

The Regions Beyond!

THE APOSTLE Paul had a great desire *“to preach the gospel in the regions beyond”* [2 Cor 10:16]. He was a true missionary – and wanted the gospel to spread even further, *“beyond”* where he was to the lost and perishing who were ignorant of Christ. Paul longed to minister around the world where the gospel had never reached!

When he was in Ephesus he wrote to the Christians in Rome *“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation”* [Rom 15:20]. Paul made it his ambition to preach where Christ’s name had never been heard before.

That ought to be the desire of every pastor and congregation – to spread the word of the Lord beyond their present community to uncharted areas beyond their parish.

One gets the impression that whenever Paul saw a ship in anchor he wished to board her to carry the gospel to wherever it went! How do you and I feel when we see crowds of people in a stadium or on the television – does our heart burn for their salvation? Do we long to tell them about Jesus?

As Christians we must be sensitive to the great need of humanity - salvation in Jesus Christ.

Christ has commanded us to be faithful to Him - and that means being faithful to the Great Commission, viz *“Go into **all** the world and preach the gospel to **every** creature”* [Mar 16:15].

It is important to realise what faithfulness to the gospel means. Many people think that faithfulness has only to do with belief and maintaining the status quo. But the defining point of faithfulness is **not** doctrinal but practical – it is defined by **obedience** to God’s will! It is defined by what we **do** - not just by what we believe! The parables teach us this.

For example, in the parable of the Talents we read about the servants who gained more talents receiving the commendation of *“Good and **faithful** servant”* [Mat 25:21]. This was said to them because they had obeyed and done the will of their Master in using their talents.

Paul commended the Church at Thessalonica because *“from them sounded forth”* the gospel. They spread the good news. Paul could confidently say to them they were the elect of God. How could he be so sure? Because of their *“**work of faith, and labour of love”*** in sending forth the good news. The

gospel was not just *"in word only"* [1 Thes 1:3,4,8]. In other words, true faith in Christ, involves obedience to the Lord's commands - which includes obeying the Great Commission of [Mark 16:15].

It seems Paul did not like preaching where there were other gospel ministries. That probably meant he was more concerned to preach to the 'unchurched' than to those who were Christians and under a ministry already. He was what we would call an evangelist - preaching to the unconverted.

This ought to make presbyteries consider whether they should be sending preachers where there **never** was an evangelical ministry before. Of course most denominations in the UK do not have 'spare' ministers or students, but for those who do have 'uncalled' qualified preachers (and there are some denominations who have), the possibility of sending preachers to new housing schemes, etc should come high on their agenda.

Paul of course had no desire to leave the believers in Ephesus (especially as there were adversaries waiting to pounce on them! [1 Cor 16:9]), but he made it plain that his heart was in spreading the word to those who never heard it before in the regions beyond.

So at the beginning of another year we need to remind ourselves that the church exists for the sake of the world. We are to be the salt and the light. We need to realise our responsibilities towards the 'unchurched'. It has been said

that it is easier, humanly speaking, to bring people who are totally ignorant of the gospel to a knowledge of the truth, than it is to bring those from a background where the gospel has been rejected.

A time came when the Apostles were to turn to the Gentiles. Jesus insisted that preaching the gospel begin in Jerusalem, but as a nation the Jews continued to reject it, and have lost the privilege of being the custodians of the truth - the Church now having that responsibility.

Of course that did not mean that individual Jews were or are, beyond salvation. Any individual Jew was and is welcome to Christ, and indeed many Jews did come to saving faith under Paul's ministry in the various places he preached.

We believe the glory of the Lord will yet cover the whole earth as the waters covers the sea [Habakkuk 2:14], and that all nations, not just many or most, but all nations will come into the New Jerusalem from every nation, tribe and language. That means the gospel will be preached to every culture in every corner of the earth. The wall between Jew and Gentile has gone.

So someone, somewhere, sometime, will have to go to the regions beyond and tell of Jesus wondrous love. May we have the mind of Paul when he wrote *"Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you"* [2 Cor 10:16 NIV].

The article below appeared in 'Christian Voice' December Issue 2004 and is reprinted with permission exactly as it appeared there. While we do not agree with everything in this witness for Christ, we are thankful for it and encourage readers to read it all to learn the moral and spiritual state of our country and to awaken the Christian community to be more active in defending and supporting our Christian heritage and constitution.

I Saw 'Corpus Christi'

A personal view from Stephen Green

"This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes" [Mark 12:11]

ON 30th NOVEMBER, 'Christian Voice' learnt that students at St Andrews University were to stage a production of Terrence McNally's blasphemous play 'Corpus Christi' at the Crawford Arts Centre studio theatre.

The play which was debuted in New York in 1998 to angry protests, has the 'Jesus' figure as a hard drinking, promiscuous, swearing homosexual who is crucified for being 'King of the Queers' after being betrayed by Judas, who is cast as his lover. With only ten days remaining, 'Christian Voice' supporters were urged to prayer and action. Stephen Green, National Director, describes the events of last weekend.

By the grace of God Christians protested, preached and prayed outside the Crawford Arts Centre where the 'Corpus Christi' play was staged in St Andrews last week. The gospel was preached in the middle of the play and I saw it all the way through as the guest of the director. A sickening experience it

was. Afterwards the director and the cast came together to learn face to face from me exactly why they have offended us and Almighty God. None of this would have happened without your prayers, and none if it would have happened without a chain of events orchestrated by God which was nothing short of the miraculous.

BACKGROUND TO A PROTEST

It was all set in motion from my point of view when I received an email from a 'Christian Voice' member in Scotland on Monday two weeks ago alerting me to a press cutting dated 28th November about the performance of the play called 'Corpus Christi' in St Andrews by university students. I already knew of the blasphemous nature of this play, and it seemed the director, Zsuzsi Lindsay, was deliberately setting out to offend. A lot of research on the internet and then a couple of phone calls identified the times of the performances and the venue of the play as the Crawford Arts Centre in the heart of St

Andrews.

Some more searches identified the directors of the Crawford Arts Centre and the top three directors of the University. We then had to collate all this information and put it into a 'user-friendly' form. Having done that, I wrote to everyone on the list, enclosing the newspaper cutting and asking for the play to be cancelled. Next we emailed all those of our members and supporters who have let us know their email addresses if they have one(!) and we posted a version of the E-alert to everyone else and to all the churches in Fife. Our members and supporters, together with their friends and whole churches in some cases, began to express their outrage verbally and in writing by post and email, in measured terms of course, to the directors and the University.

Next, we booked a low-cost flight from Bristol to Glasgow, a hire car at the airport and a £25 per night hotel in St Andrews. All was set for a presence in St Andrews and a pavement protest outside the Arts Centre Studio Theatre for every performance. That sums up the sheer mechanics of the process which culminates in the protests in St Andrews at the end of last week.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU PRAY

But it is the spiritual dimension which is the more instructive. Always be careful when you pray! On church on Sunday 5th, I was invited to tell the fellowship about the play

and about what we in 'Christian Voice' were doing about it. During the presentation, I heard myself saying: "The theatre seats 66 people, and I am aiming to get inside. Wouldn't it be good if 66 people got to hear the gospel of Jesus?"

I suppose I was encouraged of signs of God blessing in the resignation of one of the Crawford Arts Centre directors, Dr Roy McLachlan. On the Tuesday there was to be more encouragement. Another member of 'Christian Voice' had unearthed the website of the actual production company, www.zuloo.org. A local restaurant was named as the company's sponsor. It only took two phone calls and that sponsor had resigned, infuriated at how they had been taken advantage of. The Crawford Arts Centre would also cancel the Saturday afternoon matinee, afraid that we might rampage through the art collections at a time when the gallery itself was open. The Lord was moving. But how was I going to get inside, and how were 66 people going to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ?

THE LORD INTERVENES

Around twenty of us gathered outside the theatre on Thursday evening before the performance. I want to thank God for them. 'Christian Voice' people were joined by Revd James Dowson and people from UK Life League and by Rev George Hargreaves, the leader of Operation Christian Vote. Only one of our number were able to get

inside, having pre-booked a ticket by telephone. No one else could get in as the company had hired six large security staff who were checking identification.

Our brother inside on the first night lasted precisely fifteen minutes before he stood up, said 'This is blasphemous' and walked out. He could take no more. He is not an evangelist. So no one inside heard the gospel that night. As well as the security men, there were about four police officers headed by an inspector from the police station directly across North Street from the theatre. In fact, I went with the inspector to the police station, and asked if I could file a complaint of blasphemy. The inspector said that even to pass the case to the procurator fiscal it would be necessary in Scottish law to have the evidence of two eye witnesses to the actual event. So the door appeared closed.

At that moment the Lord miraculously intervened using BBC Radio. A reporter was there on sight for Radio 4 news, and he asked me and the play's director, Zsuzsi Lindsay, if we would do a 'head to head' interview after the show. We both agreed. The piece was recorded for broadcast that night and the next morning.

AN INVITATION TO SEE THE PLAY

During the interview, Miss Lindsay asked me, "How can you say the film is blasphemous when you haven't seen it?" To which I could not help

replying "How can I see it when your heavies are stopping us coming in?" At that point, on air, in front of millions of listeners, Zsuzsi Lindsay invited me to see her play as her guest. She even lent me a copy of the script to read.

But left me with a challenge. The Lord had paved a way, in fact He had compelled me to see the play. He was clearly going before, but I had now to do something. I had to decide how and when to share the gospel with 66 people, or 80 including the cast and Zsuzsi Lindsay. There was talk of a question and answer session at the end, so I asked Miss Lindsay before the show if I could put my point of view during that session, to which she agreed.

FRIDAY MEDIA FRENZY

The next morning, George Hargreaves and I met representatives of the UCCF and the Christian Union at St Andrews university in the company of Les Beech, a 'Christian Voice' from St Andrews itself. It was good to meet in the name of Christ and encourage each other. The CU have not felt able to join our protest despite opposing the play, but although we would challenge them to be more vigorous in standing up for Jesus, we would never condemn them for not doing so. Who knows, their prayers could have been instrumental in all that happened.

The rest of the day turned into a media frenzy, which started for me with a phone-in on BBC

Radio Scotland. Towards the end, Mr John Di Folco, chairman of the Crawford Arts centre, complained that he had received over 120 letters alone protesting about the play. (Only 120?) He claimed some of them were 'threatening', but when he read them out, it was clear that the writers were simply warning him in measured tones of the terrible consequences of blaspheming the God of heaven and earth. His contempt both for God and for the feelings of ordinary people was obvious.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS LIMITED

Mr Di Folco seemed to think that freedom of speech was sacrosanct, but in fact it is limited. It is not permissible to stir up racial hatred in Scotland and sectarian insults are an aggravating factor in crimes of violence. It should not be possible to blaspheme Almighty God and insult the Christian Faith either. A combination of law, political correctness and fear mean that a racist play would not be staged in the Crawford Arts Centre any more than one which cast Mohammed, the Buddha or a Hindu 'god' as a homosexual. Why was always Jesus Christ who was considered fair game.

In the afternoon, I had interviews outside the Arts Centre theatre which were broadcast on Grampian TV and BBC TV News. Using pre-recorded footage from the Thursday night, one brother's preaching of the good news of Jesus

was broadcast on prime time television. In addition, the story went around the world on Sky and CNN. We have had emails from the USA most of them supportive as well as from the UK.

THE LORD WAS WAY AHEAD

Meanwhile on Wednesday morning,, the Lord had convicted a St Andrews graduate, Tom Harrison, to take a trip from England to St Andrews to protest at this event. His uncle, a street evangelist and 'Christian Voice' member, had alerted him from information he received from 'Christian Voice', and Tom's uncle had only joined because of Harry Hammond Day in Bournemouth. The Lord was a long way ahead of us in this chain of events. As He would be.

Tom managed to buy two tickets during the day at the Arts Centre, one for himself and one for Gillan Williams, our film director (yes, we do have one!). Tom and Gillan were both already in the audience when the security men guided me to my seat as a guest of the director.

Meanwhile outside the theatre, members and supporters of 'Christian Voice' continued their protest and prayed for those of us inside. We were a smaller group than on the Friday, but there was a strong feeling of the presence of God and an assurance of His peace.

THE GOSPEL IS PRAEHED!

I watched the play and took some notes, feeling strangely protected

from the stream of obscenity in the play, but I was still agonising over how and when I would preach the gospel to 66 - or 80 - people. Then, about half-way through, Tom leapt to his feet and said "I protest," and went down to the front. The lights went up and the cast fell silent, leaving Tom centre stage as he preached the gospel to 66 people. After less than a minute, the heavies arrived to carry Tom out, but not before he had preached the forgiveness of sins through the perfect blood of Jesus.

So the gospel was preached to 66 people, to just one audience, on just one night, no more, no less, exactly as I had prayed so publicly, and I had not to do it. By the grace of God Gillan remained in his seat, staying put as our second witness, and I carried on taking notes. Then at the very end, as the house lights went up again, Zsuzsi Lindsay said that there would not be time for the question answer session. I felt betrayed, and was wondering how to address the audience, when I realised I did not have to. Our gracious Lord had already arranged for someone to do it better than I could have done. All I was there to do from then on was to speak to the cast. But how was that going to happen?

THE PLAY ITSELF

But let me go back to the play itself. I am not going to pass any comment on the quality of the performances. Whether it was played well or badly is hardly the point. The question is,

was it blasphemous? Was it valid to protest about? The answer is yes on both counts. It was just as blasphemous as playwright Terrence McNally boasts it is in his introduction to the script. I could hardly believe how offensive, insulting, crass and disgusting it was as well. Simon the Canaanite (played by Rob Rollings) says at the end: "If we have offended, so be it." You did, Rob, you certainly did. But offending me is one thing. Offending Almighty God is quite another.

The play portrays Jesus (Joshua in the play) as a promiscuous homosexual, in more ways than I want to go into. One of the milder is the obligatory 'gay kiss' when Joshua (Ayman Oghanna) is seduced by Judas (Nicolas Crub). Simon speaks of a sexual experience with Joshua. Joshua himself says he has 'lain with' all the disciples. He is finally crucified as 'King of the Queers'. 'Corpus Christi' is plainly and obviously blasphemous on any one of these points alone.

In this play we do not see the sinless Son of God working the perfect will of His Almighty Father/ Sometimes Joshua's miracles work and sometimes they don't. The centurion (Marco Biagi) has a sick wife, not a daughter, who instead of living when Joshua gives the word, dies. God (Edward Whitley - the 13 actors playing Joshua and his disciples, play other parts during the course of the play) speaks in a silly booming voice and is neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. Joshua encourages his disciples to

get drunk and blesses a 'gay marriage' between Bartholomew (Chris Nemes) and James (Jeremy Taylor). There is much more, for example the corrupt use of the Bible by Judas in the crucifixion scene, that is so obviously designed to offend and insult Christians and blaspheme Almighty God and the Scriptures that it is pointless to deny the fact.

MCNALLY'S TARGET IS CHRISTIANITY

Apart from that, the grotesque portrayal of Mary, the mother of the Lord (Jeremy Taylor - someone thought it really funny to have Mary played by a man with a beard), as a drunken, battered wife, putting Joseph (Simon Mitchell) up as a domineering wife-beater, is specifically designed to offend Catholics. I must say that the characterisation of a Roman Catholic priest (Rosie Oliphant) as a sadist and all nuns as creepy or vindictive offended me even though I am not a Catholic and don't agree either with priestcraft or enforced celibacy among ministers.

There is also a pastiche of praying the 'sinner's prayer' by Lazarus (Marie McNulty) and of driving out demons, making it clear that McNally's target is not Catholicism or evangelicalism but what he sees as Christianity, in total. McNally thrashes around trying to assault as many popular symbols of the Christian faith as he can. One strange exception is that the whole cast pray the Lord's Prayer in all

seriousness facing the audience, and it must be said in fairness that parts of the real Christian message break through in other places. Sadly, like the curate's egg, a few good parts do not make the whole of it anything but rotten.

John (Andrew Lane), Joshua and God all proclaim the New Age concept that all men are divine, not that men are sinful and need a redeemer, as Christianity teaches. There is a spiteful, vicious parody of the Lord's Supper, in which Philip (Simon Mitchel) jokes "Take this saltshaker, it is my life," and Peter (Barney Wybes) responds "Eat this knife. It is mt gallbladder" while the other apostles fall about laughing over the idea that bread and wine could represent Joshua's (jesus') body and blood. The fact is, a play written, not out of love as is claimed, but out of blind, ignorant, obsessive hatred for the Christian faith in general and its condemnation of homosexual activity very much in particular.

OBSCENITY

Then there is the obscenity. From the aural voyeurism of hearing copulating couples encouraging each other in adjoining rooms as Mary gives birth in a motel, to the crucifixion scene which ends the play, expletives and explicit sexual references, most but not all of them homosexual, swamp the play to knee height. I simply do not see why, even when he has decided to write a blasphemous play claiming Jesus was homosexual, that it is either

funny, necessary or even grown-up for a playwright to make his cast and audience wade through filth at the same time. That is, unless it's not a very good play in the first place and you have to do something rather daring to get attention.

Which brings me to the actors themselves. They cannot distance themselves from the characters they have played or from the play itself, and the stain of the sin of blasphemy clings to all of them. But apart from that, the string of expletives given to Andrew (Sofia McKinnon), who gets to use the F-word most, left me stunned. You would not hear such a torrid of filth on a building site, and I know that from experience. There we were in the middle of a town named after that same holy man of God, listening to a young girl speaking obscenity after obscenity in his name. What an insult to the memory of St Andrew, in St Andrews itself. I just hope her parents were not there to hear their daughter degrade herself like that.

PERFECTION DEFILED

Well, after the play, the cast and Zsuzsi Lindsay agreed to listen to me, and listen they did, as I tried to explain to them that the Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. The Bible also says quite clearly in a number of places that homosexual activity is sin, and you can wheel on any number of clever theologians you like to try to explain these passages away, but some of us will still believe the plain words on the page. Only

because He was without sin could Jesus pay the price of our sins on the cross. He takes our sins upon Him, and we are clothed in His righteousness when we believe in Him. It followed that to portray Jesus as a sinner, which the play unashamedly does, struck at the very root of the Christian faith. I was offended, and God was offended. There was another dimension. They had portrayed my Lord and Saviour as a homosexual, and He is closer to me than a brother. I felt personally insulted by that, I explained. They would not insult someone in the street or someone's family at any other time, and yet they were doing that here.

They listened very politely, and asked some questions. "Should the church not get up to date?" asked Rosie. "I am a Christian and not all Christians agree with you," said Rob. "Shouldn't homosexuals know that Jesus died for them as well?" Rosie added. These were polite, intelligent questions, which revealed the obvious replies. In particular, the blood which Jesus shed is available to wipe away the sins of all of us, but we have to see our sin as God does first. Then Marco, who is homosexual, accused people like me of persecuting people like him for two thousand years. Why should he not get his own back? His question embarrassed the rest of the cast, but from his perspective, it made sense. I explained as best I could that I could not help seeing things from the Biblical perspective, and that Jesus could take away his

sin and heal him of those desires.

As I was going round saying goodbye to them all, I felt I had to say something more to Sofia. I told her that I was saddened and dismayed to hear the filth she had spoken that night. She said quietly, "They weren't my words". Now, an actor has to act for all the world as if he is the very person he is playing, but at the same time he can never escape being responsible for his conduct in character. "They came out of your mouth, lassie", I replied.

WE STAYED TO THE END BY THE GRACE OF GOD

More people came on Saturday evening than on the other two, and there was quiet a crowd outside the theatre, praying and praising God, and handing out leaflets to passers-by and to those going in. The leaflets had our objections to the play on one side and the true gospel on the other. The audience divided up roughly half-and-half between those who would not take leaflets and those who were open-minded enough to do so. There were opportunities for one-to-one evangelism and even the police and the heavies heard the gospel. We prayed that the performance would be cancelled, and I even asked Zsuzsi in person not to put it on again, but it was the will of God that it should go ahead.

During our time of prayer, I felt moved to pray for the cast and the director one by one by name, and implore God to turn their hearts, to draw them in repentance

to the cross and cause them to trust in Jesus' saving blood. My heart still aches for those young people to realise what they have done and turn to the Lord Jesus whom they have blasphemed. By the grace of God, six of us stayed to the end praising God, preaching the word, and praying. We were there until the cast themselves finally came out. As they passed by I told a few that I would pray for them but they did not seem to want to look at me.

I came away with a heavy heart and a deep burden for those young people, and I don't quite know why. There is no end of kids going wrong, getting into sin and depravity just as bad and worse. Why these? They are just a pleasant enough group of normally polite young people I spent a few minutes with who have become enmeshed in an evil they simply do not understand. Is what I feel for them something to do with seeing young souls chasing a false religious dream? Was it because I saw them as themselves on stage and not them in their characters? Is it because I have actually spoken to them, and heard something from them? Is it because they are about the same age as my own children? Whatever it is, I weep for them and far for them. Action have consequences. And please God I won't stop praying for them.

SO WHAT NOW?

By His grace God enabled enough witnesses to see the play to enable a prosecution to proceed according to

Scottish law and His law. Reluctant as I am to see the director and cast prosecuted, they know that is what I intend to do, and God Himself has made it perfectly clear that this must happen. Otherwise, He would have prevented us from seeing the play. We are to present a case to the police and demand that the Procurator Fiscal start a prosecution for blasphemy. Whether the Fiscal will do so in in the hands of God.

PRAY

Please praise the holy and wonderful name of Almighty God that He always goes before and makes the way clear for His people and that He has and will glorify His wonderful name. Please pray for wisdom as we prepare a complaint for presentation to the police. Please pray that the Procurator Fiscal treats this matter with all seriousness despite the fact that the law in Scotland has not been used since 1843, and that he brings charges. Please pray that the cast and company and all involved with

the play and the Crawford Arts Centre will be convicted of their sin and will repent and turn to the one they have so willfully blasphemed. And please pray for St Andrews town, university and church who collectively allowed this evil to take place and will be held accountable for it. May God in judgment remember mercy.

ACTION

Write to the Chief Constable of Fife Constabulary, Peter Wilson, at Fife Constabulary Headquarters, Detroit Road, Glenrothes KY6 2RJ. Ask him to thoroughly investigate and present a case to the Procurator Fiscal.

Stephen Green is the National Director of 'Christian Voice'. More information may be found on their website at: www.christian-voice.org.uk
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The Deceitfulness of Riches

"The wife of the lottery winner who took home the richest undivided jackpot in US history, says she regrets his purchase of the \$314 million ticket that has thrust her family into the public spotlight," according to a December 14 Associated Press article. "I wish all of this never would have happened," Jewel Whittaker told The Charleston Gazette. "I wish I would have torn the ticket up". "Since winning the lottery two years ago, her husband, Jack Whittaker, has been arrested twice for drunken driving and has been ordered into rehab. He also faces charges he attacked a bar manager, and is accused in two lawsuits of making trouble at a nightclub and a racetrack. . . . Whittaker took his winnings in a lump sum of \$113 million after taxes."

Congregational News

EDINBURGH

I was greatly encouraged on the 26th of October when the presbytery agreed to a mission work in Edinburgh. It was some weeks earlier that I had felt lead to believe that the Lord was calling me to this work. I asked around in order to find out what were the more "spiritually needy" areas of Edinburgh. Among the areas mentioned were Burdiehouse and Southhouse. The point was made that most areas could use an extra "pair of hands." Our initial visit to Burdiehouse and Southhouse on the 7th of October left us feeling that it was indeed an area that needed more gospel witness and that it was an area that we could relate to. Speaking to one or two people in the community greatly encouraged us to think God was going before us. On the 24th of November we flitted to Edinburgh. Then on the 30th of November I was inducted to the work here.

One of the main ways that I hope to work here is door to door in the area, thus getting to know people and hopefully pointing them to Christ. There are about 900 houses in the area which is probably about a third of the houses in the parish. There are 10,500 people in the parish and to have 50 in the parish congregation is a good attendance. To say it is a needy area is an understatement. The parish church for Burdiehouse and Southhouse is Kaimes Lockhart Memorial in Gracemount and the minister is the Revd Iain Penman who

preaches the gospel faithfully, relevantly and winsomely. We have to say, that the welcome we received from the minister and others in the congregation when they heard we were going to work in that part of the parish was so warm and encouraging that it was indeed humbling. This welcome has not only continued but increased. Also the encouragement from people outside the immediate area has been a valuable blessing to us. Various Christians over the years have had a burden for this area, and different ones have done real Christian work, so although it is comparatively barren there have been faithful, loving workers.

I was greatly encouraged the first time I was out with leaflets to have one gentleman not only ask me in for a cup of coffee and fellowship, but also to discover that he was a preacher of the gospel albeit he worships outside the area. Richard Lo very kindly donated 200 booklets with an excellent Christmas message. As a result of distributing these, we had a telephone call from a widow wanting a visit. She lives with her housebound sister and adult son. They subsequently invited me to come round each week for a time of worship. Perhaps it's my lack of faith but I did not expect to be invited into people's homes to share the gospel message so quickly.

We have a service in the manse each Sunday at 5.00pm and some friends have encouraged us

greatly by attending. Everyone is most welcome, whether natives or visitors. We hope to have services in the Burdiehouse area eventually and until that comes about Iain Penman very kindly offered us the use of the church. The church is a 1/4 mile from the area, while the manse is about 2 miles or barely 5 minutes by car from the area. Incidentally the road from the manse to the church is partly through the countryside so we're glad for that rural flavour.

All in all we are very encouraged and believe that we have made the right move. We had anticipated having our whole ministry in Tain and Fearn, a prospect that constantly pleased and challenged us, so this change of direction was indeed a great surprise. We pray that the congregation there will go from strength to strength and see greater blessing than they ever saw during our ministry although the Lord graciously granted blessing while we were there.

Please pray that we would have zeal, strength, wisdom, love, joy and grace for the work. That we would make the most of the time and opportunity given to us. That we would continue to be encouraged. That the seed would fall on good ground and souls be saved. That a congregation would come about and a place of worship be provided in the targeted area. That the necessary supporters, funds and materials would be provided. That we would have patience and endurance for the anticipated work ahead. That the many tasks needing to be done in a new home would get done while at the same time the task for which we have come here would be well and truly at

the forefront of our activity.

Please continue to pray for all the family, Alana, Jonathan, Graeme, Nicola, Melissa and our two grandchildren Jordan and Ellie. Jonathan is working in Inverness. Graeme, Nicola and Melissa are settling well in school though like ourselves they still miss Tain and Fearn congregation and friends left behind. Give thanks for all the encouragements we have received from God's word and providence, from various services attended, from God's people and perhaps those who as yet are not in the kingdom. *"May the whole earth be filled with His glory."* [Psa 72:19]. John Ross.

STORNOWAY

The congregation is looking forward to a return visit of Revd Geoff Thomas from Aberystwyth in Wales for the Communion on the 3rd Lord's Day of February. It continues to hold a 'Christianity Explored' course which was only marginally affected by the severe storms during the early part of January.

Many speakers have been heard over the last few months including representatives of Tear Fund, Something for Romania, Slavic Gospel Association and local Blythswood workers. Fellowship meetings are still held twice a month after the evening services. The congregational Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 20 January when the Financial Statement for the past year was discussed. In the past year the congregation lost two of its original members through the death of Mr David Mackenzie, its precenter and his sister, Miss Lillian Mackenzie.

"I am the Good Shepherd"

**We are grateful to
Mr Kenneth MacLean for sending the following address**

For the seventh consecutive year, the Inverness & District Gospel Male Voice Choir arranged a Farming Community Service in the Dingwall Auction Market - now in more spacious and comfortable premises. The service commenced with prayer by Choir Chairman, Bill Cowie, followed by praise in the singing of Psalm 23 to the tune "Orlington".

It was again a cause for thankfulness to see so many folk from across the age spectrum at the service, with almost five hundred attending. Choir members are grateful to God for this renewed opportunity, and pray that what was sung and what was said will be blessed to many and be to the glory of God.

Choir member Roderick MacKenzie from Fearn gave the Gospel message. How appropriate for such a location that the subject should be "The Good Shepherd". May many come to know Him and follow Him.

Roderick spoke as follows on the portion of John's Gospel chapter 10:1-14

THANK YOU ONCE again for coming here today and for your encouragement to continue what has become a memorable annual event. Special thanks are due to the Mart management and their colleagues who have worked behind the scenes to prepare the building for this afternoon and to ensure we are comfortable.

I had thought that the baton for this address should pass from me to another this year, but there is such a thing as a "press gang", and it has operated once again, and so perhaps for one final time, who knows, I am privileged to have the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you based upon the illustration

that is used throughout the Bible of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and sinners like you and me as His sheep.

As I have thought about this it has been wonderful for me to realise that there are so many references to this illustration in the Bible, and I would like to direct your thoughts very briefly to three areas specifically:

- 1) Who is the Shepherd?**
- 2) Who are the Sheep?**
- 3) The coming Separation**

As I proceed, I am bearing in mind the following three quotations: "I can forgive a man for a bad sermon. I can forgive the preacher

almost anything - if he gives me a sense of God; if he gives me something for my soul; if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel"

(Martin Lloyd Jones)

"Our people do not need so much to have their heads stirred as to have their hearts touched"

(Edwards)

"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men"

(Baxter)

1) Who is the Shepherd?

a) Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, is the Shepherd. He gives His life for the sheep and thus proves His love for them.

b) He knows His sheep - He calls them by name.

c) He searches for His sheep - not in vain - and He is doing that today and, finding His sheep, He rescues them.

d) He speaks to His sheep through His word - the Bible.

e) He tends and cares for His sheep and brings them to enjoy comfort and security in the knowledge of their sins forgiven and safe arrival at last in heaven.

He binds up the injured sheep and strengthens the weak sheep.

He leads His sheep by His Spirit.

2) Who are the Sheep?

a) We are the sheep. We come from North, South, East and West, and from all points in between.

b) We are all by nature lost sheep - all can say, "*all we like sheep have gone astray*".

c) The longer we are lost, the more likely we are to be in danger - when sheep are lost in a wilderness without care, they will eventually perish and you farmers know that very well.

d) We are stupid. Many of us who have worked with sheep cannot get over how often they take the wrong turning - and so do we in relation to God and His word: we take the wrong turning and things go wrong rather than right for us, because we refuse His word and run away from it.

I use the following illustration with permission:

"Blackie" was the name of an orphaned black-faced lamb brought up on the East Coast of Harris, which is like the moon - mostly rocks! It fared for itself over the summer but as winter came in, it would not respond to the call of the shepherd to come to the trough for food - it continued to fare for itself, as an independent. Eventually one day the shepherd went out and called, and, of course, did not expect Blackie to come - but Blackie could not be seen either. The shepherd went to look, and eventually found Blackie on its back, so weak for lack of food that it looked as if it would die. The shepherd lifted Blackie onto its feet again, guided it gently to the trough, and, at long last, Blackie began to eat. Blackie began then to respond to the shepherd's call, and soon was first to come to

the trough! The illustration is a fair picture of many here today, who at first did not trust in the Good Shepherd, but then did. The invitation is to come to Him for help and blessing - why hesitate?

- e) We are in need of care and attention - on the outside and on the inside.
- f) The sheep listen to their Shepherd.
- g) The sheep follow their Shepherd.
- h) The sheep know their Shepherd.
- i) We are in need of the Good Shepherd of the sheep (Remember "Blackie").

3) The coming Separation -

conducted by the Good Shepherd: It is only by trusting and believing in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, that you can really know what you have already sung this afternoon, "The Lord is my Shepherd", and finish up with the words, "And in God's house for evermore, my dwelling place shall be".

I have talked very briefly about this illustration, and it is just wonderful at the end of this short

address, to be able to assure you that Jesus the Good Shepherd gave His life for His sheep. If you don't believe me, then check it out for yourself in His word - you will see how it is there. Jesus says that your heavenly Father is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost, so, once again on this December afternoon, the invitation is extended to all, "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*". And if you accept this invitation, you will hear Him say to you as one of His sheep on His right, "*Come you blessed of my Father: take your inheritance - the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*".

What will happen if you do not come? The answer is extremely sad, but has to be faced up to by all of us - you will be lost eternally. Yet, "*God is not willing that any should perish*". His loving invitations include: "*Come unto me and I will give you rest*"; "*Son, daughter, give me your heart*". Please do not wait - do it now! God bless you all, and may your hearts be touched.

What a Way for a Preacher to Go

According to a January 10 AP story, Rev. Jack Arnold, 69, collapsed and died in mid-sentence of a sermon after saying "And when I go to heaven . . ." The Presbyterian minister was nearing the end of his sermon Sunday (at Covenant Presbyterian Church in the Orlando suburb of Oveido) when he grabbed the podium before falling to the floor, according to Rev Michael S Beates, associate pastor at the church. Arnold had been the senior pastor of the church until the late 1990s. The cause of death is believed to be cardiac arrest. He had bypass surgery five years earlier. Before collapsing, Arnold quoted John Wesley, who said, "Until my work on this earth is done, I am immortal. But when my work for Christ is done . . . I go to be with Jesus."

This is the Finger of God

By Revd Alexander Murray

"...This is the finger of God..." [Exodus 3:19]

THE CHANNEL 4 News Report began by picturing the huge tsunami wave approaching a beach resort in the Indian Ocean on 26 December, accompanied by the words – “ **Jesus Christ !!** ” – spoken in the chilling intonation of surprised oath by a tourist there present.

The swear-word, uttered in habitual, insensitive spontaneity, by the unidentified eye-witness does, however, identify for us the true meaning of what was taking place. God’s judgment was about to overtake these parts of our earth, and we cannot shirk the conclusion that it is JESUS CHRIST who has done it. It is **His** voice to the world in this generation of mankind, and spoken through the medium of His Holy Providence of “preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” (Shorter Catechism 11 cf) “*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father*” [Mat. 10:29] and “*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*” [Mat. 28:18].

To my knowledge this is not the message that has gone out from any Church leader in any area of the Christian Community. It hardly accords with the “God of love”

proclaimed on all sides of today’s spectrum of theological thinking! Yet it is the clear unmistakable teaching of Holy Scripture and of Jesus Himself. The **word** of God in Scripture interprets for us the **word** of God in His Providence, whereas the **word** of God in Providence does, in turn, vindicate the truth, in fulfilment, of the **words** of Holy Scripture. In answer to the disciples in Matthew 24 our Lord had this to say, “... *And there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. ...*”

Another thing, not commented upon to my knowledge, is the **timing** of the event. Significantly, it was the morning of the Lord’s Day. Not Friday (Muslim), Saturday (Jewish) sabbaths, but the First day of the Week, the memorial to “Redemption Accomplished” in the resurrection from the grave of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Day of Christian Worship till the end of time! One may wonder as to what attention may have been given to the claims of the Lord’s Day by tourists etc. around the periphery of the Indian Ocean on that 26 December 2004. Little or none, I suspect!

A further most significant

witness to the event's meaning is its **timing** in the sense of the element of complete surprise achieved - *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"* [1 Thes. 5:2 cf] *"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"* [Mat.24:44].

To my mind, along with the pagan generation where we have our lot, we are in danger of losing the true meaning and, therefore, the benefit of what is being acknowledged as an "unprecedented" event in the experience of the modern world. It can be referred to as a "natural" event for which scientific answers are available or, simply, "an act of God" for which none of us shares blame, but is that good enough in the situation? I think NOT!

Steps are being taken to give warning of the approach of another tsunami. But God has many more weapons in His arsenal to bring judgment to bear upon man if he fails to respond to the Divine Voice to the nations. "No", we need to take it to heart that God will not be excluded from His creation - *"and ye shall know that I am the LORD"* and *"and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD"* [Ezek. 13:23 & 14:23].

Again, then - What does Jesus tell us in this regard? - *"Or those eighteen, upon the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?"*

*"I tell you, Nay; but, **except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**"* [Luke 13:4,5].

PAUL REFERS TO THE FACT that we must all appear before Christ's judgement-seat as *"the terror of the Lord"* [1 Cor 5:11], and well he might. Jesus the Lord, like His Father is holy and pure; we are neither. We live under His eye, He knows our secrets, and on the judgment day the whole of our past lives will be played back, as it were, before Him, and brought under review. If we know ourselves at all, we know that we are not fit to face Him. What then are we to do? The New Testament answer is: call on the coming Judge to be our Saviour. As Judge, He is the law, but as Saviour He is the gospel. Run from Him now, and you will meet Him as Judge then - and without hope. Seek Him now, and you will find Him (for *"he that seeketh findeth"*), and you will then discover that you are looking forward to that future meeting with joy, knowing that there is now *"no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus"* [Rom 8:1]. So

Whilst I draw this fleeting breath;
When my eyelids close in death:
When I soar through tracts unknown,
See thee on Thy judgment-throne;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

J I Packer

The Churches

WE SHOULD constantly praise our God for the fact that there is a church of Christ in our land. There never was a moment in our history but *"the gates of hell"* were ready to devour and destroy the church worldwide. So let us give thanks for all who preach, *"Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."*

We need to constantly remember the benefits of God's grace, these are innumerable. People of all ages from almost every conceivable background are being saved. The people of God are growing spiritually. A great variety of good work is being done.

Young people are continuing to be called into Christian service of one kind or another. Missionaries still go out from these shores. Money is given freely and gladly to the Lord's work.

There are thousands of church services, bible studies and prayer meetings every week. People are studying God's word and Christianity at elementary levels and at the most advanced level. Bibles are distributed freely and by tens of thousands.

The gospel is a force in peoples lives and in the community. There are Christians in many walks of life. The Lord has His remnant, and that

remnant appears to be from right across the spectrum of Christian denominations. We would all like to see more of what is good and positive in Christendom, nevertheless may we with all our hearts give thanks for what there is and despise not the day of small things. For when all is said and done it is only a very small minority that take a vital interest in the Gospel.

What a blessing, if after the Tsunami, that has had exceptional media coverage, and hopefully has touched our hearts to the very depths, if the church nationally and world wide is quickened into greater urgency and godliness. Not only have we a message of great compassion and love, but we have the only message that will prepare people for whatever disaster should befall them or us.

Although the church is a small minority, they are an immensely important minority to God, and they have a duty to go into all the world with the gospel. Sometimes people say how can a Christian stay in this or that denomination, and possibly it has been said about every single denomination more often than one would care to count. Yet God uses His word and His people in all

these different situations. It is all important that we recognise the sovereign hand of God in this matter, and that we respect and love our fellow believers although we may in all honesty believe that they are wrong in certain beliefs and practices. No doubt they can see many faults in us. What a need for the Church of Christ to be knit together in love.

It is important to remember that the reason for taking an interest in the whole church is that at the end of the day there is only one Christian church, and we must have a prayerful interest in the whole of Christendom.

In the letters to the seven churches of Asia, the constant exhortation is to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, in other words, they were not only to consider what the spirit said to their particular church but what was said to all the churches. We likewise must consider what the spirit is saying in our day to the whole church. The wise will get instruction from this exercise and much material for prayer.

To tolerate wicked men or women is not a virtue [Rev 2:2, 20]. Wickedness can be blatant sins of the flesh or of the spirit, what a change in Christendom if this were heeded, and such people were made aware that the church cannot tolerate wickedness. For a church to forsake her first love [Rev 2:4], necessitates that she repent, what tears are needed in Christendom.

Where is the love that

crosses denominational barriers, or that weeps over the lost, or that evidences to all men that we are Christ's disciples, or that makes people hunger for God and His word. Commitment to Christ requires faithfulness unto death [Rev 2:10] what depths of conviction and strength should characterise the church.

Compromise may be good in many political situations but it can be a total disaster in the spiritual realm. Idolatry and sexual immorality are soundly condemned [Rev 2:14], so relevant for the Christian Church in Britain today. If these sins are not condemned, it is inevitable, that they will not only be in Christendom but that they will take over Christendom.

Even Satan's deep secrets were considered desirable knowledge by some in the church [Rev 2:24] what perversity and arrogance is in the human heart. Churches can have a good reputation which they simply do not deserve [Rev 3:1]. Depth of insight is required, and spiritual alertness. False claims re office and spiritual pedigree [Rev 2:2 & 3:9] are as old as Christendom. Self righteousness, self satisfaction, and a high estimate of ones self is a sure sign of spiritual deadness [Rev 3:17 & 18]. Dire and most solemn consequences will follow if the church does not change her ways for the better. Such a catalogue should make us all aware of our own sinfulness.

Not withstanding the negatives there was much that was

happening that was not only good but excellent. Hard work and perseverance [Rev 2:2]; suffering persecution [Rev 2:10]; being true to Christ's name [Rev 2:13]; increased activity Rev 2:19]; not soiling their clothes Rev 3:]; Keeping God's word [Rev 3:8]; We believe it is the same in our day.

The church is weak in herself but strong in the Lord. It is made up of sinners saved by grace. *"For ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."*

[1 Cor 1:26-29].

The call to the Church then and now is to repent of all that is wrong and to do what is right. The words of the Reformation, 'always reforming' are very apt for the church in Britain in 2005.

The promise to one church after another is that, they will be richly rewarded if they heed what the spirit says to the churches. Truly our God is infinitely loving and merciful. May the Church in Britain go the way of repentance and faith which is the way of blessing.

No prayerful Christian can read the letters to the churches in Asia without hoping that they eventually repented, likewise nobody should reflect on the Church in Britain without hoping and praying fervently that she repents and does what is right. That is a prayer that should never cease to ascend from our hearts.

"THE BELIEVER IS NOT SO MUCH a member of any local church whatsoever, as he is a member of the catholic Church of Christ, which is not confined to any place or people. In like manner the office-bearers of the Christian Church are not the office-bearers of any particular society alone, but the office-bearers of the whole visible community of believers. It may be necessary for the advantageous exercise of their office, and profitable for the Church, that particular ministers should be set apart to labour in particular charges, as more extensively theirs. But their ministry is not limited to these. Their commission as preachers of the Gospel is a commission co-extensive with the visible Church of Christ; and they are free to exercise their ministry wherever and whenever they have a regular opportunity to do so. Both members and office-bearers stand related, in the first instance, to the Church catholic or universal, and only in the second instance, to the Church local or particular."

James Bannerman, ('Church of Christ', vol 1, p47)

Ministry, Not Committees

THINK ABOUT IT: the most valuable asset people can give to your church is their time. If a man or woman comes to me and says, 'Pastor, I have four hours a week to give to the church in ministry,' the last thing I'm going to do is put him or her on some committee.

Committees discuss while ministries do. Committees argue while ministries act. Committees maintain while ministries minister. Committees talk and consider while ministries serve and care. Committees discuss needs while ministries meet needs. We must minimize maintenance in order to maximize time for ministry.

Maintenance is church work: budgets, buildings, and organizational matters. Ministry is the work of the church. The more people you involve in maintenance decisions, the more you keep them from ministry.

We have no committees at Saddleback. We do, however, have 150 different lay ministries. Our paid staff does the maintenance, and our lay ministers appreciate that the time they volunteer is given to actual ministry.

In streamlining your structure, it's better not to vote on ministry positions. There are several good reasons for this:

* It avoids personality contests and attracting people who are only

interested in power or prestige.

* It allows new ministries time to develop slowly, out of the public spotlight.

* It allows new members a chance to get involved more quickly.

* It makes removal easier should people fail in a ministry.

Not voting on ministry positions also allows you to respond more quickly to the Holy Spirit's leading. Once a woman came to me and said, "We need a prayer ministry."

I said, "I agree. You're it."

She said, "Don't I have to be elected or go through some approval process?" She had imagined having to jump through all kinds of hoops first. I said, "Of course not. Just announce a formation meeting in the bulletin and start it." She did.

You shouldn't have to vote on whether or not a person can use the gifts God has given him or her in the Body of Christ. I'm sure you realize how radical this approach is.

In the typical church, members handle the maintenance (administration) of the church, and the pastor is supposed to do all the ministry. No wonder the church can't grow!

Until next time,
RICK

[Taken from Rick Warren's Toolbox Ministry - Issue No 186]

" I believe that young people are indifferent to the Church today, not because the church has demanded so much from them, but because it has required so little".

Mort Crim

There are no financial problems in churches. There are no problems of relationships in churches. There are no youth problems in churches. There is only one problem in churches - a spiritual problem. All other problems are but symptoms of this one spiritual problem.

JONAH and the WHALE

A little girl told her teacher that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small.

The little girl then repeated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible. So little girl said, "Well, when I get to heaven I will ask Jonah." The teacher asked, "But what if Jonah went to hell?" The little girl replied, "Then you ask him"!

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