

## EDITORIAL

# Electing an MP

BY THE TIME our next APC News appears we will have a new government. It is the Christian's duty to vote. How should we vote? What principles should we apply?

To say that there is no point in voting because they are all a 'bunch of crooks', is not only untrue but very silly reasoning. If they are all a 'bunch of crooks', then it is because we, the electorate, have put them into power, either by our vote or by our indolence in not voting.

The present concern about sleaze and corruption among MPs, ought to stir us up to be sure that we are not responsible for such people holding such power. We ought to be more industrious than ever that good people hold important office in the land.

For the Christian, the primary concern ought to be the upholding of God's laws and the spiritual and moral welfare of the people. Nothing, but absolutely nothing, should deter us from that primary object. Each Christian ought to find out which candidate, no matter what Party he may belong to, will preserve our Christian heritage and allow the kingdom of God to

advance.

If we were a truly Christian nation, then individual Party policy would perhaps be worth considering. However, in practice we are very far from being a Christian nation. Although our financial situation is in a very serious state, it is not the most serious matter in our land. The most important crisis in our country is the spiritual decline in Christian values and ideals. Until this is recovered, Party policy should not dominate our choice.

Our poor financial situation is due to our neglecting the spiritual and moral aspects of life. Immorality is costing our nation billions of pounds each year. Because we have abandoned God and His Word as the only rule to direct us in our journey through life, our nation has lost its role of leadership in the world and is struggling to survive with huge amounts of debts.

The Bible insists that "*Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people*" [Pro 14:34]. In the last two decades, our nation has legislated in opposition to the very fundamental and basic standards of God's Word.

Our laws are no longer in unison with God's revealed will. We are carving out a course after our own imagination. As Isaiah complained in his day regarding Israel, we "*call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness*" [Isa 5:20].

We are a "*sinful nation...laden with iniquity...children who deal corruptly*" and "*have forsaken the Lord*" [Isa 1:4]. We are under judgment, God has blinded our eyes. Both church and state are in spiritual poverty - our eyes are blinded from seeing what the problem really is "*For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers)*" [Isa 29:10].

Our electorate system provides us with 'machinery' to remove those we do not wish to rule over us - the ballot box. We have a wonderful opportunity to put into power the best person available. And if there are no suitable candidates, perhaps we should offer our own services! Our Confession states clearly 'It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate'.

It is impossible to separate religion from civil matters. We are constituted religious beings. We all have souls as well as bodies. Religion and politics are inextricably merged together and just cannot be separated. Politics is not dirty, it is politicians, and only some at that, who are dirty. Politics

is not a necessary evil, politics is necessary because of evil. Personal revenge is forbidden, but God has sanctioned the State to take revenge on the wicked. That is why "*The Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him*" [Gen 4:15]. There was no State to take revenge against Cain, so he was to go free. We need the State to protect us from the wicked.

We wholeheartedly agree that there are separate boundaries for both Church and State, but they are to work together in their respective realms. God's law relates to the civil magistrate in that it must restrain and punish evil doers and protect human life and property and to provide justice for all people. That is why Paul says the law was not made for the righteous but for the lawless [1 Tim 1:9,10]

The civil magistrate cannot regenerate the heart. No group of men can "*by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom*" [Psa 49:7]. Only God can renew the heart. Keeping the law cannot make people good - but it can be a means of suppressing wickedness and protecting innocent people from suffering at the hands of evil doers. The Church is the organ God has appointed to proclaim His Word and truth and along with the Holy Spirit, promised to the Church, God will bless His Word and it will not return to Him void.

We are called to pray for our

civil rulers. God has appointed the State, and as Paul puts it “*there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God*” [Rom 13:1]. One reason why we should pray for our civic rulers is in order that we, the Church, can live a quiet and peaceable life and preach the gospel [1 Tim 2:2]. The civil magistrate is “*the servant of God an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer*” [Rom 13:4], and ought to be prayed for as much as ministers of the gospel. We need to remember that God raised up Moses and Daniel to be great Statesmen and were used mightily in bringing blessing to their nations. They were not priests but civic rulers.

It is naive to think there could not be revolution in our country. If that happens, as it has happened in other countries in the last few decades, we could find ourselves under the hands of a dictator. Such judgments would not be the first to come on a nation.

Having abandoned God as our Rock, our nation looks to the State to ‘save’ it from the troubles of life, and when the State fails to deliver, there is no where to turn. The hungry dictators of the world will not be slow to detect where there are opportunities to exploit a people who are vulnerable and searching for leaders who will promise them what they want to hear.

All Christians have a duty to pray earnestly for, and seek the best

for, their nation. We still have law and order and there are procedures for rectifying abuses. Let us grasp them before it is too late.

As Christians we ought to be unashamed of what we believe, and when opportunity presents itself we ought to state where we stand regarding spiritual and moral values and ideals. We ought not to be apologetic about our convictions. We have nothing to be ashamed of and everything to rejoice in.

There are thousands of people milling around us today who are looking for the answers that Christians can give them. The Bible is full of wisdom - yes, wisdom for this world as well as the next. God has not abandoned this world - He aims to make it a wonderful place which will bring glory and honour to Him. All nations will yet bow before King Jesus. All nations will call Him ‘Blessed’. We are commanded to “**Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples**” [1Chr 16:24]

All nations shall serve the Lord, and as each nation has it’s own identity and culture, and as we are told that “*the kings of the earth will bring their glory into*” the New Jerusalem [Rev 21:24], we need to recapture our Christian identity and remake our culture one of honour and glory to God. At the end of the day, that is all that truly matters.

May God enable us all to choose candidates who are most likely to bring that honour about. □

# God is Always Good (2)

by J Cameron Fraser

AS STATED IN MY previous article, I intend in this one to illustrate how my experience of cancer, and particularly of a stem-cell transplant, has helped me relate to one particular member of my congregation. Since I first wrote that, however, several other members have been diagnosed with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses. In particular, the woman who loaned me the book *A Bend in the Road*, which I found so helpful, has herself been diagnosed with the same type of lymphoma I had, except in her neck rather than the spleen as in my case. Being able to give answers to her many questions about the treatment she is facing has been pastorally rewarding.

Other examples could be given, but my primary purpose has been to focus on one particular person, a fifteen year old girl named Cassidy Taekema. Cassidy does not and did not have cancer, although she would likely have developed an acute form of leukemia had it not been for a preventative stem-cell transplant. While the circumstances and details were different from mine, I was struck by how my own experience so

soon before hers had prepared me to have at least some understanding of what she and her family were going through. A close bond developed, and many conversations were held, in person and by e-mail, on what God's purpose in all this might be.

August 2009 was spent by my wife, Margaret, and me (and for part of the time, by our younger son James) in Scotland. Right up until the time of departure from Canada, I wondered if I would need to stay behind to conduct Cassidy's funeral. While in Scotland, it was a joy to meet with family and friends who had been praying for me. We encouraged prayer also for Cassidy, and I spoke about her in a church on Skye.

Cassidy's story goes back to her birth. She was born with a rare condition known as severe chronic neutropenia. This means that her bone marrow produced no neutrophils, which are the body's main defense against bacterial infection. She started a treatment of daily injections of something called granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF for short). I am going

to let Cassidy's mother, Sonya, tell the story from there...

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In January of 2008, Cassidy went for a routine blood test. The results showed, for the first time in her life, a completely normal blood count! Of course we had the test redone, just to be sure, but over and over again they showed normal neutrophil counts. We were ecstatic, and quickly shared the great news, with praises to God coming first. Cassidy's paediatrician in Lethbridge kept a close eye on her, and discovered that over repeated examinations, the swelling of her spleen (which had been enlarged for years) had also decreased substantially. This meant that, though still needing to be cautious, she had more freedom of activity and movement than she'd ever experienced before.

Her haematologist from Calgary called, and though an annual bone marrow biopsy had been done in October, she wanted to do another one, just to see what was causing the changes to the blood counts. Reluctantly, we agreed. We really wanted Cassidy to enjoy her new-found freedom, and not continue to be poked and prodded, but knew the doctors needed to be cautious as well. So in early July, she went in. All went well, there were no complications, and preliminary results showed no abnormalities.

Life went on as normal. In late August we met up with family in British Columbia for a camping holiday. We had a mostly fabulous time, minus some weather issues. One day I was at the local laundromat, when my phone rang. I answered, and it was the haematologist in Calgary, informing me that because of some anomalies that had shown up on the biopsy, Cassidy needed to come up to Calgary--the sooner the better-- but to enjoy our holiday first. Oh, and Cassidy had to go off of the G-CSF completely, and immediately.

I was so glad I was alone at that moment. The fear that had gnawed at me throughout Cassidy's life now roared and bared its ugly teeth. Before I could panic, however, the words, "Did I not say I would take care of you?" came into my mind. Immediately I was calmed, and phoned my husband to come meet me. We discussed what had transpired, cried and prayed together, and went back to the girls.

We told them that Calgary had called, and because of some test results, Cassidy had to stop her injections. We didn't say the rest, because it was important for them to stay innocent and have carefree fun as long as possible. The following night we stayed in a very posh hotel, uncertain when our next chance would be to enjoy a vacation together .

On August 28th we headed to Calgary. Once there, we were

informed that Cassidy's chromosomes had mutated, and if untreated, would become acute myelogenous leukemia, which is terribly difficult to treat. The only realistic treatment presented was a stem cell transplant.

Our world fell apart! Everything had been going so well, it felt like the rug had been pulled out from under us!

And yet, there was the simple but profound notion that this was how Cassidy would finally experience the miracle of complete healing, and having a disease-free body. And that's the hope we clung to as we moved forward to transplant. Cassidy never worried--she had a God-given peace all the way through.

The process progressed rather quickly. The bone marrow transplant team started actively searching for a donor (no one in our immediate family was a match) in September, a process that takes anywhere from a few months to a year. (The medical team is referred to as the bone marrow transplant team, but the actual procedure is called a stem cell transplant.) On November 5th we were informed that they had found a perfect match! From there, we had several more appointments in Calgary preparing for transplant, and on December 14th Cassidy was admitted to the oncology unit at the Alberta Children's Hospital. We knew going in that we would remain in Calgary

for a minimum 100 days post-transplant.

There are many risks associated with stem cell transplants, but the technology has advanced ten-fold since Cassidy was a baby, and we really felt God had protected her all these years to get her to this point. Everything leading up to transplant worked so smoothly, it was impossible not to see God's hand in it.

Cassidy went through a week of chemotherapy, to which she didn't react too badly. On December 23rd, she received the cells that would change so much of her life. All went well, but for a fever in the middle of the night. She was put on antibiotics just to be safe, but it ended up being a simple post-transplant reaction, and she had no fevers afterwards. There were no huge issues after that point--at least nothing unexpected--and she recovered quite well. Mucositis became an issue briefly, but Cassidy continued to eat in spite of it, thanks in part to morphine. She also needed one blood transfusion just to help boost her haemoglobin.

On January 6th we were given the news that, for the first time in her life, Cassidy's marrow was making its own adult neutrophils--without the aid of G-CSF! This meant that the marrow was indeed grafting. And things just continued to get better from there. Her mucositis eased, she was able to take all her medications orally, she

was eating enough that her intravenous line could be safely removed, and she sped right along to discharge, which was the 17th of January.

We moved into the Ronald McDonald House. The following two and a half months had their ups and downs, but Cassidy remained healthy and strong. Around us there were so many families going through their own trials, and we couldn't help but feel extraordinarily blessed that she was doing so incredibly well. So well, in fact, that we were able to go home on April 1st, 2009--day 99. Thank you, Jesus!

The adjustment to being home was not an easy one, though Cassidy was most enthusiastic about seeing her friends before and after school, when her sister was being dropped off or picked up. She was still much too immunosuppressed to be out in public, and was restricted in what foods she could eat, so that was a bit challenging for her. As the first week progressed, though, it got easier for both of us. Until the 8th of April, when she woke up with a rash.

Initially I thought the rash was due to some jewelry Cassidy had been wearing overnight, but when it didn't ease and started to spread, I called Calgary. The bone marrow transplant team member I spoke to advised us to come up the next day, as Good Friday was on the 10th, and she didn't want us to wait past the

long weekend. So, with fear and trepidation, we made the return trip to the place that had been our home for many months.

Several doctors came to examine Cassidy. They were looking to rule out graft versus host disease (GVHD, a potential complication of stem cell transplants in which the newly transplanted cells attack the recipient's body). The rash's appearance and presentation were definitely not classic GVHD, but the doctors set up an emergency appointment with a dermatologist, just to be sure. The dermatologist was more certain it was GVHD, but a very mild case, which, he assured us, was not a cause for great concern. He sent us home with a prescription for topical steroid creams, and we left Calgary, once again, for home.

On Easter morning however, it was apparent that Cassidy's condition was not improving, and possibly deteriorating. She had developed vomiting and diarrhea, which are potential symptoms of GVHD. So, after talking to the oncologist in Calgary, we decided to make our way back up to the Alberta Children's Hospital.

On admission, it was obvious that Cassidy was dehydrated, so immediately the staff started to infuse her with fluids. My husband Dave and our older daughter Kali left shortly, as he had work and she school the next day, and really, we felt our stay would be a brief one.

Get the fluids in her, get the diarrhea and vomiting under control, and we'd be on our way. Little did we know...

The rest of that week was tumultuous, to say the least. There was much debate over Cassidy's condition between members of the bone marrow transplant team, the gastro-intestinal specialists, and those dealing with infectious diseases. There was the distinct possibility of GVHD, but other plausible diagnoses included bacterial, viral, or parasitic infections. Often these discussions were had while the doctors were standing around Cassidy's bed, which was unsettling and frightening.

It was decided to start Cassidy on steroids and an immunosuppressant due to the likelihood of GVHD. She was also given a dose of an anti-parasitic medication and started on a course of antibiotics just in case. And tests on any other possible viral infections were still pending.

But things did not improve and, indeed, worsened. On the 16th of April, after about a week without the benefit of any food, intravenous nutrition was begun. The same day, it was decided--rather suddenly--that an endoscopy and biopsy of the gut needed to be performed. This was terrifying for my girl whose body had already turned against her. How much more would she have to endure?

The endoscopy was mostly successful but for a bit of bleeding afterwards. And the results showed that, indeed, GVHD was the main cause of Cassidy's symptoms. In fact, the GVHD was categorized as grade 4 of the gut--the worst possible, but for the fact the liver wasn't affected.

After the scope and biopsy, Cassidy started to expel blood, and blood only, through her stool and vomit--this was terrifying! The doctors continued treating her with steroids and immunosuppressants, the standard protocol, but it had little to no effect on her condition. And the pain she was in was heart wrenching.

This was extremely difficult for Cassidy. She usually has a very good attitude about her illnesses and their treatments. Even going in to transplant she was the least worried of us all! I think the uncertainty on the part of the doctors, the lack of progress in healing, and the general lack of diagnosis and treatment really affected her spirit. Not the positive girl I was used to, so this was very trying for me in that respect as well. Seeing her suffer and look at me wordlessly made me an emotional wreck.

On the evening of April 19th it was decided that Cassidy would be started on a drug typically used for Crohn's patients, in hopes that it would heal her badly damaged intestine and stomach linings.

However, her condition was so grave, and the effectiveness of this drug so questionable, that the doctors advised Dave to stay for the next few days. Kali went home to stay with family friends, as sitting around waiting and watching was not what we considered to be in her best interests.

April 20th, the doctors came to us and told us about a new therapy undergoing clinical trials in the States. It takes adult mesenchymal stem cells, and after an infusion into the patient, their job is to go to sites of inflammation, resolve the inflammation, and proceed to rebuild injured tissues. (In Cassidy's case, the entire lining of her stomach and intestines needed to be regenerated.) However, this therapy is not available in Canada, but the doctors were hoping to get permission on compassionate grounds to use it on Cassidy.

This was the best news we had heard yet, for obviously other methods of treatment were not working, and Cassidy was getting sicker, frailer, and her pain was increasing. We knew something had to be done, and finally had some hope to hold on to. The doctors worked around the clock, filling out forms, talking to officials, until April 22nd when they gained approval from Health Canada, the university and hospital boards, and the pharmaceutical company in the States to obtain the cells for Cassidy's treatment. All involved

realized this was really her last option for healing, and were more than cooperative.

That day Cassidy also, for the first time, requested morphine for her pain. Her pain was getting too much for her tired body to fight. And that night she finally was able to get some sleep.

The afternoon of the 24th was the first of the mesenchymal stem cell infusions. The plan was to infuse these cells twice a week for four weeks. The cells worked as hoped, but not as quickly as we would have liked, so four more infusions over four weeks were added. During that time, Cassidy was also diagnosed with the adenovirus, which was also a very serious complication, once again requiring drugs only Health Canada could approve. And approve, they did.

During this whole period, I e-mailed daily updates to prayer supporters. Here is part of what I wrote on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June:

... It's amazing how priorities, and what you consider blessings in your life, change when disaster strikes. Last year at this time, we were celebrating what we thought was the healing of Cassidy's disease, clueless that it was just entering a new phase. We were finishing off a year of school, never dreaming that the next one would be cut so short. We were planning summer holidays, activities, camping trips, and all things (gloriously) frivolous,

unaware that life would change for us so soon.

I'm a little envious of that family - of all they took for granted, of the minutiae they thought was so important, of the freedom they experienced in their life.

I do not know what the next minutes, days, weeks, etc., hold for us. And I really don't want to know. Through all of this I've learned the beauty in seeing all the little blessings, savouring the small moments of joy, tasting God's greatness and grace, and deeply feeling his presence in all that is life. I wish it hadn't taken these circumstances to open my senses to this. But knowing that he is in control gives me great peace. So I will hold onto him, wherever this journey takes us, trusting that he will see us safely through, and hopefully learning the lessons along the way. His way.

So, though I wish my sweet child and family hadn't been given these trials, and pray that they will be over soon, I am thankful for the lessons being learned along the way. And I wouldn't want to be the person I was last summer. But I would like a little taste of that frivolity again. Because I would savour it that much more....

It took a number of weeks or months to re-teach Cassidy's digestive system how to process food. In fact, from the time she was admitted to hospital, to the day she was able to truly eat a real meal was

four months. In that time she had lost a significant amount of weight (going from an already lean 104 pounds down to a paltry 69), and most all of her muscle mass.

Cassidy was discharged from the Alberta Children's Hospital 125 days after being readmitted, and we stayed in Calgary at the Ronald McDonald House for another 103 days. This made our total stay, minus some weekends, and the Easter break, 347 days. Christmas decorations were being hung as we packed to leave, and we were so grateful not to have to stay for a second Christmas. We had experienced every holiday of the year either in hospital or at the House.

Almost a year post-transplant, we came home. Cassidy is doing schoolwork by correspondence, getting together with friends periodically, and life is becoming normal, though it is a new normal, including regular check-ups in Calgary and ongoing changes to medication doses as new challenges are faced and dealt with. The future is still very uncertain--with still some evidence of GVHD present today--but we are grateful for all we've been blessed with, and count each new day a gift.

As for me, I live and view life differently. I plan less, and wait more. I speak less, and listen more. I judge less, and love more. I'm calmer, less likely to react impulsively, more

introspective. And this is in large part due to very special people God has put in my life along the way. I also know that every person has their own set of trials, and though many of ours were and are very visible and public, one cannot assume to know what is going on in another's life, nor presume to know how they should respond and react to either blessings or adversity.

But this I know for sure: God is doing a greater work in us, and that can only come as we learn to trust him no matter how dark the days and sleepless the nights. And it is only as we have been through the darkness with him that what we know with our heads slides down into our hearts, and our hearts no longer demand answers. The 'Why?' becomes unimportant when we believe that God can and will

redeem the pain for our good and his glory.... When I put the sovereignty of God beside his unending love, my heart can rest.--  
Verdell Davis

And, more importantly, from Romans 8: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What beautiful and eternal comfort, in what can be a less-than beautiful but very temporal life. And to this my response is gratitude. For God is always good. □

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IN OUR HAPPIEST TIMES we do not want to die. The wish for death rises only when our sufferings seem unbearable. What we really want in these times is not death but relief. We would love for the good times to come again. We would like the pain to go away...We want life and happiness...

We are kidding ourselves when we romanticize death as the climax of a life well lived. It is an enemy. It cuts us off from all the wonderful pleasures of this world...The longing of the human heart is to live and to be happy.

God made us that way. "*He has put eternity into man's heart*"[Ecc 3:11] .....We are made to live forever. And we will. The opposite of eternal life is not annihilation. It is hell. Jesus spoke of it more than anybody, and He made plain that rejecting the eternal life He offered would result not in obliteration, but in the misery of God's wrath...So eternal life is not merely the extension of this life with its mix of pain and pleasure. As hell is the worst outcome of this life, so 'eternal life' is the best. All that is evil and harmful in this fallen creation will be removed. All that is good, all that will bring true and lasting happiness will be preserved and intensified. *J Piper*

# A Land of Many Idols

TODAY, BRITAIN may well be described as a *pluralist* society. Pluralism is the position that many different religions are acceptable, not just one. This is the spirit of the day—people should be free to practice their own religion. As Christians we benefit from this. It means that we are able to gather together in our homes and in our churches to worship God. We are free to do this, and for that we are to be thankful. But it raises difficulties for the Christian as well. Ideally we would live in a Christian society, a society where the laws of the land are based upon God's commands. That reality however lies in the future when God will announce the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth. At that time 'the former things will have passed away' (Revelation 21:4). Until then we ought to expect difficulties and tensions, 'the birth pains' of the new order (Matthew 24:7–8).

A pluralist society suits those who say they believe in *every* religion and those who believe in *no* religion. It also suits those whose religion is entirely arranged around self—the worldview that says 'my beliefs don't affect anyone else!' But to have a faith that *dismisses* the claims of every other religion, and dismisses them as idolatrous—which is what Christianity does—is

not something that fits comfortably in a pluralist society. It is not encouraged. It is in fact discouraged, to the point where laws of the land may be made against it. We hope and pray this does not happen. But even if it does, the truth remains. Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, *no one* comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6) There is no salvation outside of Christ or alongside Christ. He alone is able to save.

Today, Christians do what God's people have always done in the past to understand their own times—we look to the Word of God. Looking to the Scriptures helps us to understand our situations, to see what God demands of us, and also—perhaps most importantly—to see how we might expect God to act in our times. When we read the Scriptures we find that pluralism is not a new idea. Indeed it was the prevalent attitude of the nations—examples are Egypt and Babylon in the Old Testament and Asia and Europe in the New Testament. Our situation in Britain today is not a world-first. It is, rather, one that God's people have found themselves in throughout the ages. We can therefore learn a great deal about what God thinks and how he acts in such a situation when we read the stories of Israel's exodus and exile

in the Old Testament, and the missionary journeys of the apostles in the New Testament.

One such story from which we can benefit is recorded at the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra. The Jewish people were captured and taken away from their own land. No longer did they live in their own country where they could freely gather together and worship God. The Temple, indeed the whole of Jerusalem, had been destroyed. Many were put to death. Friends and families were broken up. Possessions were lost and confusion reigned. What was God doing? Had he forsaken them? They were now living among a people to whom God was, at best, one among many idols. The Jewish people were foreigners in the Gentile world. Twenty-first century Britain strikes similar chords with the land to which the Jews were exiled. Our nation is a Gentile society too. It is one where there are numerous idols. It is therefore a land in which it is easy to wonder what God is doing—especially when the pluralist screws are tightening harder and harder in a bid to make Christians conform. The same questions arise: What is God doing? Has he forsaken us? Answers to our questions are found in Scripture. For there we find God's answers to the same questions posed by previous generations.

In Babylon it seemed as though God had turned away from Israel. But he hadn't. And in a remarkable

turn of events 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 (also Ezra 1:1–4) tells us, “*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’”*”

When we read this decree we might think to ourselves, ‘What a godly man Cyrus was!’ However, Scripture tells us something else. It tells us in Isaiah 45:5 that Cyrus *did not know God*. He was not one of God's covenant people. As far as he was concerned the God of the Israelites was just one among many gods. Cyrus was a pluralist and he was king over an expanding pluralist empire. Indeed, it is thought his empire increased to such an extent that resources for maintaining order were stretched to the limit. In such a political situation it makes more sense to give people the freedom they desire than hold them against their will. He therefore acknowledged those in his empire with religious convictions and permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This may

well have been one factor that God used to cause Cyrus to do his will. In any case, Cyrus's personal religious convictions, or lack thereof, did not stop God. Even though Cyrus was not one of God's people, God 'stirred up his spirit' to accomplish his will.

The first lesson for us to learn therefore is that a pluralist society *does not prevent God from executing his plans*. It is true that a pluralist society is not ideal. There will be no idols in heaven. But for now, God's plan is that we live in a pluralist society. And as was true of the days of the exile, so it shall be true of our days too—it is God's will that shall be done. It is his repeated promise that the idols of the world shall pass away.

A second lesson for us is that a pluralist society *opens up opportunities for Christians to share the gospel*. In his infinite wisdom God engineers situations in the world to accomplish his will. He arranges circumstances so that his will is always done. Today the command God gives us is not to build his temple, but rather to build his church. This takes place whenever we share the gospel. It comes by sowing the seeds of the good news of Jesus Christ's victory over the grave in the lives of those we meet. A pluralist society is one that is opposed to the gospel, but a society that opposes the gospel is also one that needs the gospel. And where there are needs, God gives

opportunities to provide for those needs. God's people therefore must be ready to share the gospel when the doors open for it, which they will, for today God continues to stir up the spirits of those who do not know him. This is, after all, what he has done for us—as Jesus said, our knowledge that he is the Christ is 'not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 16:17). As God cleared the way for the Second Temple to be rebuilt as Cyrus decreed, so today he will clear the way for his church to be built as Christ decreed (Matthew 16:18). Not even the gates of hell shall prevail against that.

In our society we will find many opportunities to share the hope of the gospel with those around us. Our land is one of many idols, yet it is only God that can satisfy the longings of the human heart. The promises of the world's gods are empty. Therefore Christians can expect those around them to become disillusioned with the world. Are we ready for these times? Are we ready to speak into the crises that people enter into: when people find that the world is unable to make good on its promises? The people of God need to be ready and willing to offer those around us that which is made good—the promise of Christ—'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). In every circumstance the gospel is needed.

God is always at work. Therefore his people shall find opportunities to share the gospel in all situations, whether at a personal level, local level, national level, or even at a global level. The gospel applies to every situation, and is needed in every situation.

At the same time we have to notice that living in a pluralist society *requires a spirit of Christian discernment*. In a pluralist society not everything is always what it first seems. During the building of the Second Temple there was a most illuminating example of this. Zerubbabel, who was the governor of Judah and chief supervisor of the rebuilding project, was approached by a number of men who said, 'Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here' (Ezra 4:2). This request was promptly rejected. Why did Zerubbabel reject their offer? He did so because he recognised that while they may well have worshipped God, they did not worship God *alone*. God was not the only one they sacrificed to. These were men who bought into the spirit of the day and who therefore also sacrificed to the idols of the surrounding lands. God does not permit the worship of any god before him or beside him—that is the first commandment, and these men were unrepentant for breaking it. Zerubbabel's decision was shown

to be the correct one. Having been turned away they rejected this opportunity to repent of their sin and turn to God. No longer did they want to help build the temple. Instead they continued in their sinful opposition to God and began bribing officials in their efforts to destroy it.

Similar issues confront the Christian Church today. A pluralist society encourages people to follow Jesus. However at the same time it also encourages the following of figures from other religions too. For this reason the church in society has to be discerning. Had Zerubbabel permitted these men to take part in the building of the temple then they would have destroyed the Lord's work. We would expect the same from like-minded men today.

The circumstances we find ourselves in today are not so different from those that have faced God's people in the past. This ought to fill us with confidence in God. He has demonstrated his sovereignty in ages past and he will do the same again for us today. More than mere historical records, these passages of Scripture provide us with the assurance we need that God is with us. Here, in the Word of God, we discover God's will for our own situations and the assurance we need that our obedience to him is not in vain.

*John C. A. Ferguson*  
*University of Aberdeen*

# Congregational News

## DUNDEE

*“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”* [Jam 5:16]. That is how our congregation feel with the passing of our dear friend Mr Quinn. We miss him and his prayers. Mr Quinn has worshipped with us since about 15 years and has been ill for the last few months in hospital. He passed away on 5 February.

Our minister was privileged to be with him one hour before he died. His family had been up all the previous night with him and had gone home for a rest. He was all alone, unconscious, when our minister spoke to him but he made no response. He prayed over him and sat in silent prayer with him for 10 minutes, and then left.

He often told us about his conversion - it was on Dens Road just up from the church and pointed out the very spot to us. He was a great encourager and often had a comforting word for us. We will miss his wisdom as well as his prayers.

Please pray that God would raise up others in his place to be a help and blessing to us.

We are still enjoying our Christianity Explored Course and finding that all of us are learning

more about Christ and our own hearts. Christianity Explored is an excellent occasion for fellowship.

We look forward to the Special Easter Service for the community and have the literature ready. The theme is ‘The Ultimate Sacrifice’, and is based on Christ’s death on the cross as the greatest sacrifice the world has ever seen.

We feel in need of reviving power amongst us. We have a lovely fellowship but are in need of more spiritual vitality and energy. Do pray that we will be a blessing in our community.

## EDINBURGH

Thankfully, the Christianity Explored Course is now in the 7th week and the attendance, though small, is very encouraging. The opposition towards anyone becoming a Christian, was highlighted in the shop the other day, when somebody said to one of those attending the CE course, we’ll not be friends with you if you become a Christian.

Two Faith Mission ladies, Becky and Elizabeth, are helping at Transformers for a few months. It is a matter for constant thankfulness

when people come around to help and yet we pray for more help here and in every corner of God's kingdom.

The attendance at Transformers, was alarmingly low the other week but there was an outstanding attentiveness. The following week's attendance was very good and there were attentive ears, but some children had to be told to leave early. May God, in His infinite love and grace, "set apart" all of the children to be followers of Christ.

We had an evening meal and review with the transformer leaders and some of the questions we discussed were: Why are we doing transformers? Why are you doing transformers? What's the best way that we can do transformers? What are you prepared to commit to achieve this goal? How can we help one another achieve this goal? What would you suggest to improve transformers? This kind of exercise helps leaders to appreciate one another and very importantly, makes us focus more clearly on communicating the gospel to the children.

What a debt of thanks we owe to all who support and pray for the work here. To God be the glory. Pray especially for "one or two" children from here that may get sponsored for attending a Christian camp. It is proving to be a very delicate situation.

When we heard the following prayer, we thought we should share it with those who would read this article. 'May the love of the Lord Jesus draw you to Himself; May His peace guard your heart; May His joy fill your soul; May His power equip you for His service. May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit descend and rest upon you now and always, Amen'.

*JR*

## **PORTREE**

On the 9 March at our Presbytery in Inverness, the Revd A M Cattanach the minister of our Portree congregation sent in his resignation. It was accepted with sadness. Mr Cattanach has been unwell since some time, and has now had to move to the Budhmor Home in Portree.

The Presbytery in December had appointed a delegation to go to Portree to see how they could help Mr Cattanach and the congregation. However, Mr Cattanach's health deteriorated and was too ill to be visited.

The delegation were able to meet the congregation and encourage them in the Lord. So, the congregation are now without a pastor and we ask for prayers regarding the future. May God provide for the congregation. □

# Points for Prayer...

## CHRISTIANITY SIDELINED

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, in February warned that Christianity is being sidelined in the UK as never before. He said 'We have reached a point where politicians are mocked for merely expressing their faith. I cannot imagine any politician expressing concern that Britain should remain a Christian country. That reticence is a scandal and a disgrace to our history.' He issued a call for Christians to become more assertive about their faith and heritage: 'If we behave like doormats, don't be surprised if we are treated as though we are. It is time to return to the public square.' The meeting heard that some 250 million Christians around the world suffered persecution, and more had been martyred for their faith in the last century than at any other time. Lord Carey said that while there could be no direct comparison between the pressure put on Christians in the UK and the violent persecution of many believers abroad, he identified a 'strident and bullying campaign' to marginalise Christianity in the UK being waged by atheists in the name of political correctness. 'The bullying campaign seeks to ban faith schools, despite evidence that faith schools perform

better than many others. It is clear that we must stand up against this marginalising of faith. We must constantly remind society of its Christian roots and heritage.'

*Christian Broadcasting Council*

## SCRAP CHRISTIAN PRAYERS

British Airways check-in operator Nadia Eweida in January appealed against a ruling which said that she did not suffer religious discrimination. On February 12m Nadia, who was temporarily banned from work for wearing a silver cross, lost her appeal against the Employment Appeal Tribunal decision that she was not a victim of indirect discrimination. The committed Christian was off work without pay for six months.

*Bible Society's Newswatch*

## LILLIAN LADELE CASE

The UK Supreme Court has turned down an appeal application in the case of Lillian Ladele, a Christian registrar who was disciplined because of her stance on civil partnerships. The nation's highest court dismissed her appeal, claiming it 'does not raise an arguable point of law of general public importance'. Gay rights are trampling on the the rights of

Christians. Miss Ladele is actively considering taking her legal fight to the European Court of Human Rights. It is vitally important in the new Parliament after the election that we continue to campaign to protect the rights of conscience of Christian employees.

*The Christian Institute*

### **SKIRTS VIOLATE EQUALITY?**

Making girls wear skirts as part of their school uniform is 'potentially unlawful', equality bureaucrats said in February. It may discriminate against female pupils who have gender dysphoria and believe themselves to be boys, according to a 68-page report. Officials at the Equality and Human Rights Commission released their guidance in expectation that the new Equality Bill will become law.

*The Christian Institute*

## **...and Praise**

### **CHURCH VICTORY**

A 600-member-strong London Church on January 12 won its legal battle against Lambeth Council in a last-minute out-of-court settlement. Lambeth Council served the All Nations Centre in Kennington with a noise abatement notice on

September 25, 2009, preventing the church from amplifying its music or sermons to the congregation on threat of prosecution. Although the church has been at its current location for over 45 years, a small number of residents began complaining to the Council about noise levels shortly after the church began a leaflet drop in the local community.

*Christian Legal Centre*

### **SACKED TEACHER**

Olive Jones, a Christian supply teacher from Weston-super-Mare, in January was offered the opportunity to return to her old job after Somerset Council recognised that it can be appropriate for a tutor to share his or her faith with a pupil or a family, depending on the situation.

Mrs Jones was dismissed in November 2009 after attending a meeting with her employers who had received a complaint from a parent that Olive had shared her faith with a sick pupil and asked the pupil's mother whether she could pray for the pupil.

As a result of intervention by the Christian Legal Centre and extensive media coverage, the Council arranged to meet Olive in the new Year. Andrea Williams, director of Christian Legal Centre, said 'We are delighted with this outcome...Common sense has

prevailed...We will continue to support people like Olive, who should never have to face this kind of disproportionate action and discrimination for merely living out their Christian faith’.

*Christian Legal Centre*

## CARE’S VISION

*“Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven”* [Matthew 5:16].

CARE (Christian Action Research & Education) exists to support the Church to be informed, active and equipped in key areas of concern in a changing society. Nola Leach, Chief Executive of CARE, writes: CARE’s vision is to be a radical and relevant organisation, maintaining a reasoned and compassionate Christian voice to government and society on crucial issues such as: the promotion of healthy marriages; the education of our children; the value of life from its beginning to its natural end and human dignity.

CARE has recently received a high profile within Westminster and beyond. I believe that this is because of the calibre of our Public Affairs team and the fact that what we say is relevant. It is not only backed up by good quality research, but accompanied by care for the vulnerable members of our society -

the family facing unplanned pregnancy or post-abortion issues, the trafficked girl, the disabled and the elderly.

At the time of the exile in Babylon, Jeremiah’s words are fascinating. He exhorted them to get married, build houses, have children - get on with normal life. That’s really powerful. They were building community.

We must balance our ‘holy rage’ against the injustices of our nation, with love. It comes back to living out our faith and using the talents God has given. We have huge opportunities. Society is crying out for answers and the Church is best placed to offer those solutions.

That is why I get so excited when I hear stories of Christians making a real difference and maintaining a clear witness, whether through working with Care-Confidential or our ground-breaking sex and relationship programme **evaluate**, or living out their faith in their homes, schools, the business world, the media or local government.

In many ways our society is broken. Yet as Christians we have a message of hope. We may feel as if we are ‘aliens and strangers in a foreign land’. It is our real privilege to work with you to bring that message of hope.

May you know God’s richest blessings in all you do for Him.

*Nola Leach in CARE Today*



CARE **NOT** KILLING

## Assisted Suicide Bill Published

Margo MacDonald recently published her End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill. The Bill will be discussed by the Scottish Parliament within the next 3 or 4 months. It is important that Christians pray and take all necessary action.

### The Bill

The proposals in the Bill are unbelievably wide. In addition to allowing people with a recognised terminal illness to seek assisted suicide, the Bill would permit the same facility to people 'permanently physically incapacitated to such an extent as not to be able to live independently and who find life intolerable.' It doesn't take too much thought to realise that this definition could include anyone who has a disability, ranging from tetraplegia to blindness, or deafness or a degree of immobility that makes them dependent on support from other people. Worryingly, too, there is no legal definition of what it is to find life 'intolerable'.

The Bill is surprisingly silent on what kind of end of life assistance would be legalised. It is presumed, but not specified, that it would be a cocktail of drugs which the patient

would self-administer. But any method would apparently be legitimate. The ambiguity probably results from a mixture of careless drafting and a desire to avoid spelling out what is involved in ending someone's life.

There are a number of so-called safeguards written into the Bill to ensure compliance with the law, in part to preclude the practice of 'euthanasia tourism' - people coming to Scotland just to die. Anyone applying for assisted suicide must have been registered with a Scottish medical practice for at least 18 months. However because the Bill does not specify an NHS medical practice there is the chilling prospect of practices being set up solely to facilitate and encourage assisted suicide.

The most worrying aspect of the Bill is what is not spelt out. Although purporting to allow assisted suicide (where a patient

self-administers lethal drugs supplied by a physician) it would actually also permit euthanasia (where a physician administers death to a patient directly). This means that Margo's prediction, on the basis of assisted suicide only, of the number of Scottish people likely to take advantage of the new law is a huge underestimate. Based on the experience of the Netherlands, where euthanasia is permitted, the number could be as high as 1500. Margo predicts 55.

## **The principle**

What underlies most attempts to legalise assisted suicide are two notions. The idea of autonomy - it's my life and I can do what I like with it; and the suggestion that only by deciding the timing of one's own death can one die with dignity. Both are flawed notions.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy is seen to over-ride any other consideration as if taking one's own life had no impact on, or involvement with, anyone else. 'No man is an island,' said John Donne - a tailor-made phrase for this issue. Deciding to take one's own life has an impact on many people around the patient. Medical staff who supply or administer the cocktail of drugs, and family members who may be against the assisted suicide are all drawn into

the procedure. Most importantly it is the impact on wider society that would be the greatest concern.

Dr Stephen Hutchison of the Highland Hospice lays out the dangers clearly: 'What patients want in response to their distress is loving, compassionate and competent caring - rarely physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. The huge problem is that if, for this tiny minority who advocate it I was to have the option of providing assisted suicide, my ability to openly acknowledge and address the concerns of the majority would be severely compromised. Patients, already fearful and vulnerable, would simply not be able to talk about their distress without fearing that assisted suicide would be on the agenda. Fears thus suppressed would fester. The needs of the majority would have to give way to the wishes of a minority.'

### **Dignity**

The word 'dignity' has been hijacked by those wanting to legalise assisted suicide. 'Dignity in Dying' is the organisation forcing the assisted suicide agenda. The implication is that medical care which does not include assisted suicide in some way lacks dignity.

'Human Dignity is inviolable. It must be protected and respected,' says Article 1 of the European Charter of Human Rights. Interpreting this statement is one of

the main battle grounds between advocates and opponents of assisted suicide. Those opposing assisted suicide argue that human dignity is protected and respected when care, compassion and treatment are offered; in doing so we affirm the inherent human dignity of a person. To offer to terminate someone's life implies, mistakenly, that they have lost dignity and that their life is no longer worth living.

Please consider writing to your MSPs (you have 8) expressing your concern about the Bill.

You can find out who your MSPs are by going to [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk) and clicking on 'MSPs'. You'll then be asked to enter your post code. Get guidance on what to write from the Care Not Killing web site ([www.carenotkilling.org.uk](http://www.carenotkilling.org.uk) – and go to 'Scotland').

If you do not have access to the internet, phone 0141 332 7212 (CARE for Scotland) for information and help.

Please pray for MSPs as they consider this crucial legislation; pray especially for Margo MacDonald that she may experience healing and a changed opinion on the issue of assisted dying.

Care Not Killing, is a UK-based alliance of individuals and organizations. It brings together disability and human rights organisations, healthcare & palliative care groups, and faith-based organisations, with the aims of promoting more and better palliative care and ensuring that existing laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide are not weakened or repealed.

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## Scottish Reformed Conference 2010

This year's Scottish Reformed Conference will be on Saturday 8th May at Hamilton College. Registration starts at 9:15 am, and the conference ends at 3:30 pm. The speakers will be Dr Ralph Davies and Rev Kenneth Stewart. Ralph Davies is pastor of Woodland Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA. Before taking up his present position he was Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson. Kenneth Stewart is minister of Dowanvale Free Church of Scotland, Glasgow and has previously served churches in the west of Scotland and Canada. This year's conference fees have again been maintained at £5, with students only £4 and under 17's free. There is a crèche provided and children's activities so that families can attend. Last year over 500 attended, making it Scotland's largest family friendly preaching conference. Full details at <http://www.scottishreformedconference.org/>

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