

The APC News

The Magazine of the Associated Presbyterian Churches in Scotland

Swords into Ploughshares!



The former restaurant in Ballnafettack Road - soon to be a Christian Centre!

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SO OFTEN THROUGHOUT the country, we see church buildings turned into snooker clubs, restaurants, night clubs, businesses and used for all sorts of things. A sign of the times, no doubt. The opposite of what Isaiah the prophet envisaged when he prophesied of the days when nations would turn their swords into ploughshares!

However, it is not all one-way traffic! On page 12 you will see that our congregation in Inverness have purchased a former restaurant building in Balnafettack Road, and hope to turn it into a Christian centre with a worship hall. We are thankful to God the many obstacles which stood in the way of purchasing this building were removed. May it all be to the glory of God. •

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EDITORIAL

Torch Passing - Covenant!

LAST AUGUST ON THE eve of President Fidel Castro's 75th birthday, he handed a Cuban flag to the leader of the young communist organisation. He was passing on the torch of communism to the next generation.

One press release said, "Castro was metaphorically enacting what he calls his most powerful dream - that Cuba's younger generations take over from him once he's gone to keep his revolution alive." Castro does not want his 'dream' to fail and not having achieved it himself, he is making sure that his beliefs and principles will be carried on by the next generations.

This highlights the important Biblical concept of the covenant. What Castro was doing with his beliefs and convictions, is what God told His people to do with His Word and truth - pass them on. God commanded Abraham to pass on to succeeding generations His covenant, that is, pass on to our children the blessings, truths and promises God has given us.

Without our realising, we pass 'something' on to our children and the succeeding generations. Our ways and practices and lifestyles, proceed from a set of beliefs about life. Passing on something is an inescapable concept. It is not an issue of Covenant v. no Covenant. It

is an issue of **whose** covenant, whose ideals and values are we going to adopt and practice, God's or Satan's? We are either giving our children an heritage of truth and righteousness, or we are giving them something else. If it is not God's truth then it is a lie.

No one really started from 'scratch' - apart from Adam and Eve. That's why God gave them His covenant. He wanted them to start on the right foot. He gave them His Word and told them to obey. They didn't and so there is now a right and a wrong way to live - God's way and man's way.

When Noah went out of the ark, and each of his sons went their way, they carried with them Noah's teaching. He, no doubt, told them about God's covenant, His promises and His faithfulness. He would have told them to keep that covenant and to pass it on to their children and to their children's children. Somewhere down the line, a generation stopped telling their children, or at least stopped believing it themselves. They started believing something else, and passed the 'new thing' on.

We all now start with a legacy bequeathed to us from our parents and predecessors. As soon as we can understand, our minds are fed with the beliefs of our parents and superiors. They instruct us

in their ways and convictions, just as Castro is doing. We can change and exercise our own minds. As we mature, we accept it, or don't accept it. And that is a very important decision - far more important than most people realise. To deny God's covenant as true, and to promote our own understanding of truth has serious consequences.

We are, as Scripture so often reminds us, covenant keepers or covenant breakers. We are one or the other.

We are responsible for passing on the covenant as God gave it, or we change it or reject it. Only God of course can change the heart, but He has laid on us the responsibility of making known His truth to our generation.

Asaph tells us, under inspiration, that God *"established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they might arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God"* [Psalm 78:5].

Castro wants his generation to have his beliefs and convictions because he firmly believes he has what is right and true. He has no doubts about what he believes. So he is passing on the torch.

What a lesson for Christians! How earnest are we to ensure that our children and generation know the truth of God? Are we

passing on the covenant teaching and promises of God? As our legislators are fast discarding much of what has a hint of Biblical teaching and values about it, the Church has more than ever a great responsibility to ensure that its members perform this most important duty.

Part of the problem seems to be that we have lost our zeal for God. Time and again the Bible says, *"The zeal of the Lord will do this"* [2 Kings 19:31, Isaiah 9:7]. The disciples of Jesus saw the fulfillment of [Psalm 69:9] in the demonstration of His zeal in the temple.

We need to re-capture a zeal for God. Paul commended the Jews for their zeal, even although it was in ignorance *"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge"* [Rom 10:2]. Ephaphras also was commended *"I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis"* [Col 4:13].

Terrible things are happening in the world as a result of misguided zeal. Passion for truth and righteousness is a commendable virtue and not to be confused with erratic and extreme behaviour of the irrational.

True Godly passion will be reflected in our compassion. Unless we have compassion, our zeal will not be from the right source. It must never be said that we had every passion except compassion. Christ had passion but His compassion was more obvious. So it ought to be with His disciples. •

Increasing Joy in Heaven!

What Jonathan Edwards thought about the joys of heaven!

The contents of this article is adapted, taken from John Piper's article on Jonathan Edwards entitled 'Can Joy Increase Forever?' found on his website

JOHNN PIPER, the senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, is a serious student of Jonathan Edwards, the well-known theologian pastor in New England in the 18th century.

Piper says that Edwards probably knows more about heaven than he does about hell - which is saying a lot. Edwards, it will be remembered, preached the famous sermon entitled 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' which has the reputation of being the means of converting more people than any other sermon. Edwards was also the only minister to experience two lasting revivals in his life-time.

Piper maintains that Edwards was a Christian hedonist. By hedonist he means that it is of the essence of Christian virtue to pursue happiness in God. He argues that not only is it our duty to pursue obedience to God, but we ought to pursue the enjoyment of that obedience. The joy of serving God ought not to be, as it were, a by-product of obedience, but joy itself ought to be pursued by the Christian. God desires that we enjoy Him.

Piper would alter the first catechism to read, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever'. He learned this from Edwards. It is because Edwards

believed that the greatest joy for man was his enjoyment of God, and God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him, that Piper examined Edwards's view of heaven. He discovered that Edwards believed heaven was not only filled with joy, but an ever-increasing joy.

Piper says that Edwards, 'soared in his meditations on heaven'. Edwards believed that heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory together with a great, and ever-greater joy in God.

As a child, Piper says, he feared heaven, as never-endingness. That to him seemed to be 'sameness'. And that was boring! However, Edwards maintains that heaven is joyful and we will have an ever-increasing joy in discovering more and more of God's riches. We will be satisfied with what we know and the prospect of knowing more of God will thrill our hearts. "God wills to lavish this fullness on us for our joy" says Piper.

God being infinite, and we being finite, there is no way that we could "comprehend the limitless, infinite fullness of God's glory" as expressed in [Eph 2:7] "*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace*

toward us in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus”.

Our joy can never be complete but must be ever-increasing forever and ever. The perfection of heaven, says Piper, is not static. We do not see all there is to see at one time. We cannot take it all in. We do not become God. We are still finite. Therefore there will always be more and more of the infinite God to discover. The end of increasing pleasure and joy in God will never come!

In Edwards own words “It will take an infinite number of ages for God to be done glorifying the

wealth of his grace to us - which is to say he will never be done”. [The End for Which God Created the World, ¶279, in God’s Passion for His Glory, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998)].

“And our joy will increase forever and ever. Boredom is absolutely excluded in the presence of an infinitely glorious God”.

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...and of the Other Place!

A quotation from Dorothy Sayers,

“THERE SEEMS TO BE a kind of conspiracy, especially among middle-aged writers of vaguely liberal tendency, to forget, or to conceal, where the doctrine of Hell comes from. One finds frequent references to the "cruel and abominable mediaeval doctrine of hell," or "the childish and grotesque mediaeval imagery of physical fire and worms." . . .

“But the case is quite otherwise; let us face the facts. The doctrine of hell is not "mediaeval": it is Christ's. It is not a device of "mediaeval priestcraft" for frightening people into giving money to the church: it is Christ's deliberate judgment on sin. The imagery of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire derives, not from

"mediaeval superstition," but originally from the Prophet Isaiah, and it was Christ who emphatically used it. . . . It confronts us in the oldest and least "edited" of the gospels: it is explicit in many of the most familiar parables and implicit in many more: it bulks far larger in the teaching than one realizes, until one reads the Evangelists [gospels] through instead of picking out the most comfortable texts: one cannot get rid of it without tearing the New Testament to tatters. We cannot repudiate Hell without altogether repudiating Christ”.

(Dorothy Sayers, *A Matter of Eternity*, ed. Rosamond Kent Sprague [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973], p. 86)
(Taken from Desiring God Ministries web site (see previous article for details))

The Importance of Punctuation

PUNCTUATION IS very important. It can change the whole meaning of a sentence. Look at this sentence which a professor once asked his students to punctuate: "A woman without her man is nothing".

The men wrote "A woman, without her man, is nothing"!

The women wrote "A woman: without her – man is nothing"!

Punctuation does matter!

When the Bible was written, it was written without any punctuation marks - in fact there wasn't even spacing between the words! That is one of the reasons there can be controversy over the meaning of some verses.

Take for example the first verse of the well known Psalm 121. *"I will lift my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help"*. Reading it without any punctuation marks at all, (as we have written it above), it means that David's help comes from the hills.

However, putting a colon in between "hills" and "from" and inserting a question mark at the end, (thus "I will lift my eyes to the hills: from whence comes my help?"), changes the whole meaning. It now reads something like this "Shall I look to the mountains (for help)? No. From where comes my help? My help is from the Lord"! It means

the exact opposite! Instead of the Psalmist's help coming from the hills, he tells us it comes from the Lord.

This latter interpretation may well be the correct one. In Biblical times the mountains were the places where the heathen worshipped their gods - but the Psalmist wished to inform his readers that his help came from Jehovah God who made the mountains! So we see the importance of punctuation.

How thankful we should be that God has raised up Christian scholars who know the original languages and culture of the times in which they were written, and can translate them into our common language.

While interpretation still comes into our understanding of the Bible, we do need the original written words of God. There is one clear message that God wants you and I to understand from the Bible – it is that He loves saving sinners and that everyone is welcome to Jesus Christ.

Someone said If the Bible was to be reduced to one sentence, that sentence would be *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* [1 Tim 1:15]. And if the Bible had to be reduced to one word, that word would be "salvation". •

The Private Lives of Public Servants

The following article is by former US Senator Charles Colson. In his review of a recent book on the subject, he reminds us of the principles involved in offices of trust, as originally understood by the founding fathers of America

WE OFTEN HEAR THAT a person's private conduct is unrelated to the performance of his or her public duties. This is especially true if the private failings involve sexual matters. Advocates of this point of view never tire of telling us about former presidents whose marital infidelities didn't prevent them from political greatness.

This argument was made regularly during the debates over President Clinton's impeachment. The president's defenders told us that the Founders would have been dismayed at our making a man's private conduct the basis for judging his fitness for office. And especially is this so, they said, with sexual sin which is something so personal you can be justified lying about it.

Well, a new book tells us that far from being dismayed, the Founders believed that private misbehavior would lead to a breach of public trust.

In his just released book, 'On Two Wings', philosopher/theologian Michael Novak makes a

compelling case for the biblical origins of the American experiment. As he puts it, the way that the story of the American founding is told today cuts off "one of the two wings by which the American eagle flies." That cut-off wing is America's "compact" with the God of the Bible. The Founders believed that there was a God who brings down the mighty and lifts up the poor. They relied upon this belief, and this belief is, as Novak writes, "an indispensable part of their story."

As you might expect, this belief shaped their understanding of morality and character, as well. They did not make the distinction between private and public conduct that we do. Novak tells the story of a prominent Boston doctor, Benjamin Church, Jr. Church's fellow Bostonians thought him to be a patriot and were subsequently shocked to learn that he had been selling his services to the British.

In a letter to James Warren, Samuel Adams offered an explanation that would be incomprehensible to many contemporary Americans: He linked the doctor's

treason to his reputation as an adulterer. Adams wrote, "He who is void of virtuous attachments in private life, is, or very soon will be, void of all Regard for his country." He added that "there is seldom an instance of a man guilty of betraying his Country, who had not before lost the feeling of moral obligations in his private connections". In other words, if a man or woman won't honor private obligations, why should we believe that he or she will honor his public ones? They won't.

If this seems hard to understand, the problem lies with us, not our Founders. Our culture has forgotten what the Founders knew and Novak's book documents: The American experiment is a moral, not just a political, exercise. And as such, it assumes certain things to be true about human nature and, as Novak tells us, about the authority of the God of the Bible. But these beliefs run contrary to our culture's

worldviews. And that's why the ordered liberty envisioned by the Founders has degenerated into a demand for personal autonomy that asks nothing of its citizens, not even their virtue.

As Novak brilliantly reminds us, private virtue, rooted in biblical faith, is essential for the American experiment to work as the Founders intended. And, it's vital that Christians understand this often-ignored "wing" on which our way of life depends. The wing that teaches us that, without virtue, there can be no greatness. •

For more information: Michael Novak, 'On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding' (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

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Politics and Religion

NOW WE WANT TO BE sure we are understood when we say that religion and politics are interrelated. Certainly we do not mean that civil government (the political and legislative process) should be used to change or reform men and women (though the fear of punishment has a deterrent effect on people who might consider a criminal act). No man or group of men "*can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him*" [Psa 49:7].

The purpose of God's law as it relates to the civil magistrate is to punish and restrain evil, to protect human life and property, and to provide justice for all people. Only God can regenerate the heart. An individual cannot be made good by keeping the law.

If the Christian religion cannot mix with politics, that is, if it cannot act as the standard for determining right and wrong, then what standard will be used?

Gary DeMar

Christ in All the Glory of His 'Offices'

WE MUST 'MEET' Jesus if we are to be saved from our sins. The meeting of course is spiritual but nevertheless real and effective.

Most of our readers expect this experience to be priestly or judicial in character. That is, an experience in which God's law and its demands are paramount and we see our utter inability to keep them perfectly, so we are completely condemned. The significance of Christ as the Saviour, providing forgiveness for sins, is therefore very important to us. Christ Jesus is the great High Priest who has made atonement for our sins by His death. By faith we receive this forgiveness. In this experience, Christ is recognised as the Saviour providing forgiveness to us.

However, this is only one aspect of the greatness of Jesus Christ. Christ has more 'offices' than of a priest. Our catechisms tells us He is also a King and a Prophet. There are many aspects of Christ's Person which are wonderful and attractive. The fact that we see any beauty or loveliness at all in Christ is evidence that we believe in Him. *"There is no beauty that we should desire Him"* [Isaiah 53:2] refers to the unsaved man.

It may be that our very first 'encounter' with Jesus Christ was not as a priest in His saving role of

forgiving us our sins. The woman of Samaria realised that Jesus was a prophet before she saw Him as a priest. Her experience of Him was that He knew all about her. She was attracted to Him because of His sympathy and understanding. This first encounter was a saving experience of Jesus. It created faith in her and gradually she recognised He was the great High Priest.

So it may be with people today. We may be 'drawn' to Jesus by witnessing His majesty or His love or His patience and it may be some time before we see Him in His priestly role.

There are many aspects of Christ's Person which are real and saving which do not immediately reflect His priestly office. Zacchaeus came to saving faith in Christ by first appreciating His unconditional love and whole-hearted acceptance of himself, a publicly despised person. It would also appear that the thief on the cross saw Jesus as a King rather than a priest when he prayed *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom"* [Luke 23:42].

Isaiah too, saw Him in many different roles *"Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* [Isaiah 9:6].

Do you see any loveliness in Jesus Christ? •

'Harm Reduction' Ideology

Many councils and help groups promote 'harm reduction' theories to combat the harmful effects of immorality, but as this article shows, it is counter-productive and even increases the harm it was meant to reduce.

HARM REDUCTION is the name given to the idea that permitting an evil to some degree can help to reduce the full blown effects of the problem.

For example, in drug taking and in sex-education, emphasis is given to safer methods of using drugs and having sex, rather than teaching total abstinence.

It is a damage -limitation approach and although well intentioned has been proved to be counter-productive. Away back in the eighties Planned Parenthood in America confessed that their programme of handing out condoms was a complete failure.

"Sex education **increases** promiscuity. It **increases** teenage pregnancy. It **increases** the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. And it **increases** high risk sexual behaviour. Even the most stringently entrenched advocates of sex education, Planned Parenthood, have been forced by the cold, naked facts to admit as much" says David Chilton¹. In his book about a Christian Response to AIDS, he provides the data and evidence that harm reduction in sex education has only increased the problem ten-fold.

The same results can be shown in other areas of morality. The 'tolerance zone' for prostitution

in Edinburgh has only increased the problem as a letter from the local residents living near the zone testify². The idea was that by allowing prostitutes to work 'safely' in a 'speciafied zone', would help the problem.

The police were even behind a bus service to transport the prostitutes to prevent them from walking through residential areas. However, the whole scheme had to be scrapped. Councillor Pat Attridge confessed the police were "caught between a rock and a hard place".

Fifty years ago, before the 'harm reduction' philosophy was implemented and before sex-education was taught in schools, there was not the degree of harm from sexual activity and drug-taking that there is now. Human wisdom has been shown again to be futile regarding the healing of sin.

The only way to reduce the harmful effects of sin is to teach the need for repentance and to give assurance of the mercy and grace of God. We also need to encourage the complete turning away from vice and sin. •

¹'[Power in the Blood](#)' page 49, by David Chilton ISBN 0-943497-05-1. See also '[The Big Lie: The Scandal of Planned Parenthood](#)' by George Grant. Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1987.

² Alex Gordon letter in '[The Herald](#)', 28 August, 2001.

Congregational News

DUNDEE

We had an encouraging end to the year with a new couple coming regularly since our mission in October. Several additional meetings were held during December including children's clubs. It was particularly encouraging to have a nucleus of 3 children from the club attend some of the 'adult' Sunday services. We also had some local unchurched friends come and worship with us during December.

A communion was held on the last Sunday of the year and almost all of our members were present to take the sacrament.

Our hall continues to be used for the counselling of girls who are in crisis over their pregnancy, and a weekly prayer meeting on Tuesdays at lunchtime still takes place. This meeting is for the Christian leaders in the city who meet for a time of prayer. Tea/coffee is provided, but no food - just prayer

On new year's day we held a joint service with the Free Church in St Peter's Church when our pastor preached on facing the unknown future in faith, based on Noah's command to "Go forth" from the ark. We also had a joint service with the Free Church, on the first Sunday

of the year, our pastor taking both services again.

With all the seasonal activities now behind us, we look forward to carrying on the work of spreading the gospel around our community and teaching ourselves the Word of God. There are plans for other missions - details later.

EDINBURGH

Have seen a steadying out of numbers attending but would love to see more joining us on a regular basis. Encouraged by our first congregational lunch where we enjoyed spending time together as a congregation. Invitations were also sent out and we were particularly pleased to see some new faces join us for food and fellowship. All being well, another lunch is planned for February.

Links with the Viewforth Church of Scotland congregation and with St Columba's Free Church are mutually rewarding and we are keen to find ways of continuing to work closely together in His service. We are looking forward to our communion weekend on 20th January (DV) when we will have Rev Ian MacAskill from South Uist preaching to us.

Please note that the time of our Sunday evening service has been changed to 6.15pm and that the midweek bible study takes place in the manse at 7.30pm each Wednesday.

And finally - our thanks to all of you who remember our city and the congregation in prayer - pray on!

INVERNESS/DINGWALL

Purchase of new meeting place. The congregation has just recently purchased a former restaurant to change it into a Christian Centre in the community, and a venue for the APC church services in Inverness. The property has a car-park, and there is room for the building of an extension including a hall and other meeting rooms. Our prayerful purpose is that this project will provide a Christian venue for the community which at present does not have as many

churches as some other parts of the city.

Book Reading Club. The Book Reading Club continues to meet and the exercise is enjoyed by those attending, as we reflect on the lessons learned from books such as "Encouragement" by Derek Bingham. At present we are reading Richard Bewes book "The Stone that became a mountain". If any readers of the APC news wish to join in this fellowship they are most welcome, or better still, why not start a Reading Group where you live?

Family Lunch. This is organised for parents and children who meet for lunch in the Church hall after the first worship service. Arrangements are made for "child minding", while the parents meet to discuss matters related to Family Life. At our first meeting we considered Family Worship, and at the January meeting the discussion is



The view from the new building purchased by the Inverness congregation

on the first four chapters of the book "The Family You Want".

Drakies Sunday Club. This is a Sunday School outreach, in the Community Hall, and is run by some young folk in the congregation with the support and help of others. It is encouraging to see the young ones learn about the Lord Jesus Christ, and also to meet a number of the parents at the worship services which are arranged in the hall from time to time. This work, along with the Sunday School classes and crèche in the church, are great opportunities to teach young minds the things that really matter.

Evangelistic Outreach. Every three months an evangelistic magazine, called "Southside News", and prepared by John Lister, one of the elders, is distributed in the district around St Stephen's Church. Gospel leaflets were also distributed downtown during the busy Christmas shopping season. There has been positive feed-back from these missions, and we continue in the prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to bless the work.

Orphanage Club. This good work continues, and although the display of items occurs only twice a year, the collections are taken more often. The amount of items gathered, with the rich variety in colour, sizes, clothing, toiletries, bed covers and clothing increases to move our hearts each time. God has richly

blessed us with opportunity to help others.

All these matters are commended to your prayers. Our mission in life is to be that as we live for Christ, in his grace, He will be given the praise.

STORNOWAY

The congregation had its usual Sunday School Party on the 28 December and was greatly encouraged by the attendance at its New Year Day Service of so many from other local congregations. It looks forward to the annual visit from Slavic Gospel Association in January. The "Parenting" video night in the manse is hoping to recommence on 15 January. Fellowships are continuing every fortnight after the evening service on Sundays.

The Stornoway Communion is in February when we look forward to having Revd Malcolm MacInnes from Inverness over for the weekend. •



The Lochcarron Sunday School group at the rail station on an outing to Kyle of Lochalsh last July

BOOK REVIEW

'The Book of Origins'

Genesis Simply Explained

By Philip Eveson

Published by Evangelical Press

THIS BOOK IS A DETAILED and consecutive commentary on the book of Genesis. It is in the series of Welwyn Commentaries: The Bible Simply Explained. The author Rev. Philip Eveson was minister of Kensit Evangelical Church Finchley London for twenty-five years and is now Principal of London Theological Seminary. Prior to the publication of this book, the reviewer listened to a number of very helpful and edifying sermons by the author on Genesis and we therefore looked forward eagerly to seeing this book in print.

Genesis is described as a 'history book with a difference'. History usually involves looking back at what has happened in the past and assessing the importance of people and events. A special feature of the book of Genesis is that it urges us to look forward to the fulfillment of God's great promises in Jesus Christ.

This commentary works through the book of Genesis section by section. It highlights key words, phrases and themes and explains their original meaning within the context in which they are set. Small details that could easily be bypassed

by the reader take on a new significance. It stops to reflect on genealogies of names that the reader



could easily gloss over, demonstrating how these sections often bind the entire book together in a meaningful way. It invites us to tiptoe through the graveyard of Bible characters and to learn important lessons through examining their lives. The subtle interplay of God's providences, promises and purposes are portrayed in an illuminating manner. Whatever theme is covered by the commentary its constant refrain is the promise of Jesus Christ.

If you have been reading Genesis for many years and feel that you are familiar with its contents you will still find this book refreshing, stimulating and encouraging. If your daily Bible reading has recently become sluggish why not begin your private devotions again with the book of Genesis? Take this commentary as your guide as you begin to read a short section of Genesis each day and you will find spiritual enrichment throughout 2002.

Again and again, you will find yourself enthralled by the power of the Genesis message. You will discover that it is difficult to read this commentary without stopping to marvel at God's great works and to worship our great God and Saviour.

Catherine MacCuish

Your Prayers Answered for Indonesia Crisis - but Continue to Pray!

In our last Issue (December), there was an article entitled 'The Unreported Genocide', about the persecution of Christians in Indonesia. Here is a follow up. Thank you for praying - but please do not stop.

Christmas Crisis for Christians Averted in Indonesia

By Wendy Griffith,
CBN News Reporter

December 21, 2001

CBN.com - Two weeks ago, Christians on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi were on the verge of a great massacre. Muslim jihad forces in the thousands were pressing in from all directions.

Now, thanks to the timely arrival of government troops, it appears a Christmas massacre has been averted. But many believe the danger is not over yet.

Near the cities of Poso and Tentena in central Sulawesi, village after village was wiped out, Christians were murdered, homes turned to ashes, and churches burned to the ground. "Yes, everything was burned, the house was burned, it's gone, there's nothing left," said one villager.

"Please, we need immediate protection, and then, all the Laskar Jihad forces that have come to be

kicked out, because the way I see it, they've all come from the outside and made things worse," said one man.

When the jihad forces came through with bulldozers and bombs, thousands of Christians ran to the mountains and are now living in the woods and jungles. Others fled to crowded refugee camps, waiting to see when or even if they can return home.

"If I could go back today, I'd go back today, but the police have said, don't go back yet. We're waiting for word on whether it's safe or not," another villager said.

While danger still lurks, many believe they are safer now that government troops have arrived, a direct answer to prayer according to some Christians.

But jihad troops are still on the island. Men armed with machetes search cars, looking for weapons or people who may be hiding. They also keep commerce from getting to larger towns such as Tentena, a village with 28,000 Christian refugees.

Not only are the jihad troops still prevalent, but the Indonesian government claims that Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network set up bases in their country, the world's most populous Muslim nation. "I have to warn the people there in Poso to search and be on watch to prevent them [Al Qaeda members] returning to Poso and using the same camps," said Abdullah Hendropriyono, Indonesian Intelligence Chief.

But the Laskar Jihad, the main Muslim militant group operating in the area which has been blamed for much of the recent bloodshed, has repeatedly denied links with al Qaeda.

A U.S. State Department document released this week listed 45 countries where al Qaeda and affiliated groups have cells. The list, which included nearby nations such as Malaysia and the Philippines, did not name Indonesia.

Meanwhile, more than 50,000 Christians will spend Christmas in the woods, make-shift

homes or refugee camps, waiting and praying for peace.

A local pastor gave this advice to the persecuted Christians in Sulawesi. "To all our friends in Tentena: love our enemies, don't hate them. If we do that, then what we're hoping for both our Christian friends and our Muslim friends, will happen," said Pastor Durma.

About a thousand people have been killed on Sulawesi Island in the past two years in sporadic fighting between Christians and Muslims.

And in the nearby province of Maluku, about 9,000 people have died in three years of sectarian warfare, including nine Christians shot dead this week in Ambon. Police fear more unrest could erupt during next week's Christmas celebrations.

Editor's note: The above story courtesy CBN News, www.cbn.org/cbnnews/

The above article was taken from the website of 'Voice of the Martyrs', at www.persecution.com

Christ's Prayer in Suffering

"THERE IS NO DOUBT that a Man who can so quickly drop His self-absorption, His concentration on intense physical suffering, His temptation to rage, resentment, hate, self-pity so that He can be interested...let alone forgive His tormentors, is a Man who merits our supreme admiration. To call on God on such a moment, under such circumstances, to rise above all that would drag Him down and pray "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*", leaves us spellbound with wonder."

John White

Living Truth in a Fallen World

This series is based on a seminar given at the Evangelical Alliance Assembly, Cardiff, 5-7 Nov 2001

We hope to publish all four parts of this series in future issues. The four subjects in the series are: Truth; God; Jesus; Commitment



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

Truth in the Bible

WHAT IS A biblical concept of truth? Contained in this question is a belief that the Bible can be trusted as a definer of truth. For followers of Jesus, truth is always *biblical*. If the Bible is what it claims to be - the inspired words of God - then this is sufficient for us.

A biblical notion of truth is *absolute*. In other words, it applies in all times and in all places, and potentially can be understood by everybody. If God has spoken, then what he says can be trusted as absolute and is the benchmark against which to assess all other truth claims.

Following on from this, biblical truth is *revealed* to us by God. We need this because, as fallen creatures, we could never discover it through our own efforts.

Finally, a biblical notion of truth must be *unique*. In other words, the Bible is the only inspired, authoritative and trustworthy revelation of God's words. No other source of truth can be put on the same level as the Bible.

Jesus claims that *he* is the truth [John 14:6] as he is the incarnate Word of God [John 1:1, 14]. He claimed that his words were true [Matthew 5:18, John 16:7 etc.] and he redefined the Pharisees' understanding of truth [Matthew 5:21,22]. The Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of Truth [John 14:17] as he would teach the disciples the truth about Jesus [John 15:26ff; 16:13ff]. Jesus also claimed that God's words were truth [John 17:17] and had the power, through the Gospel to set people free [John 8:32].

Truth in contemporary culture

How does the biblical notion of truth compare or contrast with that expressed in contemporary culture? To help us answer this question we will look at the work of the Manic Street Preachers and at *The Matrix*.

Manic Street Preachers

The Manic Street Preachers are almost the elder statesmen of British

rock music. They have been around since the early 1990s producing numerous albums. The band have been through numerous crises but arguably are as popular today as ever. In 1998 the band released the album *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours*. Aneurin Bevan, a famed socialist and founder of the welfare state in Britain, used this phrase at the end of his speeches. It expresses the belief that there is no universal truth (like Christianity for example), but rather only personal truths that we must respect. It indicates a personal view of the world, a personal moral code while at the same time others hold a different one. It is an expression of relativism - of the idea that what people claim is truth is only one of many options. This is a result of there being no external reference points to check our truth against.

This may seem like a barrier for the Gospel and for the biblical idea of truth. But is it? If this position is taken to its logical end, then anything goes. Morality becomes something that we ourselves decide - with a token disclaimer that as long as it doesn't hurt anyone it's all right. This is simply unliveable as all people class some actions as absolutely wrong. It may be rape, paedophilia, murder or genocide, but everyone has their limits beyond which they don't believe people should go. Almost all of us recognise an absolute level of morality; we need absolutes; and we need absolute truth.

A look at the lyrics on the album provides a bridge in which to communicate the claims of Jesus.

Two sample lyrics include:

'The gap that grows between our lives
The gap our parents never had'
The Everlasting

'Too afraid to open your eyes
To see the sadness that's inside'
*You're So Tender And
You're Tired*

The rejection of absolutes, when taken to its logical conclusion leaves us unable to relate to one another. It leaves us as isolated, fragmented and confused individuals. This is the natural outcome of accepting contemporary culture's definition of truth. It reveals our lives as fragile, insecure and sick. Why should this be the case? The truth is that we were made for relationships. Ultimately, we were made for relationship with God. The good news of Jesus Christ offers us a restored relationship with our heavenly Father as well as a place in part of the community of God. This can help us overcome the isolation and loneliness that many people feel. A rejection of absolute truth and the God in whom it is grounded leaves us stumbling around in the dark, lost and confused. Through the Gospel this can be reversed.

The Matrix

One of the most significant films of recent years is *The Matrix*. Released in 1999 and directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski, it tells the story of Thomas Anderson (aka Neo). By day he is a full-time programme designer, and by night a part-time computer hacker. He is troubled by deep questions about life. Something is gnawing away at him, and he recognises that there is a major problem with the world. He is afraid of not being in control of his life. The frustration, confusion and answers begin to unravel when he meets Morpheus. The following extract is when Neo meets Morpheus for the first time:

'What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste or see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.'

Morpheus to Neo

This quote recognises that humans have limited understanding, that our minds are finite. We can never really know anything with certainty - least of all truth - so there is no point searching for it. All claims for truth are, at best, subjective and at worst, deceptive. No one else can tell us what the truth is - we are all in the same boat as one another. We cannot trust what we see around us and assume is real. The mere fact that something is visible does not guarantee that it is real. Indeed, our

brain 'secretes the reality' we perceive. How can we know anything at all?

Again, this seems to be a barrier to the Christian message, but is it? If the above sentiment is worked out fully, it leaves us as humans with no basis to be sure of anything. The world around us could be a fantasy world and we would be none the wiser. We would spend our days blissfully unaware that there may be something else out there. To believe our brains create our own reality is ultimately unliveable as, for example, receiving the love of another person is not a reality, but merely a chemical by-product. Our most precious and tender moments would be a dream, an illusion having no basis in the truth. It is correct to state that humans have limited understanding, and also right to believe that we are all in the same boat. But what if someone was to come from outside our reality and show us that there was something else out there. Neo needed rescuing by Morpheus, and as Christians we believe that Jesus has come from outside our own reality, that he has come into our world to rescue us and to reveal what God is like, what life is about and how we should respond.

Two further quotes from *The Matrix* can provide a bridge for the Gospel. When Neo meets Morpheus for the first time, he is faced with an answer for his deep questions about life:

'You've felt it your entire life - that something is

wrong with the world. You don't know what it is but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad'

'[The truth is] that you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch - a prison for your mind'

Both quotes Morpheus to Neo

These quotes acknowledge the belief Neo holds that all is not as it should be in the world. This is a common understanding today. We look around the world and see war, famine, deprivation, oppression - we know instinctively that it is not as it should be. Why is this the case? As Christians, we believe that each of us is made in the image of God, and therefore that each of us has a sense of failure and perfection imprinted into our nature. We know

that we are not what we should be and we desire to improve ourselves, to be better than we are. This failure leaves us as slaves, though not slaves to a computer, but rather to sin. The Bible teaches that each of us is born into sin, that we are controlled by it, and that we need to be rescued from it. In the same way that Morpheus comes from outside Neo's reality to rescue him, so Christians believe that Jesus came from heaven, was made a man and died on the cross to rescue us from the sin that kept us captive. By his death we are set free to live and be as God intended.

This is the truth that Christians profess to believe. It differs from the truth that contemporary culture offers, which nonetheless can provide a bridge to explaining the Christian understanding of truth.

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M'Cheyne's Advice in a Letter to Someone he had Never Seen

"Do not take up your time so much with studying your own heart as with studying **Christ's heart**, 'For one look at yourself, take ten looks to Christ!' Look at [Rom 15:13. That is my prayer for you. You are looking for peace in **striving**, or peace in **duties**, or peace in **reforming** your mind; but ah! Look at His word. *"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in **believing**."* All your peace is to be found in believing **God's word** about his Son. If for a moment you forget your own case altogether, and meditate on the glorious way of salvation by **Christ for us**, does your bosom never glow with a ray of peace? Keep that peace; it is joy in believing."

Making an Important Decision?

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS to help you.

(1) Don't ask God to bless **your** plans, ask Him to show **His** plans - they are already blessed! And remember, God will never tell you to do anything that doesn't line up with what He's already told you in His Word [Isa 8:20].

(2) Make sure your goal is to glorify God. Sometimes that's hard to know, for the worst pride often masquerades behind feigned humility. The human body is amazing - just pat a man on the back and his head begins to swell!

(3) Use your brain. God's guidance transcends human reasoning, but it doesn't exclude it. When God saves you, He doesn't remove your mind, He renews it. So pray, then put it to work [Rom 12:2].

(4) Seasons aren't meant to be ignored. If it isn't God's timing, wait! In the right season the plan will be clear, the people you need will show up and the funds will be provided [Ecc 3:1]. God has promised it, so trust Him!

(5) Seek trustworthy counsel. Beware of those who patronise you for selfish reasons. Listen to those who value what you value and have where you want to go [Pro 27:17].

(6) Never act without the facts, but never limit God to them. When knowledge won't take you another step, faith will carry you through, for that's what connects you to the power of God. Now listen again: "If you don't know what you are doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help [Jam 1:5]. •

Bob Gass - taken from 'The Word for Today'

The Next Presbytery

will be on

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26th FEBRUARY**

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in
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