor Capital of the UK. There is no other area in the UK where it is possible to participate in so many outdoor sports activities as Lochaber. Its main attraction for visitors is Ben Nevis, an amazing mountain offering superb walking and mountaineering experiences. In a typical year, Glen Nevis receives approximately 450,000 visitors. Approximately 100,000 people visit the summit at 1344m above sea level. Lochaber also hosts the Scottish Six Days Trial, which is a prestigious annual motorcycling international event, and also the Mountain Biking World Cup.

Over the last few years, the Kilmallie congregation has witnessed God answering their prayers as they have experienced a steady growth in all aspects of the congregation's work.

An annual summer outreach to the community through a Holiday club has been very successful in giving a good impression of the church, as the gospel is presented in a fun, interactive way, and new children and their families are introduced to the church building and its people. Over the last few years some young teenagers have become part of the congregation, and eight of them attended church camp this summer, most of them for the first time. The growth of the Sunday School in particular has resulted in the need to purchase a portacabin for more space.

There is quite a contrast in the Sunday worship services, as the morning is busy and lively with so many children; the evening worship is quieter, which is particularly appreciated by the six Sunday School teachers!

Kilmallie has witnessed God answering their prayers as they have experienced a steady growth in all aspects of the congregation's work.

Home Bible studies have been useful in encouraging new believers in their faith. Over the last three years, the men and women have met separately over the winter months, but just recently they have come together to attend a Christianity Explored Course. This was begun initially as a means of preparing the congregation for evangelism in the future. At the time of writing, about 40 people from varied backgrounds and understanding of Christianity attend this.

One group the church is particularly grateful for is the Evergreens. Once a month the retired folk from the congregation get together for lunch at the manse. After a good feed, they can catch up and have fellowship together. Whilst they may feel unable to join in some of the other activities of congregation, through Evergreens they keep up with what's going on and are then able to pray for the work. Two years ago, a young woman from the congregation came to help at Evergreens and became a Christian!

Other groups in the life of the church are Jelly Tots (a parent and toddler group) and Road to Recovery, a support group for those who have an addiction problem or those who live with someone with an addiction.

The numerical and spiritual growth of the congregation has been matched by its financial growth over the last three years, as quarterly



Making a splash at the congregational outing

figures in this magazine will show. We are thankful that, through the givings, we have been able to submit more than what is required to Central Funds, and at the same time purchase temporary additional space, furnishings and technical equipment for running Christianity Explored. A new venture this year will be a web link with the Free Church College part-time course, and we hope people from other local congregations will be able to join us.

Growth and change in the congregation demands commitment of time and other gifts. The congregation is served by the minister, Rev Christopher MacRae, four elders, Mr James Cameron, Mr Craig Murray, Dr Alan Massie and Mr David MacCallum, and one deacon, Mr Keith Pettinger. Others are actively involved in the congregation through visitation, hospitality, helping with youth work, keeping finances in order, leading Bible studies, and providing a listening ear for many who struggle with the difficulties life brings.

On a practical level, our building is in need of transformation, and we are in the early stages of considering how best we can use the building now and in years to come.

Much of what is said here is positive, but there are often times when we feel our impact is but a drop in the bucket when we see so many in the community we serve in need of the Good News of the gospel. They are valuable to God. Jesus loves them. So many of them don't know that. Please pray for us as we commit to making a difference in the lives of individuals and families in Kilmallie.



We are the Chambers family: Darren, Annette, Siobhan and Arienne.

Darren and I were married in May 1997 and were not churchgoers at all. We had a little boy called Kieran in March 2000, but unfortunately he died at birth. The hospital chaplain was very good to us, but I still worried about where Kieran was – whether he was in heaven or not, and why this had happened to us. In February 2001 we had a little girl, Siobhan, who was born seven weeks premature. She had to be put on life support to help her breathe. Thankfully, she came through that and got home after four weeks in hospital. We then had another baby girl in November 2002. Arienne was born five weeks early, and she had to be transferred to another hospital 150 miles away. At the time they thought she had bowel problems, but eight days later we were told she had Cystic Fibrosis. I started to think, "Is there really a God? Why is all this happening to us?"

A couple of years later I was a member of a committee of a Gaelic playgroup called 'Croilegan', which my children attended. In January 2005 the building we were using had a burst pipe, and we had to quickly find other premises. That's when I approached Chris MacRae, the minister of Kilmallie Free Church, who was a native Gaelic speaker. He was

delighted to let us have the use of his church for our group. He joked that we had to come to church on a Sunday if we wanted to use the hall! This did make me think. Soon after that Darren was down at the church putting a trampoline together for us when he read a poster on the wall with a verse from the Bible on it. After reading it he got a feeling inside that he had felt 13 years previously, when he had prayed with a friend. He tried to ignore it but couldn't. He decided to go and visit Kiki (Chris MacRae) to talk about the feeling and God.

"Is there really a God? Why is all this happening to us?"

We decided we would go to church the following Sunday to see what it was like, and couldn't believe the feeling we both had afterwards. Even the children seemed different – in a nice way. I thought, "surely a building can't do that to us". So we went again the following week and got the same feelings. That's when we realised God was working in our hearts and that it wasn't anything to do with the building. Now going to church is an important thing in our weekly schedule. The minister and congregation at Kilmallie Free Church are very supportive towards us. We know now that Kieran is at peace and that there really is a God who is looking down on us at all times.

.....

16 years ago, I lived next door to this guy who said he was a born-again Christian. He never preached to me, but he did listen and he answered all of my questions. One day he prayed over me, and I had a feeling like my heart was being ripped out. Little did I know that this was the start of a new life for me.

I did nothing for another 13 years, when my wife asked me to build a trampoline for the nursery that used a room in the local church. While in this room I read some scripture on the wall, and BANG! It was the same physical/spiritual feeling I had 13 years ago. It was unmistakable and undeniable. I knew what was happening and I was also very scared and excited at the same time.

I didn't know what to do or what my wife's reaction would be. But God knew what to do. He put me on the same work shift as a committed Christian who grounded my first steps. He introduced me and my family to a gentle and dynamic minister and my wife to a strong and caring minister's wife. He gave me an understanding and supportive wife. He surrounded my children with a loving and faithful congregation. He knew what to do. I professed my faith, was baptised with Siobhan and Arienne in June 2005, and then I became a member of the congregation.

As a family we have gone through trials and we face challenges, but I know with all my heart that God is with us on our journey. We still worry, laugh, cry and argue! In other words, we are a normal, average family, but we have a peace that money can't buy. We have a focus that isn't on us but on a loving God who blesses and guides us.

Kilmallie Sum

Our church gives us a loving, fun family environment for our children to learn to lead a better life. It is the one stable thing in my life that doesn't change. It gives me warmth, guidance, true friendship and support. It's a place that challenges me and gives me joy. Sometimes I don't "want" to go all the time, but I know I "need" to go.



My name is Joan MacLennan. I have been a member in Kilmallie Free Church since 1968, and professed faith under the ministry of Professor Donald Macleod, who was the minister in Kilmallie at that time. I live in the village of Corpach, approximately three miles from the Church.

I was brought up in a Christian home and taught the Word of God and the catechism at an early age, for which I am profoundly thankful. However, these blessings do not bring salvation, and I needed to come to a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus for myself.

The congregation has seen a big change since 1968, with many of the original members and adherents having moved away due to retirement, and many have passed away.

It is vital to belong to a local Church and seek to serve the Lord where we are placed.

I attend church on the Lord's Day, and the mid-week prayer meeting as much as possible. Ladies' Bible studies, which are held fortnightly over the winter months, have proved to be a blessing to many who wish to learn more about the Bible, and I am glad I am able to share my Christian experiences and lead these. This year the Kirk Session decided to start a Christianity Explored Course due to the recent growth of the congregation, so I am involved in leading a group. I also have the dubious pleasure of being the congregation's treasurer! This has been a challenging role in the last while, with all the changes required for charities.

Quite often we hear people say, "I can still be a Christian without going to church." This is quite wrong, and it is vital to belong to a local Church and seek to serve the Lord where we are placed. The Bible teaches us that we should love one another, and I feel this is best expressed in a willingness to help others and to have a servant mentality like our Saviour, as we can do nothing without Him. However big or small our "corner", we can and should all contribute to the unity of the body of Christ. We should seek to grow in grace and show forth the fruit of the Spirit of God in our daily lives.

Last year you got the chance to hear about the holiday club that took place in Kilmallie Free Church, near Fort William. We had an excellent time and were prayerful that this would happen again this year. God did not disappoint!

Again we handed out forms through the three local primary schools in which we are involved. By the holidays, we had 80 children signed up, and the week before club this had risen to 100. Having only hoped and planned for 70 children, I must admit that I was having concerns about being able to accommodate and care for so many children, but by the time the first day was over, all such worries were gone.

Our theme for this year was "Champions' Challenge" (by Scripture Union*), to tie in with the Olympics. It was very sporty and the children were kept active for the full session. The teaching was based in the Gospel of Luke and focused on Jesus being our "Trainer", "Physio", "Team-mate", "Substitute" and the "Winner". The teaching was split into five different slots, with different team members being responsible each day. There was a character witness, a DVD slot, a memory verse challenge, a group discussion time, and a testimony time where one team member shared how God was at work in his or her life. In between there was singing, crafts, games, "Slam Dunk", and the drama.

The team we had this year were excellent and very well balanced! Some people had done a lot of children's work, and others were new to it. Some were experienced in children's work but were new Christians. Around 30 people from our own congregation were involved in a variety of ways, five from other local congregations, and seven from around Scotland. Our thanks go to all these people for giving up their time to help us, several taking the week off work to do so.

Several of our teenagers said it was like being at camp again – recharging their spiritual batteries to get ready to go back to school.

As well as enjoying visitors who come from around the country to help us, we are blessed with seeing our own people growing in their faith and developing the talents that God has given them. This year the organisation for both the crèche and the crafts was delegated out, as the various leaders had become confident in their own abilities. Various adults had moved from being group helpers to group leaders. This was great to see.

Summer Outreach



Team GB Holiday Club 2008

You might think that looking after about 90 children a day would be hard, exhausting work. It was tiring but not in a draining way, and the programme for the day flowed really smoothly, even when we had to occasionally change plans due to "technical hitches".

One of the highlights of the week was the work with the High School and Primary 7 pupils in the evening. On three nights, some of the team went down to the church to play football, make jewellery, and get to know and share their faith with the children. This year we had between 20 and 25 attending each night, which was really exciting. The first 45 minutes were spent in various activities, and after some refreshments the rest of the time was spent looking at God's Word and applying it. It was great to walk into the church at night and see so many teenagers studying the Bible. Several of our teenagers are Christians, and one of the real blessings for them during the week was having older young Christians around to talk to and learn from. Several said it was like being at camp again – recharging their spiritual batteries to get ready to go back to school. It was also great for the P7's to be introduced to older teenagers that they will see in the high school on a daily basis and meet at the SU group and at church.

As always, the hard part of the club is what to do afterwards. How do we keep contacts alive and help people see the

relevance of what their children have been learning during the club?

Points for thanksgiving:

- Willingness of the congregation to help the work through prayer, time and practical support;
- The team bonding so well and working well together;
- The smooth running of the daily programme;
- New people attending church since the club.

Points for prayer:

- Follow-up – how best to encourage families and children make the leap into church life;
- Christianity Explored – we have begun the course this year in the hope that we can use it next year as a follow-up for parents from holiday club;
- Youth fellowship – we have seen a few new faces come along, including some boys. Pray that they would grow together and spur each other on.

Fiona Walker

* The material we used was very good, and we also found a host of support materials linked to the theme for the 3-5 age group and the 11-14 age group from the Scripture Union website (www.scriptureunion.com).



***Faith's Reasons
for Believing: An
Apologetic Antidote to
Mindless Christianity
(and to Thoughtless
Atheism)***

**Robert L Reymond
Mentor, 2008
£11.99**

This latest book from Professor Robert Reymond is a substantial re-writing and updating of a small book published in 1976, entitled *The Justification of Knowledge*. Now out of print, but still in demand, the earlier work was designed as a primer in apologetics, to which the author has added material from his *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, as well as other material.

The result is a collection of essays that straddles theology and apologetics. Professor Reymond's concern is to counter the charge that Christian faith is irrational. Faith, as the title puts it, has reasons for believing. Everything that faith believes is both reasonable and capable of defence.

Such defence is not just the calling of academic apologists. As Professor Reymond reminds us in the opening chapter, every believer is called to be ready to give a reason for his hope to whoever asks: 'Christians should be able to articulate the rational ground for their Christian hope' (p20).

For that reason, chapters 2-7 explore our grounds for believing in Christian theology as an intellectual discipline, for believing that the Bible is God's Word, that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, that He was conceived of a virgin, that the miracles of the Bible are credible, and that Paul was supernaturally converted on the Damascus Road. Each of these lines of biblical testimony build upon the "five pillars" of Christian theology that Reymond highlights in chapter two – Christ's theological method, His mandate to teach the nations, the apostolic model, the activity of the early church, and the nature of Scripture as the revealed Word of God. The anchoring of apologetics in these biblical foundations is the strength of Reymond's work.

But the author's concern is deeper than this. He wants to present reasons for faith, and not evidences for faith. It was, he contends, the problem with the older, Warfield methodology, that it 'sought to build upon the base of adequate evidence grounds for the Christian's personal faith and the validity of the Christian faith as a whole prior to personal commitment, making its appeal on terms that would be acceptable to the reasonable non-believer' (pp246-7).

Reymond sees this as an undercutting of the Reformed faith that Warfield is concerned to defend, and too much of a concession to fallen human reason. He sees the classical

apologetics of R C Sproul and the Ligonier school as following the same Warfieldian methodology. Reymond's own model is a form of Van Tillian presuppositionalism, but even Van Til is critiqued as being 'anti-scriptural' in places (p379).

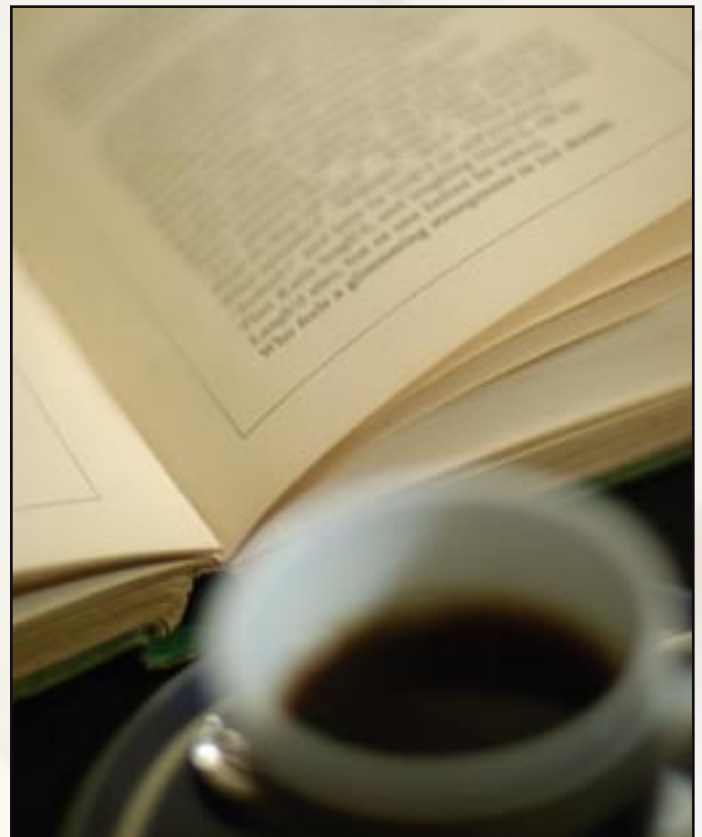
The central chapter rejecting evidentialism is followed by chapters on faith's reasons for believing in the triune God of Christian theism, the authority of the Bible, the nature of biblical truth, Christian ethics, and the Pauline method of Acts 17 in reaching a postmodern generation.

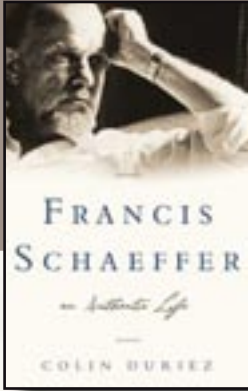
My main problem with the book is the ordering of the chapters. The logical flow of the book would have been greatly enhanced had the discussions of biblical truth, authority and theistic reasons come at the beginning, followed by a more chronological sequencing of the reasons for believing the testimony concerning Christ (why is the chapter on Jesus' resurrection before the chapter on the virgin birth?). It also would have helped to have the discussion on Warfield's method at the end of the book.

As it is, the book appears as a disjointed collection of discussions; but that should not detract from its value. There is much of help here. Reymond is nothing if not thorough, and he has trawled both the Scriptures and secondary sources to give exhaustive treatments of his subjects.

There is much in this book to aid us in the defence of the faith; but, perhaps more importantly, there is much to help us work out a method of defending the faith that is itself consistent with the faith we are defending.

Iain D. Campbell





Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life

**Colin Duriez
IVP (Hardback)
£12.99**

There is no doubt that Francis Schaeffer was one of the leading Christian thinkers of the 20th century. Through his several books published between the

late 1960s and the early 1980s, he enabled many Christians to assess all aspects of life from a Christian viewpoint. As with many others who read them, his writings helped me in several ways, even if at times I did not agree with all his conclusions, and I am still grateful to God for the way Schaeffer helped me as a young Christian in the 1970s.

Since I was familiar with his books, I was quite surprised, when reading this book, to discover that I knew very little about Schaeffer apart from his work connected to L'Abri in Switzerland. I assumed that he had always been serving Christ in the manner for which he became well-known: helping individuals to think through the reasons for believing in the existence of God, or working out practising faith in Christ in the changing world of ideas that marked the first decades of the second half of the 20th century, or assessing the drift of Western society further into an anti-Christian morass, which he did by analysing art and music as well as philosophy.

This hardback volume is not an assessment of Schaeffer's ideas. Instead it is a biographical account that surveys the various periods of his life. The main incidents in his life are explained clearly, with as much background information as necessary. We are given a well-written biography of a very important Christian thinker that gives many reasons for becoming familiar with Schaeffer and his work.

First, the life of Schaeffer is another reminder that the Lord often takes His servants from unusual backgrounds and prepares them for future roles. Schaeffer was born into a working-class family in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1912. His parents at that time were not Christians – indeed, they regarded the church with suspicion; furthermore, they were not interested in the arts or literature of any kind. Yet, as a teenager, Schaeffer became interested in philosophy and literature and also discovered the beauty of classical music. Later in his teens, he became a Christian after reading through the Bible and discovering that it answered the questions he was asking about life. It is obvious that even then God was preparing him for his future ministry among the questioning young people of the 1960s and 70s.

Second, Schaeffer shows us that it is possible to change direction in ministry and yet have an effective influence in unexpected ways. He was a respected leader in a separatist denomination in the United States, The Bible Presbyterian Church. No doubt his thoughts had been developing even

during the years that he was within that denomination, but it was a visit to post-war Europe to investigate the state of the church there that seems to have been the catalyst for his change of direction. At that time, the Protestant church was tottering against liberalism on the one hand and being misdirected on the other by the increasing influence of Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox theologians. Barth may have been asking the right questions, but he was providing the wrong answers (as a theological student at the newly-begun Westminster Theological Seminary, Schaeffer had studied Barth and other such theologians under the guidance of Van Til). Schaeffer determined to provide biblical answers to the many questions arising in the minds of people as they saw a new world appearing, especially as a consequence of the 1960s.

Third, I found this book to give a moving insight into the quality of family life that surrounded Francis Schaeffer. The involvement of his wife Edith in his work is described well, and at times it is easy to see how much she contributed to his ministry. Her missionary background in OMF, where her parents had served the Lord in China without advertising for financial support and by adapting themselves to Chinese culture and language, helped the Schaeffers during the years in which they lived by faith, especially after their move to Europe. Many other features of their marriage and family life are revealed throughout this work.

The life of Schaeffer is another reminder that the Lord often takes His servants from unusual backgrounds...

Fourth, the volume reveals the surprising breadth of Schaeffer's abilities, and I will mention one example. Although he is best known for his intellectual analysis of the thought world of his time, he was also an accomplished children's evangelist (he instigated an organisation called Children for Christ, which developed helpful practices for communicating the gospel to children). Of course, there may be an obvious lesson in this - if we cannot explain the faith to children, will we be able to explain it to adults?

Lastly, I would suggest that Schaeffer's life exemplifies two important principles of Christian leadership. The first is that he discovered that the basic outlook of a true leader is to implement an answer to a basic question: "Where would God have me serve Him best at this stage in my life?" The answer for Schaeffer was demanding and required courage, but he discovered that the God who called also opened the doors and provided the means. Connected to this discovery is the emphasis Schaeffer placed on prayer, and some marvellous examples of answered prayer are given in this book. But I am not going to specify them, so if you want to know what they are, you will have to read the book. Well, I'll mention one. What would you do if you were in a plane that was about to make an emergency landing in the middle of the Atlantic? And what happened next? Read the book.

Malcolm Maclean

Building for Jesus - in Kirkcaldy

A community lacking facilities and suffering from deprivation, and a congregation with a vision to work with the community and needing space to grow: these were the driving forces behind our decision to extend our church building.

The run-up to the building work was lengthy. A building group of three people with relevant expertise was formed to operate under the oversight of the Deacons' Court. A lot of time was spent discussing options with the congregation and the architect, Crawford Mackenzie. In the end we decided that we needed to provide a larger and better equipped kitchen, a café area for our community café, and a counseling room for use by drugs counsellors and other agencies making use of our building to facilitate their work in our local community. These new spaces would also provide improved accommodation for our Sunday School and Youth Fellowship, and make it easier to provide meals for congregational lunches and outreach events.

The Building Group went through a lengthy tendering process in order to get the work done within budget and to the correct specification. They tried to foresee all eventualities and to make provision for them in the budget.

The next step was to ramp up our fundraising. Andy Pearson, our community worker, produced a DVD explaining the project. The DVD introduced the church and community and explained the building project. We then sent out hundreds of DVDs to those whom we hoped would give financial support. The DVD cost a couple of hundred pounds to produce (plus a lot of blood, sweat and tears on Andy's part), but through it we raised around £13,500 in the space of a few months. The income to our building fund this year now tops £24,000. We also borrowed £40,000 from the Board of Trustees of the Free

Church of Scotland to supplement the money we raised.

With a budget and specifications agreed and the funds we needed in place, we signed a Minor Works Contract with the builder, Steven White Developments, and work began in May and ended on schedule in July. The building work went smoothly with no real disruption to congregational life, and our builders were a pleasure to work with.

Keep praying that this work will be used to win many souls for Christ

The end result has met all our expectations and more. We are delighted with the work that has been done, and the new facilities have already enhanced the ministry of the church. The building feels much more spacious and airy, and the flexibility the new accommodation gives is a great boost. We have a vastly improved kitchen, making things much easier for those involved in catering activities. It is about two months since the work was completed and we are already seeing more people coming along to activities based in the church and to our café. We anticipate that after our 'official opening' in a few weeks' time, this growth will accelerate.

Our heartfelt thanks go to God for His help and blessing in all of this, and also to the many kind and generous people in the Free Church and beyond who contributed to our building fund. We have been humbled and blessed by your kindness. Keep praying that this work will be used to win many souls for Christ.

Neil MacMillan



Our new counselling room, which can also be used for Sunday School and Youth Fellowship

Donald John Morrison Elder, Callanish



The congregation of Callanish continue to mourn the passing of their Elder, Donald John Morrison. He was born on 24 April 1923, one of a family of five, with two brothers and two sisters. Donald John was called up to the army on 12 February 1942, and most of his service was with the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment, until his demobilisation in March 1947. Like many of his peers, he seldom spoke of these years; however, one of his contemporaries reported that Donald John was present in some of the worst action areas of World War II, serving in Africa, Italy, France and Germany. Basically a shy person, his reluctance to speak about his wartime experiences was also repeated insofar as his spiritual life was concerned. However, he was heard to tell of one occasion that markedly influenced his life. On duty as machine gunner, he was asked to report to a superior officer. In his absence the post came under attack, and the soldier relieving him was killed. He always saw this as the hand of God protecting him.

Following his demobilisation, Donald John spent a brief time in a Stornoway factory, and from there he moved to Glasgow, where, in 1948, he joined the Strathclyde Police. He completed 28 years' service, and at retirement held the rank of Sergeant. During his time in Glasgow he attended Govan Free Church, and it was here that he professed faith in Christ, taking these first steps in following his Lord and Master in 1965. After his retirement in 1976 he moved back to Callanish, joining the membership of that congregation, and in 1983, along with others including his brother John Peter, he was ordained an Elder.

His conduct during the war and as a police officer was exemplary, and without question the same could be said of his Christian life and witness. He loved the company of the Lord's people and was a contented and frequent participant at many of the gatherings and fellowships that were very much a focus of his generation. He fulfilled the role of Congregational Treasurer for many years, until ill health made him surrender the burden. As poor health continued to dominate his life, church attendance was a visible struggle; yet the pleasure that he derived from being in company with the Lord's people was immeasurable. Latterly, as his health progressively worsened, he had to enter into Dun Berisay Care Home. Shortly afterwards he was hospitalised, and it was there that he passed away, having run the race with patience, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of his Faith.

Donald John was a diligent office bearer, a gentleman by nature, and a man of prayer who often bore the burdens of his community to the Lord. Such prayers are missed in this world, but we believe they are still being answered. We remember the nieces and nephews and all the extended family in our prayers.



The extended foyer leading to our new kitchen and café area



Church Open Day

On the 18th of October, we plan to have an 'Open Day' to celebrate the completion of all the building work. This will provide us with a perfect platform to invite local residents into the church to see our brand new facilities. During the day we'll have loads of food on offer and games for the kids, as well as a home baking stall. The outside agencies and support services that use the church during the week will also be invited along to display information and to chat to locals about the various services they offer.

We've timed the day to perfection, as we'll have a mission team over from Mississippi during that week, so we'll have plenty of helpers on hand! The open day will be an ideal opportunity for the congregation to get to know local residents better and to publicise our church services, toddlers' group, Saturday café, and the other community initiatives we are about to begin. It promises to be an exciting day, a day when the church and the community gather together under one roof.

Andy Pearson





Ùrachadh

Madainn Disathairn' aig Òrdaighean Shiaboist leugh sinn an còigeamh caibideil de Dhàn Sholaimh agus ghabh an teachdaire an rann mu dheireadh mar cheann-teagaisg . Bha e beannaicht' a bhith ann agus prìseil a bhith a' faireachdainn 'Saill a' sileadh anns gach àit' O cheumannaibh gu rèidh.'

Lorg mi notaichean air a' chaibideil-sa agus sinn ag èisteachd ris an t-Urramach Murchadh Macamhlaigh nach maireann ann an coinneamh ùrnaigh Ghriais anns an t-Sultain o chionn iomadh bliadhna.

Bhruidhinn e air cho sèimh sa bha Crìosd a' tighinn agus an eaglais na laighe anns an leisg spioradail. B'iad na facail, 'mo chalaman' a labhair E. Thuirte e gu robh an calaman glan ged a bhios a nead salach agus thog e na briathran, 'Tha sibh glan ach chan eil sibh uile glan.'

Chuir ise dhith trusgan a dleasdanas agus bhruidhinn e air cho marbh sa dh' fhaodas sinn a bhith eadhon an-dèidh amannan dùsgaidh. Nach e an fhirinn a tha an sin?

Tha Crìosd a' gluasad agus ga dèanamh comasach a bhith deònach. Tha ise ag èirigh ach tha comharradh Chrìosd air a' ghlas. Thèid creideamh gu toll an dorais.

Nuair a tha e air chall tha i a' tuigsinn gu feum i slighe fear-turais a ghabhail. Nach eil seo cho coltach rinn fhìn? Glè thrìc nuair a tha camadh anns a' chrannchur is ann an uair sin a dh' fhòghlamas an Crìosdaidh tòrr. Chan iarradh duine slighe dhuilich ach dh'iarradh gach Crìosdaidh toradh air a' cheann thall.

Nì sinn leisgeulan anns an leisg spioradail agus cha bhi ùrnaigh againn. Faodaidh sinn Crìosd aithneachadh ann am Meadhanan nan Gràs agus an-dèidh làimh 's dòcha nach cuir sinn na tha sinn air a chluinntinn gu feum.

Ged a tha tiodhlachan math, is e a tha math E Fhèin.

Nuair a tha an eaglais anns an Dàn air a h-ath-bheothachadh tha i 'tinn le gràdh,' agus cha dèan càil feum dhi ach Crìosd Fhèin.

Nach e an fhirinn a tha prìseil! Bha sinn ann an Griais còmhla o chionn iomadh bliadhna air ar n-ùrachadh leis an dealbhsa, agus a-nis bliadhnachan mòr' an-dèidh sin tha sinn a' cluinntinn gu bheil E àillidh agus gur e seo, 'fear mo ghràidh –sa agus mo charaid.' Nach e beatha a tha falamh gun Esan a bhith còmhla rinn agus nach e beatha a tha làn le bheannachd?

(Seinnibh seo air fonn Moravia.)

'S ro-mhilis blas mo smuaintean air
nach àlainn seo ri luaidh
gun canadh peacach sàraicht' sgith
'san fhàsach dh' fhàs cho cruaidh.

Gun canadh e gur toil leis fhèin
Bhith an lùchairt an Àrdrigh
A' tasgadh nithean diomhair shuas
Nach dealaich ris le tim.

Tha mionaidean an sligh' gach neach
Sam meal iad làthaireachd Chrìosd
Bidh Esan ac' cho àrd mar rìgh
's iad fhèin cho buailte sìos.

Cho peacach aingidh is cho truagh
Gun choimhliontachd nam feòil
Gun nì sam bith ac' a bheir iad
A dh' ionnsaigh Rìgh na Glòir.

Nuair chanas Esan, "Fosgail dhomh"
Nach duilich gu bheil sinn
Cho tric ag ràdh, "Chan urrainn dhomh
Chuir mi mo thrusgan dhìom."

Tha an là a' tighinn 's chan fhada thuig'
Sam falbh sinn uil' a-chaidh
Nach sona nuair sin bhios luchd gaoil
's luchd-faire anns an oidhch'.

Nach tig Thu a-nis dh' ionnsaigh ar n-àit'
Is dèan do chòmhnaidh ann
Cùm sinne faisg air innleachd slàint'
's dèan E ro-phrìseil dhuinn.

Mur eil an Tighearn' làidir treun
Na dhaingneach dhuinn an tim
Nuair bhios E oirnn' mar bhalla –dìon
Nach sona laighe sìos.

Bhith laighe sìos fo sgàile-san
Mar mhiannaich càch o shean
Bha dòchas àraidh aig an eaglais
Ris a' ghaoth an ear.

Chan eil an sin ach pìos den bhàrdachd ach shaoil mi gur e fagaisgeachd Chrìosd a bha na rinn a' miannachadh, agus gu robh seo gu math coltach ris an earrainn air an robh sinn a' beachdachadh.

The Highlands of Scotland: The Promised Land?

For many of our students, Scotland is seen as the "promised" land. Recently, after a spate of spring cleaning, I took a number of old calendars with pictures from the Highlands of Scotland in to show the students. There was a great picture of Inverness with the Free North Church in the foreground, where Alistair had been an assistant minister many years ago.

The calendars were snapped up by students who wanted to have their slice of Scotland. Over the next week, the students often joked with me, asking if I would take them to Scotland with me next time I went. Some students also asked if there was some kind of scholarship that they could apply for so that they could do one year of their studies in Scotland.

Many of them have the view that because all of the Scots they have met (all Dumisani lecturers) are Christian, that Scotland is a very godly place. They assume that it is virtually crime-free, poverty-free, AIDS-free, unemployment-free – all that South Africa isn't. Of course, for a Scot reading that list, we know that the story is very different.

Would our churches be able to provide the support and help that our students would need?

In fact, if I were to draw up a chart comparing both countries on various aspects of life, Scotland would not always come out tops.

Over the last three years, we have adjusted to life in South Africa, acclimatizing to changes in weather, culture, traditions, language, finances, education, friends, family and church. The students' desire to visit Scotland set me thinking of what changes or "culture shock" they would face.

Of course there would be the obvious changes of climate. This is not something to be discarded lightly. I would think that Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) could be a very real problem, especially for people who are used to the enormous skies we have here. You would have to look up at a South African sky to understand that. Then there would be the apparent affluence of Scotland compared with the poverty faced by most South Africans. There would be the bewildering choice offered by the supermarkets. Instead of two types of porridge oats, numerous brands would be available. Public transport would be another baffling part of life. Instead of being crammed into very noisy minibus taxis, where within minutes everyone is your best friend, there would be the impersonal double-decker buses or trains where eye contact is avoided and everyone pretends that no-one else exists.

I would also suspect that their understanding of 'ubuntu' would not be realized in the UK. *Ubuntu* is the South African concept of man's interdependence with man. It is played out



Jenny Wilson

in strong family and community units. Everyone has a sense of responsibility for everyone else. In times of need, even distant family members will help out without being asked. Coming from this support network to the more reserved, anonymous and impersonal society into which the UK is fast developing would, I think, be a big shock. Would our churches be able to provide the support and help that our students would need? One would hope so, but in reality I am not sure how easy it would be.

But probably the biggest culture shock would be the lack of Christian ethos in the country. This would be heightened by their perception that the country that sends them missionaries must be a godly nation; yet, in reality, it does not have the overt Christian ethos that South Africa generally has (in practice, if not officially). Even though their understanding of the Bible is not always accurate, their desire to have their faith with them in all areas of life is commendable. Even now, school staff meetings begin with prayer, as do staff meetings in other government organizations. Even in government schools, the day begins with Bible reading and prayer. Banners fly above the main roads advertising Christian concerts and services and calling people to prayer for their country. Most cars have bumper stickers proclaiming God's love. To be a Christian is the expected norm. Most people will pay lip service to Christianity – even if they have not had a personal experience of God's saving power in their lives.

One of our friends who recently visited the UK said that she couldn't wait to get back to South Africa, as it felt as if God had deserted the UK.

To find that level of godlessness would, I think, come as a great shock to people here. Rarely do you hear people swearing or blaspheming in the streets – in English, anyway, although there may be many unsavoury words in isiXhosa that we have yet to learn!

But even now, as thousands of South Africans are leaving their country each year in search of a better life, we have a duty to be salt and light in the darkness that surrounds us wherever we live, and point others to the real Promised Land – which even now is being prepared for the children of God. A land where there is no pain and suffering. A land where there is no crime or fear. A land where 'there is no need for the sun and the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.' Rev 23:21.

Opportunities in Colombia

Fiona Christie keeps us informed about her experiences.

Mission to the Atlantic Coast

"You give them something to eat." These words of Jesus from Luke 9 echoed in my head as I faced hundreds of people desperate for food and clothing during our month-long mission to displaced communities in Cordoba, the region north of here. It was great to get to know another beautiful part of Colombia, but the extreme need left me feeling helpless and frustrated. New experiences for me were sleeping in a hammock, mixing cement, laying bricks, travelling three to a motorbike, treating children for lice, and supporting people in the process of grieving. One of the highlights was taking part in an art therapy workshop for people who had experienced various kinds of loss. Some of the participants had been forced off their land quite recently; it was a privilege to accompany them as they processed their sense of loss, and wonderful to see the therapeutic effects of art alongside words of hope from the Bible.

Apart from some minor accidents, we were kept safe, and were able to get involved with all sorts of projects. This trip reinforced for me the need for the local church to be salt and light in their community. A short-term mission team can have a lasting impact – we helped build a toilet block for a displaced community – but that is no substitute for the ongoing work of the Church, faithfully proclaiming Jesus and sharing the news of His wide-ranging salvation. Continue to pray for these communities and the churches that serve them.

Now I am back teaching and am thinking of setting up an English library. There are plenty of resources in English in the Seminary library, but it will be a year or two before my students will be able to access them. What they need are simple children's books. The combination of pictures and limited vocabulary is just what they need to gain fluency in reading. If you have one or two children's books lying around, why not parcel them up and send them to the postal address



Local children

below? They might take a while to arrive, but once they are here, they will make a huge difference to the students' learning.

What the students need are simple children's books to gain fluency in reading.

Urban Mission

The seminary has given me some time to get involved in other projects, and I have started to help at an urban ministry run by a Christian agency here. Once a week, we take bread and hot chocolate to a downtown hostel. Afterwards, we take what's left over to those living on the neighbouring streets. It's difficult to know where to begin to pray: drug addicts, prostitutes, teenagers sniffing glue, alcoholics, and scores of children are all desperately in need of the life that only Jesus can bring. Pray for God's light to shine in that dark place.

The Urgent and the Important

Please pray for me to be able to be strategic in the way I use my time: I'd like to be able to leave a programme of study in place when I leave, and at the moment I seem to be living from class to class. Pray for me to be able to think ahead a little.

If you wish to send a children's book to Fiona, the postal address is:

FUSBC, Apartado Aereo 59004, Medellin, Colombia



A rural dwelling

Why Africa?



Marsali Campbell explains why she is returning to Africa.

My, what a year this has been! When I left Uganda in spring 2007, I had no idea what was ahead of me – and I am thankful for that! I had some thoughts of what might happen as Rita and I planned for deputation in May/June, but we had no idea she would need major surgery just as we were about to begin. After a busy summer, I was preparing to start Bible Studies at International Christian College (ICC) in Glasgow – however, we were shocked and devastated to lose my Dad so suddenly and unexpectedly. But God knows our appointed times of birth and death, and what a blessing it is to know that my Dad is in heaven eternally.

However, I started my studies in September, and was astounded to realise how much I enjoyed them! I valued both the lecturers and students who made the subjects so interesting. Most classes were very interactive, and with such an international student body, the discussions were so valuable.

I have had a truly wonderful summer. I was very tired when I completed my studies in June, as I had tried to balance study with deputation and family and friends. I had a spectacular trip to Israel, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and then came back to Scotland and just had lots of time with my family. After six years in Africa, it was wonderful to have such an open time to relax.

It would take too long to speak about the many ups and downs of the year, but I would like to concentrate now on answering the question: Why Africa?

Many of you know that my calling to the work in Africa was gradual but strong. I was happy in my life and work in Scotland when I started to feel a great desire to work in Africa. I was sure I was to go with AIM, but at that time I had no idea which country I would go to, or what kind of work I would do. After initially thinking I was to work in rural community health, everything changed and I was asked to

consider working with a Ugandan Christian team that was working with street kids. I said yes, that yes has stayed yes, and it has grown into a stronger yes as the years pass by. My involvement with Dwelling Places has been a roller coaster of highs and lows; I often describe it as the best job in the world but also the most difficult at times. Our ministry to reach and rescue children living on the streets is a privilege to be a part of. It has grown into a multi-disciplinary team. Our work has endeavoured to develop in four main areas: rescue of the street kids, rehabilitation in a two-year residential programme, reconciliation with any family members, and resettlement back into homes and communities. For those for whom we find no family members, or for whom the situation is not safe or suitable for resettlement, we endeavour to find foster or adoptive families. We are also trying to develop an independent programme for our older teenagers.

The health work has developed alongside this, sometimes pioneering into new areas such as the remand centre where many street kids are held, and into the slum areas. The main priority for the health work is our residential kids, although we do try to help as many as possible. We want children to know God, to know they are loved and cared for and respected. Our health work endeavours to be holistic, caring for them physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically.

All this may still not be answering the 'Why Africa?' question. Because the real answer is in the calling. I need to know that this is the place where God wants me to be. It is indeed true that there is desperate need all over the world, especially in health work, and especially with children. If I was staying in Africa based on whether I liked it, or whether the work was going 'well', I would have been long gone! I am returning to Africa because I believe with my whole heart that that is where God wants me for this time.

My heart is so excited to be returning home there, and yet the reality is that I will miss my family and friends here. I need to find a new place to stay, which I am really praying about, as I would love to settle as soon as possible and feel 'at home'. I also need much prayer for doing some more language studies in Luganda. I have spoken to the DP team about trying to balance my time for that in the first few months, though I can never know how that will work itself out in reality – health work is notoriously unpredictable!

Dwelling Places is now a registered UK charity. If you are interested in finding out more about the work of Dwelling Places, please check out www.dwellingplaces.org

Also, my own website is being revamped and should be up and running soon – www.marsali.co.uk



Resettlement. One of the Dwelling Places houses.

From London to Lima

This month we hear from a volunteer, **Marianne Silva**, who was helped by our Support a Volunteer Fund and from **Ruth Bailey**, who tells about the welcome contribution made by Marianne to the life of Colegio San Andrés.

For those of you who haven't had the privilege of knowing me, I'm a 19-year-old fashion student, born and bred in London. My family and I attend the London City Presbyterian Church (LCPC). My father is Peruvian and my mother was a missionary in Lima 30 years ago. Being half Peruvian and having visited Peru at various times, I must say I considered myself accustomed to the culture and all its unusual and wonderful ways!

Ever since I was thirteen, I dreamt of going to Rio de Janeiro and working with street kids. Well, it wasn't to be. Brazil turned into Peru and street kids turned into the students of Colegio San Andrés! None of this happened until I had worked for two summers six days a week.

I knew a fair bit about the Colegio as my father is a former student, and of course the Church is always getting updates of school events and things to pray for. The first week of school I was quite nervous, as I was meeting and getting to know my classes and the teachers. However, I was very warmly welcomed by all the teaching, administrative and maintenance staff. The children were welcoming too, but that was seasoned with a little curiosity. They were somewhat surprised to find that the volunteer was slightly unorthodox for a teacher, teaching the primary school kids the correct words to the songs from *High School Musical*! That broke the ice very quickly!



Thumbs up for the camera!



Marianne (in red) with pupils

Provisionally, I got on very well and had fun with my students. I think I spent more time singing and dancing with them than actually teaching them English!

I felt part of the school community straight away. There were so many events that I could never get bored! On the second week the school gymkhana took place - a day full of fun games when everybody competed to win points for their Houses. I was surprised to see how competitive they all were. Even the five-year-olds in first grade were screaming at their classmates to jump in the sack faster or to put more effort into it. They were very disappointed if their team didn't win an event. I was asked more times than I can remember to which House I belonged and some were very disappointed when I answered. Huge banners were made with slogans on them, T-shirts were painted, and faces were painted in House colours! It was a day that had been looked forward to by so many and it certainly lived up to expectations.

In Colegio San Andrés, the teachers are allowed to teach the Gospel freely and put up scriptures on the walls. Every day there is assembly, where the Gospel is explained. We sing hymns and Psalms, and the primary children know countless verses - that put me to shame! It's very encouraging to see such freedom and enthusiasm for God's Word in so many young people. God is definitely blessing Peru, and I believe that this developing country will prosper as the Gospel permeates society more and more.

The school's social work project for 2008 was to help provide school materials for children living outside the city in a shantytown called Pachacutec (named after the greatest Inca ruler). The town is home to 300,000 Peruvians who are

living in extreme poverty, some of them in shacks made out of cardboard boxes. I was expecting to see an area of about five hundred people, but on arrival I was stunned to see the vastness of it - plots as far as the eye could see. I travelled with the four head prefects, and as we entered *el barrio* none of us spoke. The prefects had lived their whole lives in Lima but had never been exposed to poverty on such a vast scale.

We spent the day with around a hundred excited kids. (We weren't as lively, as it was 45 degrees!) The children seemed thrilled to hear that I wasn't from Peru and even more so when I spoke their language! They took great delight in my weird accent. Before that I thought I sounded like a local!

My trip to Peru and working in the school has helped me a great deal in putting into perspective the privileges that I have and enjoy.

A month later we returned to Pachacutec with Clive Bailey and all the prefects. This time we were loaded with writing pads, pens, pencils, and lots more stationery, and the novelty of balloons and smiley-face stamps. The students of Colegio San Andrés had all been so generous, from the young children in primary one to the older ones in fifth year secondary. I was overwhelmed by the amount of gifts.

Over 130 children had gathered in the church in Pachacutec to receive the new materials for their schooling. God has been so generous to the pupils at San Andrés that they were all able to give so much to the underprivileged. There was plenty to go around. I found it quite touching to watch the faces of the little children light up when they ran to collect their goodies. The contact with these children was one of the highlights of my time in Peru. I was thrilled to be part of this outreach.

I wouldn't have been able to do my year out in Lima if I hadn't had support from others. My church was able to support me in a very generous way, and thankfully, I was able to apply to the volunteer fund that Women for Mission provide. This all greatly contributed to my finances. If you are considering doing voluntary work such as I did, please do not hesitate to get in contact with WFM or other such groups.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time abroad. It was an added bonus getting to live with my family and getting to know them all (I have a HUGE family). I miss living in Lima and working in the Colegio and hope very much to go back after university.

My trip to Peru and working in the school has helped me a great deal in putting into perspective the privileges that I have and enjoy. I am more grateful to the Lord for the blessings I already have, rather than asking for more. As the apostle Paul says, 'I have learned to be content whatever my situation.'

A Short-term Volunteer...

In March 2008 Marianne Silva came to work in Colegio San Andrés as a volunteer, helping out mainly in the English department, where her contribution was very much appreciated.

Being a bright, outgoing girl, she soon made friends among both staff and pupils. Although she had no teaching experience, she had a very good but respectful relationship with the pupils.

Her other contribution to the school was photography. She is an expert photographer and took many photos of the work in the school and also of the social work undertaken by the pupils. Some of her photos have been used in publicity of the school.

Marianne is missed by pupils, staff, and parents, and the school is very grateful, not only for her contribution to the crucially important English teaching in the school (native speakers are highly regarded), but also for her willingness to serve God and the young people in San Andrés.

Ruth Bailey, Lima



Enjoying school

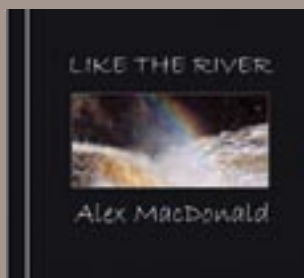
... Could You Make A Difference?

Have these articles encouraged you to think about volunteering for short-term missions, either at home or abroad? WFM's Support a Volunteer (SAV) Fund may be able to help you too.

For further information and an application form, contact :

Mrs Maggie MacLeod
8 Sutors Rise, Nairn, IV12 5BU

We look forward to hearing from you!



Like the River

Alex MacDonald

£10

Available from the Free Church Bookshop or online at www.alexjmacdonald.co.uk

folk songs *Newfoundland* and *The Tay Boat Song*. The latter is a tribute to Alex's father, who was a singer of note, and this was one of his favourites.

The CD launch helped with the fundraising initiative for an extension to the Free Church building in Kirkcaldy – located in one of the country's most socially deprived communities, where the church is engaged in ever-expanding social and gospel outreach. It is with that in mind that one song stands out as a beacon of purpose for the whole project. *Big Man Big Heart* is the tale of a man well-known in Free Church circles and an inspiration to a generation of many young Highland Christians – the late Rev Douglas MacMillan. It is poignant to note that it is Douglas' son Neil that is now the minister in the Kirkcaldy charge.

And so the work continues - as it must. *Like the river*.

Like the river, the work of the committed Christian never stops flowing. The Rev Alex MacDonald has recently swapped hats to involve himself in one of his great passions – song. Having played guitar and indulged his hobby as a singer/songwriter for many years, it is good to see a collection of his work now gathered together on one CD.

But for Alex, the music is much more than a mere hobby – as with all that he does, he will see within this medium the place of the message and the potential for spiritual expression and for the uplifting of the spirit. The arts are an entity that the Scottish Presbyterian tradition has not easily embraced over the centuries, and it is good to see here a gift recognised and duly expressed.

The songs themselves are very much the product of the singer/songwriter genre - folk songs of place and of humanity, sung and arranged with simplicity, honesty and integrity and with no small amount of message. Acoustic guitar, drums and harmonica set the musical soundscape, and it is Alex's talented sons Doug and Rob that provide the bulk of the instrumentation.

Alex MacDonald's great strength as a songwriter is his ability to tell a story, and this is perfectly executed on the epic opening track *The Fall of Tam Moncrieff* - a wonderful monologue in the genre of the story song and the ballad tradition – an engaging tale of good, evil and moral principle. Tom Morton referred to the song as a Calvinist take on Bob Dylan's *Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts* - and it is Dylan (whom Alex has always studied assiduously) that is very much the reference point throughout the CD in terms of mood, structure and influence.

Other songs on the album include *The Runner*, a song written about his brother who, whilst working as a surgeon in India and treating a patient with rabies, caught a reaction to the anti-rabies serum and was struck down with MS. He was an athlete in his younger days, but would now never run again. There is *He Stands a Beggar* - the tale of Lachlan Mackenzie, the 18th-century preacher from Lochcarron who, when he went to the big city of Aberdeen, was initially looked down on by the local people due to his uncouth appearance. By the time he had finished his sermon, you could have heard a pin drop. There are love songs; songs of place and identity; songs of faith; there is the patriotic anthem *Scotland's Story*; and there are also two excellent versions of the familiar traditional

Calum MacDonald (Runrig)

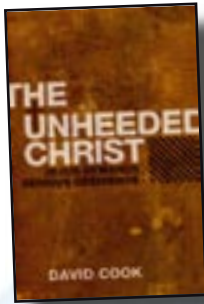


Image courtesy of Jenny Somerville

Alex with his sons Doug and Rob

'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.'
Psalm 130:5

**New Arrivals at the
Free Church Bookshop**

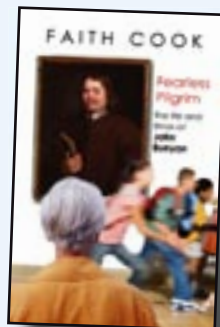


The Unheeded Christ: Jesus Demands Serious Obedience
CFP, £6.99

This book by David Cook will challenge you as you hear afresh the words of Christ. Jesus is the Lord: listen to Him again, and don't let Him go unheeded.

Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan
Evangelical Press, £16.95

In this new and well-written biography, Faith Cook relates John Bunyan to the turbulent times in which he lived; surviving two periods of imprisonment in Bedford prison, he was sustained by his faith, determined, as he himself wrote, 'to live unto God that is invisible.'

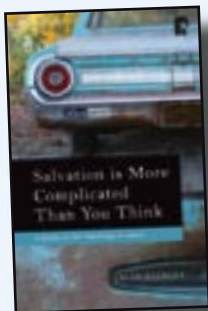


Salvation is More Complicated Than You Think: A Study of the Teaching of Jesus Paternoster, £8.99

This book by Alan Stanley is an important resource for any Christian seeking to understand what God requires of those on the narrow road to heaven.

Pastors and teachers will also

benefit from comprehensive biblical theology on salvation in the gospels.



Joseph: The Hidden Hand of God
CFP, £6.99

Liam Goligher provides us with a helpful insight into the life of Joseph.



Free Church Bookshop

15 North Bank Street, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH1 2LS
0131 718 4141 bookshop@freechurchofscotland.org.uk

www.freechurch.org/bookshop

- Sat 1** As we keep praying for our denomination and our own local church, let's put our hope in the Lord, knowing that He **has** heard and that no prayer goes unanswered in His time.
- Sun 2** Falkirk (own minister preaching), Perth (Rev Jim Abernethy), Rosskeen (Rev Bill Graham), St Columba's (own minister), Oban (Rev Nigel Anderson), Tarbert (Rev Ron. Christie) and several other congregations are holding communion services today. Ask the Lord to be with each of them to bless.
- Mon 3** Tonight is the last night of the Discipleship Explored course that has been held in Leith Free Church. Give thanks with them that there was a good attendance and ask the Lord to keep on working in the hearts and lives of all who were there.
- Tue 4** Let's give thanks for answered prayer for the Kilmallie summer activities, which have resulted in some new people coming to church and to the Youth Club.
- Wed 5** There is a joint monthly prayer meeting tonight in Oban between the Free Church and the APCs. Pray for good fellowship and evident results from their prayers.
- Thur 6** Fortrose congregation request prayer for a new church building, asking that their plans may be guided and that finance would meet their needs.
- Fri 7** Thank the Lord that the free light lunch on Fridays in Leith Free Church continues to be a good source of contact with people from the community and a great chance to share the love of Christ in action and in word.
- Sat 8** Perth congregation will be hearing from Donna Macdonald and her mother Annie Margaret tomorrow evening, sharing news of their experiences ministering to street children in Uganda. Pray that this will stimulate prayer for them.
- Sun 9** The congregations of Lochgilphead (preacher Rev Calum Macleod), Aultbea, Leith, Knockbain and Golspie will be holding their communion services today. Pray for the Lord to be the host at the table in each place.
- Mon 10** Pray for Mr James Morrison and his faithful ministry in the congregation in Lybster, Caithness. Let's pray for more people from the community to join them and be blessed.
- Tue 11** Susan MacLean, Youth Worker in Skye and Wester Ross, has a programme of activities in November. Please pray for each of these and that the children may know the Saviour early.
- Wed 12** Pray for the youth club *Shipmates* in Poolewe and the Raasay after-school club as they meet today. Pray too for the other youth clubs meeting on other days in Wester Ross.
- Thur 13** Tonight those attending Christianity Explored in the Buccleuch, Edinburgh congregation will be studying 'What is a Christian?'. Pray that some will become Christians tonight.
- Fri 14** Rev Cammy Mackenzie will share his testimony, "From Prison to Pulpit", at a Supper Evening in Perth Free Church tonight. Please pray that these meetings will foster fellowship among local Christians and will help unconverted folk too.
- Sat 15** The Free Church College Part-Time Course meets today. Give thanks that there are now several links to Free Churches throughout the country. Ask the Lord to bless each one who will gather to study the Word in the different places.

November Prayer Diary

- Sun 16** The congregations of Kirkcaldy, Urray, Paisley, Rogart, Smithton, Dornoch and Helmsdale hold their communion services today. Please pray for any new members taking communion for the first time, and for the Lord's presence.
- Mon 17** Pray for St Peter's, Dundee as they prepare for the renovation of the church, and to give an alternative venue for worship. Give thanks for the commitment within the congregation, and pray for the minister, office bearers and members.
- Tue 18** Rev Richard Muir, Coatbridge, has been unwell. Please pray for his recovery to full health and fitness, and for continued support for the congregation in the meantime.
- If you have any requests for prayer or praise for the January Prayer Diary, please send them now to Dayspring MacLeod: 0131 226 5286 or e-mail: dayspring.macleod@btinternet.com*
- Wed 19** Remember the Free Church Bookshop and manager Rev Charles Douglas as he serves the Lord through the ministry of books. Pray that the books available there may be used to promote growth in the Christian life of the church.
- Thur 20** Tonight leading scientist Rev Dr John Polkinghorne will give a talk on 'Science and Religion' in Achiltibuie. Please ask the Lord to use this event to open the hearts and minds of those who will hear his reasoning.
- Fri 21** Let's keep praying for all the youth groups meeting in our churches on Fridays. But let's pray too for the large number of young people who will be binge-drinking tonight and who need to know the joy of the Lord in their lives.
- Sat 22** Pray for the editors of our youth magazines – *The Instructor* and *Free*. Ask the Lord to give them inspiration so that the articles will be relevant and helpful to the young folk.
- Sun 23** Coatbridge, Leverburgh, Livingston and Portree congregations will be celebrating the Lord's Supper today. Pray that they may be encouraged by new members coming to join them, and by the presence of the Lord Himself.
- Mon 24** One elder and three deacons were recently inducted to the congregation of Arran. Give thanks for these men and pray for them as they fulfil their duties in the congregation.
- Tue 25** Pray for Rev Robert Macleod and other Hospital Chaplains. Ask the Lord to give them the right words to help each of the patients in their care in their time of need.
- Wed 26** The Free Church wishes to appoint a Finance Manager to work from the Offices in Edinburgh. This is an important position. Please pray that the Lord would guide the right person to apply and be accepted for this post.
- Thur 27** Pray for Christian Unions in Universities and Colleges. Some of them are having to struggle against aggressive atheist groups. Pray for students from your church.
- Fri 28** Rev Alasdair I MacLeod will be giving talks this weekend to a large number of students at the Annual House Party of St Andrews' Christian Union. Pray for the Lord to give Alasdair the right messages to open hearts and minds of the hearers.
- Sat 29** Pray for the large numbers of students from UK and overseas who fill our universities and colleges. Ask that they may be led to go to church today, and that there they may find that Jesus is alive and very relevant to their lives. Pray that they may be warmly welcomed if they come to the Free Church.
- Sun 30** Tonight the two other Edinburgh Free Churches will join with Buccleuch for the evening of their communion. Please pray for a time of blessing at all the services of the weekend.



FINANCE MANAGER

The Free Church of Scotland has some 100 ministers, an overseas missionary programme and a training College, as well as significant property and financial assets. The Church now wishes to appoint a Finance Manager in the Church's Central Offices located in Edinburgh.

You will be responsible for a wide range of financial and accounting duties including oversight of the central financial administration of the Church. You will also provide key support to the Chief Administrative Officer in a number of specific areas.

This is a senior position requiring considerable experience in accounting and financial administration, with knowledge of Charity Accounting preferable. You will be able to demonstrate the necessary enthusiasm, flexibility and experience to work under your own initiative in a small team environment.

You will be working in a Christian environment and will be expected to deal with Church courts and ministers as well as external organisations. You will be involved in decision making integral to the furtherance of the Church's mission and it is therefore essential that applicants are sympathetic to the mission and ethos of the Free Church of Scotland.

Applicants may obtain further details from:

Mrs Sharon Fraser
PA to Chief Administrative Officer
Free Church of Scotland
The Mound
Edinburgh
EH1 2LS

Tel: **0131 226 5286**

Email: **offices@freechurchofscotland.org.uk**

Please Don't Explain the Bible to Me

We all have pet hates. Mine include Welsh rugby fans, champion boxers who insist on referring to themselves in the third person, and the American habit of having little leather tassles on the end of shoelaces. I also have a particular theological hate: being told that a preacher is going to 'explain the Bible' to me. Not that I don't need the Bible explained to me. There are parts of it that I find quite obscure, and stories that are difficult to understand, such as the passages in the Old Testament that tell of terrifying massacres commanded by God. Then there are the questions about how to relate the Old Testament to the New, how to understand the New Testament use of the Old, etc., etc. All of these things I find difficult in differing degrees and I appreciate the help available from those who can explain them to me.

This is not what irritates me, however; rather it is the description of what happens from the pulpit on Sunday as 'explaining the Bible'. Why is this so? Put simply, because such a description privileges the didactic content of the pulpit over the proclamatory, confrontational aspect of the declaration of the Word of God. When the preacher preaches, he should, if he is any good, explain the Bible to the extent that he communicates the content of the passage to his congregation and deepens their understanding of the text; but that is where his task begins, not where it ends.

Its purpose was to confront people with the Word of God, not simply to explain God to the people.

This arises from the nature of the Bible itself. The Bible is not simply a book of information. It is not the equivalent of, say, a car maintenance manual or a travel guidebook. Sure, it contains God's story, which is itself made up of a lot of facts, a lot of events, and a lot of material that allows us to understand ourselves and the world around us; but it also confronts us with these things, demanding a response. It is God's story, and that is something that involves us. For example, as 1 Corinthians tells us, when the cross is proclaimed, some think it is foolishness, some find it offensive, and some find it to be the power of God to salvation. For none of these groups is it simply an item of information. Thus we cannot extract the informational content of the Bible and claim that we have truly understood it. It is not enough to know that Christ died; it is not enough to know why Christ died; it is necessary to grasp that fact by faith, to know that Christ died for me and to cling to that as if my life depended upon it (which, indeed, it does).

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, put this nicely when he said that the whole of the Bible was made up of law and gospel. The law commands us to obey God and demands a response of perfect obedience, which we can never do in



Carl Trueman

and of ourselves; the gospel tells us what Christ has done on our behalf and demands a response of faith, of total trusting commitment. In other words, the Bible can never be handled simply as a collection of facts or pieces of information; it must always be understood as God's words to men and women, confronting us with His demands, and demanding a response from us.

In light of this, Luther also understood (correctly, I believe) that the preacher was not so much a teacher as a prophet. Sure, prophets teach; but there is an existential urgency, a confrontational aspect to their teaching that demands – and elicits – a particular response. When the prophets spoke in the Old Testament, they did not so much explain God to their audiences as actually speak the Word of God to people. They were God's heralds, confronting people with His demands. This provided the model for later preaching; not that such preaching was inspired in the same way as that of the prophets, but its purpose was to confront people with the Word of God, not simply to explain God to the people.

This has some immediate practical implications. Preaching is to be confrontational; it is to terminate in in-your-face applied doctrine that demands a response. Frankly, the use of overhead projectors, PowerPoint, etc., might be helpful in Sunday School classes, but when it comes to pulpit ministry, it is legitimate to ask what purpose these things serve. Do they facilitate the kind of prophetic confrontation that biblical preaching should embody? Or do they reflect rather an understanding of preaching which sees it primarily as explaining the Bible, as merely unlocking its informational content or teaching individuals to read the Bible better for themselves? If the purpose of preaching is seen as the latter, then we should abandon preaching immediately: there are plenty of books and CD-roms which help to explain the Bible a whole lot better than a forty-minute sermon every Sunday morning. If, however, Luther and company are right, if preaching is not 'explaining the Bible' but rather proclaiming the Word of God in a prophetic way that confronts men and women with God's claim upon them and gives them no place to hide, then such innovations surely serve more to blunt the confrontation than to sharpen it. As with so many things in this world, the medium is the message.

The Shack: The New Pilgrim's Progress?

The Professor: 'This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!' - Eugene Petersen

The Pastor: 'Wrapped in creative brilliance, *The Shack* is spiritually profound, theologically enlightening and life impacting' - Steve Berger

The Pundit: 'This book was absolutely amazing... so powerful and moving.....It made me feel so peaceful and at ease... this book was fantastic' - Catie

The Presenter: 'The Shack will change the way you think about God forever.' Kathie Lee Gifford - Co-host, NBC's *Today Show*

The Pedant (or Prophet): 'Sugary sweet sentimental sap. Heresy'

The Shack is the latest multi million publishing phenomenon from the US. It tells the story of Mack, who is struggling to come to terms with the murder of his young daughter. Mack receives a note from God telling him to come to the shack where his daughter was murdered. There he meets the Trinity: Papa, an African American woman (the Father), a Middle Eastern workman (the Son), and an Asian girl (the Holy Spirit). There then follow several conversations and experiences as "the Trinity" help Mack.

The book has been warmly received and is being seen by many Christians as a great way to communicate the Gospel. I came to this book with an open mind, and yet as I read it I became increasingly depressed and alarmed. Why?

I don't mind that that *The Shack* is not particularly well-written (I found myself getting bored with what is in effect a sermon in story form). Nor is it a major concern that the book is full of the sugary sentimentalism which results in the Disneyfication of Christianity. No - where it really matters is in the New Age spirituality, the heretical doctrine and the hyped commercialism.

Firstly, there is the now familiar emergent/New Age attack upon the Bible: 'God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects.... Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt, or was that guilt edges?' Who needs the Bible when "the Holy Spirit" says, 'you will learn to hear my thoughts in yours'? Anyway, the Bible is not "me" enough. As Mack puts it, 'I guess part of me would like to believe that God would care enough about me to send me a note'. That's what we need. A note from God. Personal. Handwritten. Not a book that tells us about what God has really given.

And of course the "Church". 'Jesus' says, 'I don't create institutions, never have, never will'. There is an element of truth in that, but there is also a considerable element of destructive falsehood. It is Jesus who died for the Church, and Jesus who provided apostles, prophets, teachers, etc., for the Church. It is an organic body, but it is still a body with structure and order - a structure and order that our touchy-feely conformists can all too easily dismiss with a wave of their "it's just an institution" wand. It gets worse. "Jesus" says, 'I have no desire to make them Christians' (speaking of those who were Buddhists, Mormons, Baptists, or Muslims). Really? I thought the point of Jesus's death was that we would become Christ's Ones.

Not surprisingly, there is a completely inadequate doctrine of sin. God does not want to punish sin. He wants to cure it. So unless everyone is saved, it looks as though God's will is thwarted. Which leads us on to the implicit universalism in *The Shack*. Mack asks "Papa" if there is anyone she is not especially fond of. To which the response is 'Nope, I haven't been able to find any. Guess that's jes the way I is.' Of course, the notion that God loves everyone equally fits well with the Disney generation, but it is not biblical or logical.

The major heresy in the whole book is the way the second commandment is completely ignored. One assumes that the Lord had a good reason for telling us not to make an idol in the form of anything to represent Him. Are we now saying that we know better than God? Does God not know best how to reveal Himself without us getting in the way by creating our own images?

Finally, there is the hyped commercialism. At the end of the book we are asked to "continue our experience" of *The Shack* at the website and to participate in The Missy Project, which in effect means spreading the word, lobbying to get it made into a film, blogging, and of course selling and buying as many copies of the book as we can. We are urged not 'to make it an advertisement but just to "share"'.

This book is dangerous. Not because it challenges us, or makes us think about ourselves. But rather because it could, as Kathie Lee Gifford points out, change the way that some people think about God forever (or at least until eternity). If you want to know about God, then read the Bible. If you want to know God, then believe the Bible. If you want to see how far down the road the church in the Western World has gone from reasonable, historical, biblical, Christ-centred Christianity, then read *The Shack*.

The Editor

