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May/June 2002

# The APC News

The Magazine of the Associated Presbyterian Churches in Scotland

## The Vancouver Congregation



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**T**HE EDITOR WAS ABLE to visit our Vancouver congregation during the month of March and there is a short piece about his visit on page 18. The photo above is of some of the congregation who were at a luncheon in the home of Hugh and Kathy Fraser. Hugh (pictured at the back on the right) is one of the elders there and is a son of the late James Fraser who was an elder in our Toronto congregation.

As already mentioned in an earlier issue, our minister in Vancouver Revd Douglas Beattie, passed away in February. Some of our ministers hope to visit the congregation during the next few months. Please pray for our congregation in Vancouver especially about the vacancy. •

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**Mr D M Fraser,  
Publications Treasurer,  
'Stratharris',  
Daviot, by Inverness, IV2 5XQ  
Telephone 01463-772253**

**Email:  
donald@stratharris.freeserve.co.uk**

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Postcode.....

Tel No.....

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*Editor:*  
Revd Donald C Macaskill  
238 Arbroath Road, Dundee DD4 7SB  
Tel 01382 451798  
E-mail:  
dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk

## The Jesus Mission

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**F**OR SOME CHURCHES the summer means missions and evangelistic efforts. It is commendable that some Christians sacrifice a week of their holidays to go on camps, etc to look after 'unchurched' youngsters as they are introduced to the Christian faith.

Did Jesus ever have a mission? It seems from Luke chapters 9 and 10 that He did. In chapter 9, He sent out the 12 apostles to places where they could in some cases expect a poor reception. In chapter 10 He sent out 70 additional disciples to where He Himself was to follow later. It is interesting to note the conditions immediately prior to this second mission. Was there anything that particularly 'motivated' Jesus to have this mission?

Surprisingly, this mission was held directly after some discouragements. Jesus had just experienced personal rejection at Samaria, "*they did not receive Him*" [Luke 9:53]. It seems, that although there was a revival only a few months earlier in that place (after the woman of Samaria gave her testimony) the effects had obviously worn off. Revival does not last forever - then or now.

Then there was the discouragement of the attitude of the disciples who were to engage in this mission. Following Christ's

rejection at Samaria, James and John wanted fire to come down from heaven and burn up those Christ rejectors. They even appealed to the example of Elijah to substantiate their attitude. But Jesus had to rebuke them "*You do not know what spirit you are of*". He also had to remind them of their calling - they were in the human salvage reclamation business, not in the work of condemning and destroying people's lives. "*For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them*" [Luke 9:56].

A third discouragement for Jesus was the failure of the three would-be-followers to estimate the true cost of discipleship. Despite the enthusiasm of these three Jesus had to remind them that total commitment is required for the Master's service "*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" [Luke 9:62].

The quality of the personnel Jesus had for this mission was not of the highest order. But there was another discouragement - there were not enough of them either! The task was enormous but there were so few workers. "*The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few*" [Luke 10:2]. So, the rejection of the Saviour, the poor quality of those willing to help, the fewness of the

workers did not prevent Jesus from continuing to do mission! We must not use any of these common excuses to deter us from fulfilling the command *“Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* [Mar 216:15].

Jesus knew exactly what was involved in mission work. It was dangerous and risky. The illustration He uses makes that very clear *“I send you out as lambs among wolves”* [Luke 10:3]. It was possible to lose your life, or your popularity, or your respect. In the early days many lost their lives. Psychological damage was also possible. Those who could not handle rejection would not find it comfortable. The only comfort in that situation was to remember that it wasn't necessary a personal rejection for *“he who rejects you, rejects Me”* [Luke 10:16].

These 70 missionaries were to avoid confrontation if at all possible. No matter where they went, their initial greeting was to be *“Peace to this house”* [Luke 10:5]. We are reminded of Paul's advice *“If at all possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”* [Rom 12:18].

They were even permitted to eat non-kosher food! The references *“eat such things as are set before you”* and *“eating and drinking such things as they give”* [Luke 10:7,8] indicate that they were not to make a fuss about the dietary laws. Remembering that Jesus was also to change the traditional practices of hand-washing and fasting [Mark 7:5

and Mat 9:14], does this mean that some traditional Christian habits today can also be overlooked in a missionary context? In our secular pagan society today, many such questions are being asked.

It is encouraging to read that the 70 *“returned with joy”* [Luke 10:17]. Despite all the concern about the fewness of the workers, those who went out were blessed. Again Jesus gives a warning about the joy of mission work. Be sure it is for the right reasons. *“Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven”* [Luke 10:20]. We must not be content with 'temporary' blessings in contrast to the salvation of the soul for *“What will a man give in exchange of his soul”* [Mat 16:26].

Was the mission a success? Did they get many converts? Note Jesus said *“**your** names are written in heaven”!* Were there no new names added as a result of the mission? In a sense it doesn't really matter. God alone converts. What we have to do is sow the seed. When we do sow the seed, we should give thanks that we were able to do it.

Most important of all is what Jesus thinks. Is He satisfied with our efforts? Mission is hard and challenging and often without much fruit. However, mission must be done. Jesus has made it plain that it is His will that we do mission - we must go into the world with the gospel. The fruit and the results are always God's business - our business is to sow the seed - everywhere! •

# Do the Jews Have a Divine Right to the Promised Land?

By John Piper

**H**OW SHOULD Bible-believing Christians align themselves in the Jewish-Palestinian conflict? There are Biblical reasons for treating both sides with compassionate public justice in the same way that disputes should be settled between nations generally. In other words, the Bible does not teach us to be partial to Israel or to the Palestinians because either has a special divine status.

I do not deny that Israel was chosen by God from all the peoples of the world to be the focus of special blessing in the history of redemption which climaxed in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. *"The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth"* [Deu 7:6].

Nor do I deny that God promised to Israel the presently disputed land from the time of Abraham onward. God said to Moses, *"This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring'"* [Deu 34:4].

But neither of these Biblical facts leads necessarily to the endorsement of present-day Israel as the rightful possessor of all the disputed land. Israel may have such a right. And she may not. But that

decision is not based on divine privilege. Why?

First, a non-covenant-keeping people does not have a divine right to hold the land of promise. Both the blessed status of the people and the privileged right to the land are conditional on Israel's keeping the covenant God made with her. Thus God said to Israel, *"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples"* [Ex 19:5]. Israel has no warrant to a present experience of divine privilege when she is not keeping covenant with God.

More than once Israel was denied the experience of her divine right to the land when she broke covenant with God. For example, when Israel languished in captivity in Babylon, Daniel prayed, *"O Lord . . . we have sinned and done wrong . . . To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame . . . to all Israel . . . in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you"* [Daniel 9:4-7; see Psalm 78:54-61].

Israel has no divine right to be in the land of promise when she is breaking the covenant of promise. This does not mean that other

nations have the right to molest her. She still has human rights among nations when she has no divine right. Nations that gloated over her divine discipline were punished by God [Isaiah 10:5-13].

Secondly, Israel as a whole today rejects her Messiah, Jesus Christ, God's Son. This is the ultimate act of covenant-breaking with God. God promised that to Israel "a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called

*Wonderful  
Counselor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting  
Father, Prince  
of Peace"*  
[Isaiah 9:6-7].  
But with tears  
this Prince of  
Peace looked

out over Jerusalem and said, "Would that you . . . had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. . . . You did not know the time of your visitation" [Luke 19:42-44].

When the builders rejected the beautiful Cornerstone, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" [Mat 21:43]. He explained, "Many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of

heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" [Mat 8:11-12].

God has saving purposes for ethnic Israel [Rom 11:25-26]. But for now the people are at enmity with God in rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ, their Messiah [Rom 11:28]. God has expanded his saving work to embrace all peoples [including Palestinians] who will trust his Son and depend on his death and resurrection for salvation. "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of

*Gentiles also,  
since God is one.  
He will justify  
the circumcised  
by faith and the  
uncircumcised  
through faith"*  
[Rom 3:29-30].  
The Christian  
plea in the  
Middle East to

"a non-covenant-keeping people does not have a divine right to hold the land of promise. Both the blessed status of the people and the privileged right to the land are conditional on Israel's keeping the covenant God made with her."

Palestinians and Jews is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" [Acts 16:31].

And until that great day when both Jewish and Gentile followers of King Jesus inherit the earth (not just the land), without lifting sword or gun, the rights of nations should be decided by the principles of compassionate and public justice, not claims to national divine right or status. •

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# Revival or Not?

The article below is taken from Highland Christian News edited by Colin Wilson and is used with his permission.

**F**OR ALL THAT GOD is doing we thank and praise Him. And we believe in that word which tells us that it is the Father's heart that none should perish but all come to repentance.

However regarding revival I continue to feel that the church (as a generality but with notable exceptions) is still relying on its own abilities and cleverness to bring a spiritual turnaround; while our nation - and we are not alone in this - is continuing at an ever increasing rate to abandon the righteous path that God would have us choose.

I have had two sets of Christian couples recently expressing their concerns to me about an imported "church growth" programme which separates husbands from their wives and wives from their husbands. The justification (seemingly) for this particular programme is that "It works!" ????? Yet the basic principles of this programme appear to owe more to the school of pyramid selling than they do to any clear scriptural injunctions.

Meanwhile our adoption laws are being changed to offer children for adoption to homosexual couples. What does our God think of what we are doing to our children who are made in His image?

A message I came across the other day carried a quote from Duncan Campbell:

"We may organize, we may plan, but until we get on our faces before God and do business with a covenant keeping God, we shall not see revival. We can have our conference and conventions, and speak of our wonderful times, but what we want and what we need, is a fresh manifestation of the mighty power of God that brings men down in deep conviction to seek the Saviour.

"May God in His mercy and His grace bring us all to that place. It's time to get serious, and we must be willing to pay the price, and go after God with all that we have so that His Kingdom may come, and His will be done, so that many will come to know Jesus." •

## Prayer

Prayer is pointless if you do not have faith to believe God will answer you, or if you think it is about the right words, the right feelings, the right posture, or the right length of time.

# A 'Thank You'

Mrs Elma Ross, the wife of the late Revd John W Ross, has written a 'Thank You' letter to several groups who showed kindness to her and the family at the time of Jackie's death. We reprint one below which was sent to the friends at Blythswood Care, with an additional piece specifically for readers of the APC News.

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*25th March 2002*

## **To all my dear friends at Blythswood Care**

*Sometimes I wish there was a bigger word than 'Thank you'. I could use it to express my gratitude for all the love and friendship you have shown to us over many months, and in such a special way in the last few weeks and days.*

*At one time when some of our children were small, they had what they called their 'cosy yellow blankets'. At bedtime they would lay them on the floor and then lie down on them. Jackie would wrap them up tightly like Egyptian mummies (might be seen as a form of restraint nowadays), carry them through to bed and tuck them in. It's been a bit like that for us. We have been wrapped securely in a blanket of support and care as we went through Jackie's illness and death and we felt we were being carried safely to rest as night was approaching. But there's a big difference. Jackie as a Dad had to leave his children for the night because he needed rest for himself. But our Father in heaven, who carries us into what seems like darkness, 'slumbers not, nor sleeps'. He sticks close by, promising to be 'our everlasting light'.*

*Our hearts are full of thanks to God for the precious days we had with Jackie before he died. His enthusiasm for life was so great that I had sometimes wondered how he would be when he could no longer muster enough strength to get up and go and do. But he embraced the reality of dying with the same purpose and resolve. As he grew weaker his joy seemed to increase, as did his love and concern for the souls of those to and about whom he spoke. He had a word for all who visited. He warned them about being sure they had their trust in Jesus Christ and not in anything they themselves had done so that they too could face death with peace and anticipation in their hearts. When his colleagues came to visit he urged them to have confidence in what is written in the Bible and to keep on in the work of spreading the gospel.*

*One day I suggested he might be overdoing it with so many visitors. He shook his head and said, 'You can't overdo it at this stage' and waved his hand for me to show in more of his friends. Your support and prayers lightened the burden many times when the going was tough and I thank you for the countless practical things you did to help. Thank you in*

*a special way for your demonstration of affection and friendship in your attendance at the funeral, in your letters and cards and in all the lovely flowers that I have received. Life with Jackie was colourfiil, occasionally hair-raising and full of love and happiness. There is so much to miss. But now my prayer is that we - all of you and my family and I - will go into the future with increased commitment to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of others, doing all to the glory of God, not seeking our 'own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.'*

*Thank you - it still doesn't seem expressive enough but it is all I can say.*

*With love* 

---

*I am grateful for the opportunity to thank readers of the APC News for your love and prayerful support during Jackie's illness, at the time of his death and now as we grieve for him. Thank you for your cards, letters, phone calls, flowers, gifts and countless other gestures of sympathy. I have been touched by the kind things said about Jackie who was always very special to us but seems to have meant more to some of you than he or I realised.*

*Thank you for remembering my family and me in prayer and please continue to do so. As I have already said to some of you, it lifts my heart to read in a letter or hear someone say, 'We're praying for you.' It is like as if I am being swept up in these prayers and carried to where I need to be. I thank the Lord for encircling us with such loving Christian friends.*

---

## **Of Joy in God**

Oh what a wonderful thing to be saved  
Life everlasting to know.  
Fullness of bliss with my God as my Friend  
Glory's begun down below.  
Praise to my God then I'll give  
Through Him I now truly live.

So I go onward assured of His love.  
Blessed in my heart then to know  
He will be with me and shield me from foes,  
Helping me down here below.  
Praise to my God then I'll give  
Through Him I now truly live.

Each day He's with me and guiding me too  
And I can prove of His grace.  
Though He may try me, I know He will give  
Help on the hardest of days  
Praise to my God then I'll give  
Through Him I now truly live.

Then when He calls me away from this scene  
Life in the glory to share.  
With all those ransomed and washed in the blood,  
Knowing a great Saviour's care.  
Praise to my God then I'll give  
Through Him I now truly live.

*Ray Chaplin*

# The Environment - and the Case for People

---

**T**HERE IS A WORLDVIEW that believes people are a problem on the earth. People have caused the environment to degenerate to such an extent that our very presence is seen as a type of virus or a cancer whose influence and spread must be restricted. This environmentalist worldview is based on what was regarded as scientific facts. But these facts are now being challenged with amazing evidence to the contrary.

Bjorn Lomborg is a statistician and environmentalist who believed the dire predictions about where our world was going regarding overpopulation, starvation, mass extinction, disappearing forests and our ever decreasing natural resources. He then read about an economist, Julian Simon, who claimed things were getting better rather than worse.

Lomborg was so angry he decided to discredit Simon by careful study and examination of all the evidence. He was amazed. He was completely converted and joined Simon in exposing the false facts and wrote a book [The Skeptical Environmentalist](#). In January this year, the well known magazine [Scientific American](#) devoted 11 pages and a cover story to investigating Lomborg's claims. It

failed to succeed in undermining Lomborg's facts and his full rebuttal can be seen on Lomborg's website [www.lomborg.org](http://www.lomborg.org). The facts do not support the environmentalists' claims about the state of the earth.

It is not just in the issue of evolution that scientific facts are misrepresented, but also in the matter of the environment. Much that goes for scientific facts are just not facts at all. There are huge discrepancies among what scientists believe regarding the facts. The huge discrepancies are not made public. Up to 44% of scientists do not agree with what the environmentalists state. Lomborg has been vilified for challenging environmentalists' honesty.

In 1992 Michael S Coffman, an environmentalist, resigned his post and comfortable job as Chairman of the Forest Health Task Group of the National Council of the Paper Industry for Air Stream Improvement. This was because he was compelled to study carefully the claims that there were behind the environmentalist movement. He, like other environmentalists, believed there were catastrophies awaiting our planet. But what he discovered "changed my life for ever".

Coffman says in his book "Unbelievable sums of money are

being diverted into meaningless laws and regulations that these self-proclaimed saviors of the earth hold sacred. Coffman says his "book is not about some grand conspiracy but about the hypocritical power and politics of an agenda and belief system rapidly becoming the law of the land - a belief system that is being forced...by a powerful minority using the politics of guilt and fear".

Coffman as well as Lomborg has discovered that some ecologists denigrate the human race to a mere cancer. He quotes David Graber, a Research Biologist, "Human happiness, and certainly human fecundity, are not as important as a wild and pleasant planet. I know social scientists who remind me that people are part of nature, but that isn't true. Somewhere along the line - at a bout a million years ago, maybe half that - we quit the contract and became a cancer. We became a plague upon ourselves and upon the Earth...Until such time as Homo Sapiens should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along".

Lomborg shows that human ingenuity in technology and reasonable measures have improved the quality of the environment. The percentage of people starving on the earth since the 1970s has halved and is expected to drop another third by the end of this decade. His study shows there is no evidence that our natural resources are on the verge of depletion and the quality of our air

and water has improved. Lomborg proves that mankind can improve the quality of the environment - and the more people the better!

His findings agree with the Biblical teaching that we are made in the image of God and we can exercise creativity in improving our environment.

Care, balance and honesty are required in discussing these emotive subjects which can now be political. We emphasise that only some environmentalists make the subject a religion. Only some are New Age and go to extremes.

It is also important to remember that God has made mankind custodians of the earth and we have great responsibilities towards the environment. What this article is intended to show is the dishonesty that is behind some claims which contradict the Bible's teaching that man was, and still is, albeit distorted, made in the image of God, and was designed to populate the earth and make it more habitable with dominion over it.

Lomborg does warn us that although things are "vastly improved" they are not good enough. We have a long way to go. But he has demonstrated that future hope lies, not in viruses or cancers, but in people made in God's image exercising their sanctified and God-given talents and ingenuity.

The books: '[The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World](#)', ISBN 0521010683 and '[Saviors of the Earth](#)', ISBN 0-8024-7327-X. •

# Congregational News

## **STORNOWAY**

The island has had a busy time with visits from the missionary organisation WEC and a special visit from Christian leaders from the famous author of "Operation World" Patrick Johnstone. The Christian Institute is to have its first ever visit to Lewis on Friday 10 May.

The congregation has its local communion and Guest Service at the end of May. Please pray that new people will come to the Guest Service. The theme is: "What is Faith?" The congregational outing is on Saturday 8 June.

## **HARRIS**

The congregation had its communion at the end of April when Revd Archie McPhail from Oban preached over the weekend. Please remember its second communion of the year is to be held on the last Lord's Day of September. There is a lot of illness in the congregation at this time, so please pray for them. Sam Morrison the elder is likely to be remaining in hospital.

## **DUNDEE**

We are still encouraged with our usual activities bringing some new

faces into the church. Our outreach worker continues to make contact in the community and in the schools.

Lunchtime prayer in the church hall on a Tuesday is still continuing for city leaders. We have also now opened the church on a Wednesday from 10am to 2pm for any member of the public to come for prayer. Someone is always in attendance to assist anyone who may want help with any particular concern. Please pray that this venture will be taken up by the community.

We are still needing help to meet our financial target to continue employing David Dow for another year beyond June. We are most grateful to all those who sent in forms for monthly payments. Even as little as £5 per month is of great help.

A mission in July for young people is being prepared, and a mission in September is planned with help from friends up north coming down to the city. Please pray that God would be glorified in all that we do.

## **INVERNESS**

The Book-Reading Club has had its final meeting for the Session. Under the able management of the

Ladies in Dingwall, the group enjoyed a rich and varied provision of food on Tuesday evening, 14 May. After the meal, Carine MacKenzie, who has written many children's books, spoke on the importance of books, focusing on her own speciality – books for children. Having highlighted the present plight of so many children who have not heard about Jesus Christ, Carine suggested many ways in which we can spread the good news about Jesus Christ, not only among children but also among adults. All present were challenged to prayerfully take up the challenge and use the many opportunities there are to let others hear the meaning of the name of Jesus. I recommend to you the profitable exercise of running a Book Reading Club in your church fellowship.

The Kingsview Christian Centre project is developing. Major alterations have been made inside the former restaurant, and we wait for the official planning permission for cutting windows in existing walls and for the hall and other rooms to the rear. For all of this we need finances. The Lord has shown us many tokens of his favour, and we pray that those who have more than they need for their own comfort and temporal security, will be moved in heart and hand to help meet our need. Any help you can give will be appreciated and should be sent to the Inverness Congregational Treasure, and made payable to the "Kingsview Centre Fund".

## **HONG KONG**

Cameron and Ishbel Tallach as medical doctors have been running Peace Clinic in Hong Kong since over 25 years. On Saturday 20 April, Peace Church in conjunction with medical and dental clinics, held an Evangelistic Meeting. They asked us for prayer and here is a short account of the evening which Cameron sent by email.

"About 60 visitors came, some of them patients in the medical clinic. 5 people professed faith and another 5 made a new commitment. None of these were our patients. I was thinking to myself, "I suppose this is what ministers feel when they have a communion and no-one comes forward!" But of course there can be delayed fruit too.

One of our patients who attended was in the clinic recently and listened attentively while I spoke a little about Jesus. She said she understood the message at the meeting "a bit." I confess I was disappointed, after all the effort we had put out to get people there, that the speaker didn't open the Bible though he spoke for a full 45 minutes. Yet the Lord surely was working."

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**The Next Presbytery  
will be on  
FRIDAY 6th SEPTEMBER  
at 7pm  
Note it is the day before our  
Annual Conference**

# Doves and Pigeons

---

**W**HAT IS THE difference between a dove and a pigeon? The birds look similar but there are differences.

The Bible speaks of doves and pigeons. They are distinct. One of the sacrifices to be offered in the old testament was either “*two turtledoves or two young pigeons*” [Lev 12:8]. The word ‘turtledove’ in Scripture means a dove.

The Holy Spirit is represented in the Bible by the dove. The pigeon is never represented as the Holy Spirit. Experts in the study of birds have explained the differences between the two in the following ways.

Pigeons are much more common than doves. They are more ‘sociable’ in that they will come near us, while a dove is very sensitive and does not usually come near people.

Pigeons are not afraid of humans - Trafalgar Square and city centres are testimony to that! There are many pictures of pigeons walking up to humans and perching on their heads and arms. Doves would never do that.

Pigeons fight and are very territorial. They will fight for their place on the perch and will attack other pigeons until they get their patch. The least sign of any disturbance and the dove will fly away. The dove is easily frightened away. It does not disturb the peace

and is attracted to peaceable situations. The dove is a calm-bearing bird.

You can train and domesticate a pigeon to do certain things. A pigeon will adjust to circumstances. Not so the dove - you must adjust to the dove, for it will not change its habits.

Finally, pigeons can have more than one mate. Doves have only one - for life. The distinction between a dove and a pigeon is exacerbated by the fact that you can get a white pigeon!

One of the amazing things about the baptism of Jesus was the dove **remaining** on Jesus “*I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him*” [John 1:32]. The dove remaining on Jesus was confirmation that He was the Prince of Peace. The dove could not have stayed on Him if there was any unrest or disturbance. It was proof that Jesus had the Spirit above measure.

The Holy Spirit is drawn to us when we walk with the Lord. When we are following Him and walking in His ways, then the dove may come on us. When we grieve the Spirit the dove flies away. “*One corrupt word proceeding out of our mouth*” and the dove flies off for we have grieved the Holy Spirit [Eph 4:29-30].

It is important that we know what frightens the heavenly dove away. Envy, bitterness, an unforgiving heart, and gossip, are the things that will grieve the Spirit and cause the dove to disappear.

Resentment, harbouring a bad spirit and seeking revenge on those who have done us a bad turn, are more accurate signs of our spirituality, than the doctrine we hold. We may feel that we are theologically 'sound' but if we manifest a bad spirit in our relationships towards the people we live with and work with, we are revealing that the dove is not resting upon us.

When James and John wanted to bring fire down from heaven on those who rejected Jesus at Samaria, Jesus rebuked them for their spirit and attitude, not their theology [Luke 9:55]. We can have the best theology in the world but if we are sniping and knit-picking our brethren, our doctrine is useless. Unless our theology makes us humble, gracious and Christ-like, it will profit us nothing - it is worthless.

When Joseph said to his brothers who sold him as a slave to Egypt, "*it was not you who sent me here but God*" [Gen 45:8], Joseph manifested the forgiving Spirit of Christ and the dove was visible. All could see it.

When we pray for our enemies and genuinely wish them

success, we have the dove on us. But when we seek compliments and drop hints about our achievements, it is a pigeon and not a dove, that is on us.

We can often make a mistake in thinking we see a dove when it is only a pigeon. We can be **preconditioned** to see doves when it is only pigeons! Denominations often fall into this trap.

When they feel they have to advertise their unique testimony they are often only publishing a pigeon religion. When denominations state their particular distinctives more than the gospel, they are promoting pigeon religion. Publishing unique characteristics may look and sound good to their faithful followers, but it is not the gospel that is being promoted.

When churches emphasise with uncompromising certainty that they have pure worship and pure teaching, then pigeon religion has taken over. It may look and sound true, but they are only telling us how good they believe they are and how better they are than others.

When we say things and print things to make ourselves look good and our opponents look bad, then it is a pigeon religion. When we pray and 'dream' that revival will only come through our church or our denomination, then the dove has flown. We are more important than Jesus. •



# What is a Thorn in the Flesh?

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**P**ERHAPS IT WOULD be helpful to look at what a thorn in the flesh is not, before we look at what a thorn in the flesh is.

A thorn in the flesh is not something we are born with. It is not a handicap that we may bring with us into the world at our birth. That certainly is a problem but Biblically speaking it is not a thorn. A thorn is not necessary a disability or an illness.

Neither is it something we are born into - such as an unfortunate family background with a drunken father and a mother on drugs. A thorn is not necessary anything to do with our environment or circumstances. It is sad indeed that some children come into the world in such situations but that is not a thorn.

A thorn is not something that comes on us through no fault of our own. Many people have been unfortunate in happening to be in the wrong place at the wrong time - that is not having a thorn.

Finally, a thorn is not a sin that we cannot stop, such as some addiction. Some people feel that their addiction to drink or cigarettes is a thorn but they are wrong. What then is a thorn - what does the Bible teach us about a thorn in the flesh?

A thorn in the flesh is "something God sends to one of His children to make them humble". It is something that deliberately sends

them to keep them low. They are getting proud and God hates pride. Paul tells us plainly "*a thorn in the flesh was **given** to me...lest I should be **exalted** above measure*" [2 Cor 12:7].

Paul was tempted to boast. He had wonderful experiences - visions of the highest order. To make them public would have silenced his critics and confirmed his apostolic calling. He was tempted to publish these visions. He resisted. "*For although I might desire to boast...I refrain*" [2 Cor 12:6]. He knew that if he gave in to his feelings of pride, God might do something that would make him humble. So Paul reminds himself that he was given a thorn to keep him quiet.

A thorn is something we don't like - something that is probably an embarrassment to us, something we are ashamed of. It is something that keeps us from being 'big on it'. Something that takes us down from our 'high horse'.

A thorn could be anything at all. It could be a sore back coming at awkward times preventing us from doing something we wanted to do but which would only make us proud. So God stopped us. It could be an unexpected failure in an exam which we boasted was easy.

A thorn is the only thing that sorts us out. Nothing else works. Friend, relatives, husband,

wife, could not tell us because we were too proud to take their advice. Like Joseph and his dreams - his father and brothers counsel only made him worse. He needed to learn a lesson. So God said 'There's only one thing for it Joseph, I have to send you to Egypt'.

The wonderful thing about being 'sent to Egypt' is that if we repent, if we humble ourselves, we will still be blessed. We can make up the lost ground. God is the chief forgiver. He loves forgiving those who repent. He loves blessing His people - even after they fall.

Another example is Hezekiah. He took ill, but his life was spared for another 15 years. He really prayed hard about that. But he got proud during these extra years. When the delegation of Babylonian ambassadors came to look at his kingdom, "his heart was lifted up" because "God had given him very much property" and "very great riches" and he started showing off the beauties of the temple [2 Chron 32:24-31]. God set him aside for a while.

Pride is perhaps the sin that God hates most among His creatures. "The Lord God has sworn by Himself, the Lord God of hosts says 'I abhor the pride of Jacob'" [Amos 6:8]. "Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" [Pro 16:5].

It is possible to have a thorn and not know it. It is possible to be blind to God's voice in a thorn. Jesus again and again rebuked the Pharisees but they never learned the lesson although they were humiliated.

We need to remember that if we do have a thorn, it is because God **loves** us. He is not trying to make a fool of us by giving us a thorn. He is trying to put us in the best place. If we fight against a thorn we will make matters **worse**, not better. We must not cover up or pretend when God is putting us in our place. To try and vindicate ourselves can be very counter productive. Let us remember "The Lord lifts up the humble" and He "does not forget the cry of the humble" [Psa 147:6 and 9:12]. •

## The Lives of Saints

"The people who will not love you because you are holy cannot help but respect and fear you for that same reason. But every time you give up a little holiness to gain false love from sinners, you forfeit the reverence which their consciences secretly paid to your life. Like Samson, a Christian walking in the power of holiness is greatly feared by the wicked; but if sin exposes an impotent spirit he is captured and falls under the lash of their tongues and the scorn of their hearts."

*William Gurnall*

## Visit to Vancouver

**T**HE EDITOR visited our Vancouver congregation during the month of March. Vancouver is a beautiful city and very cosmopolitan, with perhaps more Chinese and eastern cultures than any other type of nationality.

The congregation is small (twenty-four people attending in the morning and seventeen at night). A midweek meeting is occasionally held at one of the elder's homes. Despite the recent set-backs they are looking positively to the future trusting that God will provide for them. The two elders have been holding most of the services since their late pastor took ill more than a year ago.

Part of the editor's duty was to arrange for the theological student's presbytery exams. The student, Mr Jerrold Lewis, did very



*Jerrold Lewis and his wife and family*

well having passed three hours of 'grilling' on Bible knowledge, Catechism repetition, and questions on the two books 'M'Cheyne's Life' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress'! Mr Lewis hopes to continue his theological studies at Whitefield College and preach in the congregation from time to time.

The editor wishes to thank the congregation for their kindness especially those who looked after him in their homes. Please pray for the Vancouver congregation. •



*The two elders, Mr Gerry Epp on the left and Mr Hugh Fraser on the right with the theological student Mr Jerrold Lewis in the middle*

# Letters

---

Glenlomond  
Kinross

Sir,

*I feel compelled to respond to Philip Ross's Book Review article on exclusive psalmody in April's APC News. I was surprised by my reaction to the article, but following prayer, returned to it with a view to understanding both it's content and intent.*

*As a Christian infant, I welcome and encourage debate on a whole range of issues affecting the church and our walk with the Lord. Whilst I acknowledge that being deliberately provocative may at times be necessary to illicit some response, I feel that it is possible to do this in a more constructive manner and was therefore disappointed that the tone of the article was so condescending and patronising.*

*I choose to worship in a denomination that uses the psalmody exclusively in public worship, but my own personal conviction is that hymns and songs of praise and thanksgiving from our Christian brothers and sisters are as sweet music to the Lord's ears as our a cappella offerings. Our chief aim is to glorify, praise and worship God and there are numerous scriptural references inviting and instructing us to do this with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*

*I agree whole heartedly with his comments regarding the Apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer being our priorities, but am mindful of other responsibilities the Lord places on us. I feel he has done himself a disservice as he has clearly researched the subject and theological principles influencing current practice, yet chose to disregard equally important teaching and instruction from Christ and the Apostles about building one another up in the faith and not belittling other Christians.*

*I fail to see how members of other denominations could feel encouraged or strengthened by the uncharitable comments he made about "insufferable amateurs unable to make it in the outside world". We have all been given different gifts and the intention and meaning behind our worship is surely more important than our individual musical aptitude. Is the discordant presenting I have heard in some of our own congregations more glorifying to God?*

*We face attack, resistance and sabotage from satanic groups and the secular world without resorting to fighting amongst ourselves. At a time when churches are working together to carry out God's work, hurtful remarks about their choice of worship are far from constructive. What fruits of the*

*Spirit are we displaying if we are so disparaging of other's efforts?*

*His comments on the challenges of translating and interpreting the Old Testament, serve to highlight our very limited understanding of our all-knowing and wonderful Creator. When even the most gifted theological minds struggle, we have a greater personal and collective responsibility to pray for guidance and understanding when reading and/or meditating on God's Word (irrespective of what translation we are using!)*

*On a more positive note, I would like to thank him for encouraging me to take a deeper look at my own views on exclusive psalmody. I apologise if I have misunderstood or misrepresented his article's contents and would welcome his comments or points of clarification.*

*Yours in the Lord,  
Eileen MacDonald*

---

We sent the above letter to Mr Ross who replied as below.

*Sir,*

*I appreciate the effort that Eileen MacDonald has made to read my article. The first thing I want to clarify is that it was intended to be a book review rather than an article arguing for exclusive psalmody. As such, I believe it was a balanced and subdued consideration of Iain Murray's work. I do not think he is*

*so easily patronised and his handling of history has been severely criticized by respected scholars in recent years.*

*My comment about "insufferable amateurs" is no more uncharitable than Eileen's reference to "discordant presenting." Both observations are fair and perfectly compatible with biblical Christianity. The law of charity does not require us to avoid sharp or sarcastic words.*

*More importantly, it is not true that various types of worship may be pleasing to God because what matters is individual intention. I accept that even if it were possible for us to worship God in some perfect form, it would be useless were it not in the Spirit and were it not made perfectly pleasing to God by the sacrifice of Christ. But does that mean that the form of our worship is a matter of absolute liberty? Some people worship through icons (images of Jesus, Mary, etc.) and claim to have profound communion with God as they do so, but does that legitimise something Scripture condemns? I do not believe so. Scripture does set precedents and speak about forms of worship. The idea that it does not matter how you worship God as long as your worship is heartfelt is a species of the genus "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." It is also equally wrong.*

*Philip Ross*

Editor's note: This subject is now closed. But we still welcome letters.

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will be an

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**Due out on the 6th July**

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next Conference

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### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

Revd G I Macaskill, APC Manse, 36 Newvalley, Isle of Lewis HS2 0DN Tel/Fax 01851-703217  
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Mr Kenneth MacLean,  
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### **PUBLICATIONS TREASURER**

Mr D M Fraser,  
'Stratharris', Daviot,  
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### **EDITOR of 'APC NEWS'**

Revd Donald C Macaskill  
238 Arbroath Road, Dundee DD4 7SB  
Tel 01382 451798 Fax 01382 451764  
Email: [dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk](mailto:dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk)