

Worldliness!

THE WORD 'worldliness' does not appear in the AV and the term "worldly" appears only twice - once to describe lusts and once to describe the tabernacle. But the concept of being worldly is in the Bible.

So what is worldliness? It is an important question because many people have a distorted understanding of the Biblical meaning of 'the world'. In many church circles there are all sorts of connotations of worldliness. I heard recently of a minister being told he was wearing a 'very worldly tie'!

In the Bible, worldliness means the **attitude** and **spirit** of a person's life and ways. It refers to the type of thoughts we have, the sort of inclinations and desires we have. It refers to our feelings and attitudes towards people and things. It refers to the undue time and attention we give to things.

Paul makes clear worldliness is not so much what we wear or do, as the spirit we have that defines worldliness. He says it is the spirit in which we do something that is worldly "*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God*" [1 Cor 2:12]. The values and ideals of unbelievers are worldly because they do not have the spirit of Jesus. Paul warns the

Colossians to beware of the philosophy (ideas) and basic principles "*of the world*" [Col 2:8] because they are based on carnal reasoning and values.

He also reminded the Ephesians that before their conversion they walked according to "*the course of this world, according to the...spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*". This was because they were unregenerate and "*conducted themselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*" [Eph 2:2,3]. So worldliness refers to the way we do something or the evil desires we may have.

When Paul told the Romans not to be "*conformed to this world*" he was referring to their own proud thoughts which they had of themselves, for he went on to say "*do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think*" [Rom 12:2cf]. He was speaking about self-opinionated churchgoers.

So pride is undoubtedly a worldly thing. The Apostle John confirms this when he says "*Do not love the world or the things in the world*" and then goes on to define what he means by the world. It is the "*lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*" [1 John 2:15cf]. Ungodly desires and

longings of the flesh are clearly 'worldly'.

Peter tells us that believers have "*escaped the corruption that is in the world*" which was obtained through lust [2 Pet 1:4]. The world can corrupt us and create a craving within us which is just a lust.

There is a huge difference between love and lust. Love is willing to make a sacrifice for the object of its love, while lust is self-centred and has the gratification of its own desires as its object. Lust is impetuous and can be irresponsible, while love is willing to wait and is prepared to give in order to please its object. The greatest display of love is God so loving the world that He gave His one and only Son as a sacrifice.

Greed and gluttony, are all worldly attitudes. Paul tells us there are those (even in the church) who do not serve the Lord but their own bellies and those whose "*God is their belly*" [Rom 16:18, Phil 3:19].

Self-interest and snobbery are other vices which are not recognised for their 'worldliness'. "*Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion*" [Rom 12:16]. These are the things that Scripture defines as worldly and not the way we have our hair or the colour of our tie.

To be envious and argumentative are also worldly. In the NIV we read "*You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are*

you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" [1 Cor 3:3].

A desire to win the lottery or become a millionaire and live a grandiose lifestyle without any thought of God or His cause, is a desire which unbelievers, those "*of the world*", revel in. Believers who are focused on the Lord, know they have unsearchable riches stored up in heaven and need not 'dream' of winning millions of pounds which will perish in the using.

As well as our attitude towards material possessions and people, there are of course, things in the world that we must not love. There are many areas of life ('little worlds' within the world) which are controlled by the evil one which we must turn from. There are "*rulers of the darkness of this world*" who target Christians and tempt believers to do things which are wrong and evil. This is the world we are not to love.

While there are evil people who will corrupt us, we must remember it is not people per se but their practices that are dangerous. The church at Ephesus was commended because it hated "*the deeds of the Nicolaitans*" not the Nicolaitans [Rev 2:6]! Again, we are not to have fellowship with the "*unfruitful works of darkness*" not the people of darkness, else we would never be able to evangelise them. We must separate people from their deeds. Love the sinner but hate the sin.

Let us strive to have the mind and attitude of Jesus Christ.

A Bridge Over Troubled People

Sinners of all stripes find a church home under the Interstate 35 in Waco Texas

LUGGING BACKPACKS and hefty bags on Sunday at sunrise, they trickle in to the expanse of dirt and gravel under Interstate 35. Littering this city block between 4th and 5th streets in Waco, Texas are taillight shards, pigeon feathers, and at least one dead bat. The men sit mostly in solitude at the base of support columns, waiting for something to happen.

More than a dozen are there when, just after 9, a van with men from two drug rehab centers eases over the curb and parks. Two pickup trucks follow with trailers of folding chairs and sound equipment. One flatbed truck doubles as a stage. Recovering addicts line up chairs beneath the northbound lanes.

A hoodless, bumperless Chevy pickup arrives. Made from '73 to '85 parts, its burnt-orange bed is filled with balding tires, plastic drums, aluminum cans, wire-tangled innards of mechanical devices, and a push broom. Former drug addict and ex-con Kenneth Kucker gets out, slams its blue door, and hands a visitor a peppermint, his smile peeking through a lopped-off ZZ Top beard. He smells of the axle grease

that permeates his jeans, but he's dressed for worship in his best T-shirt that reads 'Church Under the Bridge'. "It's a humble bridge," Kucker says. "Today it's going to be sanctified."

For Waco's homeless and hard-living people, there may be no safer place than this bridge on Sunday morning—as safe from street crime as from the glares of worshipers in other churches.

The interdenominational Church Under the Bridge (CUB) began in 1992 when Baylor professor Jimmy Dorrell, 54, began a Bible study for homeless men who slept under this overpass. The group grew to include more homeless, poor, drug addicts, prostitutes, and bikers. They were later joined by others who had no church experience or felt they didn't fit into area congregations.

Now the people who worship under the bridge are a demographic snapshot of this city of 100,000 people and 257 churches. Black, white, Asian, and Latino students from Baylor University, and others from the upper middle class, form the body of Christ with the down-and-out of all colors.

CUB's calling is to be a church to the unchurched of all socioeconomic levels and races, and to serve the poor and marginalized. Ex-prisoners and food-stamp recipients worship with the well-heeled and educated. Along with breaking down class barriers, racial reconciliation is one of the church's main pillars. At one service, Dorrell had the assembled break into small groups to talk about any prejudice they harbored, and to pray for forgiveness.

"Several times a year," Dorrell says, "we address the issue in a sermon, have a couple of different-race friends or marriage folks share their struggle and victories, and then pass out a list of questions for the racially mixed groups to discuss."

The church's core values include a rejection of attractive "holy" buildings; 51 percent of offerings support outreach in Waco, Haiti, and India. Nothing goes to rent and utilities. Should prospective construction work to widen the highway or other events keep worshipers from their usual space, CUB has purchased another piece of land for \$3,000.

"It is a backup, next to another bridge where the homeless used to sleep, which we can use if we are ever run out from our current spot," Dorrell says. "Even at that vacant lot, we have no intentions of building a facility."

From Calcutta to Waco

Kucker, 54, drove a Cadillac in the 1970s when he earned \$50,000 a

year as body shop mechanic. He's a Vietnam vet with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a self-described former "junkie, car thief, and alcoholic" who became a Christian while in prison. Once out, he drifted, homeless, among the big cities of Texas. He moved to Waco to be near the Veterans Administration hospital psychiatric ward.

Churches he tried to attend—two in Waco and one in Houston, where a security guard confronted him two steps onto the church grounds—all threw him out because of his appearance. In Waco he was living in a Geo Metro with an Apple computer in back when he heard about free meals under the bridge. He was hungry enough to check it out.

Today, 10 years later, he's a church leader living in an apartment owned by CUB's relief and development arm, Mission Waco.

Dorrell parks his pickup a few cars over from Kucker's and a couple of rows from a Mercedes-Benz SUV. The plump, gray-bearded pastor in shorts and a Baylor T-shirt greets folks with handshakes, back pats and hugs so hearty that at times they lift people off the ground. He mingles among indigents and Mercedes drivers alike with gestures of acceptance and welcome.

Dorrell's journey to the bridge began in the 1970s, when he was a missionary to lepers in Calcutta and New Delhi slums. There he had something of an epiphany. He believed the church is the primary agent of change in the

world, but surrounded by India's abysmal poverty, he asked himself, What is the church doing to incarnate Christ?

"It's Jesus who sat at the well with the prostitute," he says. In contrast, many US churches install burglar bars on their windows and hire bouncers to keep away people who look unusual. Or they move to the suburbs and isolate themselves from things Jesus called his followers to do.

"The church has got to rediscover its purpose in a postmodern culture, when absolute truth is no longer accepted by the mainstream," Dorrell says. "Unchurched people are looking for something that speaks genuineness to them."

Church Under the Bridge, he says, serves as a call for renewal for the church in America to be about the Father's business.

"In the church, I have crack addicts, prostitutes, criminals, but I also have materialists, power mongers and arrogant Pharisees," Dorrell says. "The gospel is just as much for them as it is the addict. All are accepted where they are."

At 9:30, Dorrell joins a circle of about 15 folding chairs in the sunny area between the northbound and southbound bridges to lead a Bible study for mostly homeless men. Dorrell's booming voice carries over traffic overhead as a box of doughnuts gets passed around.

About 100 feet away, Conrad Lahr sets up a circle almost

twice that size, including a small loudspeaker and mike, for the Recovery Under the Bridge 12-step meeting for alcoholics and other addicts.

Lahr, 39, began taking drugs as a wealthy New York teen. In and out of rehab and homelessness, he lost his wife to prison and his kids to the state. Hopelessly addicted, on July 21, 2002, he prayed, "God, help me." That day he was driving I-35 north toward Dallas when he saw a Salvation Army sign in Waco. He took the next exit and doubled back, where he found the bridge gathering. He thought it was a block party and stopped.

Twenty minutes later, he knew he was supposed to be there. A week later, he was in Mission Waco's Manna House rehab, where he became a Christian.

Now he directs a Mission Waco halfway house and does freelance carpentry. On Sundays he leads the CUB recovery group. Last year he reconciled with his parents, whom he hadn't talked to in 13 years. His father offered him a \$60,000 job as a driver, which Lahr turned down. "I'd probably be drunk," he says of what he'd do with a big salary. "I don't need money. This is my family now."

Other churches often ask Dorrell to tell success stories like those of Lahr and Kucker. But success for Dorrell may be that Howard, a bridge fixture legendary for his alcoholism, didn't get drunk today.

"I don't have to tell these

people they're bad and nasty," Dorrell says. "The world tells them that all the time." What is important is that, for at least the 90 minutes they spend at a Sunday service under I-35, they know somebody cares, he says. "They may have robbed a store the night before, [but] our role as the church is to love them as Jesus loved them."

It's not that the CUB disregards the need for repentance and obedience, Dorrell says, but God's incredible love — not more condemnation — is what brings people to repentance. "We do preach the reality that there has to be a change" in behavior after conversion, he says. During church services, he often encourages people to "make things right" with each other and straighten out various areas of their lives.

Congregant Charmaine Beers adds that repentance happens, but the challenge is believing in God's forgiveness for so much sin — or that there's a God who even cares. "You don't know what it is to have a pure, righteous, upright, holy life when all you've known is sad and ugly," she says. "I've led people to Christ by example and love—but it took two years before they felt it might be real, not another lie of the world or another letdown."

Love brought Beers back to the bridge 10 years ago, after Jimmy Dorrell preached the funeral of her sister-in-law, Dixie. A crack- and heroin-addicted prostitute, Dixie was found in a weedy field one freezing morning. She had

overdosed. Someone had dumped her body in the field and stolen her shoes. She was buried in a pauper's grave.

Months before her death, Dixie had told Beers she had felt welcome at CUB and had been treated kindly. Dixie's death hit Dorrell hard.

"Just another prostitute gone, but Jimmy loved her—you could tell he cared," says Beers, herself a former methamphetamine addict.

An eighth-grade dropout who began smoking pot at 12 and dropping LSD at 13, Beers drifted in and out of homelessness much of her life. After Dixie's funeral, Beers's husband, Randy, nagged her to return with him to the bridge. Like most newcomers to CUB, Beers hung to the back, quietly watching well behind the rows of chairs. If this is real, show me, she prayed.

God answered. "I found out there's a loving, forgiving God out there who wants to love me despite me," Beers says. "Jesus loves me, no matter what."

Her first job was running Mission Waco's thrift store. Now she's office manager of the Mission Waco social services center, which provides emergency aid to the needy.

Uncooperative Donkeys

Just after 10:30, 200 people are at the bridge. Waco's hungry poor queue at the back for the day's meal, this one sponsored by local Methodists. Dorrell's wife, Janet, is

strumming an acoustic guitar as she begins a musical warmup on the trailer-stage. Joining her is CUB's multiracial worship team on instruments that include bongos, a washboard and an unplugged electric guitar played by a man with mental retardation.

As the chairs fill, latecomers know to grab a chair from the trailer and take care to place it away from a bridge column where pigeon droppings may plop onto worshipers below. Every Sunday is different. One focuses on missions. Another celebrates the church's anniversary with a march for the homeless. There's biker Sunday, recovery Sunday, and Palm Sunday, when a homeless guy on a donkey enters the church, palm fronds strewn in his path over the dirt, rocks, and cigarette butts.

One year the donkey wouldn't budge, so a biker put the Christ figure in his Harley's sidecar and drove him in. Easter includes a churchwide foot-washing. Every year the church holds a sleep-in under the bridge; the idea is to help those with homes to grasp the plight of the homeless.

Randall Warlick, 43, a redhaired, bushy-bearded electrician, owns a comfortable house on 14 acres outside Waco. He is a longtime Christian who's never done drugs, never had a brush with the law, and never been homeless. For years he only went to church for weddings and funerals. He grew disillusioned by the institutional church for what he calls its lack of

passion for mission to those outside its walls.

Three years ago, when Warlick was hired to wire a Mission Waco building, Dorrell invited him to CUB's Easter service. The foot-washing almost scared him away. Now he and his family are among those who count CUB as their church home. Asked why, Warlick says, "I feel like I belong here. God has blessed me with lots of things. I feel like I can help out." He shares much in common with the destitute who gather at the bridge: "Struggles. Love for God. Knowing I'm a sinner."

Rewards abound, he says. "I see people really down in their hearts get filled with the Spirit. It does me a world of good." Kenneth Kucker and others hand out one-page lyric sheets. Among the songs is "I Love This Church," with lyrics modified from Toby Keith's country music hit about a bar:

We got winners, we got losers, chain smokers and boozers,
And we got yuppies, we got bikers,
we got thirsty hitchhikers
And the girls next door dress up like movie stars,
Hmmm, I love this church.
I've seen short skirts, we got high-techs, blue-collar boys and rednecks
And we got lovers, lots of lookers,
I've even seen dancin' girls and hookers
And we like to worship where the pigeons perch,
Hmmm, I love this church.

CUB is not a celebration of sin but an acceptance of people

where they are. People aren't expected to clean up their acts before they come to church. The leadership knows sanctification takes time. Charmaine Beers, for example, kept taking drugs for at least six months after she committed her life to Christ. She didn't marry her live-in boyfriend for more than two years after that.

Many people at the bridge feel they're so unworthy that God couldn't want them. "The church typically reminds them of their sinfulness," Dorrell says. "Our responsibility is to love them. The Holy Spirit's work is to convict them. All come, feel love, and draw closer to God. They have spiritual gifts, personal value, and worth."

Such is Dorrell's approach to salvation, but that does not stop him from striving to stretch converts into disciples. "Discipleship is a church responsibility," he says. "We desperately believe in accountability and personal growth. But a lot of our people aren't Christians, and they

think you have to be a certain way before Jesus wants you. After you surrender, there's the incredible sense of wanting to follow this loving God, and willingness to be taught and challenged by the church to grow in Christ."

Dorrell doesn't give altar calls, but church leaders are always up front for those wanting to know more about a personal relationship with Christ. Sometimes Dorrell ends the service by calling all to join hands. At the back is the biker who shared Christ with Conrad Lahr his first morning under the bridge. The biker's Harley is parked along the end of chair rows. The Harley's trailer carries a 10-foot wooden cross that bears this inscription: 'There's Room Here at the Cross for You'.

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The Church - A Place of Refuge

"HALF A CENTURY OF THE WELFARE STATE may have atrophied the Christian duty of care, but the church is not a cosy club for like-minded people, dedicated, like the Pharisees, to keeping the sinful world from coming through the door. The Christian church is a caring and helpful part of society or it is nothing. From the beginning of our history, when the early monasteries looked after the needs of those around them, down to Barnardo's Homes and the Salvation Army, the Christian church and its institutions have been a place of refuge for the needy. It is this Christian care in a brutal world which converted the Roman Empire, and after it fell, the Goths, the Franks, the Danes and the Slavs, until the church spread right across Europe."

Fred Catherwood in 'It Can be Done' ISBN 0 7188 3003 2

Out of Control?

The Sovereignty of God in a World of Uncertainty

THE BEAUTIFUL town of Keswick in the Lake District has been the venue for a July Convention for more than 125 years, and continues to be a powerful magnet for Christians from all over Britain and abroad. It runs for three weeks and caters for all ages and tastes.

While there are regular daily sessions - morning Bible readings [scripture exposition] and evening services - there is also a varied programme of interesting seminars, exhibitions and bookstalls.

'**Out of Control?**' was the Convention theme this year, a thought that often confronts us as we view what is happening in our own land and throughout the world.

Alistair Begg, a Scot who has been senior pastor in a church in Ohio, USA, for over 20 years, gave the Bible readings from the Book of Ruth during the first week.

The large audience sat enthralled as he led them through the wonderful story of God's providential dealings in the lives of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. In his words, "Although thousands of years have elapsed since the events described in these four chapters, the issues involved in the lives of the characters are as up to date as tomorrow's newspapers."

The Seminar and

Lecture Programme addressed the very real issues that face us in all areas of life - in the Family, the Church, the Media; issues of Morality, Pluralism and the Environment - with a wide variety of speakers exploring both practical and 'faith-filled' approaches.

Billy Graham's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, spoke on two evenings - a dynamic speaker whose passion for Jesus was awe-inspiring.

Praise to God plays a significant part in worship at Keswick. It is amazing to be among four thousand voices, in an enormous tent, singing praises to the God who is in control and whose glory will one day fill the whole earth.

The Wednesday evening stands out - for then the wonderful voice of Jonathan Veira filled the tent as he led the praise in his rendition of 'How great Thou Art'. The internationally acclaimed bass baritone opera singer also gave testimony to God's goodness to him in providence and in grace. His miraculous recovery from a serious and life-threatening illness could not be explained medically, and led the senior medical consultant to concede, "Only God could do that".

The Convention encouraged us in our confidence that 'He who is King of the nations has all things

under his control and is also God of the ordinary'.

It was wonderful and enormously encouraging, to see hundreds of people, from teenagers to nonagenarians, queuing to get in to the meetings up to an hour before the services were due to begin. On the Lord's Day, when Convention speakers take the services in local churches, arriving half an hour early only ensured a seat on the pulpit stairs!

The 'problem' of an overflowing tent throughout the first

week of the Convention underlines the hunger that there was for God's Word. The Lord is still on the throne.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would work in each and every corner of our land to such an extent that this hunger would be manifest in the hearts and lives of young and old - that we would once again see folk of all ages flocking to hear His word expounded. *"For with God all things are possible"*.

K & C MacLean

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Contact:

Donald C Macaskill

238 Arbroath Road,

Dundee DD4 7SB

Tel 01382 451798

Fax 01382 451764

dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk

Notice to Congregations

MINISTRY TRAINING FUND

The six-monthly collection is due
to be taken by congregations
in **October**.

There have been demands on this
Fund over the past two years to the
extent that income has not covered
expenditure. Please give as the
Giver of all good enables, and pray
that He will raise up those who
will truly sow the seed, that that
seed will take root, and bring forth
fruit to His glory.

RELIGIOUS HATE LAW: A THREAT TO FREE SPEECH?

PRESS RELEASE: BARNABAS FUND LAUNCHES NEW CAMPAIGN
Press Release - 01 September 2004

BARNABAS FUND has today launched a major campaign raising concerns on laws proposed by the British government to ban incitement to religious hatred.

The Fund echoes the fears of many senior lawyers, MPs, peers, human rights groups and civil liberties organizations who believe such laws could pose a major threat to free speech.

Home Secretary David Blunkett announced that the government is planning to introduce a new law banning incitement to religious hatred "as soon as possible" in a speech on 7 July. The intention is to extend existing legislation banning incitement to racial hatred to cover religious groups as well in order to prevent crimes such as extreme right-wing organizations stirring up hatred against Muslims.

However, critics of the law point out that existing legislation banning incitement to violence and other criminal acts already provides protection if enforced properly. They argue that in reality this new law could end up being used to prevent all reasonable debate and criticism of another person's religion.

Barnabas Fund is calling on its supporters to write to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and their MP in order to raise these

concerns now in preparation for when a bill comes before parliament.

PASTORS ALREADY VICTIMISED
Fears that the law could be a major blow to freedom of speech are not based on speculation alone, but from direct evidence from Victoria, Australia, where two Christian pastors have already found themselves in court under a similar law after raising human rights concerns about Islamic teaching on a website and at a seminar. They are accused of stirring up hatred against Muslims despite the fact that both repeatedly emphasised that Christians should show nothing but love to Muslims.

Far from creating a more tolerant society the case has seriously damaged religious harmony and community relations. One former prominent supporter of the law, Amir Butler, executive director of the Australian Muslim Public Affairs Committee, has now come out strongly against it. "All these anti-vilification laws have achieved is to provide a legalistic weapon by which religious groups can silence their ideological opponents," he wrote in a recent article.

COULD IT HAPPEN IN THE UK?

In the UK as well there are hints that at least some supporters of the law intend to use it not only to prevent incitement to religious hatred, but also to stifle legitimate criticism and debate. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's The Moral Maze on 14 July Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain, indicated that in his view any "defamation in the character of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)" should be illegal under the new law.

Similarly when Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi faced media criticism when he came to speak to British Muslims in July for his views that suicide bombers can target women and children, men can beat their wives and homosexuals should be executed, Mayor of London Ken Livingstone said that "this legislation is necessary", not to prevent Dr al-Qaradawi from preaching such views, but for silencing those who criticise him for doing so.

Speaking from his office in Pewsey Barnabas Fund's director Dr Patrick Sookhdeo warned "The potential impact of this law is very grave indeed. With the best of intentions and a noble aim the government may inadvertently open the door to a serious restriction of free speech in the UK.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The government first attempted to bring in a law banning incitement to religious hatred as part of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security

Bill in 2001. In the end the clauses relating to inciting religious hatred were dropped because they faced strong opposition from the House of Lords.

In the following year the proposed legislation was reintroduced as a private member's bill by Lord Avebury. The Religious Offences Bill reached a second reading stage in the House of Lords but went no further and so was dropped at the end of that parliamentary year.

In 2002 the House of Lords also set up a Religious Offences Select Committee to examine whether there was a need to introduce legislation banning incitement to religious hatred. In its concluding report the Committee was divided over whether there was a need for a law or not.

David Blunkett's announcement on 7 July reintroduced the prospect of such a law once more and led to much speculation. The text of the proposed law has not yet been published. Neither has any firm indication been given of exactly when the government plans to bring the law before parliament other than "as soon as possible".

For further information please contact Paul Cook, Advocacy Manager, Barnabas Fund on +44 (0) 1672 564938, or by email. Also information can be found on Barnabas Fund's website.

emailto:info@barnabasfund.org
http://www.barnabasfund.org/news/itrhc/about_itrhc.htm

Children in Church

By Catherine MacKenzie

Below is part of a paper given at the APC Conference in Inverness last September. The remainder will be continued next month

MANY CHILDREN died at the hands of Pharaoh. So we don't really need to be told that the King of Egypt was a hard-hearted, immovable, despicable tyrant. He wasn't about to give into anyone.

Moses knew this from years of personal experience and had stood in front of Pharaoh many times before to proclaim the word of God but to no avail.

Pharaoh wouldn't move an inch but he didn't realise that even in his rebellion he was part of God's plan for his covenant people.

This particular time Moses and Aaron are coming to the ruler of Egypt with the same words, "*Let my people go.*" God's demand was that the Israelite people be allowed to leave Egypt to go and worship him in the desert.

For a moment Pharaoh was prepared to negotiate. God wasn't. Pharaoh's demand that the men of Israel left Egypt to worship the Lord without the women and children was not even acknowledged by Moses and Aaron far less by the God they worshipped. Pharaoh must have realised this when the eighth plague of locusts attacked the land.

The plague that hit the first born of Egypt heralded the final

release of God's people from slavery and it is then that we read about the feast of the Passover, the unleavened bread, the hyssop, the blood and the lintels.

The childish question, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' was asked by many of the Israelite offspring that night. It would have been a genuine question as the next generation witnessed the unusual goings on.

The response the parents were to give was "*It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord*" and then they were to go on to explain about the angel of death and God's mercy to them as a people.

I think that this is an excellent story to give us some biblical insight into what God thinks about children in church.

The first point is that He will not negotiate about their presence or absence. God wouldn't even acknowledge Pharaoh's suggestion that the Israelite men worshipped without their families. We can echo this sentiment with a New Testament verse "*Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" Children should be in church and we should be actively encouraging them to seek Christ.

The second point is that the children were expected to ask questions and personal ones at that. *"What does this ceremony mean to you?"* The children weren't asking 'What's that scroll?' or 'Why is he doing that?' – rather it was a deeply personal question to their parent – one that demanded an answer.

Which should thirdly make us think about that answer. What would our response be to the question, 'What does this ceremony – this church service mean to you?' If we can answer 'This church service is for the Lord because of what he has done for me,' and demonstrate that with personal examples of God's grace and mercy to us ... then we are on the right track with church and our children will be too.

If we can't in all honesty say that church has any meaning for us then our attitudes will be backing up our beliefs and our children will pick up on these and make them their own. We may think that teaching is only what we say – but it is more often what we do, who we are, what we feel. We are the lesson.

When I think about the children I know they fit into two camps very easily – a) Children from church families and, b) Children from unchurched families.

The difference between the two can be vast and sometimes non-existent. I'd like to discuss these and bring in one or two issues that have come up in our own work with children.

The Inverness congregation

has been running a Sunday school at the local Drakies Community centre for the last six years. The children we've come in contact with there have been a challenge and a privilege to work with. The learning curve for us has been pretty steep.

I mentioned that there are differences between churched and unchurched children. With unchurched children you have children who are essentially spiritual orphans. What we have in our communities today is an ever increasing number of families who have either rejected the Christian church or who have never had any meaningful contact with it.

We can remain within church buildings waiting for these families to come in or we can, as many do, reach out beyond the confines of the Sunday services to work in areas that we haven't worked in before. Youth cafes, children's clubs, community centres, schools – these are all avenues for contact with unchurched youth.

But because the church in its biblical sense is not a building we – the church – are bringing these children into the church through our after school clubs, Sunday school lessons and holiday clubs.

They aren't in the real sense the church of God until they are saved by him but for all intents and purposes they are taking part in church as they listen to your prayer, sing the chorus, play the soccer game, find out about you and hopefully over time ask you deep and personal questions like, 'What

does all this mean to you? Why do you do this? What makes you feel happy?

But why describe these children as spiritual orphans? Many that we have worked with at Drakies come from homes where a bible isn't present, prayer is a complete novelty, church is in conflict with the bed sheets, the gym or the next game of golf.

The families we come in contact with are on the whole pleasant, decent families but God is not real to them. All have good homes, a car or maybe two, some go on foreign holidays – but few have any personal interaction with their Creator. Sunday school is still seen as being okay for the kids so they don't stop them coming. However, they don't always actively encourage them to come either.

In our situation at the club the children who come regularly come of their own free will. When you work with unchurched kids you soon learn that you can never afford boredom – children will vote with their feet.

Even if your lesson has been fantastic, the visual aids inspired and the activities enthralling – if football is on next weekend you'll probably find that more than one child who was there last week isn't there the next.

Sometimes we need to do things differently, sometimes we need to react to problems, sometimes we just need to be there – a consistent witness, a friend, someone who loves God and is their friend – wherever they go, whatever

happens. 'Children's work' is crying out for people - Men and women of all ages – to witness to the wonderful person of Jesus Christ. Sharing our life experiences, being people they can depend on, trust in and laugh with.

Working with unchurched kids, with any kids, means a lot of hard work and thinking and rethinking. Trying to get something new again and again and again. Sometimes, ironically, the new discovery can be that children like routine, and the familiar and that the bible story you think has been done far too many times before is one that they've not really heard that often.

One of the things that we've noticed with the 'unchurched' kids however is how once you get to know them you can discover that you're not the first or the only Christian in their lives.

Two girls at the club have Christian grandparents, one has a Church of Scotland minister for an uncle, one girl's father used to go to church, one girl's granny teaches her the 23rd Psalm when ever she goes to visit her. Several of the children have had a strong Christian as a primary school teacher. The stories mount up until you realise that God has been working here already and that you are just one cog in a big wheel that is under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

So the spiritual orphans have not been left fatherless. God, their heavenly father loves them and cares for them. They have contact with

Christians that we do not know or never hear of. There are prayers of godly grandparents – perhaps no longer with us – but who when alive clung to the promise that the Lord would bless their children and their children's children.

Some of the children in our after school clubs and Sunday schools will not have anyone praying for them – that is what we are there for. Even the ones who grow up and move away – and they will – we can keep them at the back of our minds, at the forefront of our prayers. God's word never returns empty. Our responsibility therefore is to give them the word of God. Let the bible do its work. Be the personal visual aid that they are missing in their lives. Show them Jesus and pray.

At this point I want to refer to one other thought that I've had when I've heard about the Christian links to some of the children in the Drakies club. We must tackle the problem of a lost generation - the generation who today are parents, paying mortgages, joining golf clubs, climbing corporate ladders and sending their kids to Sunday school.

If you took a poll of people in Inverness who had quote, unquote, a godly granny – the proportion might be the same as the number of Americans that you will find with Irish grandfathers. We are in our outreach Sunday schools in Inverness caring for a high proportion of children whose grandparents or great-grandparents attended church regularly. It is frightening and humbling to realise

that any Christian or church going family is just one generation away from an unchurched, godless upbringing.

But God has always had a care for the unchurched. It is not a word that features in the bible but they are there all the same. We read about them in Exodus right in the middle of one of God's most famous discourses to his covenant people.

In the Ten Commandments God gives his people direct instructions concerning the stranger that they are in contact with. He is to observe the Sabaath too. In Deuteronomy 31:12-13 it goes further. Strangers are to hear the word of God along with the people of God so that they can listen and learn to fear God and follow his law. A further reason is given for why this is necessary. 'Their children who do not know this law must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God.'

So unchurched children are specifically mentioned in scripture – but this – we must note – is in connection with their families.

Listen to these figures. If a child is the first member of their family to become a Christian other members of their family are between 5 and 10% more likely to become Christians than they were before the child's conversion, with a mother this percentage goes up to somewhere between 20 and 30% with a father this percentage increases a staggering amount to somewhere between 80 and 90%.

Not that the Holy spirit is bound by statistics but God has chosen

families as the focal point for evangelism and he designed it so that parents would bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Children's work is right and valuable. We are commanded by the Lord in John 21:15 to "*Feed my lambs,*" "*Suffer the little children to come to me,*" – we should use every opportunity to do this. But the fact is that parents are the primary influence on a child. Disciplines like church attendance, bible reading and prayer are built up by regular, daily, personal, parental example. A love of God is nurtured within a loving family – a family that loves God and each other.

We can have meaningful relationships on a personal and spiritual level with these unchurched children – but if we can also interact with their parents and bring them under the influence of God's word – think about how many more bases we would cover. God performs his purposes in whatever way he chooses. However he has from the beginning of time chosen families as the venue for teaching children about himself. Holiday clubs are great. We should do more of them and do them for everybody. Perhaps parents need holiday clubs too?

Then we have the children who belong to church families. These children can belong to a family of two believing parents, one believing parent or in some situations none. These children have many blessings that unchurched children do not have ... they are

familiar with bible stories, they may attend church on a regular basis, they will have access to a bible. However, they are just as much unbelievers as unchurched children are until they are saved. Believing parents must definitely expect conversion. These children are children of the covenant – but we cannot presume or assume conversion until evidence and profession of faith is presented.

The tragic thing is that children who sit in pews and attend services can be spiritual orphans of a different kind if the word of God is not discussed, cherished or remembered at home. If church is just an event, if it does not generate worship within the family – then these children may attend church but have no real understanding of it. They are unchurched in a different sense.

When we think about children as part of our church services and gatherings I think we need to think back to God's treatment of Pharaoh's suggestion. God insists that children must be there – they must attend worship. There is no mention in scripture of 'children's church' or 'Sunday school'. Children are taught in the family and they are part of the worship – not separate. If there is any distinction made it is between a weaned and an unweaned child.

For the record I believe that children were traditionally weaned in bible times at about three years old. So listen to what this verse of scripture says, Isaiah 28:9 "*Whom shall he teach knowledge and whom*

shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.”

Listening to God’s word, attending church, prayer, being part of the family of God – all of it – in its fullest sense – is all for children. It takes time to teach them – big and important jobs often do. It’s difficult – believe it or not even some single people can see that. I respect the sacrifice and effort of parents in bringing up children. I can only imagine what it must be like to have several wrigglers in the pew beside you.

Parents have to make judgement calls as they have to in every area of their lives – what is the best for the child, what is the best for our family, but also what is the best for the church and more importantly what does God tell me to do. I feel that in reading scripture we see children and adults worshipping God together. I believe that this is what God is telling us to do, to try to do. It involves sacrifice on the part of parents, it should involve sacrifice and effort on the part of all the

believers.

If parents find that it is too difficult for them to do, the church, as a community of believers should help them. It is too easy to sit in judgement – staring daggers at a squirming child; tutting at the noise we think is a sign of indiscipline – instead of encouraging parents in taking what is often a sacrifice on their part. Perhaps there may be opportunities for those of us who are single or without children to ask parents how we can help integrate their children into church?

If your friend takes her toddler or school age child to the morning service she may not be getting the opportunity to listen to the teaching. Perhaps you can offer to baby sit one evening to let her out to the Sunday evening service or the prayer meeting? If this doesn’t suit – offer to look after the child for an afternoon to give her the opportunity to listen to the sermon tape, attend a bible study or read a book. For the very young children who need a crèche or an occasional Sunday school lesson – consider volunteering for the crèche. If not as a baby minder – then as someone who helps clear up afterwards.

To be continued next month.

CONFERENCE

We are sorry that we have been unable to print the papers given by Eric Alexander at our conference, but we may be able to gather notes from some of those present in a future issue. The expectant anticipation of these papers can be seen in the fact that five men from Stornoway braved the early morning and late night ferry from to attend the conference! Others came from as far away as Caithness and Fife. We thank them for their commitment and encouragement and hope they enjoyed the day.

The Virtual Church

By Peter Glover

Xulon Press ISBN 1-594673-98-5

THIS BOOK IS SO negative and critical of evangelicalism today, it is likely to be ignored, but in doing so, there would be a great danger of 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'. Peter Glover, the author, raises issues that the evangelical world needs to seriously consider and respond to in an intelligent way.

His claim is that the church in the 21st century has become irrelevant to the world and unable to influence society largely because it has either become too like the world in a pragmatic, business-like club, or 'opted out' of the world and remained in an antiquarian, withdrawn 'holy huddle'. Glover's pet-hate is the charismatic movement in all its forms, and even Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones comes in for a fair bit of criticism.

The book is overtly based on much of Francis Schaeffer's work and begins with his warning to the evangelical world that a 'new spirituality' would soon dominate Christianity. The book finishes with a quotation from Schaeffer explaining that evangelicalism has arrived at its low state because of a shift in 'worldview'. The argument is that the lack of a biblical

worldview in all of life **inevitably** leads to the disarray which now permeates Christianity.

On one page he challenges the churches by giving a list of what he feels the evangelical world is lacking today. These can be summarised as:

- w a high view of the authority of the Bible in doctrine and practice
- w God-focused worship regulated by the Bible
- w a high view of the sacraments with the Supper understood to be a means of receiving grace
- w a proper doctrine of the church with communal confessional in worship and practice
- w true catholicity of spirit in fellowship and a sense of awe in worship

Glover believes that there is a place for some form of Confessional liturgy (how else can the church worship together?) and feels the church has lost much by not reading the Law of God regularly in worship (even the very hearing of what is forbidden can act as a deterrent). He has a strong view of the church believing it to be a single community, not a collection of

individuals. He feels that the infrequency of communion could be the reason why so much strife and division remains in the Reformed church today. The failure of sound churches to show a public unity together is responsible, he maintains, for much of the churches powerless to change society. He would advocate that today the church's impotence could be because 'judgment has already begun at the House of God'.

He also believes that many preachers today only preach the 'positive' aspects of Christianity thinking it will be more acceptable and maintains that preaching truth is **inevitably** connected to refuting error. Glover feels that error is not **publicly** spelt out and therefore there is much confusion in the churches.

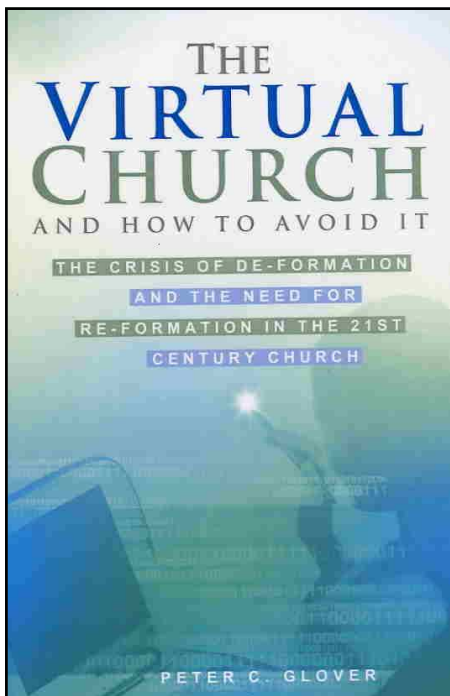
Glover condemns the idea 'that the church exists for the sake of its non-members' and reminds us we are to worship God, not because we have a need to 'share' or have fellowship, but because God has

summoned His people to worship and God has 'chosen' a weekly festival in His house. He blames the church for not being able to give a clear answer to the question 'Where was God on 9/11?' to a seeking world.

Glover laments that those who are strong in the things which he has advocated, have retreated into antiquarian 'ghettos' and withdrawn from being active in the world. His condemnation of individual pietism is as severe as it is of the modern prophetic movement and would even argue that pietistic prayer for Revival could easily be a form of escapism from the much harder task of reforming the church.

Glover is very perceptive, but has a tendency to 'generalise' and 'classify' groups too easily. The book is likely to be extremely unpopular because of its sweeping condemnation of all kinds of evangelicals today, but there are a lessons in it for the present-day church.

Revd G I Macaskill



Fasting

Presbytery Recommendation Friday 3rd September 2004

THE Presbytery recommended that ministers, elders and all Christians practice fasting. Although in the New Testament fasting is not commanded it is commended. The reasons given for fasting on this occasion were to humble ourselves, confess our sin, ask for God's blessing and guidance, to glorify God and to pray God would enable us to make a greater impact on our communities.

Members of Presbytery were encouraged to give some time to fasting before the next regular meeting of Presbytery. Since fasting is not commanded in the New Testament it is the choice of each individual to decide whether or not they fast.

*John Ross,
Moderator of Presbytery*

Fasting

In view of the above recommendation of the Presbytery I thought it might be helpful to write about fasting. When the word fasting is mentioned you might well be saying, "It's certainly not for me." Can we so easily dispense with what has been practiced in both the Old and New Testament. It is quite probable that many if not most of us have dieted or missed a meal or meals on various occasions so fasting or partial fasting

is not really an alien concept. Perhaps the question each individual needs to ask is, Does God want me to fast for my own or other peoples' spiritual benefit?

Let us think about some of the examples of fasting in the bible. Hopefully we will find it fascinating, humbling and inspiring

A Wicked Fast. When King Ahab set his heart on Naboth's vineyard, Naboth would not part with the inheritance of his fathers, so Queen Jezebel told the elder's of Jezreel, "*Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrel's opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.*" [1Kings 21:9,10]. Sadly all this was done and it certainly illustrates that fasting can go hand in hand with the grossest wickedness.

An "Orthodox" Fast. In Isaiah 58 which is addressed to "*my people*" we see how people can profess the orthodox religion, observe (what was then) the Lord's appointed time of fasting, be the picture of godliness and yet oppress the poor, turn a blind eye to injustice and do absolutely nothing to lighten the yoke of their own flesh and blood. Their "orthodoxy" was only in

the religious ritual, it did not come from their heart and it did not positively affect their behaviour towards their fellowmen.

A Wise Fast. In Isaiah 58 the same people are told, *“Is not this the kind of fast I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to cloth him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”*

This is wise fasting, when along with our fasting we are living in obedience and are showing genuine, practical, sacrificial love to those in need.

A Fruitful Fast. In Isaiah 58 they are told if they fast in God's way, *“Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will build up the ancient ruins and will raise up the age old foundations; you will be called repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”*

Reflect for a moment on this – if all (in a community, in a nation in the world) of us who say we are Christians fasted in God's way, by God's grace we could expect to turn the world upside down!

A Foolish Fast. In 1 Sam. 4:24 we read. *“Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under oath, saying, ‘Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!’ So none of the troops tasted food.”* As one commentator says, “Time saved was strength lost.” Saul's son Jonathan was unaware of his father's command and ate some honey. Saul would have killed his own son had not the men intervened.

A Perfect Fast. Our Lord Jesus Christ fasted for forty days (See Mat. 4:2) and like everything He did it could only be perfect. The fact that he did fast should make everyone think seriously, prayerfully and respectfully about fasting.

An expectant fast. The prophet Joel saddened and perplexed by the ungodliness and the peoples' abandoning of God's ways, proclaimed: *“ ‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.’ ”*

Little doubt but this could be said to us as a nation considering how we are turning our back on God. What a powerful encouragement to turn to the Lord with hope and expectation. We can say to ourselves and to all categories of sinners, *“God*

remains, 'gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.' Turn to Him with all your heart."

A Showpiece Fast. The Pharisees in Mat. 6 fasted to be seen of men, and they did it with style. They got their pathetic reward - they were seen. They should have done it in secret, from the heart and to God. They would have had an eternal reward. If we fast out of pride or merely abstain from food without engaging in heart felt prayer, or think our fast merits God's favour, it would be spiritually worthless.

An Expected Fast. In Mat 6 Jesus says, *"When you pray.... when you give to the needy."* The reader understands that Christ expected his people to pray and give to the needy. Jesus also says, *"When you fast."* So it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that he expected his people to fast.

A Profitable Fast. In Mat 6 Jesus says with regard to proper fasting, *"Your father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you."* Could anything be more encouraging?

A City Wide fast. After hearing Jonah's terrifying message, the King and people of Nineveh fasted, *"And God had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."* [Jonah 3:10].

An Apostolic fast. In Acts chap 13 and chap 14, we see fasting before Saul and Barnabas were sent on a missionary journey and when

elders were appointed.

Biblical fasting is not the mere abstinence from food. It must be done from the heart to God, it must be accompanied by prayer, the less other people know about it the better although a number of people might agree among themselves to fast. We shouldn't impose it on others but we could gently encourage others to do it. It must be accompanied by an earnest obedience.

It must be done in a spirit of humility so don't be surprised if Satan does his utmost to stir up a spirit of pride in you the very time you try to fast. You could well feel lead to do it not only on account of your own sin, but also on account of the sins and needs of others in the church at large or in the world.

I like the advice given by Peter White, in "The Effective Pastor" (CFP) "Start small, perhaps missing one meal a week, or a month. In the time which you would have spent at the meal, speak in detail with God about something which in your heart of hearts is more important to you than eating." Whether you and God will want to develop such times will become apparent. In the meantime you have definitely asked God for something that really matters, and probably started to grow a very healthy independence of mealtimes." Probably more than one reader will wish they had read Peter White's advice before they had their first attempt at fasting, because they bit off more than they could chew!

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

Email:

donald@stratharris.freemove.co.uk

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Postcode.....

Tel No.....

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Editor:

Rev'd Donald C Macaskill
238 Arbroath Road, Dundee DD4 7SB
Tel 01382 451798

E-mail:

dcmacaskill@apchurches.org.uk