

One Scotland, Many Cultures

May 2011



One Scotland, Many Cultures

Introduction

In writing this report our aim is to encourage the Church at all levels to reflect on its engagement with a rapidly-changing society in modern Scotland. We are aware that we should respond creatively and positively to the opportunities and challenges presented by social change that have been dramatic in the second half of the 20th century and which seems to continued to gather pace during the first decade of the 21st century. Increased mobility and easier means of transport and communication globally bring new ideas and new migrant populations to Scotland on a scale never seen before.

Radical Hospitality

St Luke tells the story of Jesus visiting the home of a Pharisee for dinner. He said to his host that he should not invite his friends or relatives or rich neighbours to dinner in case they invite him back, in which case he is repaid. Instead, Jesus told him, when he gives a banquet he should invite the poor, the lame and the blind. As Christians, we are about breaking down the barriers that keep us apart and about building bridges that lead us to ways we can walk together. Looking to the deep and rich images we can bring to bear from scripture, our stories point to a society that not only welcomes strangers and foreigners, but more profoundly has a shared empathy with their needs. Deuteronomy 24:17-22 forms the cornerstone of this foundation as we identify at every level with the people of the exile, the ones on the margins. They become the most important priority and a bias towards their welfare is explicitly written into our code of conduct and train of thought. This is clear and controversially counter-cultural.

Societies that grow in diversity as new cultural influences enter and take root are not a new occurrence, although with modern travel and a global economy that stimulates a migrating population, multi-ethnic societies have evolved in ways unforeseeable even a generation ago. As a way of unpacking our thoughts, and as a response to the particular question, 'what would the Gospel principles involved in the Church's reflections on the issue be?' our response to the issues surrounding migration and the multi-ethnic nature of our emerging population in Scotland has to be informed by our scriptural call to a radical hospitality.

The story of the Syro-Phonician woman in Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28, who argues her case for inclusion with Jesus and wins; the innumerable times Jesus knocks down barriers that society has carefully put in place (the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 1-42, the healing and forgiving stories where he refuses to conform to the codes which keep people in the places society deems appropriate: the woman with the flow of blood whose story is found in three gospels - Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48, the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-45, the forgiving of the woman caught in adultery in John 8: 1-11). All these express the radically different desire God has for us as we share this world. We share a common humanity and history; throughout time, countries have found themselves in different situations, sometimes the powerful, sometimes the ones in need. If we begin to see ourselves as the sharers of one world rather than the keepers of separate cultures, we move more towards our image of body and family.

We know that we, as people of God, have not 'arrived', but are always on a journey – we are a people seeking to learn and to be changed. Once we feel we have 'arrived' we become spiritually impoverished. We are required to have an openness to where God is

leading us, to other people. And the Church of Scotland at its heart has a conviction that it is, and needs to be 'reformed and always reforming'. This is not simply in the sense of restructuring committees or Presbytery reviews but that we, as a people, are always changing as we respond to the love and inspiration of God, and we should expect challenges.

Jesus called his disciples to be *salt of the earth* and *light for the world*. Salt can make a real difference. Salt preserves; salt brings out flavour; salt is antiseptic, may sting an open wound but will bring healing. We want the Church to be seen as relevant, risky and always needing to be reformed. And as light that reflects the love and truth of Christ, the Church must not just be like a lighthouse to warn of hazardous rocks, danger and destruction but also of people who are to be like street lights, pointing to and reflecting Christ, showing a better way in dark and uncertain times. We need to respect the history of the Church, and that for many people, it needs to be pastor as well as prophet, but there also has to be open to change, as well as the ability to challenge (sensitively) and care for folk pastorally.

The images which frame the faith we embrace have a pervasive and all-encompassing empathy for those who find themselves on the margins of society. In other words, 'welcome' is essential to the practice of Christianity. For us to examine our understanding of Scotland as one nation with many cultures sharing together and for us to move towards a vision of how the Church might address these important issues, we look to the deep imagery found in the stories which shape our beliefs. In these sacred texts, we are given a lens through which to see a different vision.

The issue of identity and culture sit in tension sometimes with the gospel call to be 'one body,' 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free' (Galatians 3:28).

If one part (country or culture) is too insistent on its separateness and unique place (nationalism over a global awareness), then it can pull the one body apart. Our Christian voice (i.e. a response from the Church of Scotland) can offer a different way of moving forward – one where the country embraces the part it has to play within the broader context of a global community. This is different from a vision where the greater emphasis is placed on our unique history and culture. While we have much to celebrate as a nation, the voice possibly lacking is the one calling for a joined-up, clear understanding that we have a part to play in a much bigger arena. An exploration of where we go as a modern multi-cultural Scotland is a challenge to be relished.

The story of Ruth points to commitment across racial and societal divisions (as a portrait of a shared global family rather than a small snapshot of one culture), the call to love your neighbour and (those who others might assume is) your enemy in Mark 12:30, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and Mark 12:31 opens the door to conversation and compromise rather than circling our wagons against the onslaught of others. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 (the love of God can come through the most unexpected of people without them being part of the Christian community) reminds us that we need to tap into and claim the gifts offered from the world's vast store of experience, not assuming that we have the corner on wisdom.

The acceptance of diversity as gift is also an image the church possibly needs to consider anew. The ancient story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) has a traditional interpretation that is well known: the story has been seen as one principally concerned with the sin of human pride...pride that would lead the survivors of the flood to attempt to get higher than

God by building a tower...pride that would be punished by God when God outsmarts them
- confuses their language and scatters them across the face of the earth.

The story of the Tower of Babel is sometimes understood to show that linguistic and cultural diversity are a result of God's judgement on human ambition. However, the previous chapter, the table of nations, suggests that these identities were a fulfilment of the covenant with Noah. At Babel/Babylon, God condemned imperial dreams of linguistic and cultural uniformity, so that dispersal began to achieve the divine purpose of filling the earth. Babylon itself continued to stand for the arrogance of empire, as in the books of Daniel and Revelation, contrasted with Zion and the new Jerusalem.

"Be fruitful and multiply and abound on all the earth." In our story, that was God's command to the children of Noah. And we are the benefactors of that Godly creative desire.

Cultural diversity is an increasing reality in every contemporary society. It is a major aspect of globalisation and presents enormous opportunities for the Church of Christ in service and in mission. The Day of Pentecost declared the gift of God's Spirit for "all flesh" whatever the language spoken, underlined for Peter in Caesarea (Acts 10.34: "God shows no partiality"), and Paul in Athens (Acts 17.26,8 "all nations ... are God's offspring").

How we react to our understanding of scripture, informed by our own experience and tradition, must not only be an emotional or intellectual response, but also needs to inform how we be Church, our actions, relationships and processes.

In our lives diversity is a blessing, not a curse. Many cultures are a tribute to the wondrous work of God, a God not content with monochrome humanity, but an entity who crafted a world full of difference, a God who revelled in diversity. A God who says, 'Look at my big, wide world! Marvel at the nuance of it all. Traipse over the globe and you will discover the inordinate beauty of humankind.'

What a glimpse of the brilliance of God - to claim this for us – to plan and dream and desire diversity. To be scattered across the face of the earth is to be promised newness and a fresh perspective – a symphony instead of a solo – a choir with all the subtlety that blended voices sing.

Thank God that the human race has such diversity to gather from. We bring our fresh eyes and hearts, minds and ideas to a world that embraces it and stirs it and creates something else altogether. Without this gift from God, think of the portraits and vignettes; think of the subtle and sacred sharpness we would have missed.

This theme continues in the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), when the people hear the words about Christ not in one language, but in their own native languages – the beauty of diversity celebrated symbolically as all cultures are embraced, acknowledged, and ultimately included in the one message.

In this report, we uphold these interwoven images and expressions contained within our sacred stories. They inform our arguments and discussions, they work through our actions, they call us to reflect on our role and purpose in a global context.

Where Scotland comes from

The idea of Scotland as a nation is an ancient and remarkably persistent one – from the first King of Scots Kenneth MacAlpine in the 8th century, through the wars of independence during the 13th and 14th centuries to the union of the crowns in 1603 and the Treaty of Union with England in 1707, through incorporation into and participation in the British Empire and 19th century industrialisation, through two world wars in the 20th century, to the re-establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999. All through this time a distinct Scottish identity has been maintained.

The territory of Scotland has, by comparison with most other European nations, largely retained its present boundaries since the late 13th century, with the addition of the Orkney and Shetland Isles during the 15th century. The land border with England – Scotland's only land border - is one of oldest extant borders in the world, having been defined in 1237 by the treaty of York. Perhaps the earliest defining statement of a Scottish sense of nationhood is contained in the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320 – predating by five centuries the rise of 19th century nationalism in Europe and elsewhere.

It is important to recognise that despite this long history, Scotland has never been ethnically or culturally homogeneous. Rather, Scotland has developed as a nation through a process of continuous migration and settlement. The very name 'Scotland' derives from the Scots people who ruled the kingdom of Dalriada in western Scotland in the 8th century, whose origins were in Ireland. Even in these early days, as Scotland emerged as a settled kingdom, added to the cultural mix were the Picts in the north and east, Angles in the south east, and celtic-speaking Britons in the south west, not to mention the Norsemen whose cultural and linguistic legacy is clearly visible in Caithness and Sutherland, the Hebrides, and most notably, in Orkney and Shetland.

In later centuries, French-speaking Normans, Flemish merchants and others settled in Scotland during the middle ages. While Scottish kings claimed sovereignty over the whole territory of modern-day Scotland, the traditional Gaelic-speaking, clan-based culture of the Highlands and Islands retained a great deal of autonomy, and the cultural divide between the Gaelic-speaking highlands of Scotland and the Scots (and later, English) – speaking lowlands is still evident today. This is despite the large-scale migration of Gaelic-speaking 'Highlanders' to the lowland urban centres following the Clearances of the 19th Century, a century which also saw the beginning of large-scale immigration from Ireland, Italy and other countries. The response of the Church of Scotland to what was largely Roman Catholic immigration was lamentable as was illustrated as late as the 1920'S in the position adopted by the General Assembly While this has long since been repudiated there is a clear lesson that an easy trap to fall into is basing policies on 'fear of the other'. This report sits in this context of repentance for what has gone before, and to seek continued forgiveness from our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, for whom the pain of sectarianism in some places in Scotland is still very real.

The process of migration – immigration and emigration – has continued throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, with the arrival of new groups of immigrants from, for example, Pakistan and Hong Kong, and more recently from mainland China, central and eastern Europe, and indeed from all over the world, who have made Scotland their home, who have settled here, found work, established businesses, raised their families, and contribute to the growing richness and diversity of modern Scottish society. Adding to this diversity is the continuing circulation of population within Scotland and across the United

Kingdom especially with England with whom there is considerable shared and often conflicting history.

If we are to engage effectively with the changing nature of Scottish society, it is clear that we first have to acknowledge this historical diversity, to realise that as a nation Scotland has always been influenced by successive waves of immigration, and that our most recent experiences are not a unique development. Acknowledging that history is the key to challenging what may be very strong ideas about what it means to be 'Scottish' based on assumptions about who the 'indigenous' Scots are – assumptions that need to be challenged.

Migration

Like many nations, Scotland has evolved at least in part through the influence of waves of migration, both in and out, over many years. Scotland has historically been a country of net out-migration. In the past decade Scotland has become a country of net in-migration; in the last six years net in migration (from the rest of the UK as well as overseas) has been at least 19,000 per annum.

Recently there has been significant increase in populations from other cultures that had previously been non-existent or very rare in Scotland. This has added something new and, for many folk, exciting to our nation's life. But diversity can also be a difficult and uncomfortable place for people. It requires a degree of confidence in our identity to have the capacity to celebrate difference and diversity.

In recent times the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism have developed to respond to the huge influx of new arrivals to Scotland. As a celebration of diversity, "one nation, many cultures" may seem a good journey to be on for most of us, but there is a view in some places that it is undermining who we are as a nation. In the same manner this mantra must be lived out authentically rather than being a well-repeated bland statement. Having been very much part of the shaping of the Scottish nation over the last 450 years, it is crucial that the Church of Scotland takes the time to reflect on what it wants to contribute to this public debate.

How do migrant people living in Scotland see themselves? Compare this attitude to migrants to France or USA, where to live there is to become French or American, where an individual's culture is absorbed or made subservient to the all-encompassing French values or American dream.

Identity is complex; geography, social experience, family; aspirations and many other factors may contribute. People's sense of identity is an individual think and should resist the temptation of labelling others.

The Industrial Revolution and the Highland Clearances were early signs of a transient population within Scotland, and after the First and Second World Wars people found themselves in a different culture in cities and those left behind in rural areas had to make sense of their reconfigured communities and the roles vacated. In more modern times this pattern has been repeated with the growth of commuter suburbs and with the recent economic downturn people have been forced to move around the country for work.

Moving from one country to another is a much more significant move in many levels than movement within a nation, and it can leave a great impact on individuals, communities and

nations as a whole. The issues of self image and belonging apply just as much to internal migrants as they do to those from other nations.

The movement of individuals to small close-knit communities who are not used to newcomers / incomers can cause local tensions. The rise of suburban housing estates can create bases for people to work and socialise in cities, but come back home only to sleep. Even city centre living can be a lonely experience and this is where churches can provide radical hospitality. Greyfriars in Edinburgh and St Georges, Tron in Glasgow are two examples where such activity takes place.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Church of Scotland?

We have a radical gospel of good news to LIVE AND proclaim. We now live in a society which is unfamiliar to many people in the Church: beyond church halls and session meetings, the world is variously described as *post-modern*, *post-Christian* and even *post-secular*.

In post modern society understanding of 'membership' is changing within the church but also within all spheres of life. Once the 'culture' of the Kirk resonated closely with the culture of Scotland, but we cannot expect this to be the case any more. This is not a statement of regret or resentment at the world we live in, but a reality. The world that some may remember from decades ago is no more. The Church does not exist for nostalgia or as a heritage institution but should acknowledge what it has contributed and still contributes to the whole society.

It offers in many places a sense of stability, community and sanctuary. The Church of Scotland and Presbyterianism in general, has had an enormous influence on Scottish identity and culture over the centuries.

So what is the vision of the Church of Scotland: what sort of people do we want to be? What kind of nation do we want Scotland to be? What kind of message is given from a Church which is a national Church? The Church of Scotland, as the national Kirk is called to serve the whole community. This is a major opportunity but it is a big challenge. The membership of the Church struggles to be representative of the community as a whole.

What is it about the culture of our church which fails to resonate with the culture that we inhabit? Excuses may also be real barriers. Does poverty exclude people from church? Does holding our main services on Sunday mornings, when most Scots now use their leisure time in different ways? What about our attitudes towards others, or a perceived dress code? Do our rituals and language connect with those who have not been brought up in the Church of Scotland? Are our worship services and all our activities intentionally welcoming to incomers and outsiders?

In some communities, there is a narrowness of vision and the church can be seen as the clubhouse of one cultural group, 'folk like us', always looking back. People in these groups get a sense of identity and self-worth from belonging, but it is not an open, welcoming place for outsiders. In the census, 10 years ago, 65% reported themselves as Christian with 42.4% as Church of Scotland. This bears little relation to our own membership figures. How do these statistics impact our thinking, or should we just try to be what we think the Holy Spirit is calling us to be? There is the constant challenge for local churches to be shaped by their local communities (which may be seen as Church Without Walls) but also '*not to be squeezed into its mould*' (Romans 12:1-2).

Do Church of Scotland congregations reflect this diversity and acknowledge the diversity and challenges it brings throughout the country.

Christians need to be constantly thinking about how our faith relates to the world. We could be better at responding to the cultural life we inhabit. We want to challenge the church to give thoughts to these issues, and to consider how as individuals and as communities of faith we feed our spiritual life, enabling, equipping and sustaining us to carry on.

Thomas Chalmers spoke against the theory of *'two kingdoms'* (a separation between the sacred and secular), and instead commended working for the *Godly Commonwealth*. We don't just inhabit a church realm, but we seek actively to engage in both spheres; we need to know what the other realm is all about. We are not apart from the world, but a part of it. Our faith doesn't give us the right to speak or be heard, but being members of a plural society does. We can only have the right to speak about the vulnerable if we also are willing to be vulnerable and have the integrity of our experiences and are involved in living and working alongside them.

Many in the church have a negative attitude towards secularisation. However, it needs to be recognised that in many areas secular principles have led to the developments in the Church – attitudes about the status of women changed in society long before they changed in the Church, and it was scientists and environmentalists that helped open the Church's eyes to the reality of climate change, which has in turn led to a revolution in our thinking and action on caring for the earth.

How do we understand the culture of Scotland today? We need to get under the skin and be aware of the diversity of culture in Scotland today, and to act as well as speak. Not uncritically, and not with a view of adopting it, but to understand and engage with some appreciation of where people are coming from; otherwise it is hard to build relationships. The key to whatever work we do is relationship. This doesn't mean we need to totally immerse ourselves in the popular culture of the day, but we need to be active in understanding and dealing with issues such as social justice, poverty and the major concerns of our times – which is about caring for others.

In a more secularised culture, there will be more people who do not understand a Christian approach to social, political or moral issues, but we should not become defensive about this, rather witness to our faith through patience with others who do not see the world as we do as well as in our actions. For instance, many people assume that all church activity has as its primary objective a desire to convert others. This may be true for some initiatives, but much of the work undertaken at a local and national level is simply about following the example of Christ: serving others, helping the vulnerable and marginalised, and being alongside. We should be unashamed about the claims of the Christian faith, at the same time as being able to listen and learn with those from a different perspective of whatever hue.

Working in partnership with those in public private partnership and the voluntary sector both within and outside the church for common goods, and to challenge stereotypes.

The Church is seen by many people in contradictory and, even, incompatible ways. In some eyes, the Church is a bastion of the establishment, a friend to the police and guardians of morality. To others, the Church is alongside the outcasts – asylum seekers, drug addicts, prisoners. The Church is a persistent nuisance to those in power, asking

difficult questions about the inadequacies of provision for the most vulnerable. It is seen as holy huddle, concerned for its own members and status. It seen as a place of safety, support and help for those in need and nourishment for those on life's journey. It is seen as a balanced voice on the national stage, bringing reason and respect to media debate. And it is seen as a place of radical change and revolutionary politics. Is this a case of One Church, Many Cultures?

In every part of Scotland today, there are community projects initiated by members of local Church of Scotland congregations, often working in partnership with others, aiming to meet people at their point of need, offering encouragement and unconditional support, providing safe meeting places, helping individuals find self-respect and ways forward, listening, caring, encouraging involving, training, empowering.

As flawed individuals all dependent on God's grace, Christians engaged in public life and in social action, must recognise and respect the infinite worth of each person. MADE4U IN ML2, a community charity in Wishaw, put it like this: *Congregations and communities are changed by Grace. The Gospel is about grace even though many inside the churches hide behind our religion. As we seek to listen and care; to build bridges and respect; attitudes and lives will be challenged and people changed.*

Celebrating difference

There is a tension when celebrating difference in that it can be seen as encouraging separation rather than enabling integration. How do Christian communities engage with the idea of one nation, many cultures and yet still remain a distinct faith community in it own right? Diversity in the church must also be acknowledged; theological; liturgical; geographical and in many other ways.

In some quarters there is a perception that the Church should be standing up more for the rights of Christians and the privileges and status that has been accorded the Church as an institution in the past. However the Church does not exist to protect privilege. The Church should be challenging these attitudes and the perception that those outside (and inside) the Church have of our mission. Our energy should be directed into fighting for our belief that the Church's vision is to strive for justice and peace, working alongside the vulnerable and the marginalised and helping the voiceless be heard by the powerful.

We exist not for our own interests but for the interests of all people.

Let us not be so sensitive to the trivial things, let us be angry about the grave injustices in the world.

This does not mean we cannot talk about our faith: quite the opposite in fact, we should be articulate about our motivation for our missionary activity. Churches, local and national, should help to equip people to be prepared and confident in undertaking this work. We should define ourselves by who we are, not who we are not.

We have a positive identity to affirm.

The Church must be about striving for justice and peace but we exist for more than that. We are all called to be witnesses to the risen Christ – by how we live, what we do and what we say. *There are some who fear that in the Church today, given the culture of society we live in, is so changing and different from our own, witness is compromised by a*

lack of boldness in lifestyle and in gracious proclamation. According to Jackie Pullinger (REF), Christians have too often seemed to have hard hearts and soft feet.

Christ calls us to have soft hearts and hard feet.

While there are church congregations who value people marginalised in society as part of their worshipping community there are many areas where improvements could be made. For instance, how representative is a kirk session of the local congregation? How representative is the congregation of the community? The Poverty Truth Commission uses the phrase ‘nothing about us without us is for us’ – how far should this apply to aspects of church life?

Conclusions

Our gospel call to radical hospitality is all about being willing to be counter-cultural and embrace the possibility of transformation.

The Church of Scotland is diverse – parts are dynamic and risk-taking, parts are places of stability, but as we are all one in Christ we have a common mission. Our culture once resonated with the culture of Scotland, and still means something to many people, even if they are not regular church goers they still describe themselves, culturally, as Church of Scotland.

Scotland has changed and is changing. The impact of devolution, migration, economics and new technology is driving radical shifts in social attitudes and the way we live and work. Secularism and ideas from outwith the Church realm are not always to be resisted, but should be examined for their merits.

We need to be open to the possibilities of change.

The Church’s role has changed as well. If our mission for the future is to mean anything, we need to focus on our goal, building the Godly Commonwealth. If we simply looked back with rose-tinted glasses to halcyon days to a time when the Kirk wielded a great deal of power, we sell short the level of Church influence on society and the work and prayers of many today.

We are convinced that God still has a role for the church in society, and that we can – and do – make a positive difference to people’s lives.

Accepted Deliverances:

- Encourage members, ministers, Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Councils and Committees of the Church of Scotland to consider the report *One Scotland, Many Cultures* and its call to radical hospitality and its implications.
- Instruct the Church and Society Council, in partnership with others, to provide resources for congregations to engage with the issues raised in this report and to share stories of good practice.

Church and Society Council
Church of Scotland
121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN
Phone: 0131 225 5722
churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk
www.churchofscotland.org.uk
Charity Number: SC011353