

The APC News

The Magazine of the Associated Presbyterian Churches in Scotland

The Late Revd Jackie Ross

IN THE FIRST FEW MINUTES of 13th March 2002, our denomination lost one of its finest ministers - the Revd Jackie Ross from Lochcarron. He had been pastor there for over 31 years. He is probably best known for his international aid work to third world nations heading up the Blythswood organisation.

He married Miss Elma Sutherland from Inverness in 1970 and they had five children, Philip, Sarah, Lois, Jeremy, Jason. The funeral took place in Dingwall where Jackie attended school and lived for some years with his mother, sisters and brothers before marrying. We publish below his last letter, which was distributed at the funeral.



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My Last Letter

Highfield, Croft Road,
Lochcarron, Scotland, IV54 8YA

9 March 2002

Dear friend,

My life is almost at an end. By the time that you read this, I will be in heaven. In these last days, I have been convinced that I was not always plain enough with people during my life. We all need Christ; without him, we will perish. Yet, it can be difficult even to ask your own family, "Are you really trusting in Christ?" At this

[Continued on centre pages, 12 and 13]

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Fearing a Call from God!

I SUPPOSE ALL CHRISTIANS experience fear at some time or another. Even the strongest believer has fear - even when 'called' by God to some great work. The promises of God do not eliminate fear from our hearts.

When Moses was called to go and deliver the Israelites he tried hard to avoid the call. He gave as many excuses as he could, so much so that *"the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses"* [Exod 4:14].

It is said that in the Bible there are 366 commands to 'fear not'. One for every day of the year - even a leap year! And most of these occasions was **after a promise** and a **call** from God!

Gideon is another good example. He wrestled with God after being called to deliver Israel from the Midianites. In fact Gideon needed **four** 'signs' before he felt strong enough to obey [Jud 6:17, 6:37, 6:39, 7:10].

Despite all the promises God gave David that he would be king of Israel, there were times when he still feared Saul and ran away from him. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were both called by God but both feared and trembled.

In the New Testament it is no different. Paul was afraid in Corinth so much so that God visited him with the words *"Do not be afraid...for I have many people in*

this city" [Acts 18:9]. In the case of Peter walking on the water, Peter wanted confirmation that it was Jesus who was calling him *"Lord if it is You, command me to come to you on the water"* [Mat 14:28]. Peter received assurance for Jesus said *"Come"*. But Peter could not continue to walk on the water, because he began to fear.

Our ability to serve God and obey His call, depends so much on our faith. The fear we have is because we think everything depends on **us**. Our fear is because we are not seeing God's power and strength and are focusing on our own capabilities. No wonder we sink.

John Ortberg tells of an occasion when he came across a street fight outside a bar. Three rough looking guys were beating up a youngster. It was so awful he felt he had to do something. He was filled with fear as he moved towards the three toughs. They moved towards him! But all of a sudden they reversed. It surprised Ortberg, until he turned round and saw one of the biggest and brawniest men he ever saw in his life coming out of the bar and moving towards the men. He was the bouncer! Ortberg felt strengthened and gave chase to the men. He realised that he gained confidence and strength because he knew the strength of person who was 'behind' him.

Ortberg tells us that if he just believed that God and all His supernatural strength was behind him 24 hours every day, what a difference that would make to his faith. At the end of the day, it all comes down to our faith - or rather, where our faith is placed.

Fear prevents many a Christian from doing what he could - and what God calls him to do. Fear is the result of looking to ourselves instead of God.

Psychologists tell us that people with a strong sense of their own abilities are much more resilient in risky situations and are able to cope much more easily. Instead of being filled with fear, they have a confidence that often carries them through. If that is true, how much more ought Christians who have all the strength of the Godhead behind them, be able to obey the command of God to go into all the world with the gospel?

Paul could say, under Divine inspiration *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* [Phil 4:13]. Where is our confidence and hope placed? Where are we looking for strength? Our mind-set determines our confidence, hope and strength.

If our mind is stayed and focused on the Lord, then we can do everything He asks of us. But if our mind-set is on our own abilities and strength, then we will not even attempt great things for God. All the people in Scripture and in history, who did great things, had their minds set on God. Paul calls the

Philippians to think on the things that are good and beautiful, and the Colossians to set their affections on things above where Christ is, so that they would be strengthened.

We emphasise again, it is in the things that God **calls** us to do that we must not be afraid of, and take courage and go in His strength. To have positive Biblical thinking like this is not to say that we do foolish things. We never have a warrant to do what is sinful or unwise - or what is nothing but our own fleshly desires. As every Christian is called by God to serve Him to the best of his abilities, we must use all the talents and opportunities God puts in our path.

Fear, more than anything else, prevents God's people from doing the things God wants them to do. Satan makes them afraid and they begin to think of all the excuses. Our image of God, is far too often, very small, instead of very big. Our God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. If we think of Him as small and powerless, then we will be filled with foreboding and uncertainty. But if we realise He has a plan to redeem the nations, through His people's witness, then we will have confidence.

We are not called to work **for** God, we are called to work **with** God. He will be with us in all that we do for Him - even to the end of the world. The promise Jesus gave to His disciples *"lo I am with you always"* is dependent on their going *"into all the world"* and preaching the gospel [Mat 28:19]. •

A Tribute to the late

Revd John Walter Ross, Lochcarron (29.2.36 –13.3.02)

By the Revd Alexander Murray

THE FIRST THING IS, to perhaps, realise that “Jackie” has, in fact, died. He possessed such a vibrant spirit that it looked, over the last years, as if nothing could overcome his enthusiasm for life, and the work that he seemed to feel he must do, and **continue** to do, every day, week by week. It was this capacity for **doing** that characterized his ministry. Whilst an Arts Student in Glasgow he, with others, formed a tract society. This developed into street preaching, to a book-van and so to the huge organisation that is Blythswood Care, operating in so many countries and spheres of Christian work today.

His late senior elder in the Lochcarron Congregation, John Mackenzie, Kishorn remarked to myself soon after Revd Ross’s coming to the district, - “there is not a lazy bone in that man’s body!”

Jackie Ross was nurtured in Dingwall under the justly revered Revd D A Macfarlane who preached in the “tin-church” that used to be behind us over on the “By-pass”. Our late brother in the ministry surely appreciated the worth of the pastorate thus enjoyed in youth. This was evident from the number of occasions on which Jackie would refer to words of wisdom and

guidance which he had heard Mr Macfarlane speak - related to his own conversion, making a public profession and call to the ministry and so on.

Others benefited from that nurture and a quite remarkable situation in the family circle, (that has now been breached by death), is that the four sisters and four brothers were found professing Christ in a positive sense. Equally remarkable must be the comfort that parents in the Lochcarron Manse were to find in the like positive adherence to the faith of the gospel manifested by their own children of 2 daughters and 3 sons - and this in a day such as ours is!

As we would expect, and in the midst of all the activities of his life, it was the work of the pastorate that was always nearest to the heart of John Walter Ross. Lochcarron was his first and only charge. He was a devoted and faithful minister of the Associated Presbyterian Churches and his wise counsel in Presbytery and Assembly will be greatly missed by his brethren. An earnest preacher, his maturity in the faith was evident in more recent years.

“Jackie” has, of course, gone from our midst, from family, congregation and our church. When

I visited him, nearly two weeks before his death, and I was taking my leave of him for the last time, he used the words of the Shunammite [2Kings 4:26], "**It is well**", twice! We may properly recall the words associated with Samuel Rutherford -- "O well it is for ever, O well for evermore, my nest hung in no forest of all this death-doomed shore". The spirit that was so bright and active here has gone to the congenial company of the "*spirits of just men made perfect*" in paradise. As has been said, it is something that the Church below and the Church above can not easily agree about. It is, however, our Sovereign Master's

will; and **submission** is what remains for us!

All the good works that Jackie was able to overtake in his life here, (and we may never know their true extent), might well suggest that he "deserves" a place in heaven. Jackie would be the first to give the **lie** to that; and tell us that his whole salvation depended on the "good works" of the Lord Jesus, in **His** life and death; and who has so claimed heaven for Himself and all who come to trust in Him and in **Him alone**.

To his loving widow and all concerned the Presbytery tenders its sincerest sympathy! •

Faith in Facing Death

“**N**OWHERE MORE THAN AT a Christian funeral should the world see the blessings of faith. At that particular time when hearts are more receptive than usual a special opportunity is presented to witness to the saving power of Christ and to point others to Him. The Christian doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, God's redemptive love for His people, and the certainty of future rewards and punishments probably can be more effectively presented at that time than at any other.

We are told that in the early days of the Church the pagans were often amazed at the calmness of the Christians in the hour of death. There was something about their noble and fearless bearing that pagan philosophy could not explain. That attitude seemed strange then, and still does, to the man of the world, for he cannot understand how it is possible for anyone to view death mildly and calmly. Christians who have been enlightened from the Bible concerning death and spiritual things do not fear death. But it is unfortunately true that many faithful saints have not received instruction on this subject, or at least have failed to grasp its full meaning, and that they still share with the world the fear of death.”

Lorraine Boettner

BOOK REVIEW

by Philip S Ross

Should the Psalter be the Only Hymnal of the Church?

Iain Murray
Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2001.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION is, “Why?” Why have the Banner of Truth published a booklet against exclusive psalmody? Are militant psalm singers at the gate of neo-Puritan evangelicalism? Are hymn-singing congregations under siege? Is psalmody a burning issue?

Towards the beginning, Murray states that the case for Psalms-only is an application of the “regulative principle” which asserts: “God claims in Scripture the right to determine how he shall be worshipped.” Such a definition is not only “briefly stated,” but also inadequately stated. It disregards the motivating concerns of those who held to this principle to guard liberty of conscience and to account for the human tendency to idolatry. They wanted a church free from human tyranny. Their aim was not to deny freedom, but to defend Christian liberty.

Most of the booklet is a rehearsal of unoriginal arguments, but it also includes an interesting section where Murray seeks to prove that the “best Reformed churches” did not see hymns of human composure as an intrusion on divine authority. Some of his claims, such as the one that Calvin gave priority

to psalms “by way of preference, not principle,” so lack evidence that not even the most sympathetic hearer could concede that he has found the obligatory two or three witnesses to support his case.

Leaving Calvin, Murray uses quotations from Manton, Flavel, Dickson, and others, to portray the Puritans as enthusiastic supporters of extra-biblical hymnody. However, even assuming that his citations are accurate and contextual, more questions are raised than answered. Such men, from Calvin to the Puritans, asserted that God was to be worshipped in the way that he had commanded. Some promoted their views with force or even suffered for their convictions.

So, if they believed that God had commanded that he should be worshipped by means of extra-biblical material, why did they not promote it with equal vigour? Where is the rich heritage of Puritan hymnody? Why was their legacy psalm-singing churches? Were they inconsistent? Or, is Murray not telling the whole story? Even if he had demonstrated that Calvin chose psalms “by way of preference, not principle,” the question would remain, “Why did he prefer Psalms?”

References to later writers such as Edwards, Erskine, Duncan,

and Guthrie give an insight into their attitude to hymns of human composition. Yet, to marshal them as defenders of the view “that the use of the Psalter in the Reformed Churches was not generally based on the restriction which more modern writers have claimed to find in the regulative principle” is misleading and anachronistic. Certainly, Ralph Erskine was a poet. His work included five remarkable verses entitled ‘Smoking Spiritualised’ which included the following:

Doth juice medicinal proceed
From such a naughty, foreign
weed?
Then what’s the power
Of Jesse’s flower?
Thus think, and smoke tobacco.

Nonetheless, to conclude that Erskine’s religious poetry was “widely sung” in public worship is as unreasonable as to conclude that smoking during public worship was commonplace. Religious poetry and song was (and is) appreciated in many Reformed Churches, but this has often coexisted with the practice of restricting public song to the Psalms. Even if the Netherlands were included where scriptural passages such as the *Nunc Dimittis* and the *Magnificat* have also been sung, it would be distortion to present this as evidence that the Reformed Churches were comfortable with extra-biblical song in public worship.

To argue that the existence and appreciation of religious poems among a handful of Scotsmen

disproves that the Reformed Churches held to a principle of exclusive psalmody is to mislead. Neither the quaint sayings of John Duncan or the dying words of John Candlish can be taken as indicative of the views of churchmen who lived long before their time. Their enjoyment of hymns from out with the Psalter cannot nullify generations of church practice. The question remains, “Why was song in the Reformed Churches restricted to Scripture for so many generations if, as Murray implies, the leaders of the church did not believe that God had commanded it should be so?”*

Having finished with history, Murray seeks to argue “from the New Testament not simply that the case for hymns is left open, but that there is good reason for believing that the praise of the church was not intended to be left precisely where it was in the former dispensation.”

This begins with a series of quotations from certain authors and a flurry of proof-texting designed to highlight a relative, but not absolute, difference between the Old and New Testaments. The final point of this being that “it is difficult, and at times impossible, to make the language of David and Asaph the most appropriate expression of Christian experience.” Citing Isaac Watts, he affirms that the result of confining public song to the Psalter will be that worshippers “sing one thing and mean another” for “there are many hundreds of verses in that book which a Christian cannot

properly assume without putting a very different meaning upon them.”

Can this view be reconciled with Reformed interpretation of the Bible? The oft-quoted words attributed to John Owen, “If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all,” indicate that he at least would say, “No.” If the Christian cannot assume parts of the Old Testament without changing the meaning, then all attempts at interpretation are futile. The accusation that Christian use of the Old Testament requires Christians to say one thing and mean another is as old as Christianity itself. The Apostles have long been accused of abusing the Old Testament (particularly the Psalms) in this way. However, if Christian use of the Old Testament demands falsification it is better to dispense with it altogether.

Murray’s thinking becomes clearer in his comments on Psalm 22 where it emerges that he considers the role of song in worship as response to revelation. He asserts that the hymns of Watts or Wesley “express the feelings of the believer to Christ crucified” better than Psalm 22. For him, George Herbert “is surely right when he says:

The fineness which a Hymn or Psalm affords
Is when the soul unto the lines accords.”

Thus, the crucial issue in determining the appropriateness of a Psalm or hymn becomes the extent to which it satisfies the singer’s

subjective experience. But is this any different from the “consumer-oriented worship” much derided by conservative hymn singers? Does their worship differ from that of a believer caught up in the euphoric chorusing of a Benny Hinn Miracle Crusade? When the deciding question is reduced to, “How was it for you?” there is no difference.

The claim that in the Psalms “the language of full assurance ... is occasional rather than pervasive” will come as a surprise to many. It can only be assumed that Murray is using a particularly narrow definition of assurance or that he lacks familiarity with the Psalms. Similarly, when he determines the lack of “sustained themes on heaven” claiming that “the desire for heaven could not be a characteristic of the Psalms,” he sounds like the Anabaptists who, according to Calvin, “think of the people of Israel just as they would do some herd of swine, seeing they think that our Lord only wished to fatten them on the earth as in a sty, without any hope of heavenly immortality.” [Inst. II.10.1]

When one begins from the presupposition that many of the Psalms must be understood with “a very different meaning” if they are to be used in Christian worship, it is not surprising that the immediate historical sense of the Old Testament will be seen as the full meaning. In which case Murray’s attack is not upon Psalm singing, but upon Reformed interpretation of the Bible.

Ironically, while much contemporary scholarship has focused on establishing the Old Testament background to the New Testament and reaffirming their basic continuity, Murray appears to be moving in the opposite direction. James Dunn, for example, in his commentary on Colossians states that the “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” mentioned by Paul are “more or less synonymous ... as the titles of the Psalms [LXX] and such passages as 2 Sam. 6:5; 22:1; 1 Macc. 13:51; and 1 Cor. 14:26 indicate.” That is not to suggest that Dunn is interested in exclusive psalmody; he takes the view that “it would be surprising if a new movement as spiritually vital as Christianity did not produce its own hymnody.” Unable to find a “prominent orthodox commentator” who takes this view, Murray opts for the speculative interpretation of John Eadie.

There are more surprises in store – this time for those who argue that a lack of assurance (as they perceive it) in Reformed churches can be blamed on certain theological emphases. Iain Murray informs them that the problem is in fact Psalm singing which creates “a level of experience more akin to the Old [Testament].” Such argumentation is as hollow as that used by opponents of hymnody who identify extra-biblical hymns as the foundation for false assurance.

Doubtless, the words that people sing (secular or religious) may affect their thinking, but this

particular claim appears to be based on Murray’s idea that the Psalmists lacked assurance. Should lack of assurance, or false assurance, be a major problem in any church the cause is most likely to be theological misunderstanding or misapplication of the gospel. If it is unclear why this booklet was published, it is clear that it has not ended the matter but only created more confusion. Part of the reason for this may be that Scripture does not directly address the issue.

Some will say that that is because it does not envisage the use of extra-biblical song in public worship.** But we may go further and ask, “Does Scripture envisage any place for song in the congregation?” This question is important for anyone concerned with Biblical precedent. Today’s reality is not that most churches restrict congregational song to three psalms, or even four hymns, but that church worship is dominated by music, singing, flag-waving, dancing, and theatrical performances from insufferable amateurs unable to make it in the outside world.

One may safely say that Scripture does not highlight such activities as characteristic of Christian meetings. Indeed, there is no example of congregational singing in the post-Pentecost church. That is not to say that Christians did not sing, only that a simple appeal to the New Testament cannot prove that

singing had a place in public worship. They were not divided over the revision of cherished hymns long-afforded deuterocanonical status. They did not choose where to worship according to musical preference. Instead, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Should these things not at least be our priorities today?

Ultimately, only renewed attention to those activities will advance this discussion. Psalm-singers will never persuade hymn-singers to recycle their hymnbooks if for them "hymns have excelled the Psalter" in many respects. Hymn-singers need not seek to win over psalm-singers for a general disinterest in the Old Testament and growing incomprehension of the Psalms will do the job for them. More and more people are only too glad to sing, "If I were a butterfly I'd thank you Lord for giving me wings" rather than "excelled" words such as, "*the LORD declared this to my Lord: 'Sit down at my right hand.'*"

However, were we to gain the kind of appreciation for the Old Testament that characterized the New Testament church, might not arguments over Psalms and Hymns become strangely irrelevant? Were our churches preoccupied with the apostolic teaching about Christ rather than with a search for music that "expresses the feelings of the believer to Christ crucified," would the scene not be different? What if we found the Psalms to be as full of

meaning and power as did Peter and Paul when they preached the gospel from them? What if we discovered that their meaning was not limited to an ancient nation, but that their words are cumulatively fulfilled in Christ and his kingdom? In their expressions of despair; declarations of hope; visions of endless life; cries for salvation; and even imprecations, we would discover things pregnant with meaning – brought forth in the person of Christ and his everlasting kingdom.

Once we have made these discoveries through a renewed devotion to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, then we can ask, "Is it true that hymns have excelled the Psalter?"

Philip S. Ross

* After completing this review I discovered a response by Rowland S. Ward published in the January 2002 edition of the Free Church Monthly Record which deals specifically with the historical issues. If Ward's analysis is correct, Murray's work cannot be considered a serious attempt to understand the principles (or even "preferences") which shaped Reformed worship. Rather, it reflects an outlook more parochial than that of the historical figures it quotes, being primarily concerned to recast church history in the narrow mould of a particular evangelicalism.

** i.e. those gatherings described in Scripture [e.g. Acts 2:42,46; 20:7; 1 Cor 14:26ff] where participation is not a matter of Christian liberty [Heb 10:25].

point, it is hard for me to put more than one sentence together, but somehow I want to say what could not easily be said, and what should have been said.

Many of you have wilfully rejected Christ. Your conscience convicts you and you know that you will give an account, but you suppress the truth. Friends and all as we have been, I must say that you will not get away with that. You are without excuse. You need to trust in Christ; without him, you will perish.

We all need Christ. It is easy for us to be self-righteous hypocrites, even looking for opportunities to point out that other people are self-righteous. But that will not do. We cannot depend on any thing that we do. We all need Christ, and all we need is Christ.

Someone has translated this extract for me from the sermons of the French preacher, Adolphe Monod. He says here what I would like to say to you myself.

“Faith, not works; that is the gospel. That is what distinguishes it from all human systems. All the doctrines conceived by man and all the false interpretations given to the doctrines of God by religions throughout the ages say to sinners, "Do this or do that and you will live." Sacrifice your life, your health or your well-being, throw yourself under the wheels of a juggernaut, sit on the ground, hold your arm outstretched until it grows stiff and withers, keep silence for the rest of your days and your sins will be forgiven. Do penance, go on a long pilgrimage, withdraw from society and bury yourself in sad solitude, fast, abstain from things, mutilate yourself, crucify yourself and your sins will be forgiven. Do good works, help the poor, visit sick people, fight your temptations, be sober, just, without reproach and your sins will be forgiven.

How different is the language of the gospel! Believe! Stop being consumed with fruitless efforts to work your own reconciliation with God. You will never ever succeed. A way to be saved is still available to you but it is by completely giving up hope in yourself. It is in crying to God, "Grace, grace, be merciful to me a sinner." "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." No matter who you are it is by faith you can be saved.

But what do you have to believe?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" is a phrase you will have heard so often, maybe even repeated it many times yourself, perhaps since you were a little child, so that it hardly even occurs to you that you could do with it being explained. It is so simple that even a child can understand it and that is perhaps partly why most people don't understand it.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Do you really understand this? Place all hope for your salvation in him. Build on him. Do not be afraid to lean on him. He is the Rock of Ages. Believe in Jesus Christ. Dwell in him. Clothe yourself in him.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then, and you will be saved. "

Consider this my friend, because you will follow me soon enough.

Yours sincerely

John Walter Ross



The interment at Lochcarron Cemetery

Living Truth in a Fallen World

This series is based on a seminar given at the Evangelical Alliance Assembly, Cardiff, 5-7 Nov 2001. There are four Parts to the series.

The first Part was on Truth, the second Part on God, and this Part is on Jesus'. The remaining Part is on Commitment



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Part Three - Jesus

WHAT IS THE biblical notion of Jesus? Images of Jesus that may be familiar to us spring readily to mind. For some of us they are mental pictures of how Jesus may have looked; for others it is the reality of a personal relationship.

Amongst many biblical images of Jesus, we can find: Son of God - [Matthew 8:29 and Matthew 14:33]. Son of Man - [Matthew 16:13 and Luke 7:34]. The Word - [John 1:1 and 1:14]. The Messiah - [Matthew 1:1 and John 1:41]. Friend of sinners - [Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34]. Lamb of God - [John 1:29 and Acts 8:32]. Teacher - [Luke 3:12 and John 13:13]. Healer - [Matthew 4:23 and Acts 10:38]. Saviour - [Luke 2:11 and Acts 13:23].

For many people, Jesus is viewed as a historical character, a good teacher, perhaps a prophet, perhaps the stuff of mythology or perhaps even non-existent.

In this chapter, we will explore two different cultural viewpoints and examine what they suggest to us about Jesus and then

explore to what degree they are a barrier or a bridge into communicating the good news of Jesus Christ. We will look at the BBC television series, *Son of God* and the film and book *Chocolat*.

Son of God

Son of God was first aired on BBC television over Easter 2001 as a three part series looking at the historical life and times of Jesus. The programme contained impressive computer generated reconstructions of this era - the centrepiece being a reconstruction of what Jesus might actually have looked like.

Viewing figures for the first episode were 6 million - 25% of the television audience. The book is now available from the BBC shop online at www.bbc.co.uk. All quotes used here are from the television programme presented by Jeremy Bowen.

The programme makers seem to present the idea that the Jesus of history is not the same Jesus as believed by mainstream Christians, notably that significant events like healings and the

resurrection can be explained away. More disturbingly, the whole question of Jesus deity seems either glossed over or ignored. Lets examine a couple of those quotes.

Son of God - a barrier to the Gospel?

'There is little evidence in the gospels that Jesus grew up knowing he was special.'

This is not the same as saying that there is no evidence to suggest that Jesus grew up knowing he was special. The implied statement is that Jesus just grew up as a normal boy without a hint of the nature of God about him. The 'little' evidence that there is that Jesus thought differently to this is quite significant and we will look at that in a moment. Still talking of evidence, Jeremy Bowen goes on to say:

'There's no evidence that he had the healing touch. But the important thing is that people believed he could heal them, and there is evidence for that.'

Evidence is a curious thing. Jeremy Bowen presents evidence that Jesus lived, the time that he lived, the place that he lived and the people that he associated with. All compelling stuff.

The area that Bowen struggles with evidence for is the area that has great importance to those that are wanting to investigate the Christian faith or are Christians, namely, who exactly Jesus was and is.

Is it true that Jesus grew up without knowing who he was and what he was about? Is it true that he was just a revolutionary caught up with the search for a liberator that could free Jerusalem from Roman occupation?

The biblical evidence for Jesus' sense of identity is quite compelling. In [Luke 2:41-52], the account is given of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for the Passover feast at the age of 12, accompanied by his parents. On the journey home, the boy Jesus appears to get separated from Mary and Joseph and after three days of searching, the anxious parents find Jesus in the temple, sitting amongst the elders and the teachers who are amazed at the young Jesus' understanding. On enquiring after their son, Jesus' reply is quite illuminating:

'Didn't you know that you would find me in my Father's house?' [Luke 2:49]

Here, Jesus uses a very intimate description of God. He uses the word 'Father' implying a very different relationship with God than had been expressed before. In referring to God as 'my Father', Jesus is announcing himself as his Son - and all this at the age of 12. There is evidence that Jesus knew who he was and what he was about. 'Special' is not an appropriate word in the circumstances as Jesus had given up all the rights and privileges of God when he took on the form of a man, in fact the Bible describes Jesus as becoming nothing.

He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on the cross [Philippians 2:7]. Jesus did not consider himself special, but he knew who he was.

Regarding the evidence of healing, Jeremy Bowen speculates that the important thing was that people believed that he could heal. If Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, then Jesus must have the ability to heal. The pages of the New Testament may not provide the evidence that Jeremy Bowen is looking for, but if Jesus is who he says he is, then this means that he is alive today and still in the business of healing.

Many Christians today can speak of the healing touch of Jesus emotionally, spiritually and physically. This evidence obviously needs testing on a case-by-case basis, but the evidence is there to be explored.

One healing that Jesus performed that had nothing to do with other people's belief in 'the healing touch' is the resurrection from the dead of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. The gospel account describes it this way:

'Take the stone away!' Jesus ordered. Martha, the dead man's sister, answered,

'There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!' Jesus said to her, 'Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?' They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, 'I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.' After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. 'Untie him,' Jesus told them, 'and let him go.' [John 11:39].

The barriers that Jeremy Bowen places to the belief in Jesus as the Son of God need to be pushed and explored. It is intriguing that the name of the programme is not really explored at all. The programme makers are at pains to explore the humanity of Jesus whilst giving his divinity a wide berth.

In light of this, can the programme provide a bridge to the Gospel?

Son of God - a bridge to the Gospel?

Jeremy Bowen says this:

'To prove Jesus really existed we have to look not to his birth, but to his death - one of the best-attested

facts in ancient history. A first-century historian called Josephus was just one of 80 sources that confirm Jesus existed.'

What a positive bridge this is. If it can be historically proven that Jesus really existed, then the next question that we need to be helping our friends to explore regards the implications of this.

If Jesus existed, then who was he? Is he a great teacher, a healer, the Son of God or what? With the evidence to hand that leaves us in no doubt that Jesus lived, we need to be able to help our friends explore who he really is. A further quote from *Son of God* can help us.

'Jesus' followers must have believed that he'd risen from the dead - it's the only way to explain the rise and rise of Christianity since then.

Today Jesus is the focus of a religion that is followed by two billion people.'

What is it that two billion people have discovered about Jesus that so changed their lives? Why are Christians still allowing themselves to be martyred, even today, for the Jesus that they love and serve if he really did not come back from the dead? What about the changed lives and attitudes of countless people who have discovered Jesus for themselves?

Of course the fact that lots of people do something is in itself not a good enough evidence that something is true, but it is an

excellent place to start to help people begin to examine the person and claims of Jesus Christ - Son of God.

Jesus and *Chocolat*

Christianity and confectionary. Not automatically two things that you would splice together, but author Joanna Harris has done this superbly in her book *Chocolat* first published in 1999 by Black Swan and now a major film.

The story concerns the sleepy French village of Lansquenet - a village that is steeped in generations of repressive traditions and dominated by their spiritual leader, Reynaud the priest.

Into this village, Vianne Rocher, an exotic stranger and her daughter, Anouk, arrive and open a chocolate shop directly opposite the church during the Lenten fast. Reynaud is outraged and sets about trying to ostracise Vianne from the rest of the villagers who are soon drawn into the chocolaterie with offers of their favourite chocolate and warm understanding.

In the book and the film, the church is portrayed as a killjoy, a law-enforcer and a place where pleasure of any sort is out of the question. Naturally, the relationship between Vianne and Reynaud deteriorates and as it does, Vianne plans an Easter chocolate festival that divides the whole community into a 'Church not chocolate' battle.

The book's cover notes pose the question, 'Can the solemnity of the Church compare with the pagan passions of a chocolate éclair?'

Chocolat - a barrier?

The film and the book portray a negative image of the church, and by default, a negative image of Jesus. If the Church is the human face of Jesus, what do quotes like these tell us about him?

'We have a new parishioner. A Vianne Rocher - a widow, I take it, with a young child ... she'll never fit in. A pleasant enough woman, but she has nothing in common with us. Give her two months, and she'll be back to the city where she belongs.'
(Reynaud, the Priest)

'If we are to stay we must be as like them as possible.'
(Vianne to her daughter)

Reynaud as a representative of the Church displays an attitude that perhaps too many people have fallen victim to. New people coming in means that the boat will be rocked, the status quo upset and tranquillity disturbed.

Reynaud's attitude suggests that Jesus is far more concerned with getting people to conform to the rules than rather than demonstrating freedom and joy. Vianne picks up on this automatically. The desire to conform, to be accepted is enormous, if they just imitate the people that they will be amongst, then they might be accepted. Jesus was and is in the habit of displaying acceptance to even the

worst offenders. Even the woman caught in adultery was treated with love and respect [John 8:1-11]; not so Vianne and her daughter.

Historically, the Church has practised a 'believe to belong' policy. If you say the right things, believe the right things, and behave the right way, then, you will belong. This kind of thinking provides a major barrier to the Gospel. If we are to reach people with the reality of the love of Jesus, then we need to be practising a 'belong to believe' policy instead.

Chocolat - a Bridge?

For all the negative images that the film and the book provide, there are some excellent links into the Gospel. Vianne, when talking to her daughter Anouk about her Grandmother says this:

'All stories delighted her - Jesus and Eostre and Ali Baba working the homespun of folklore into the bright fabric of belief again and again. Crystal healing and astral travel, abductions by aliens and spontaneous combustion, my mother believed them all, or pretended to believe.'
(Vianne talking about her mother)

Later, Vianne on reflection, says this:

'Buddha. Frodo's journey into Mordor. The transubstantiation of the sacraments. Dorothy and

Toto. The Easter Bunny. Space aliens. The thing in the closet. The resurrection and the Life at the turn of a card ... and now? What do I believe right now?'

We live in a time where the pick and choose mentality reigns when it come to all things spiritual. Both of these quotes demonstrate an openness to the supernatural and spiritual realm.

In all of her searching and in all of her mother's searching, Vianne has still not discovered what it is that she believes and asks herself as much.

The fact that people are open to talk about the supernatural and all things spiritual provides a vital bridge for the Gospel. If people are willing to believe and explore Ufology, crystal healing, astral projection etc, then it should become an easier task to begin to introduce Jesus as an answer to people's search for supernatural reality.

The question Vianne asks is one that we could use. 'What do you believe right now?' It is the kind of question that invites people to share with us their values and belief systems so that we can hold them up against the claims of Jesus. •



This article was first published on the Damaris website (www.damaris.org) and is reprinted here by kind permission

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

“**S**CARS MAY BE EXPECTED because God has chosen the way of hardship for our spiritual growth and advance. The newest Christian needs to be taught this, because our natural tendency - in the face of opposition - is to ask, 'Why should this be happening to me?' Our inclination is to see adversity as an interruption, and we hope that when it is over we can get back to living 'the normal life'. Then we discover from the Scriptures - and we see it lived out all over the world - that adversity **is** the normal Christian life. It is the kingdom! Jesus warned of this when, telling of the trials that His followers would face...to enter upon the Christian life of the kingdom is to invite a whole bundle of new problems that you had never encountered before! True, the big, blockbusting problems are solved for ever at the reception of Christ's spirit - the issue of forgiveness, relationship to God, our eternal destiny and the meaning of our existence...

When young Christians at our church tell me of their new found difficulties, I encourage them. 'Its a good sign, really.' I nod. 'Its okay - its actually an indication that you really have made a start, and that you are growing as a Christian. Its all in the New Testament'. ”

Richard Bewes

PROGRESS at KING'S VIEW



The Inverness Congregation's Building at King's View, Balnafettack

WORK HAS PROGRESSED on the Inverness building, and at this time of writing, we await the necessary permission for further alterations and for the extension. From the internal work already done, the floor plan of the auditorium for worship, the kitchen/toilet facilities, and the auxiliary rooms can be clearly seen. Extensive electrical, plumbing, and decorating work is yet to be done.

With the lengthening of the days and the spring-like weather we hope to work on tidying up the surrounding grass area and car-park. The whole project involves considerable expense, and we pray that the Lord will move hearts to support the congregation in this step. The Presbytery approves of

the undertaking, and if you are led to contribute financially your support will be much appreciated.

We expect the whole denomination to benefit from the use of the facilities when they are completed. Not only may the annual church conferences be held there, but it has been suggested as a suitable venue for Youth and Young People's camps. We, in Inverness, welcome any such activities, so we hope that you can help us achieve this goal.

Whatever you may wish to contribute should be sent to the Inverness Treasurer, whose name you will see under Congregational Details, made out to the Inverness APC and indicated as for the new development. •

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SCOTTISH REFORMED **CONFERENCE**

THE 13th ANNUAL SCOTTISH Reformed Conference will be held on Saturday 18th May, 10:00 am -3:30 pm, at Hamilton College School. This year's speakers are Dr Ligon Duncan minister of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and adjunct Professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, and the Rev Eric Alexander, formerly of St George's Tron Church, Glasgow.

The Conference costs £4; those at school are free. A creche is available and special activities are available for primary children.

Booking forms from the Secretary, SRC, 37 Leith Street, Glasgow G33 2LZ. (S.A.E.) Pre-booking is appreciated. Contact: Walker.1@OPC.org tel 0141 770 7737

The Next Presbytery

will be on

WEDNESDAY 15th MAY

at 2pm

APC ASSEMBLY

on

WEDNESDAY 15th MAY

at 7pm

APC **CONFERENCE**

Please note the date of our next Conference

SATURDAY
7th SEPTEMBER

at

Drumossie Hotel, Inverness

Theme:

Faith, Hope, Charity

Speakers:

Prof John L MacKay

Revd Noel Due

Revd John Ross

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DINGWALL

Revd Dr Malcom MacInnes, Drumalin, 16 Drummond Road, Inverness IV2 4NB, Tel 01463 223983, Fax 01462 226939 Email: mmacinnnes@btinternet.com Community Centre, Tulloch Street - 6pm, Tue 7.30pm in Free Church Hall. Treasurer: D M Macdonald, Scoraig, 8 Kinnettas Square, Strathpeffer IV14 9BD, Tel 01997 421847.

DUNDEE

Revd Donald C Macaskill, 238 Arbroath Road, Dundee DD4 7SB, Tel 01382 451798, Fax 01382-451764 Email: dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk Dens Road Church - 11 Dens Road - 11am & 6.30pm, Thu 7pm. Treasurer: Mr W J Macaulay, 4 Lomond Drive, Carnoustie, DD7 6DN, Tel 01241 853621. www.apcdundee.org.uk

EDINBURGH

Revd Roddy MacRae, 6 Frogston Grove, Edinburgh EH10 7AG. Tel 0131 445 3673. Email: roddy.barvas@blueyonder.co.uk. Viewforth Church of Scotland, 104 Gilmore Place - 12 noon & 6.15pm, Wed 7.30pm in manse. Treasurer: Mr A Cumming, 31 Doune Park, Dalgety Bay, Dunfermline, KY11 9LX Tel 01383 825637. www.welcome.to/edinburghapc

FORT WILLIAM

Services held jointly with the Free Church, High Street, 11am & 6.30pm, Thursday 7.30pm. Contact: Donald MacNicol, 14 Altour Road, Spean Bridge, Inverness-shire PH34 4EZ, Tel 01397 712405.

HARRIS

Contact: Norman MacDonald Tel 01859 530345. Seilabost School - 12 noon & 6pm Tue 7.30pm. Treasurer: John MacKinnon, 8 Stockinish, Isle of Harris HS3 3EN Tel 01859 530211.

INVERNESS

Revd Dr Malcolm MacInnes, Drumalin, 16 Drummond Road, Inverness IV2 4NB, Tel 01463

223983 Fax 01463 226939 Email: mmacinnnes@btinternet.com St Stephen's Parish Church, Old Edinburgh Road - 12 noon & 6.30pm, Wed 7.30pm. Treasurer: Mr Kenneth Macdonald, 'Arnish', 16 Drumdevan Place, Inverness IV2 4DQ, Tel 01463 231364. www.apcinverness.freeuk.com

KINLOCHBERVIE

Kinlochbervie: Conference Room, Harbour Offices, 11.30am; Treasurer: W D MacLeod, 114 Inshegra, Rhiconich, by Lairg IV27 4RH Tel 01971 521388.

LAIRG & ROGART

Revd Alexander Murray, APC Manse, Saval Road, Lairg, IV27 4EH, Tel 01549 402176 Email: amurray@lairg.freereserve.co.uk Lairg Church - 11.30am, 1st, 3rd, 5th Weds 7pm; Rogart Church - 6pm. 2nd, 4th Weds 7pm. Treasurer: Miss Annie J Morrison, Woodlands, Lairg IV27 4DB; Tel 01549 402362.

LOCHCARRON

Lochcarron Village Hall - 11am & 6pm, Wed 7pm; Kishorn Meeting House 3pm on 2nd Lord's Day of month. Treasurer: Mrs Alison Stewart, 13 Kirkton Gardens, Lochcarron IV54 8UQ, Tel 01520 722239 Email: ajs.kishorn@tesco.net

LOCHINVER & STOER & DRUMBEG

Revd David Parker, Free Church Manse, Inver Terrace, Lochinver IV27 4LH, Tel 01571 844685, Free Church Stoer - 11am; APC Church, Drumbeg - 12.30pm; Free Church Lochinver - 6pm. Treasurer: Mrs E. MacKenzie, Church Road, Stoer, Sutherland, IV27 4SE, Tel 01571 855279.

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POOLEWE

Services held jointly with Poolewe and Aultbea Free Church - Poolewe 10.45am, Inverasdale 4.30pm, Aultbea 6.30pm. On 4th Lord's Day of month - Poolewe 10.45am and 5.00pm with APC pulpit supply. Treasurer/Contact: K MacLean, Dunedin, 42 Strath, Gairloch IV21 2DB, Tel 01445 712050. Email: kendunedin@aol.com

SKYE

Revd Angus Cattanach, APC Manse, 20 Glamaig Place, Portree IV51 9PJ, Tel 01478 613258 Portree APC Church, Staffin Road - 12 noon & 6.30pm, Thu 7.30pm; C of S, Dunvegan - 12.15 & 5pm. Contact: Norman MacKay Royal Bank House, Portree IV51 9BX, Tel 01478 612822.

STORNOWAY

Revd George I Macaskill, APC Manse, 36 Newvalley, Isle of Lewis HS2 0DN, Tel 01851 703217, Fax 01851 703775. Email: g.i.macaskill@btinternet.com 72 Keith Street - 11am & 6.30pm, Thu 7.30pm. Treasurer: Mr W K Macleod, 3 Oliver's Brae, Stornoway HS1 2SS, Tel 01851 703796. www.treetapesministry.org

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Revd John Ross, APC Manse, 2 Cameron Gardens, Tain IV19 1NT, Tel 01862 892199. Email: revjr@talk21.com Tain Church, Upper King Street - 11.30am & 6.30pm; Hilton Church 11.30am and 5pm, Wed 7.30pm. Treasurer: Roderrick Mackenzie, Geanies House, Fearn, by Tain IV20 1TW, Tel 01862 871000. Email: cfp@geanies.org.uk

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VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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