

SCOTTISH PROTESTANT VIEW

FREE

SCOTLAND'S OWN
PROTESTANT NEWSPAPER

Vol.31 No.7

January/February 2007

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ALARM IN THE KIRK !



The recent remarks of the moderator designate of the Church of Scotland, Rev Sheilagh Kesting, that the time was right for the Church to bless same sex partnerships has alarmed the Kirk's more traditional members. The Kirk's General Assembly last May narrowly approved the idea of blessing civil partnerships in principle, but after fierce opposition it agreed that each of its 46 local presbyteries would have to ratify the vote. The Rev Ian Watson, Secretary of Forward Together, an evangelical group within the Kirk expressed surprise at Miss Kesting's decision to express her views. He is quoted as saying "this takes away any confidence we have that she will be a fair moderator next May". As editor of the SPV I am not surprised in regards to anything this woman has to say. I have printed below something of her background as reported in the Stornoway Gazette. The Kirk's choice of Miss Kesting just shows how spiritually and morally bankrupt it is. How can evangelicals stay in a church which is permeated with the godless spirit of the age, and tramples upon so much that is sacred to God and to heaven. The Lewis Presbytery of the Kirk may pride itself in being 100% against civil marriages, but at the end of the day it suffers guilt by association. I give a vote of no confidence here and now.

by Mr Jack Bell

Stornoway woman is Moderator designate

by DONNIE MACINNES

STORNOWAY born Rev Sheilagh Kesting, Secretary of the Church of Scotland Committee on Ecumenical Relations, is the first female minister to become Moderator Designate of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Sheilagh, (53), daughter of well known former Stornoway lawyer Douglas Norman Kesting and Joan Robertson Blair Kesting who now live in the Peebles area, was educated at The Nicolson Institute.

She became a member of St Columba's Old Parish Church at age 16 and was a Sunday School teacher, Sunday School organist and choir member. She graduated BA and BD from Edinburgh University in 1971.

From an early age, Miss Kesting was interested in the different churches and during her university years, increased her ecumenical awareness and chose to worship in congregations ranging from conservative evangelical to high Episcopalian.

Sheilagh spent her probationary period in St John's Renfield Church in Glasgow

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Group are barred from holding meetings on campus Christians banned by university in gay row

A SCOTTISH university has banned a Christian students' group that opposes gay sex from holding meetings on campus.

Edinburgh University chiefs believe a course run by the Christian Union is homophobic.

The course is based on the idea that gay sex is wrong because it happens outwith marriage.

But gay rights campaigners said the organisation's teachings were homophobic and called for a ban on the meetings on university premises.

The university agreed and barred the group from running its course on campus - but the Christians say they have been unfairly treated.

Last year, copies of the Bible were banned from halls of residence at Edinburgh after protests from the students' union, prompting claims that

Christianity was being undermined by political correctness.

Matt Tindale, of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, the umbrella group for Britain's 350 Christian Unions with a membership of about 20,000, said: 'There is a possibility of legal action, which we will investigate unless the university authorities reverse their decision.'

'We believe the issue is important and is worth fighting for. This is about the principle of free speech for the good of society, so even if people disagree with us they should be prepared to allow us to air our views.'

'The course was advertised within the Christian Union meetings but is open to anyone.'

'It is called "Pure" and basically teaches that sexual

relationships are morally wrong if they take place outside marriage, and that includes homosexual activity, although there are actually only a couple of references to homosexuality.'

The group believes that gay people can live according to Christian beliefs, possibly by acknowledging that they are gay but refusing to have sex.

This has led to allegations by gay rights campaigning groups that the Christian Union is condoning the idea that homosexuality is morally wrong and is similar to a medical condition that can be 'healed' through faith.

But the Christian Union denies this is its stance and says it welcomes gay people seeking help and guidance to live in accordance with Biblical teachings.

After protests from gay rights groups, the Edinburgh Student

Representative Council backed a move to ban Pure courses. That decision was later supported by university authorities.

Adam Knight, president of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender Society at Edinburgh University, said: 'I am tired of the over-use of the word "tolerance" ' with its distinctly neutral connotations. If we are to move forward as a society, we must aim for "acceptance".'

But Peter Kearney, spokesman for the Catholic Church in Scotland said: 'This is nothing more than blind and unthinking political correctness.'

It emerged at the weekend that the Christian Union at Exeter University had been suspended from a list of official societies for allegedly breaching rules on equal opportunities by excluding non-Christians.

The Christian Union at Birmingham University was suspended earlier this year after it refused to alter its constitution to allow non-Christians to address meetings and to amend its literature to include references to sexual minorities.

Last night, a spokesman said Edinburgh University was committed to ensuring that students and staff are treated and treat each other with dignity, and to free speech and open debate.

'The university has looked into the matter, in parallel with an inquiry by the students' association, and has decided that this course is contradictory to our equality and diversity values.'

'It was decided that it is not appropriate for this course to run on university premises.'



Old College Dome, Edinburgh University, Scotland.

Stornoway woman is Moderator designate*continued from page 1*

and went on to spend a few months as assistant housemother in the Tom Allan Centre in Glasgow, working mainly with homeless women

Miss Kesting was inducted to Overtown Parish Church, Lanarkshire in January 1980, just as the steel works were closing.

Initially, her appointment was terminable but in 1983 the Presbytery returned her appointment to full status, giving a boost to the local congregation.

For a few years she was one of a team of chaplains in the local hospital. In 1981 she became a member of the Kirk's Panel on Doctrine and was later convener of the Presbytery of Hamilton's Doctrine Committee.

In 1986, Miss Kesting was inducted to the newly united congregation of St Andrew's High, Musselburgh. At this time, the congregation was worshipping in one church building while the other under-went refurbishment and Sheilagh encouraged and supported them in making full use of a flexible and bright worship space. Together with a curate in the Roman Catholic Church, Miss Kesting gave momentum to the taking up of the 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims' programme within the town, the setting up of a Churches Together group and planning joint Lent studies and worship in Holy Week and Lent.

In 1993, Miss Kesting's commitment to ecumenical work led her to take up post as Secretary to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations. This involves giving advice to congregations who wish to consolidate their ecumenical commitment in local ecumenical partnerships; being secretary to the Livingston Sponsors' Council and a member of the Grahamston Advisory Group.

Sheilagh was secretary to the ecumenical conversations, SCIFU (Scottish Churches Initiative for Union), the talks with the United Free Church which led to the recent signing of a Covenant, continuing talks with the Free Church and joint secretary of the Joint Commission on Doctrine (Church of Scotland/Roman Catholic).

She is a member of the Scottish Churches' Forum and a shadow trustee of the new Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. At various times she has represented the Church of Scotland at international assemblies, often facilitating group discussions.

Miss Kesting lists her interests as gardening, singing oratorio in a choir and photography.

The role of Moderator of the General Assembly is an honorary one, held for 12 months. The Moderator, who leads worship, rules on points of order and signs documents on behalf of the Assembly, chairs meetings of the General Assembly. After the Assembly, the Moderator generally travels as a Church representative in Scotland, other parts of the UK and overseas in an ambassadorial capacity.

In 2004, Dr Alison Elliot, who is an elder, became the first female Moderator of the General Assembly.

Stornoway Gazette Nov 2006

Ministers rebel against Kirk's 'gay blessings' bid

By Graham Grant
Home Affairs Editor

A BID to let Kirk ministers perform blessings at gay 'marriages' has sparked a huge revolt within the Church of Scotland.

Senior church officials want to give ministers official approval to perform ceremonies for same sex couples who have formed civil partnerships.

But after bitter protests from traditionalists, the idea was blocked at the General Assembly and referred to Kirk members across Scotland to make the final decision.

Now the Scottish Daily Mail can reveal presbyteries have voted overwhelmingly to ditch the move, with 74 per cent delivering what campaigners say is a 'bloody nose' to the Kirk's politically-correct leadership.

It emerged earlier this week that almost 1,000 same sex couples have 'married' in Scotland since it became legal for them to do so under the Civil Partnership Act a year ago.

Figures from the Registrar General for Scotland show 942 such partnerships were registered by the end of September.

The row follows the controversial approval earlier this week of a new law allowing gay adoption in Scotland, despite fierce protest from thousands of Scots.

Blessings for same sex relationships were recently backed by the Rev Sheilagh Kesting, Moderator designate of the Church of Scotland.

Conservatives in the Church reacted to her comments with dismay, arguing that Miss Kesting's views were contrary to the Bible and that, by airing her opinions on the issue, she undermined her position as an unbiased Moderator.

The Kirk's General Assembly narrowly approved the idea of blessing civil partnerships in principle. But, after strong opposition, it agreed that each of its 46 local presbyteries would have to ratify the vote.

Figures obtained by the Mail show 34 presbyteries voted against the blessings, with just six approving the

idea.

The rest are due to vote over the next few days and the final result could be known as early as next week - but it is now certain it will represent a damaging defeat for the Kirk's hierarchy.

Last night, the Rev Ian Watson, secretary of Forward Together, an evangelical group within the Kirk which opposes the blessing of civil partnerships, described the vote as a 'phenomenal rejection'.

He said: 'The grass roots ministers and members of the Church have rejected the radical liberal agenda that the Kirk leadership tried to promote.'

'We would argue there is now authority from the presbyteries for Kirk authorities to say ministers should not be conducting blessings of civil partnerships.'

'The Bible is God's word and marriage should be a committed relationship between a man and woman. We are pro-marriage rather than anti-gay.'

Another evangelical Christian within the Kirk told the Mail: 'People are saying they have had enough and the huge vote against is proof of the scale of the protest building up among grassroots members.'

Kirk officials have also been criticised for backing watered-down school assemblies, designed to appeal to all faiths, that critics say undermine Christianity.

The vote against same-sex blessings will be seen as a major setback for Miss Kesting, who comes from the liberal wing of the Church.

She also sparked criticism after saying the Kirk should stop worrying about the dramatic decline in worshippers.

Last year, the Kirk faced a bitter internal row after it officially backed plans to let gay and unmarried couples adopt.

Its Church and Society Council, which decides formal policy on such matters, sparked criticism after publishing a report to support the move.

Traditionalists within the Kirk voiced outrage, saying the decision did not reflect the genuine concern of many worshippers and clergymen.

Daily Mail 9.12.06

Pick Pocket Popery

As the debate rages over sectarianism in Scotland I was completely astonished to read in the Scotsman newspaper the comments of Scotland's leading Roman Catholic Cardinal Keith O'Brien. He informed First Minister Jack McConnell that "*Institutional Sectarianism*" still existed in Scotland and that the Act of Settlement was "State-sponsored sectarian discrimination".

The nation's drive towards stamping out bigotry in Scotland seemed to have both sides of the Football Old Firm in its sights, Celtic and Rangers until the Cardinal felt he should advise Mr McConnell of deeper issues!

The Cardinal's contribution was to insist that the Act of Settlement promotes sectarianism and should be done away with to pave the way for better relationships between Protestants and Catholics. What hypocrisy from a man who promotes "*state sponsored*" Catholic Schooling, a system that sectarianises young children at the ages of five and six.

The Collins Dictionary defines Sectarianism as "**narrow minded adherence to a particular sect, faction or doctrine**" and it is hard to visualise any other "state funded" organisation that fits this definition better than our Roman Catholic Schools.

In Pre Reformation days the Catholic Church would "pick the pockets" of its own by selling *indulgences* for sin. This incensed the Reformer Martin Luther when one of his parishioners stumbled drunk in front of him clutching his freedom to sin with the Roman Church's consent, but for a fee!

Then the Catholic Church managed to pick the pockets of its members through the Doctrine of Purgatory, guilt tripping families to "pay for prayers" in order that their loved ones would get their Monopoly style 'Get out of Jail card' and be released from their time of purification.

However the Church of Roman must giggle with glee, because not only has it managed to *pick the pockets* of its own, dead and alive, but it is picking the pockets of the state to enable it to indoctrinate young people with Mariolatry, Papal Infallibility, and a host of its own traditions and non-biblical practices.

Let me share a word of personal testimony. Throughout my school years I can't ever recall seeing a playground bust-up by furious boys and girls fiercely debating the "Act of Settlement", most of us would have struggled to spell "Act of Settlement" let alone define what it was! However what I did understand was that my next door neighbour went to

a different school because he was a Catholic and I went to a so called Protestant school. It was segregation at a pivotal point in life creating discrimination and building barriers.

If the Cardinal and McConnell really want to eradicate sectarianism in Scotland then they need to waken up and realise that it does not start at ten to three on a Saturday afternoon when the masses gather at Ibrox and Parkhead but it starts at the ages of five and six when children are divided up and segregated in to our Catholic and Non denominational schooling structure.

I am blessed to have been called by the Grace of God into an Evangelical Protestant Church but what I find very sad and frustrating is the fact that Rome picks my pockets every month to indoctrinate children into a Faith which I believe to be anti-Christian and anti-Christ.

We have a family in our church that home schools with no government funding and all the while the father of that household's wages goes to supplement an education system he does not agree with on solid Biblical grounds.

Let the Cardinal condemn the Catholic Education system that promotes sectarianism by separating young children at an early age. Let's have one schooling system and leave religious education to the church, the home and not the state. Let the First Minister show how serious he is about tackling Sectarianism in Scotland by condemning the real source of "Institutional Sectarianism", our ridiculously biased pro-Catholic Education scheme.

Am I anti-catholic education? We live in a democracy and if there is a body set up to educate and promote Catholicism among children then they have the complete liberty to do so, but my objection is that this, in no way, should be funded by the taxpayer.

Is the slamming of the Billys and the Bhoys an easy target for a problem that needs to be dug out from the root?

We can't condone the tribal Catholicism and Protestantism that we see in the West of Scotland. However, when we look at the earliest source of "state sponsored" propagation, we must logically confess that it is conducted through the RC education guild.

The Government is prepared to wear its Rome tinted spectacles, but it must confess that division, discrimination and sectarianism is the inevitable consequence of our current State sponsored pro-Rome bias.

William McAulay
member of Zion Baptist Church

JUST LEAVE GOD OUT OF IT!

Simply stated, secularism asserts that public life is to be conducted without reference to religious observance or values. In other words, our culture in the UK urges us to live our lives as though God does not exist, or if He does, He does not involve himself in our world. Both positions agree that this material world is all we have. The separation of God from our culture is so complete that some describe Great Britain as a post-Christian culture.

This separation runs much deeper than banning prayer from schools, discriminating against Christian Unions at universities or attempting to force Christians in churches, charities and associations to even accept or promote the idea that homosexuality is equal to heterosexuality, ignorance of Christian values and the Bible abounds.

The secularists point to so-called benefits such as being free agents, able to do what we like when we dismiss God, deciding the rules by which we live, and freeing ourselves from all authority and judgement. What they don't point out is the cost to both individuals and society. Only God can fill the vacuum and personal emptiness this leaves behind and inevitably results in embracing the non-God view of today.

The Bible opens with these words: "In the beginning, God". At the beginning of any discussion of values or ethics the starting point must be God himself. God's word reminds us in 1 Thes 5:23 "and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we deny our spirituality as

secularists do, we deny something fundamental to our existence. Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell were two gifted runners in the 1924 Olympics in France. Abrahams the secularist ran for personal glory, but Liddell ran for the glory of God.

One of the chief struggles our society has with Christianity is the belief that some things are always true regardless of our acceptance. We believe that only through Christ our Saviour can we gain forgiveness, enter into a personal relationship with God and enter heaven.

Relativism is the view that each individual or group establishes moral standards that are binding for them even if not for anyone else. In other words, everyone can decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. The last verse of Judges tells us, "in those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes". Relativism ultimately ends in anarchy.

The prodigal son said to his father, "give me" that he might break away from under his father's authority and influence. Thankfully he came to his senses and said ultimately to his father "forgive me". May our nation follow the steps of the prodigal and return to God.

The concept of absolute truth permeates the Bible. God gave the ten commandments to Israel, not the ten suggestions. Ps 119 encourages us to value and seek God's absolute moral values: "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver".

By Mr Jack Bell, editor of SPV

George Dawson rounds on Elton John



Elton John

Caleb Foundation Chairman, George Dawson MLA, speaking in Ballymena Congregational Church, 14 November, rounded on celebrity Elton John for his recent comments supporting a ban on all religion.

Mr Dawson said, "Can you imagine the outcry there would be if a religious leader demanded a ban on homosexual practice. Every so-called 'liberal thinker' and 'human rights activist' would be baying for the

blood of that religious leader. They would in all likelihood be hounded out of their leadership position.

And yet Elton John can suggest a ban on religion and those same liberal and rights activists are deafening in their silence. This is of course what we have come to expect. It seems that there is no section of the community more illiberal, or more intolerant, than those who would proclaim themselves as socially liberal.

This extension of the demands of those promoting the homosexual agenda is just the latest in a long line.

The homosexual agenda strikes at the heart of society. It has undermined marriage, the basic building block of society, by the promotion of Civil Partnerships. It has debased the concept of equality by demanding special privileges for itself. It has damaged freedom of speech by the introduction of special legislation. And now the demand is launched for a ban on religion itself.

No doubt this call will be echoed by others and the inevitable result, from a weak and compliant government, will be further legislation which will add to the ever rising tide of persecution against those who hold to a Biblical worldview.

Churches and individual Christians need to be aware of the current trends and continue to be watchful of our liberties."

The Caleb Foundation's object is, "*Promoting the Fundamentals of the Historic Evangelical Protestant Faith*".

Service looks like being Christian-only, with archbishop as its architect

Charles's dream of a multi-faith coronation is dashed



**By Steve Doughty
Social Affairs Correspondant**

PRINCE Charles's wish for a multi-faith coronation suffered a blow yesterday as the Church of England asserted the importance of a Christian only service.

The prince had hoped to invite Muslims, Hindus and others to take a role in the ceremony at which he becomes king.

But the Church said that the Archbishop of Canterbury will design the Westminster Abbey service.

The statement was the Church's first official pronouncement on how the coronation will be handled.

Its intervention made it clear that Charles will be on his own if he tries to introduce other faiths into the service.

The Church's leading lay official, General Synod Secretary General William Fittall, said yesterday: 'The coronation service is conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose duty this has normally been since 1066.

'Change it at your peril'

He, consequently, takes the lead in preparing the order of service for the approval of the sovereign.'

Mr Fittall, a former senior civil servant at the Home Office, made the statement in reply to a Synod member's request to

'clarify who decides the form of the next coronation service'.

Charles - who was 58 yesterday - has made known his yearning for a ceremony in which Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh beliefs take a place alongside the doctrines of the Church of England.

But the confirmation of Dr Rowan Williams's lead role in the service, added weight to the view that the prince will be compelled to accept a traditional and solely Anglican coronation.

Other faiths will get a look in only at a subsequent and symbolically less important event.

The Spectator magazine last month said Charles wants a second ceremony at Westminster Hall, inside the Palace of Westminster, which would admit Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh beliefs alongside non-Anglican Christians.

The prince, who will take the title Defender of the Faith when he becomes king, said 12 years ago that he wished to be seen rather as a Defender of Faith.

His desire to shift to a multi-faith monarchy alarmed many churchmen and politicians, who saw it undermining both long-standing constitutional practice and the monarch's position as Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

Charles is said to be determined to have

a 'focused and telecentric' coronation that reflects a new kind of reign.

But when he went to Lambeth Palace nearly four years ago, Dr Williams delivered a warning against undermining the Christian monarchy.

The archbishop said early in 2003: I am glad the Prince of Wales takes faith communities as seriously as he does, but the actual title, there is a historical, constitutional framework for it which you don't just change by fiat.'

Earlier this week, the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, told the Daily Mail that 'the Church of England reminds the nation that in this country the Queen is Defender of the Faith, head of the Commonwealth and head of state'.

He said of the relationship between Church and monarch: 'You change it at your peril'.

And this month the Bishop of Rochester, Dr Michael Nazir-Ali said 'the coronation service is singularly Christian in its form' and added that the Prince's duty is to defend 'the historic faith of our Church'.

Colin Hart, of the Christian Institute think tank said: 'There are huge obstacles to a multi-faith coronation service and the constitution would unravel if Prince Charles tried to do something different.'

Daily Mail Nov 2006

Archbishop Williams gets cool reception in Rome

The Pope received the Archbishop of Canterbury at a formal audience in the Papal Library on 23 November. They had 25 minutes of private talks and issued a joint statement.

They then worshipped together at the Redemptoris Mater Chapel. The service took the form of midday prayers with psalms sung in plainsong, in the presence of senior Vatican representatives, including Cardinal Walter Kaspar and Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor. They lunched together and exchanged gifts, but it is reported that on this occasion the Archbishop did not kiss the Pope's ring.

The gift presented by Dr Williams was an icon of Christ with standing figures of Pope St Gregory and St Augustine of Canterbury in prayer.

In his address, the Pope spoke of the 'strains' facing the Anglican Communion, referring to the ordination of women and homosexuality. He said, rather pointedly, 'It is our fervent hope that



The Pope receives the Archbishop

the Anglican Communion will remain grounded in the Gospels and the Apostolic Tradition'.

Dr Williams countered with remarks about meeting the challenges of modern society. However, both leaders propose to stand together on issues of the Middle East, terrorism, marriage, the family and materialism.

The occasion marked the fortieth anniversary of Archbishop Michael Ramsey's celebrated visit to Pope Paul VI in 1966 when they made their historic commitment to the goal of, "full visible communion in the truth of Christ". In

contrast, the Pope seems to have treated this Anglican visit as not particularly important. The Anglican and Roman Catholic delegations visited the Sistine Chapel for prayers. Cardinal Kaspar, president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, met for 'informal talks' and then worshipped with the St Egidio community at St Bartholomew's Church.

British Church Newspaper

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST ?

By John Blanchard

Earlier this year the British press had a field day with a story about BBC television newsreader Natasha Kaplinsky. It seems that she and her husband were declined an upgrade at a sumptuous hotel in Agra, India, close to the Taj Mahal.

She asked the receptionist, 'Do you know who I am?' The answer was apparently 'No!' The *Daily Telegraph* feature writer teasingly suggested that Kaplinsky's question was 'a perilous one to ask beyond a 10 mile radius of the BBC's Shepherd's Bush studios'.

A question of identity

Fast rewind 2,000 years, to a question that seems even more out of place. Another 'unknown' person living in a tiny Middle Eastern land asked his friends, 'Who do people say I am?'

Bearing in mind that he had been born into a working class family, lived in a town, on the wrong side of the tracks', and held no position in politics, business or religion, his question sounds presumptuous if not preposterous. Yet twenty centuries later millions of people are fascinated by it and deeply divided in their response.

The person concerned was a Jew called Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of the Christian faith. People are fascinated with his question because Christianity is the only religion based on the identity of its founder rather than on his teachings. The answer to his question is crucial, therefore, in assessing Christianity's integrity, value or power.

Did Jesus exist?

Some people say he was a myth. Almost exactly a year ago Luigi Cascioli filed a criminal lawsuit against Father Enrico Righi, the parish priest in the Italian holiday resort of Bagnoregio.

The basis of the lawsuit? The priest had written in his parish bulletin about the existence of Jesus. Cascioli alleged that in claiming that Jesus existed, Righi was deceiving the people and perpetuating a 2,000 year old myth.

The case was sensational but the charge by no means unique. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell (like Cascioli, an atheist) once wrote, 'Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Jesus ever existed at all'. Richard Dawkins repeats the

assertion in his latest anti-religious best seller, *The God delusion*.

But this is absurd. Quite apart from the mass of data in the Bible itself, at least nineteen celebrated first and second century authors record more than 100 facts about Jesus. One of these (the sceptical Greek philosopher Celsus) mounted a ruthless, sarcastic attack on virtually every aspect of Jesus' teaching but never once cast doubt on his existence! We can safely dismiss the 'myth' idea out of hand.

The carpenter's son

Others say he was just a man. Certainly, he was a man, not some kind of superman, angel or android! Untold numbers of paintings and drawings show him with wings, a halo, or some other supernatural feature. Films and plays have supplied other 'extras', but they are wrong. None of these exaggerations has any historical basis.

Once, struck by something he said, his hearers dismissed him as 'the carpenter's son' (Matthew 13:55). On another occasion someone mistook him for a gardener. He had all the usual physical limitations.

He could not stand on the day he was born, jump 100 feet in the air or be in two places at once. The Bible charts his normal development as 'a baby', 'a child' and 'a boy' (Luke 2:16, 40, 43).

We are told of times when he was tired, hungry and thirsty. At different times he was 'full of joy' (Luke 10:41) and 'overwhelmed with sorrow' (Mark 14:34). Clearly, those who say that he was a man are telling the truth ... *but not the whole truth!*

The promised Messiah

Jesus claimed he was the ultimate Messiah (Hebrew for 'anointed one'). He was not just another special person sent by God but God himself, who had come into the world to deal radically with mankind's greatest problem.

The New Testament calls him 'Christ' (the Greek equivalent of 'Messiah') over 500 times. We shouldn't be surprised. He fulfilled something like 300 Old Testament 'Messianic' prophecies covering his birth, character, power, influence, rejection, suffering, death, and even his resurrection from the dead!

This explains why Jesus had every right to say, 'The [Old Testament] Scriptures ... testify about me' (John 5:39) and did not hesitate to claim that he was truly divine as well as truly human.

On one occasion he bluntly stated, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30) and when friends asked him to show them God he simply replied, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

No other religious leader ever made such claims! But why would such a being come into the world? He came to deal with mankind's greatest problem.

Disaster

What is that problem? The Bible could not be clearer. One short statement sums it up 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). Our greatest problem is not physical, mental, psychological or financial. It is not about our relationships, our jobs, our bodies or our bank balances.

Our greatest problem is that although created 'in the image of God' (Genesis 1:27) man has rebelled against his Maker. Deciding to 'do their own thing', our first parents fatally fractured their relationship with God and found themselves under God's righteous condemnation.

Every one of us has inherited this disaster. By nature we are self centred rebels fighting against a holy God, preferring our ways to his. As someone has said, 'The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart'.

We are guilty, lost and helpless, cut off from the only one who can give our lives security, stability, dignity and meaning. We drift towards eternity, oblivious to the fearful punishment God has ordained for those who reject him.

Dealing with catastrophe

But how did Jesus deal with this catastrophe? In the most amazing way imaginable. He left heaven to dwell on earth for thirty years. He lived the perfect life that you and I have never lived.

He then allowed himself to be put to death in the place of sinners - bearing in his own body and spirit the penalty they deserved. It was the most phenomenal rescue mission the world has ever known.

And we know it was successful. How? Because after three days he rose from the dead, then later returned to heaven. He now offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who turn from their sin and trust him as their Saviour.

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Both women lived in the eighteenth century. Both were highly gifted. Both had marriages arranged for them at a young age. But there the resemblance ends.

Georgiana Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), was acclaimed for her beauty, style, wit, intelligence and strength of character. One of the top ten celebrities in the nation, she was admired and imitated.

When she changed her hairstyle, women in Paris and Vienna immediately copied her. A snippet of gossip about her boosted any newspaper's circulation, and journalists watched her every move.

Her husband was one of the wealthiest dukes in Britain, with vast tracts of land and beautiful homes - including Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and Devonshire House in London. Georgiana knew the leading politicians, playwrights, painters, actors and musicians of the time.

And yet she was an unhappy woman.



Having everything

When she married at the age of seventeen, she little realised that her older husband relied on his male friends and dogs for companionship, and on his long-term mistress for affection and sex. He only married her in order to produce a legitimate heir. He never fulfilled her need for affection.

She spent her life desperately looking for love and security but ended up living in a hideous threesome with her husband and his mistress - who also happened to be her best friend.

Georgiana's mother tried to point her towards God, but she became addicted to drink, drugs, gambling and overeating as she tried to fill the void in her life. Bouts of binge drinking and eating would be followed by desperate efforts to regain self control.

Once considered to be one of the most beautiful women in Europe, she was a physical wreck by the age of forty. She had everything, but she had nothing.

Having nothing

Marie Durand (1711-1776) was from a poor Protestant (Huguenot) family, and lived in France during the viciously intolerant Catholic *ancien regime*. When the authorities arrested her father in 1728, he hastily arranged a marriage for his young daughter to a man twenty five years her senior - in the vain hope that this man would be able to protect her.

But two years later Marie and her husband were arrested. Male Huguenots were killed; females were imprisoned. At the age of eighteen Marie was incarcerated in the notorious Tower of Constance - knowing that if she recanted her faith she could be released at any time.

But Marie refused to recant, and remained in that tower for thirty eight years. She endured nearly four decades in the dark - on the first floor of a tower with stone walls twenty feet thick and tiny slits for windows.

She found herself among about thirty other women, some of them criminals and others imprisoned for their biblical faith. Despite her youth, Marie encouraged women older than herself to remain faithful.

She led them in singing hymns, and became the light and hope of that pitiful group. She nursed the sick, wrote letters for the illiterate, composed petitions against their ill treatment, and never wavered in her faith in Christ.

Having nothing yet everything

Her eloquent written appeals to central government were seen by the philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau. As a result, the women were given a copy of the Psalms and were allowed out on the roof to get fresh air.

Marie read Psalms aloud each evening to the prisoners. Even the roughest criminals respected her, and she was a blessing to everyone. She remained strong in her faith and joyful in her eternal hope.

In 1768 the governor of Languedoc was so sickened by conditions in the tower that he ordered the release of all the women. So, thirty eight long years after being taken prisoner, Marie returned home. A Dutch church ensured that she was provided for. She died in 1776, eight years after her release.

I remember being taken as a teenager to see the Tower of Constance. It was almost overwhelming to visualise those girls and women, imprisoned in such conditions who could have walked free at any time by denying their faith in Christ and their confidence in salvation by grace alone.

The word 'register' was engraved in the Tower, probably by Marie herself. It is the local dialect for 'resister', French for 'resist!' That single word sums up her spiritual resolve, her huge courage and her great faith.

Because she feared God she knew no other fear. She had nothing, but she had everything.

Sharon James

The Weaker Vessel? A Price Above Rubies

For centuries woman have been maligned and subjected to social injustice because of Peter's famous quotation, that women are to be treated "as the weaker vessel" (I Peter 3:7). Unfairly, woman have often been treated as a sub-species, denied the vote, suffered inequality in pay and working conditions, all because men have interpreted this scripture as meaning that women are inferior to men. However, it is never a good idea to take scriptures in isolation and base whole theories upon them. In Proverbs 31, the wisest king recorded outlines in plain detail what God's design for an outstanding woman is.

This portion of the Word of God begins quite clearly by anchoring this woman as a wife submitted to her husband. Her husband "safely" (verse 11) trusts in her, and knows that she is devoted to doing him good. Women are instructed to be submissive to their husbands, as Peter says in I Peter 3:1, "Likewise, ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands." Submission, though, is not weakness. It is an active decision to bend one's own will for the glory of God and takes great strength of character.

Secondly, the woman of Proverbs is very much a homemaker. In reading Proverbs 31:13-19, we see that she is competent in many of the traditional skills that many modern young women snub. She works well with her hands with various textiles and one can imagine that her home would be comfortable with hand-made soft furnishings. She is a talented chef – and seeks out exotic recipes to please her family's palate as well as keeping them healthy. Because of her skill she is self-sufficient in being able to care for her family. Again, skill gathering of any kind is never seen as weakness, and the ability to create a beautiful, warm home and nourish your household takes a great deal of creative and kinaesthetic intelligence.

This woman is also a wonderful entrepreneur. She buys and sells property (verse 16), and sells her own excellent merchandise (verses 18 & 24), making her both an accomplished manufacturer and saleswoman. This poses an interesting question about whether or not women should work when they have children. This woman clearly did work, but she made sure it did not interfere with caring for her husband or children. She worked in order to ensure her family had a secure future, materially. In addition to this, she is also fair and experienced manager of staff. Verse 15 states that her servants are well organised – they are given a "portion" – a delegated amount of work so the staff can work as a team to best suit the needs of the household.

Not only is this woman an expert homemaker and shrewd businesswoman, but she also looks good. In verse 17, we read

that she keeps herself physically fit – a priority not unfamiliar to woman of today's "gym culture". She is a fabulous maker and wearer of clothes – wearing luxurious fabrics of silk and brocade (verse 22) in brilliant colours of purple and red. One can only assume that she dressed modestly (*and* beautifully) in keeping with I Peter 3:3.

Ultimately, it is woman in Proverbs' inner beauty and strength that classifies her as a "price above rubies". She is full of wisdom (not an idle gossip!), spiritual strength and love. She is a self-made woman of wealth, but still makes a priority of reaching out to the poor (verses 20, 25-26). It is no wonder her children bless her and her husband praises her. She is truly a remarkable woman, and certainly a formidable example to try and match.



So, in conclusion, as women we are called to be submissive to our husbands, and assist them in the work God has assigned them. Each woman is called to bend her will and connect it to that of her husbands in order to work together to achieve joint goals for God, have full responsibility for the running of the home, develop her skills to a professional level, develop a deep spirituality and look pretty good too! It is impossible to look upon a woman of virtue of this magnitude and see her as anything but very, very strong. Husbands are instructed to take care of such a woman "as unto the weaker vessel", and no wonder! A woman as amazing as this should be cared for as tenderly as though she were a fragile glass – for she is very precious indeed. God's idea of what a woman should be should inspire women to greatness – and certainly take special care when choosing a husband.

*Andrene Bamford,
member of Zion Baptist Church*

“...I WILL SHOW THEE MY FAITH BY MY WORKS.” *James 2:18*

AN UNDENIABLE WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

The following article illustrates that while some supposedly religious people are fuelled by hatred and revenge, the Christian response to unfair treatment is one of faith and love.

Three Sunday School teachers, Dr Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun are still shining for Christ a year into their three-year prison sentence in Indramayu, State Prison, West Java, Indonesia.

Wrongly convicted of illegally attempting to convert Muslim children who had willingly attended their Christian education programme, the three ladies have been a great testimony to the other 12 women prisoners with their quiet trust and faith in God. There was much unrest in the women's sections of the prison before Rebekka, Eti and Ratna arrived, but all the women now get on well. The guards have also been impressed, and the women are praying that the 400 men in the prison will be changed too by God's presence.

An Open Doors worker who recently visited the women said, “Instead of us being an encouragement to them, they were a tremendous encouragement to us! The women exude so much joy.”

Their faith has been clearly evident from the very beginning of their imprisonment, when Ratna told Open Doors, “My hope is of course for the judge to set me free; but if his verdict is not so, then - like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, I will continue to love God more than anything. He will give me the best because He is in control.”

Ratna explained how her 78-year-old father who lives in the north of Sumatra has also relied on the Lord during this difficult time:

“I was very afraid that he would be so shocked at the news of my imprisonment that he would collapse and die. But then I thought ‘He is a believer, he loves the Lord, so even if he dies he will go to heaven.’

“My father eventually learned of my

imprisonment through my sister. He reacted by saying ‘I’m proud of my daughter for the suffering she’s experiencing because of Christ. Just be bold, keep on walking in the will of God, keep preaching about the love of Christ without fear. And now I go round my hometown and tell everybody that my daughter is in prison and I’m proud of her.’

“His message to me was that this is the greatest thing God is doing in my life and he said ‘don’t expect to get out of prison too soon: finish what the Lord assigned you to do. Keep on preaching the Gospel.’

I believe God has no plan in his heart to destroy us or cause us displeasure, but rather only to prosper us, to strengthen us, for the good of those who love him.

It is an honour to suffer for Christ... And God never makes mistakes in our life never.”

When asked how the rest of her family have reacted to her imprisonment, Rebekka said, “At first, my family were shocked at the imprisonment. But during the trial, my family were able to come to terms with the fact that this is something we have to accept as part of our Christian life and witnessing.”

At 39 years of age, Ratna is the youngest of the three ladies. She has two sons, the youngest being only three years old. She said, “They miss me so much, and I miss them just as much; but God’s grace is sufficient. Joshua, my eldest, was distraught but he had a change in attitude towards my imprisonment and is now strong and accepting.

I firmly believe this has been the Lord’s doing and is the result of the prayers of our brothers and sisters all over the world.”

Her husband Sembiring works away from home a lot, so her sons currently live with her sister in Sumatra. In the past year, Ratna has seen them only twice.

When asked what she will do once released from prison, Ratna replied, I want to go home: I want to be with my children and hug them. I also want to see my father again, and cry on his chest. Those are the two things I would like to do.”

Eti, aged 44, is married to Sutrisno. When asked how her family had coped with her persecution, she said it was her son who had been especially affected:

“He was afraid as well as very ashamed of having his mother put in prison. Children of course started to mock him.”

They have two daughters (aged 20 and 14) and a son, aged seven. Her husband is taking care of the children as well as working.

Rebekka, aged 48, is married and has both a daughter and son at university. She and her husband also have an adopted daughter Linda, who daily rides 75 miles on her motorbike with her young daughter to bring food to the women because the prison meals are so poor. Paul, an Open Doors worker from the UK, who visited the ladies last June commented, I have been in many countries where driving was dangerous, but this really was the worst. We have to uphold Linda in our prayers because she is taking her life into her hands every day in order to deliver food to the women in prison.”

Rebekka is a GP and is now using her medical skills by giving voluntary medical assistance to other prisoners.

We asked Eti what she would say to Christians who have not shared her experiences and she replied, “If I could give a message to the Church that has not yet experienced persecution, my message would be: number one, keep on walking with the Lord. Second, do not be afraid. Thirdly, expect persecution.”

Open Doors is running an ongoing letter writing campaign for Rebekka, Eti and Ratna. In the past year, the women have received 15,000 cards from all over the world. Their fellow prisoners are immensely impressed by all those cards and have said, “What good care Christians take of one another!”

Open Doors paid for the women’s lawyers and Open Doors workers attended the trials, including the final appeal in February 2006.

Open Doors workers continue to visit the ladies in prison and report that Rebekka, Eti and Rama ask for ongoing prayer.

For more information contact, Open Doors UK & Ireland Phone: 01993 885400, email info@opendoorsuk.org or visit www.opendoorsuk.org

English Churchman 2006

**ALL ARTICLES IN
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EVIDENCE**

WCC fetes China's Government sponsored church

The World Council of Churches delegation, led by WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, met Bishop Ting at his residence in Nanjing on 17 November.

Ting is the honorary chairman of the government sponsored Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) which is shunned by most Chinese Christians, who meet in house churches and are severely persecuted by the Government.

Kobia praised Ting for his contribution to the ecumenical movement. "You are one of these

revered, respected and loved within the wider ecumenical movement," Kobia told Ting.

The WCC general secretary also affirmed the Council's commitment to being in solidarity with the Christian Council of China of which Ting is president. "We are here to say that the WCC is prepared to accompany the continuing process of theological reconstruction that you have already so well begun to articulate in China."

British Church Newspaper 24.11.06



Bishop Ting (left) and Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

Horrific sufferings of the Chinese Christians as Western leaders honour Government church

As the Archbishop of Canterbury and Samuel Kobia, General secretary of the world Council of Churches visit the Government sponsored churches, terrible stories of persecution emerge from China.

Gao Zhisheng, a prominent human rights lawyer who has fearlessly defended religious freedom, has been charged with 'inciting subversion of state power'. Official notification of his arrest was only given to his wife over a month later on 21 September. He may face years in prison. Gao has received a number of threats to his life and security, including being the target of several attempted 'accidents'.

Meanwhile concern is mounting for church leader Xu Shuangfu and others who were sentenced to death in June for serious crimes after a trial in which Xu and others testified of horrific torture used to extract confessions. Xu, the leader of The Three Grades of Servants, described how he was hung in the air for five hours and how interrogators tied his fingers, toes etc with wire connected to an electrical supply. The defendants showed the judge the injuries from torture but received no response.

Besides the violence against Xu himself, the female leaders amongst the group of 17 sentenced were stripped before being

tortured by male interrogators and placed in male cells where they were gang raped by the prisoners. The fears for Xu's life and those sentenced to death with him are imminent and grave. CSW is urging for a retrial at which evidence obtained through torture is excluded.

The torture and abuses against Xu's group were even worse than those used against the South China Church when the authorities sentenced the leader Pastor Gong Shengliang and others to death in 2001. After an outcry by the US President and others the cases were reviewed and Pastor Gong's sentence was changed to a life sentence. Pastor Gong remains in prison, where he has been beaten so severely that he has slipped into a coma and his life has been at risk on a number of occasions.

The picture presented to the Archbishop by his hosts should therefore not be seen as representative of Christianity in its fullness in China. The vast majority of China's estimated 70 million Christians will not associate themselves with the bodies by which the Archbishop was hosted.

These Christians see the official church as being compromised in theology and practice and the existence of a church controlled by an atheist state as being fundamentally contrary to Christian doctrine.

British Church Newspaper 24.11.06

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Hello Boys and Girls,

I am sure you all received a gift or probably gifts over the past months and I am almost sure that already you have become tired or fed up with some of them. Some may even have become broken. That's what happens in this life. Even adults get fed up with their gifts or possessions. And so now that you have been given gifts you wanted, now that you have become used to them, you will now want something else, something you saw your friend with or saw it advertised. But if you ever get these other items, you will get fed up with these too.

The Lord Jesus spoke of a gift we would never get tired of and that is the gift of eternal life. He said it was like living water and once we drink of this water we would never feel thirsty again. You can read about this gift in the Bible, John Chapter 4.

And so I hope and pray that all who read this will have received this wonderful gift.

Lots of Love from Mrs. Glass



WOMEN'S VIEW

Hello Everyone,

May I wish you all a Blessed and Happy New Year and because it is a new year I am printing below some of the sayings my husband kept in his study and which I have now put onto his notice board, if they weren't already there. Trust they will bless you.

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears however measured or far away"

"When I get on my knees, God helps me stand up to anything"

"When it is dark - attack! "

"One should live one's life as if one had only one hour to live"

"The hand of God is always there. Why not take it tonight?"

Lift up your heart to Him in prayer and tell Him of your plight

Tell Him you feel you can't go on and need Him by your side

His love is everlasting and His arms are open wide

Just pray to Him and ask His help and He will be your guide

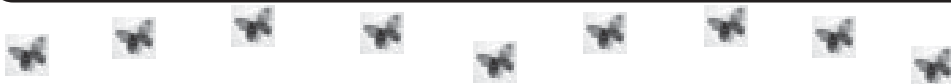
For He has trod that way before, the way of bitter pain.

He knows your feeling of despair and all your doubts and fears

He will be with you to the end and wipe away your tears"

W. Emery

"Do not stand at my grave and cry. I am not there. I did not die"



God Bless. M.Glass

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