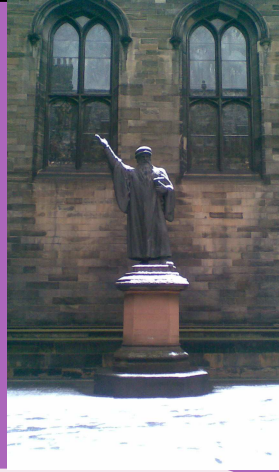




Rainy Dayze

FEB / MARCH 2010



'repent it's lent'
edition

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On Being:

Is this the fast I choose?

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Isaiah 58:6-7

I've been spending quite a bit of my time with John Knox this year. We've been chewing over the matter of the Scottish Protestant practice of public fasting in 1566. For Knox, public fasting was a sign of the covenantal relationship between God and the people of God. Its basic aim, like most Protestant disciplinary rituals, was to effect reconciliation. But it was also a very political act.

In the *Order of the General Fast*, 1566, Knox railed against a whole host of matters and, in the midst of these, there is a highly critical rebuke to a society that he believed encouraged injustice. He cried out against merchants who grew fat by cheating the public through the use of falsely balanced scales; he blasted the aristocracy —

earls, barons and lords who oppressed their labourers just because they could; he condemned greedy property owners who forced their tenants into homelessness.

Knox called on the God of justice to intervene but he didn't merely leave it up to God: he understood

covenant relationship as something which required action not only by God, but by the people of God. Fasting in the 'face' of the public was an act of witness—a witness to the injustice of humanity compared to the justice of God. Those made invisible and silenced by injustice were able to be seen and heard through this act of witness. It was the fast Knox chose to highlight the iniquity of inequity; a fast that was both spiritual and political. As an aside, although Knox was no fan of the traditional seasons of the church year, the timing of the General Fast did just 'happen' to coincide with the start of Lent—perhaps a subtle attempt at continuity in the midst of change?!

What is the fast we choose? This Lent, rather than *giving up* something perhaps the fast we choose might be to *take on* challenging systemic structures of power—structures that reek and creak and are rotten to the core. Structures which dehumanise those who are created in God's image. In this, I'm reminded of Iranaeus who said 'the glory of God is a human being fully alive, and the life of that human is the image of God.'

God of Justice, God of compassion, show us your image in those we encounter; help us to be your people of justice and compassion, give us courage to stand up for those bowed down by the weight of injustice.

Free us from the temptation to collude and 'be comfortable'. May the fast we choose be life-affirming and love-giving, shining your light of hope into the world. Amen.

Nikki Macdonald

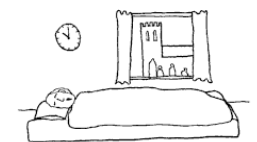
LENT



LENT IS A TIME FOR QUIET REFLECTION AND CONTEMPLATION



IT IS A SEASON OF ABSTINENCE AND FASTING



SOME CHRISTIANS GIVE SOMETHING UP DURING LENT



OTHERS CHOOSE TO CARRY OUT ACTS OF PENANCE

"the Word became flesh..."

40

Every morning during Lent (except weekends) at nine in the Oldham Room

A chance to read through the Gospel of John and pray that the Word would transform New College and ourselves.

17 February - 26 March

It's not to late to take up Lent: '40'

"40... the Word became flesh" is an exciting new alternative to "giving up something" for Lent. "40" is a student prayer group, meeting every Monday-Friday of Lent at 9AM in the Oldham Room, New College. Operating from Wednesday 17th February to Good Friday. Committing to daily prayer for Lent is an alternative to craving chocolate for 40 days, and it's something that people from any course/year/denomination are welcome

to join. We will be praying our way through John's Gospel, reading it as a prayerful text. If you would like to attend, just set your alarm clock and come along - you can turn up every day, every Thursday, once... whatever suits you. Whatever Lent means to you, you will be warmly welcomed to join the group.

Gartmore Conference: 5-9 April

And so the conference cycle spins 'round once more to Gartmore. Looks like some great speakers on the prog. Don't forget to bring the ginger beer, popcorn and an open mind... musical instruments would be rather excellent too.

Geneva trip: 10-14 June

Don't miss this year's candidates trip: a visit to the 'most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles'. No, apparently it's not New College Knox is referring to, but Geneva. If you're wanting to go, this is just a wee reminder to book your tickets ASAP.

This Valentine's Day, give the reforming scent of timeless theology.



Transform yourself by the renewing of your mind with the irresistible fragrance of tulip and French grape as you discover the incredible beauty of God's sovereign grace.

Smell Like An Old Theologian
REFORMATION
by Calvin

SACREDSANDWICH.COM

Newsletter Notes:

Rainy Dayze attempts to come out twice per semester unless the dark forces conspire and conquer. If you'd like to write a short article or poem for inclusion; fancy doing the wee prayer/ reflection slot for 'On Being'; have ideas for competitions/ or a wee silly something for 'Candidate Lite'; or would like to get involved with helping to put together the newsletter... here's your chance! Talk to Nikki.

Next edition: the 'Resurrection Shuffle'

Copy due mid-March, next edition due Holy Week. Articles no longer than 150-250 words. Email Nikki: N.M.Macdonald-2@sms.ed.ac.uk

The AGM: report and social

The New College Church of Scotland Students' Association (NCCSSA) annual cycle is coming to an end once more, and it is fitting to reflect on what candidates have been doing this year. Of course candidates contribute much to the life of New College, as individuals and as a group, and in a wide variety of ways. However, there are particular projects which should be reported in context of the NCCSSA's annual general meeting. The meeting is due to take place on **Friday 26th March at 4pm in The Wash** and all are invited.

According to the official constitution the Association exists to "deal with any matter relating to the training and welfare of candidates" through liaison with the University and Boards of the Church, and through organising social and educational events. It would be fair to say that both aspects of this role have been in evidence this year. The hugely successful study trip to Rome took place during the Summer of 2009 and is to be followed by a similar trip to Geneva in 2010. David Fergusson and Alison Jack are to be thanked for all they do to create these opportunities and to make them such a wonderful experience for candidates.

The first of our social events was an outdoor welcome gathering held in New College gardens in August when the building was alive with festival goers. It was good to meet with two new candidates for auxiliary ministry that day and I know that they appreciated the welcome. Our new look noticeboard at the top of the tower staircase, and revival of Rainy Daze, has helped regular communica-

tions amongst candidates, and with the wider New College community throughout the year. Both of our training events were well attended because they addressed a particular need expressed by candidates. In each case the training centred on a visit to a funeral director and crematorium. The Christmas Social was also well attended, with Jane Denniston, David Fergusson, Alison Jack and Richard Ellis all coming along too to celebrate Christmas informally with candidates.

The success of the Blytheswood Shoebox collection has already been reported but deserves particular mention, not least because it involved the whole New College community. It has even been rumoured that the collection may become a tradition at New College over the years to come.

On a personal note it has been a joy to serve as President on the Committee and I wish to formally record my appreciation of all the quiet hard work which has been done by Andy Haddow (Secretary), Iain May (Treasurer) and Nikki Macdonald (Communications). We have shared a journey together with all New College candidates, and in the steadfast love of God.

O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart (1Kings 8.23)

Ruth Halley (President), NCCSSA 2009-10.

Kirk law: prepare to be mesmerised

If you thought telling people at dinner parties that you're studying theology was a conversation-stopper, try being a Clerk of the General Assembly and a specialist in ecclesiastical constitutional law for 14 years. You wouldn't credit that people's eyes can glaze instantly like that...

Contrast that reaction with the looks of pleasant surprise that cross our probationer ministers' faces when they 'get' what Church Law is about, and realise what an intriguing machine it is for enabling the Church's work. In the area of ministry alone, our legislation sets out a structure to ensure that God's call to ordained service is heeded and answered with everything that's needed for preparation, education, training, discernment and eventual deployment. It provides the means to hold our spiritual leaders to the highest moral standards, but ensures their places in our method of governance and policy-making. Throughout the Church's life, its law provides the 'how' that brings to life 'what' we do in Christ's name. It's endlessly intriguing; honest.

Law, especially Church Law, must be the servant of Grace.

So I have had a couple of wee rules of life in my line of work. First, when someone said 'It's terrible: you can't do X because Church law won't let you', I assumed they meant 'Phew, I won't have to do X'. And I invariably responded 'Tell me exactly which law is stopping you and I'll see if the Church could get rid of it.' Can you believe it; I never heard from them again on the matter? And second, when someone said 'What are my legal rights in this situation?' I expected – nine times of out ten – that the really important question was 'What is the broken relationship in this situation?'. Law never comes before the mission of the Gospel.

If you expect one day to study the law of your Church tradition, prepare to be mesmerised.

Marjory MacLean—former Depute Clerk to the General Assembly



Just another day in the life...

...of an overworked MSO.

The alarm goes off at 6.30. I lie there. Will I get up? Now? Now, maybe? Oh, okay, time to get up. With luck, a following wind and half a litre of tea I am in the office between 7.30 and 8.00, on a

bad day, 8.30 and 9.00. Time to update my clock as I've been out of the office at a conference for a week, catch up on emails, debrief voicemail and try to make sense of the day. At this point a familiar feeling is growing somewhere under my rib cage, oh yes, it's panic! I really should have phoned these speakers weeks ago. And where am I going to find that information? And I suppose I really should return that call, although we have been trying to speak for a week and our answering services are becoming so friendly that it seems a shame to intrude on a budding relationship. Time for another cup of tea and some 'affectionate banter' with colleagues.

I have discovered that if ever I feel I am on top of things, it's because I have forgotten something. Several phone calls and

emails later it is time for tea break. The MSOs descend *en masse* to the café. I won't have a scone today...but they look good...oh well!

Back to the desk and final prep for the Interim Review that I am doing later. Phone call from a speaker to say she can't do the session after all. The conference is three weeks away. "No, that's no problem, quite understand." AGGHHHHH! Jot down some notes of people to call who might be able to do it instead. Leave the office to drive to the review meeting. Lunch is a sandwich in the car on the way. Reviews, local, annual, interim, final, are fun, although I realise that they can be tense for Candidates. I get to meet people, and I'm out of the office, and sometimes I get to go to exotic places like.....Inverness.

An hour and a half later the review is over and I head off to meet a candidate who wants to discuss a pastoral issue. This feels like ministry and is actually a really positive thing to be involved in. I leave feeling that we might have moved things on a bit.

I drive home and don't quite miss the rush hour traffic. Another long, but beautifully varied day. Thank goodness this is not a desk job.

Jane Denniston—Ministries Support Officer



New arrivals!



Since the last edition of Rainy Dayze there have been some 'interesting developments'!

Introducing the lovely Millie Rose Jefferson...

...And to our right, meet Cameron Andrew Haddow, blissfully sleeping through all the excitement.

Congratulations to both the Jefferson and Haddow families on the safe arrival of these two very cute people.



Candidate 'lite': Stop Sign Hermeneutics



Suppose you're travelling to work and you see a stop sign. What do you do? That depends on how you exegete the stop sign.

1. A post modernist deconstructs the sign (knocks it over with his car), ending forever the tyranny of the north-south traffic over the east-west traffic.
2. Similarly, a Marxist refuses to stop because he sees the stop sign as an instrument of class conflict. He concludes that the bourgeois use the north-south road and obstruct the progress of the workers in the east-west road.
3. A fundamentalist, taking the text very literally, stops at the stop sign and waits for it to tell him to go.
4. A highly educated Catholic rolls through the intersection because he believes he cannot understand the stop sign apart from its interpretative community and tradition. In the absence of an interpretative community, he passes through in peace.
5. An average Christian doesn't bother to read the sign but he'll stop the car if the car in front of him does.
6. An educated evangelical preacher might look up 'STOP' in his lexicon of English and discover that it can mean:
 - (a) something which prevents motion, such as a plug for a drain;
 - (b) a location where a train or bus lets off passengers.
 The main point of his sermon the following Sunday on this text is: when you see a stop sign, it is a place where the traffic is naturally clogged, so it is a good place to let off passengers from your car.
7. An Orthodox Jew does one of two things: (a) take another route to work that doesn't have a stop sign so that he doesn't run the risk of disobeying the Law; or (b) stop at the sign, say 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who hast given us thy commandment to stop,' wait three seconds according to his watch, and then proceed. Incidentally, the Talmud has the following comments on this passage: Rabbi Meir says: 'He who does not stop shall not live long.' R. Hillel says: 'Cursed is he who does not count to three before proceeding.' R. Simon ben Yudah says: 'Why three? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.' R. ben Isaac says: 'Because of the three patriarchs.' R. Yehuda says: 'Why bless the Lord at a stop sign? Because it says, "Be still and know that I am God."'
8. A scholar from the Jesus Seminar concludes that the passage 'STOP' undoubtedly was never uttered by Jesus himself because being the progressive Jew that he was, he would never have wanted to stifle people's progress. Therefore 'STOP' must be a textual insertion belonging entirely to stage III of the gospel tradition, when the church was first confronted by traffic in its parking lot.
9. An Old Testament scholar points out that there are a number of stylistic differences between the first and second half of the expression 'STOP'. For example, 'ST' contains no enclosed areas and five line endings, whereas 'OP' contains two enclosed areas and only one line termination. He concludes that the author for the second part is different from the author of

the first part and probably lived hundreds of years later. Later scholars determine that the second half is itself actually written by two separate authors because of similar stylistic differences between the 'O' and the 'P'.

10. Because of the difficulties in interpretation, another OT scholar amends the text, changing the 'T' to 'H'. 'SHOP' is much easier to understand in context than 'STOP' because of the multiplicity of stores in the area. The textual corruption probably occurred because 'SHOP' is so similar to 'STOP' on the sign several streets back, that it is a natural mistake for a scribe to make. Thus the sign should be interpreted to announce the existence of a shopping area. If this is true, it could indicate that both meanings are valid, thus making the thrust of the message 'STOP (AND) SHOP'.

11. A 'prophetic' preacher notices that the square root of the sum of the numeric representations of the letters S-T-O-P (sigma-tau-omicron-pi, in the Greek alphabet), multiplied by 40 (the number of testing), and divided by four (the number of the world: north, south, east, and west) equals 666. Therefore, he concludes that stop signs are the dreaded 'mark of the beast', a harbinger of divine judgement upon the world, and must be avoided at all costs.