

May the God who brings hope

*May the God who brings hope
To the shepherds in the field,
To the homeless in the streets,
To the abandoned in the hostels,
To the exiles in a strange land,
strengthen our faith
to do powerful deeds of peace and justice*



editorial



We are now coming to the end of the Christmas season in the eyes of many. Advent, once a period of fasting and serious preparation, has now become, paradoxically, a period of increasing consumption. Unlike many countries which celebrate Christmas after the feast up to the period of Epiphany, the Anglo Saxon world, including the US, is already guzzling and swilling its way through an extended orgy long before the feast has arrived.

Christians celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God as an event of enormous consequence to us; but only because God 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being made in human likeness' (Philippians 2:7). We celebrate this union of the divine and the human as a central mystery of our faith. And so we should: the birth of Christ changes history and changes us. It is announced by angels declaring peace on earth. This is not the peaceful torpor that reigns after Christmas lunch. It is a different kind of peace: the fullness of human flourishing and possibility – the reign of God. This event becomes more powerful because of the simplicity and poverty of its context. It is in line with what I think of as Jesus' own mission statement: *I have come that they may have life in all its fullness* (John 10:10).

The Incarnation is the central event in the long revelation of God's attempts to establish a right relationship with humanity. Time and again the agreements or covenants are broken by human greed and violence, disrupting the relationship. Time and again the prophets recall people from their selfishness back to the justice and wholeness represented by God. But, in the famous text of John 3:16, we are told that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*. Biblical scholars tell us that the 'so' carries both the intensity of God's love and the manner in which it is expressed. And that this love is for the world – the Greek word is *kosmos* – the ordered whole of creation (including humankind) - which God made in right relationship and found good.

This year, total Christmas sales in the UK are forecast to hit £44.7 billion (about half of the annual expenditure on the NHS) compared to £43.9 billion in 2008, an increase of £832 million. Christmas retail sales are expected to represent 18.5% of total retail sales for 2009. For many firms, however, Christmas sales represent up to a third of their annual takings.

The industry is 'cautiously optimistic' following 'Black Christmas' of 2008, when sales fell by £27 million, resulting in 20 major retailers going into administration and the loss of 40,000 jobs.

Not all of this money will be spent on 'presents' of course. A lot of it will simply be an excuse for conspicuous consumption, which is to say gluttony, inside and out. In this edition we print a proposal of Dr Ruth Grayson, who suggests that we redistribute our spending by matching what we spend on Christmas with what we give to charity. It is a radically simple proposal which, if taken up at large, could release substantial amounts. It might also release us from being in thrall to the notion that Christmas (and particularly Advent) is about spending. It might even really be Christmas without Marks and Spencer.

Most Christians manage to live with the world's assessment of wealth - and poverty. By and large the church has failed to preach or to get across the radical economics of the bible and particularly of the New Testament in the context of our own time. We travel with the rest of humanity along the broad highway of 'business as usual', unaware or denying that its economic infrastructure has been fatally undermined; while paying little more than lip service to the present and growing effects of climate change.

Writing in the First Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain (1945-46), the great economist J M Keynes boldly declared that: 'The day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied, by our real problems—the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.' As an economic prediction, it was undoubtedly premature and over optimistic. As an ordering of human priorities, however, it seems spot on.

Might such a sense not be the beginning of an escape from the guilt that ties us into so much Christmas giving of tat for tat? Might it lead us to a deeper understanding of what constitutes 'gift' and giving? Might we at least find, instead of the usual neurotic scramble, something more worthwhile? Far from opting out of the spirit of Christmas, might we not find ourselves being co-opted more deeply into it? In the words of the carol, 'what I can I give him: give my heart'. And that, as another saying goes, isn't just for Christmas.

Tim Duffy

out and about

On the beach at St Andrews



Justice and Peace have been out and about over the month of November. We were part of the alternate G20 Summit in St Andrews on the 7th, taking part in a march through the town to ask G20 Finance Ministers not to bury their heads in the sand, and to remember the poorest people on our planet.

Walking with Scotland United



We were also present at the Scotland United march on the 14th which was a coming together churches, politicians, trade unionists and anti-racist organisations for one purpose: to celebrate multicultural Glasgow on Saturday. Scotland United were also calling for the

banning of the anti-Muslim protest planned by a tiny group of bigots, including the Scottish Defence League and the English Defence League in Glasgow city centre on the same day. It was great to see so many people present and all the political parties represented. I never thought we would see the day when we would be cheering Annabel Goldie on Glasgow Green.



Scotland united

We finished the month on the 29th at the annual St Andrew's Day Solidarity Gathering at the Detention Centre at Dungavel, which is an abiding shame on our country. This was the ninth year we have been present for this day, lets hope we do not have to go back next year.



In solidarity at Dungavel

forced labour in the UK

Anti-slavery International has recently pursued a campaign to enforce laws against trafficking and forced labour

Modern slavery continues to exist in the UK. Some of the British products we buy today and the services we receive may have involved the use of forced labour. These workers are controlled through various means including debt bondage, the removal of passports and the use of violence, intimidation and threats.

Anti-slavery International estimates that in addition to the thousand men, women and children who are trafficked (transported away from their communities through coercion or deception) many people, including children, are in forced labour across a range of sectors, including domestic servitude, agriculture, construction, food processing and packaging, nursing, hospitality and the restaurant trade.

The UK Government introduced the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Act in 2004

which made trafficking for all forms of labour exploitation a criminal offence. However, the trafficking element of any prosecution is vital to the success of the prosecution, therefore making it impossible to obtain a conviction where trafficking is difficult to prove.

Under article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the ILO conventions against forced labour, the UK is bound by international law to criminalise forced labour and provide protection from slavery, servitude and forced labour.

There is currently a campaign to monitor the UK compliance with its new obligations. If in the course of recent work or pastoral activity, readers have had experience of either forced labour or cases of sexual trafficking could they please notify the office 0141-333-0238. More information at www.antislavery.org

campaign against the secularisation of christmas

A version of this article by Dr Ruth Grayson appeared in the Church Times in November 2008.

For most people, the period from Advent Sunday to Epiphany is characterised by rushed activity before 25 December and anticlimax afterwards, bringing huge social problems in its wake. Some churches now offer post-Christmas financial and marital counselling, but many do little to counter the difficulties faced by their communities. Particularly in the current financial climate, there is much more we could do to pre-empt such problems.

We could preach a simple message in Advent. We should be reminding people that the Magi were giving gifts to God, not to each other (Matthew 2.11). The exchange of gifts has its origins in the pagan festival that Christmas was supposed to supersede. It does not originate in the Gospels.

Charitable giving, on the other hand, is very much in keeping with the gospel message. At Christmas, it could mean giving as much to charity as we spend on ourselves (50/50 giving), in the way that John the Baptist advocated that people should prepare for their encounter with Christ ('Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none;' Luke 3.11). It could also mean giving more, as Jesus taught.

If churches collectively advocated giving to charity on a 50/50 basis, it could remove much of the stress of preparing for Christmas Day, substantially alleviate the problem of personal debt, and make a significant difference to national and world poverty. Most importantly, it would be in accordance with the gospel message.

Many individuals have now embraced the idea of alternative gifts, but this is still a drop in the ocean of raging consumerism. Perhaps we should cease to call it alternative giving, but make gifts to charity the main focus of our Christmas spending. We could call it 'preferential' giving.

It might even mean that those outside the Church see that it is prepared to put its money where its mouth is, and practise the gospel it preaches. If Christians do not set an example in their Christmas spending, we can hardly expect others to do so.

It has been estimated that charitable giving at Christmas amounts to about 2.5 per cent of the tens of billions spent annually on our high streets. Recent surveys suggest that the average per capita spending at Christmas is £400.

Many people will not, of course, be spending anywhere near £400 on themselves in the first place; but the mere exercise of estimating planned expenditure at Christmas

and aiming to donate at least an equivalent amount to charitable causes could be salutary.

In Yorkshire recently, 25 members of a synod workshop estimated their collective household Christmas expenditure, including food and travel, at almost £15,000. Even a small congregation could raise several thousand pounds on the basis of 50/50 giving. Just a few people, giving in this way last year, almost doubled one church's Christmas collection compared with the previous year.

We could keep shopping sprees for birthdays, anniversaries, and personal or family occasions, and devote our Christmas giving to Christ. If Christians are not prepared to give up gifts that we have not even had, how can we claim to be disciples of a Lord who requires that we give up everything to follow him?

None of this will be easy or painless, but neither is it impossible. Decisions about giving as individuals might mean changing our customs and expectations, and also those of our families and friends. We need to stress that it is Jesus birthday we are celebrating. So it is Jesus, not us, who should receive the presents.

We can still celebrate. Small children could be shown pictures of objects bought in their names, or projects they are helping to support, and be given party bags for themselves. Older children and teenagers, who are more subject to peer pressure, nevertheless often have strong social consciences, and may exceed expectations.

Many adults may actually appreciate receiving smaller gifts, partly because this may remind them of past Christmases, and partly because it could alleviate the pressure to spend more than they can afford.

There is a huge educational challenge here, but we can rise to it. It will not happen overnight. But it could help to restore Christ to Christmas, and make us talk about our faith as never before. Christians have a responsibility to speak out and to do something about future Christmases that will make a difference to the country, to the world, and to themselves. Swimming against the tide requires determination and perseverance; but that is the essence of following Christ.

Dr Ruth Grayson is a former social issues officer of the Sheffield District of the Methodist Church, and the founder of CASC-aid, a Campaign Against the Secularisation of Christmas by promoting charitable giving. Copies of other material she has prepared on this theme can be found on the J&P website and she can be contacted at cascaid@onetel.com

We need to remind ourselves that what we are doing is not a human action; it is divine. This is God's work, not our work. We must be very conscious of that fact because today... people are too often carried away by the merely human side of what is to be done, and they concentrate too much on their own work, their own efforts and even their own desires, fancies and inclinations. All these things are good, but they are secondary, and what is secondary has to remain in second place. What is first is God's work, God's Spirit.

Thomas Merton

please, sir, I want some more

It's official! Not only is the UK economy a basket case; it's looking for a charitable bailout. For the first time, I can sympathise with Mr Bumble, the beadle confronted by an impudent Oliver Twist. The Charities Advisory Trust publishes a Christmas Good Gifts Catalogue where people can donate money for causes such as bringing fresh water to African villages and for medical care for children in India, recently advertised a £20 gift voucher to help pay the UK National Debt.

'Why lumber your descendants with a staggering debt burden? Now is the time to start reducing the National Debt in their names (and their interest),' the advertisement reads, stating that this is 'a wonderful present for children and grandchildren.'

The UK national debt is more than £800 billion, or over £13,000 per person.

'It may seem like a joke, but there is a serious purpose behind this gift,' the charity's website says. 'The amount of money for services like funding schools, pensions, subsidies for the arts or improving infrastructure is likely to be severely cut or even disappear altogether... We may have the pleasure of overspending, but future generations will have to pick up the bill,' it warned.

The charity encourages people to mitigate the effect of the burden of the debt by donating 'a suggested £20 for every child or grandchild, niece or nephew.' What about uncles and aunts and second cousins? What about the childless, only children? There is also a suggested "bonus" for bankers, who should donate £1,000. 'Like they say on the ads, every little helps (and it certainly does no harm). And, yes, paying off the National Debt is according to charity law, recognised as a charitable purpose.'

So, let's imagine everyone owing this £13,000 put in a £100 for various relatives and 10,000 bankers coughed up £1,000. So now we only owe £12,900 each, minus £10 million. Of course, we could claim Gift Aid.

What planet are these people living on? It reminds me of the astronomer who said that we used to call huge numbers 'astronomical', but there are only a hundred billion stars in our galaxy and perhaps a hundred billion galaxies. If we want really large numbers nowadays, he said, perhaps we should call them 'economical'.

On the other hand, perhaps people need to learn the difference between charitable giving and structural economics.

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30 January - 7 February 2011

poverty and homelessness action week 'enough for all'

"It's been a hard year for many, and our trust in the banks, Parliament and other institutions have been tested. 'Enough for All' presents an alternative – one that's based on co-operation, mutual support, exchange and generosity. These are lasting values, and they deserve to be promoted."

Alastair Cameron, Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." Acts 4:35

Times are hard, as the recession has hit individuals, families and communities throughout Britain. But in the gloom, we have found inspiration. Our message is that there is **Enough For All** if, instead of retreating into our shells, we greet our neighbours, give what we can, share our ideas, hopes, goods and skills. Action Week in 2010 will demonstrate what can happen when people share what we have.

- Fed up of the trek to the dump with perfectly useful but unwanted goods? Put them on Freecycle!
- Demoralised by empty church buildings? See about using them for affordable homes!
- Suspicious of dodgy banking practices? Find out about your local credit union!

The gap between rich and poor has grown. This year's resource materials, free to download, will give up-to-date

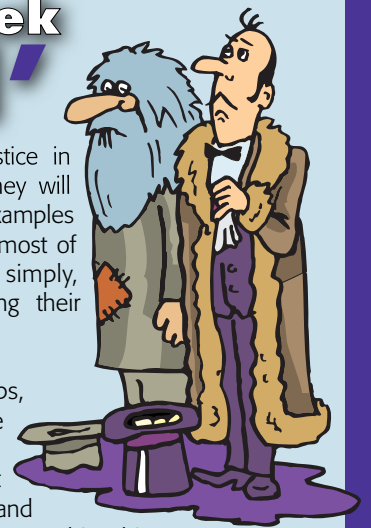
evidence of inequality and injustice in today's Scotland and the UK. They will also include plenty of positive examples of groups which are making the most of what they have, living more simply, reaching out to others, changing their communities.

We encourage church groups, schools and projects to be adventurous. Use the materials in worship, put on special events. Let us know what you are planning, and use our resources to be part of something bigger. Some ideas in the pack:

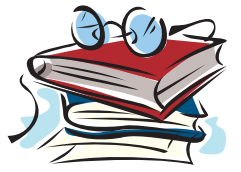
- Hold a bring-and-swap shop to share goods and ideas.
- Hold "A cup of tea" day after your Sunday service
- Assess your own community for the assets it can offer.
- Host a bring-and-share meal to link people in your area.
- Hold a 'justice fair' and invite other local organisations to share their ideas for a fairer, more sustainable society.

This year the resource material is free to download at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/resources.php. Why not take a look now, and start thinking about how you could explore this theme in your community or congregation. Or order prayer cards for your church @ £5.50 for a pack of 100. Contact Scottish Churches Housing Action 0131 477 4500

'There is enough for everybody's need, but not enough for everybody's greed.'
(Mahatma Gandhi)



a good read



More than a third of adults in the UK never read a book (God help them). Those who do admit to reading are allowed to include newspapers, magazines and even text messages. And while many claim to get much of their reading matter from their computer, I still don't think you can beat curling up with a good book. What follows is a list of some current books, with justice and peace themes, that might make good presents or ways of using book tokens (even better, with some fairtrade chocolate).

Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom (Orbis). Albert Nolan, the South African Dominican author of **Jesus Before Christianity** (also still well worth reading more than thirty years on) provides welcome relief from so many of the Neanderthals who think they represent Catholicism. Here we are led away from the corrosive culture of individualism into a spirituality of mutual responsibility which brings the freedom promised in the Gospels.

Who is My Neighbour? Deus Caritas Est (Veritas). Our sister agency, the Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs produced this book of papers by twelve contributors from a conference on Benedict XVI's first encyclical. Serious reading but well worthwhile.

Three Dancers One Dance: A Workshop on the Vision and Practicalities of Small Christian Communities and Groups (Columba). Fr Jim O'Halloran is an Irish Salesian with whom I spent a week on Iona about ten years ago, who has spent his life nurturing small Christian communities around the world. Here, in under 70 pages, is a detailed outline of six group sessions in which we become more deeply aware of what faith communities can offer. A marvellous resource, not just for J&P groups.

Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition (Birlinn). Alastair McIntosh is a prophetic presence in Scotland and in this book he moves through the science of climate change and shows it as a spiritual, moral and social opportunity to confront the greed sustained by violence at the root of so much human behaviour. A book to be read recklessly.

Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire (Eerdmans). William T Cavanaugh is an American Catholic theologian unafraid to tackle the big justice issues. A hundred pages on a Christian attitude to consumerism, free markets and another option – a Eucharistic justice which can be compared with Pope Benedict's economics in *Caritas in Veritate*.

The Wee Yellow Butterfly (Argyll). Cathy McCormack is a wonderful, irrepressible spirit who has spent the greater part of her life campaigning against poverty and injustice. She has an annoying habit of asking participants at conferences on poverty what their credentials are. This is her story with Easterhouse centre stage, but with Nicaragua, South Africa, the Vatican and Paris all getting a look in. The personality leaps off the page along with the passion for justice.

Let the People Decide: The Autobiography of Dennis Canavan (Birlinn Ltd). Normally, I wouldn't touch political memoirs with a bargepole, or at least until they cost less than a pudding supper. But Dennis is one of the few politicians

who commands respect and anyway, he spoke at our national conference. From winner of the beautiful baby contest to the teacher turned MP who was instrumental in getting corporal punishment banned; to the party pooper who tended to remind Labour and the rest when they left their integrity out of policies. This is the story of a ferociously combative politician who had to cope with the premature deaths of three of his children. A grand read, even if you do decide to wait for the paperback.

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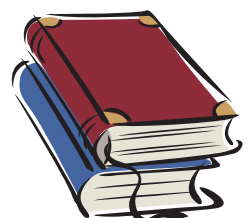
Beyond Reach? by John Madeley (Longstone Books) employs a fact-cum-fiction plot to tell a witty story of how a feisty young married woman inspires a church minister to join the Make Poverty History campaign. The result is an explosive mix that takes them into a world that neither bargained for. Their relationship energises them for the campaign, leading them to an exposé of government duplicity, of how the claims made about more aid and debt relief were far from all they seemed. The debt relief came with strings attached and there was not much of it - four years later, only about 20 per cent of developing country debt has been wiped out - and the aid increase included money for debt relief.

The Other Hand by Chris Cleave (Sceptre) is the story of two women, who meet on a beach in Nigeria, and discover their lives will never be the same. If you are interested in the asylum system in this country this is a book for you. This is a book to read and ponder and to recommend to friends without sharing details. As the Guardian reviewer said: 'Big themes, high emotion and cliffhangers aplenty... an enormously affecting investigation of love, guilt and global responsibility, told with a bittersweet urgency.'

'It Wisnae Us - the Truth about Glasgow and Slavery (Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland) Researched and written for GARA (Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance) by Stephen Mullen. 'Scotland's role in the slave trade has long been a contentious issue. In modern times, a myth of denial has evolved. It has been almost casually accepted that 'it wisnae us'. It is all too easy to see the Scots as victims of oppression rather than collaborators in the enslavement of nations. Underpinning disbelief and uncertainty until recently has been a lack of systematic research. This book examines the role of Glasgow, as both perpetrator and opponent of the 'Horrible Traffik' of slavery.'

CC

And of course, for your regular dose of J&P, don't forget to renew your subscription to the magazine.



behind every statistic

there is a human being

At the Justice and Peace office we get many calls to help people who are being deported. Mostly the calls come when the person or family have been removed to Dungavel, either by a dawn raid (still happening, I don't know about you, but 6am is certainly classed as dawn in my house), or when they go to sign on at the Border Agency office in Brand Street, Glasgow.

I have to say that in the main there is really not a lot we can do here in the office. It is not really our job to get involved in individual cases. I know that sounds like a cop out, but nevertheless there are times when you feel you must do something. That is why those who are on my email list get requests to help such cases. The recent case of Florence and Precious Mahngo was brought to our attention by a parishioner of St Maria Goretti, in Cranhill, Glasgow. Florence and Precious went to sign on at Brand Street, and were whisked away to Dungavel. They were then transferred to Yarl's Wood and were due to be deported to Malawi.

On the day they were due to be deported on a Kenyan airways flight, supporters were asked to contact the airline to ask them not to let Florence and Precious board the plane. On my first attempt the person I spoke to did not know anything, and when I asked to speak to a supervisor I was cut off after waiting 10 minutes. I then phoned back

to be told that they would not discuss the case and refused to speak to me and then they hung up.

Florence and Precious were on the plane when the reprieve came. They were taken off the plane and as we go to print they were back in Yarl's Wood. Much thanks for this must go to the local campaign in Cranhill and Anne McLaughlin MSP who campaigned flat out on this case. Our President Bishop Moran sent a message to the Home Secretary.

This only illustrates the many cases we hear of. There are many we do not hear about. People become statistics and officials are in jobs where it seems they must carry out their duties and they are not allowed to think of the person behind the statistic. There are very few cases when a reprieve such the one granted to Florence and Precious becomes no more than a postponement.

But as we race towards a general election, with the big two parties competing to show who can be the toughest on the issue of asylum seekers, let us remember the people behind the statistics and keep them in our prayers. After all Jesus was also a refugee who had to flee to Egypt.

CC

Check out the latest Asylum statistics on our website.

hypocrisy at work

"At Tetley we want you to enjoy your pregnancy without it being stressful. That's why we've put together some tips on caffeine and pregnancy..." reads a page on Tetley's website.

On November 19, on the Nowera Nuddy tea estate in West Bengal, local government officials began distributing to workers and their families coupons for emergency rations which are normally reserved only for those officially designated as below the poverty line or victims of natural disasters. The desperate situation on the estate contrasts sharply with Tetley's commitments to refrain from harsh or inhumane treatment set out in the Ethical Tea Partnership standard. Hunger on the estate is the result of a policy of collective punishment.

Nowera Nuddy is majority owned by Tata, the transnational Indian conglomerate whose wholly-owned

subsidiary Tetley makes the world famous Tetley Teas. The workers have been denied wages and rations for all but two days' work since early August. Management has closed the estate in retaliation for a worker protest in August against the punishing treatment of an 8-months' pregnant worker who was denied maternity leave, forced to pluck tea, and then denied adequate medical treatment. Workers want the estate reopened and their wages paid, but reject the suspension of 8 workers who have been singled out. Want to do something about this? Visit www.iuf.org/den6346 and find out how.

christmas eve prayer

Give us, O God, the vision which can see Your love in the world in spite of human failure. Give us the faith to trust Your goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness. Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts. And show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace.

Frank Borman, Apollo 8 space mission, Dec 24, 1968



obituary: Rev Maxwell Craig

It can be dispiriting, as years go by, writing more obituaries, particularly of people one has known and worked with. I was particularly saddened then to hear of the death of Rev Maxwell Craig at the age of 77 last month. Long a senior and high profile member of the Church of Scotland, he was also the first General Secretary of ACTS and something of an ecumaniac.

After a distinguished early career, at Oxford and then in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, he spent time as a senior civil servant where he picked up on the ways of politics, abilities he carried into the ministry. He also brought great charm and social skills, which on occasion led his antagonists to believe (to their subsequent confusion) that he shared their social prejudices. After unprecedented agitation by the Scottish churches against nuclear deployments in the 1980s, including visits to the Defence Secretary by representatives of the Scottish churches, the UK government sent a delegation. When it arrived, Maxwell was less than pleased: 'We mobilise the churches in Scotland and what do they send us – two high flyers and a clapped out ex-ambassador.' He also outlined how to deal with this sort of discussion in a way that has always stayed with me. 'Never allow the other side to dictate the conditions of discussion. Once they've got us playing on their pitch, by their rules, we've pretty much had it.'

From 1984-88 Maxwell was prominent as the Convenor of the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee. It was the high point of Thatcherism and Reaganism which left no shortage of work. He is generally accepted as having brought a more radical focus to the committee. He once said (not altogether mischievously) that it was useful to schedule

contentious issues like nuclear weapons, anti apartheid and opposition to US policies in Central America to later in the afternoon at the General Assembly. This concentrated the minds of Commissioners and allowed more decisions through without too much wrangling.

Always ecumenical, and rooted in the strength of his own tradition, he was the first General Secretary of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) in Dunblane from 1991-1998. He led a bus to the Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1996, and I remember him waiting hours to ensure everyone was duly registered. About that time, I took to calling him Pope Maxwell, which he took affably and in his stride. His courtesy and hospitable manner helped encourage many ecumenical initiatives, and brought together people from different traditions. At the time of the horrific killings in Dunblane, Maxwell along with other local church people was a valuable and unobtrusive voice for the devastated community.

Now a senior ambassador for his church, he spent some time in St Andrew's Church in Jerusalem, before becoming chair of Scottish Churches Housing Action from 2000-06. Homelessness, poverty and the abuse of power generally, were situations which offended him.

Not so long ago he courageously raised the question about the distribution of resources in a society where so many now live so much longer. Sadly, he was not given the time to work this one out. No death is ever an easy thing, particularly for those who were close. But, to go in full faculties while performing in Handel's Messiah... I am sure he will continue to bring comfort to family and friends from whatever choir he now sings in.

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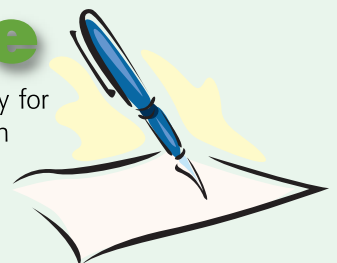
sanctuary pledge

Citizens for Sanctuary is a campaign by CITIZENS UK to implement the recommendations of the Independent Asylum Commission – one of which was to end the detention of children. It has formed a coalition of 13 national faith organisations representing 7 million people to promote a Sanctuary Pledge at the 2010 General Election. Prospective Parliamentary Candidates across the country are being asked to back the Sanctuary Pledge, which includes a commitment to end the detention of children and families for immigration purposes.

Source: *Ekklesia*

craighead course for justice and peace

Craighead Course for Justice and Peace – This four module course is currently under way for the second time, paid for by SCIAF. It will run again for the third and final time from autumn 2010. Dates and location have still to be finalised. Make it a priority and get your name down early. If you know someone who has done the course, ask them about the difference it has made in their life.



newsbrief . . . newsbrief

Christians emphasise Christmas message at Aldermaston:

Christians will emphasise the Christmas message of 'peace on earth' when they hold Advent vigils at Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE). Local Christian groups, and students from Reading, will hold weekly candle lit Advent Vigils outside the Tadley Gate throughout Advent. Caroline Gilbert, of Oxford Christian CND said: "Like President Obama said, 'this is a unique moment in history when we can break the nuclear chain'." "We should not be replacing Trident at a cost of £76 billion, but scrapping it. That would be a tremendous boost to the forthcoming negotiations on nuclear proliferation and disarmament, initiated by Ban Ki-Moon and President Obama, culminating in the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in May this coming year." Further info at www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10683

Sri Lanka told promise to free displaced must be followed by action:

Human rights groups have welcomed a promise made by the government of Sri Lanka to lift by 1 December 2009 any restrictions on movement of at least 130,000 people displaced by the war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. "Now the Sri Lankan government needs to demonstrate that it will provide the displaced with necessary assistance such as shelter, food and security as they re-establish their homes," said Madhu Malhotra, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific deputy director.

Unions call for end to violence against women:

On 25 November (the UN International Day on the Elimination of Violence against Women) the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) issued a statement noting that one third of all women are subject to violent attack at some point in their lifetimes -- and declaring that the issue of violence against women is a trade union issue. *One-third of women are subjected to violent attack at some point in their lives, with the majority of cases involving rape or attempted rape. Women aged 15 - 44 are more at risk of death and disability through domestic violence than through cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria, and each year some two million girls aged between five and 15 are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation.* Read the statement in full at www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article4664

From Hansard 4th Nov 2009: Parliamentary debate (Lord Hylton) 'My Lords, I start from the proposition that it is wrong to lock up parents and children who have committed no crimes in this country. ... The detention of children is contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. That fact compels the Government to derogate from the convention. This is a great shame on the 20th anniversary of the convention, which we as a country helped to draft.'

People seeking sanctuary in Scotland forced to survive for up to four years with no cash:

The Scottish Refugee Council is calling for the asylum support system to change as new research reveals large numbers of those seeking sanctuary in Scotland are surviving with no cash for years at a time, and for the wrong reasons. The research, conducted by Scottish Refugee Council, focuses on over 1000 people on Section 4 support – a lifeline

package comprising accommodation and vouchers worth £35 a week and valid only in a few approved shops - provided to asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. When the UK government first introduced Section 4 it was a short-term measure for individuals, couples and families whose asylum claim had been refused. However, the research shows it is being used to support people whose claims are still active, while some asylum seekers have been surviving without cash for up to four years. More information www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation - still armed & dangerous.

A major concern of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade is that a future Conservative Party government would further increase government support for arms exports. There is even talk of moving arms export promotion back to the Ministry of Defence. CAAT believe that there is still time to change Conservative policy on this issue, and are urging supporters to write to David Cameron, explaining why support for arms exports is a bad policy and urging the Conservative Party not to adopt it. Email David Cameron at www.caat.org.uk/issues/ukti/emailcameron/ With a general election coming up, it's important to put pressure on all the political parties. CAAT's Action Pack for Lobbying Candidates will be available in December. Check out their website www.caat.org.uk

CAAT is also following with interest

news reports on the progress of the SFO (Serious Fraud Office) prosecution of BAE Systems on allegations of corruption and false accounting on arms sales in four countries - Czech Republic, Romania, South Africa and Tanzania. There is also a possibility that BAE will reach a plea bargain with the SFO. Further information www.caat.org.uk/issues/bae/

Just in time for Christmas: The new Glasgow One World Shop is finally open. It is situated at 649, Great Western Road, Glasgow G12 8RE - just 3 blocks up from the top of Byres Road on the right hand side, painted bright green. Tel/Fax: 0141 337 6117

Fairtrade Fortnight 2010 takes place from 22 February – 7 March. Check out the Fairtrade Foundation website www.fairtrade.org.uk to find out all that is happening in the world of fair trade. If you have not done anything before for Fairtrade Fortnight why not try this year.

Vulture Funds bill: On 26 November the Republic of Liberia was taken to the High Court in London by two Vulture Funds seeking to make large profits on a debt dating back to the 1970s. Liberia lost, and the two Vulture Funds - both based in offshore tax havens - were awarded over \$20 million. Andrew Gwynne MP - number three on the Private Members' Ballot - has agreed to sponsor a bill targeting Vulture Funds. This is a huge step forward for the campaign. As always, however, it's not over yet. There are several stages of a Private Member's Bill making its way through Parliament where your help will be needed, to make sure enough MPs support the bill for it to become law. And it'll be a race against time to get it through before the election. Read more about the case, and find out how you can help with the Bill at www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk

a place at the table

The last time I had been in Easter Road was about 1962. This time, it was not for a football match (sadly, that was probably true in 1962 as well). In November, the STUC and ACTS put on a conference: *For everyone born a place at the table: Tackling Income Inequality in Scotland*. It was the best and most useful conference I've been to in a long time.

Most of us tend to moan about the economic situation, without any real understanding of what has happened and with even less idea of how it could be improved. Here we were given a classic example of See-Judge-Act which was intellectually coherent and morally and politically challenging.

The main presentation was by Professor Richard Wilkinson, lead author of the book *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. As the title suggests, the basis of social well being is not wealth or growth, but rather the tendency towards economic equality. Inequality within societies produces social and health problems, as well as the stress involved in negative social evaluation or, as we might say, diminishing human dignity. This view is not a theory but rather the result of massive comparison of data by researchers for societies around the world over half a century.

Graph after graph illustrated how social problems like crime, drugs, ill health, family breakdown and teenage pregnancy (to name only a few) are dependent, not on the level of wealth in a society, but on the level of equality. The UK and the USA figured too frequently at the high end of problems whereas more equal societies (not only the wealthy Scandinavia and Japan) fared far better. It does not matter whether the equality is innate or the result of economic redistribution: the result is the same.

From the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching this seemed like common sense: human dignity is sustained by working for the common good. Yet when politics has become consumerism based on the selfishness of individual 'choice' rather than the common good it is not so obvious. Professor Wilkinson spoke of us 'experiencing ourselves through each others' eyes'; and the need for a move from individual social needs to a 'qualitatively better society'. To bring this about, however, will require more than waiting on individual good will; it will require structural change at the economic and political levels.

Not an enviable task to follow such a presentation, but Dr Ailsa McKay, a Glasgow based economist, made a spirited case for a Citizens' Basic Income. A Citizen's Income is an unconditional, automatic and non-withdrawable payment to each individual as a right of citizenship. 'Society's values are based on limited versions of what constitutes productive work,' said Dr

McKay. They are usually based on 'commodification' in which income is a price paid for the work and the worker. There is a need to separate work from income and to redefine what counts as work; particularly for women. There is injustice in the inequality of men's and women's incomes. And the roles carried out by women as mothers and carers are not recognised as work, nor do they accrue any income. This requires us to recognise that economics has an ethical, political and spiritual dimension. No one batted an eye when the government spent £200 billion on 'quantitative easing' in the last year. That is over £4000 for every adult in the country, except it was paid to the banks. What is lacking is an agreed framework backed by political will.

There followed a peculiar interlude: Ann McKechnie, Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Scotland Office read from her script of the UK government's achievements. No questions were permitted. It was as if the two previous radical presentations had not occurred; an apt metaphor for a government that is not listening.

With Grahame Smith of the STUC, we heard something more akin to what I would call real policies. He pointed to recent political failures as an opportunity for civic and political renewal. There was a need for a more strategic and unified approach by civic organisations. There is a need to reduce income equality. In Scotland women are paid on average 14% less than men; and the mechanisms for equalising such as progressive taxation, minimum wage provisions and trades union membership had all been weakened in recent years. More recently union membership has seen the highest rate of increase since the mid 1980s. There has been widespread support for campaigns for a living wage of £7.00 per hour over the minimum wage of £5.80. And for those who queried how this was to be paid for, he noted that £1.2 trillion had been found at short notice to shore up the banking system.

The morning concluded with Alison Elliot, now Convenor of the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, first woman Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and an ecumenical social theologian. In this latter category she underscored the fact that ACTS was co sponsoring the conference.

Alison spoke of the need in all societies for a 'myth' that mediates social realities. Myth is not something false; rather it is a story that makes sense of and gives meaning to our lives. She noted that the Scottish Parliament, at first imbued with Scottish hopes, had perhaps been left to carry too much of our civic aspirations. Like any human agency it is limited, particularly in this case by party politics. She then offered elements of the Judeo Christian story as related in the bible as the basis of the myth that had given Scotland meaning in its history.

I detected an initial embarrassment in the audience. Perhaps as good post modernists, they felt they had outgrown explanatory narratives, especially religious ones. But in the best reformed tradition of preaching the word in season and out of season, Alison drew out the depths of meaning and dignity the biblical myth has given to Scottish culture. Not least it undercut the false grandiosity of a narrow nationalism of the 'wha's like us' variety. It also brought a respect for diversity and at the same time a celebration of equality as something exciting. Most of all it encouraged a reinvestment of social capital, or to put it another way, it allowed people

to flourish, to be truly themselves.

I felt some of the communal purpose and energy that flowed from the Claim of Right and the Constitutional Convention, before Scottish politics had largely settled back down into its current self serving bureaucracy. I came away feeling that the referendum we need, is less about unionism or independence, and more about the ways in which we can get rid of inequalities and build a society that enhances human dignity and pursues the common good.

TD

what a difference a week makes!

Cate Adams is a workplace chaplain in Aberdeen

Recently, I was sitting with a group of delegates at a conference in Easter Road looking at the issues surrounding tackling income inequality in Scotland. So what struck me and how did it affect my week?

Well, I could have written about how consumerism feeds inequality and how what should be a Christian festival is now the biggest cause of poverty, debt and relative poverty in our calendar. I could have dwelt on my frustration that the official government spokeswoman spent so much time self congratulating her party on its past 'successes' yet provided little hope or sustenance for the future. She claimed they will abolish child poverty by 2020 but there was no real focus on how they are really going to do that and how it will be funded.

I could even pick out some of the things I was challenged by: perhaps the idea that equality needs to be culturally sensitive; or that equality is not the same as conformity and should be celebrated not feared. I choose not to. Rather I want to focus on the workshop I was in, where we looked at inequality and power.

During the workshop a fair amount of time was spent looking at whether power was a good or bad thing. We looked at if we wanted power as individuals, how comfortable we were with power, and looked at the concept of a 'just' power. The definition given of power was neither positive nor negative, but rather the 'ability to achieve a purpose'. The suggestion then was it's what you choose to do with it that makes power a positive or negative force, so we contrasted 'power over' someone/something with 'power with' someone/something.

On a Thursday evening less than a week later I led a remembrance service for those who had lost their lives due to drug use. I started to reflect on how to begin to change the 'power over' to 'power with'. I concluded that the power of those grieving, coming together with members of civic and faith based

communities in a simple act of common solidarity, was a much more moving power. It was also a vision of 'power with' that far transcends the destruction of 'power over' that substances such as drugs have in our society.

In our workshop we had also begun to reflect on what happens when power is given to a group that may be community based, but is not necessarily recognised or accepted by the whole community. Here we looked at faith communities versus unions versus gangs, each having the capacity to be rooted and trusted by their followers. Yet none offers a complete solution to the community they reside in. Even if some of the community belonged to more than one group, in so doing the power of that group is often diluted as each strives to be heard over the others.

In order for there to be an effective use of power there needs to be a process of community organisation. Thus the 'community will build long term power only by organising people and money around a common vision'. So as I recently sat in the canteen of a business that has provided supported employment for over 150 years, on the day that over fifty staff were made redundant and the business went into liquidation, I wondered at the notion of the effectiveness of community power.

We had concluded in our workshop for power to be effective it needs to be a greater power than the power it is trying to overthrow. In the midst of a recession, for both disabled and able bodied the fight is on. I understand why, according to scripture, it is in our weakness we are made strong. Because in the vulnerability of loss, or in the pain of grief, both of these experiences have shown me that it's only when we stand alongside those who need us that we begin to break the divisions of inequality and redress the balance of power in the lives of the individuals we serve.

Cate Adams

diary diary

DECEMBER

- 7-18 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen
- 18 International Migrants Day
- 25 Christmas Day REJOICE
- 28 Holy Innocents Day

JANUARY 2010

- 3 Epiphany Sunday - Justice and Peace Sunday. Bishop Moran's letter to be read out at all Masses. A collection to be taken up for the work of Justice and Peace. Please ensure this is happening in your parish
- 30-7 February Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

FEBRUARY

22 - 7 March Fairtrade Fortnight

MARCH


- 5 Women's World Day of Prayer
- 20 'Cut Trident not Jobs' Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh. Rally at the Mound

'To keep up to date with the aftermath of the Copenhagen Climate Summit and the Wave demonstration, check out the J&P website.'

Full details and links on the events page of our website www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk/events.shtml

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May all our readers enjoy a Happy and Holy Christmas and find the Peace of Christ in the New Year.

Best Wishes from Bishop Peter and Ellen Charlton on behalf of the whole Commission

And Carol, Margaret and Tim in the National Office.



Our Office: 65 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 2BX. Tel/Fax: 0141 333 0238
 Email: office@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk
 OPEN DAILY 10.00 hrs to 16.00 hrs Monday to Friday inclusive.



OFFICE BEARERS:

- Bishop President - Bishop Peter Moran | Chair - Ellen Charlton
- Research & Development - Tim Duffy | Campaigns - Carol Clarke
- Administration - Margaret Clarke
- Editorial Team - Tim Duffy & Carol Clarke
- Office Volunteers - Maria Madill & Sr. Agnes Bradley

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