

COR Newsletter – 14 May 2008

Dear all,

Last Saturday

There was a full house as our church hosted the Bucharest Christian academy **music concert** entitled "Music through the ages". The young people, many of whom hadn't sung in harmony together before the start of the year gave a concert of such quality that it truly moved me. They took us through a tour of music through the ages with Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic and contemporary pieces that ended with a well deserved standing ovation. Pictures probably appearing on a Blog near you very soon!

Last Sunday

We celebrated Pentecost at our church. This forms the climax of the Easter cycle. John was in London this weekend but will be back next week for.....

Next Sunday which is Trinity Sunday.

I will be in Sofia celebrating with our sister congregation this Sunday and John will lead the service in Bucharest. **Holy Communion** at 10am with **Sunday school** as usual.

Meanwhile in Sofia, this is going to be a moving service for all of us because this will be the last time that **Lionel and Pat Sainsbury** will be worshipping with us. Lionel, who has been overseeing the building of the Sofia Metro system, is retiring to the North East of England. Whilst not being a native Geordie Lionel has perfected a Geordie accent and I know how good it is because my mum is a Geordie and I have lots of relatives still up there. Lionel has been a very important figure in the church there for years and both he and Pat will be sorely missed and we pray that they will enjoy a long and well deserved retirement

Baptism

But before Sunday we pray for **Grace Victoria Dyer** who will be baptised in our church this Saturday. We also pray for her parents Irvin and Andreea and both their families.

You shall go the ball

If you want to remind yourself of this wonderful night at the **Britannia Ball** or just see if your picture is on the web there are now 40 new pictures on our website of this hugely successful event. Go to <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> and click on the "picture gallery".

Speaking of fundraisers.....

The planning for our **Garden party** set for **Friday 27th** is now well under way. As well as the "spectacular" prizes we are also after other sorts of prizes that are more affordable to most of us. Do you have a holiday home, or your own apartment back home that you could auction for a weekend or a week. Do you have anything that will raise some interest? Let me know if you have and we'll discuss whether we can include it in the auction.

And just a reminder

After the **25th May** service we are having a church **BBQ** at Peris. If you have a car, please bring it that day and take someone who may not have transport. The meat will be provided, but it is "bring and share" for everything else.

Thought for the day

The *rough guides* travel series came in for some criticism last week because they have apparently finished a guide to the UK for foreign visitors which is often less than complimentary to my country. The British are described as self-important, insular and irritating for one, and that active citizenry in Britain had been totally replaced by consumerism for another. So far, so true I'm sure, but the quote that grabbed me the most was that the book says that in Britain the closest the people come to religious or spiritual feelings was *brand loyalty*.

We all had a chuckle over that one (we are also famous for being able to laugh at ourselves). Loyalty to a commercial product, obviously as a direct consequence of our consumerism is the biggest religion in Britain, the thinking goes - but then something dawned on me.....

Isn't nearly all religion in the world little more than a form of brand loyalty? Or do we imagine that there is free choice of faith in this world? If so, it is surely a miracle that sons and daughters of Roman Catholics grow up into Roman Catholic adults, that sons and daughters of Buddhists in Sri Lanka grow up to be Buddhist adults, that the sons and daughters of Shia Moslems in Beirut grow up to be Shia Moslems, that their Sunni Moslem neighbours in the same block will grow up to be Sunni Moslem adults etc..etc. None of these people had a free choice about what they were going to be - the die had already been cast for them - but it is remarkable how many are willing to fight and die for the brand they were instilled with.

In Romania, the brand loyalty is given to Orthodoxy. It seems to be of no consequence that a particular person last stepped into a church, naked and a month old and came out wet - they are Orthodox and completely convinced that all other faiths are wrong. That is the power of brand loyalty. To a far less, and diminishing extent this still brand loyalty (to Cof E or Methodist, Baptist or whatever) still applies to some sections of British society but what has happened in Britain is that for whatever reasons (they are many and varied) is that religious brand loyalty for huge chunks of the indigenous white population has almost completely disappeared. For the most part children of Hindu, Moslem and Sikh families still grow up to be Hindu, Moslem and Sikh adults, though even here cracks are appearing.

Once you have stepped off the religious merry-go-round, as most white British people have, the spectacle of the myriad different faiths in pluralist Britain - each with their exclusive truth claims - starts to look just plain weird. The dominant feeling is not that there are so many different religions there *must* be something else to life, but on the contrary, that there are so many different religions that they *must* all be wrong.

Pluralism in Britain has bred a virulent atheism - a plague on all your houses! They echo Pontius Pilate's profound question of Jesus "What is truth?" (Still others, *within religions*, find solace in fundamentalism and absolutism, but that's another story)

Another point of view, my own, because I was born into a completely non-religious part of British society, is that there *must* be something else to life *despite* the idiocies of organised religions. Another powerful British trait exposed here is cynicism - and I am no different.

I found this "something else", this God, buried deep within the bowels of Christianity. I had to look very hard though - the church is good at keeping God well hidden, buried under piles and piles of rubbish - but in the end I did find "something else".

Not everyone has the patience to keep sifting and looking for God though. Most who try, give up quickly, put off by what they find at first base if they make the effort. My role, and *our* role, in our little patch of the vineyard is to make the search easier - to clear the path of rubbish and debris - so that people have a fighting chance of finding God. The front line is us, ourselves. If God can be revealed to people through our openness, our acceptance, our own joy, our forgiveness, our kindness, through genuine concern, - in short if God makes a positive difference to us, then their search is aided and abetted, not stymied from the outset. God becomes less of an abstraction and flesh is put on the bones of our beliefs - he becomes real.

The **prayer for today** by Francis Brienien I think expresses well the paradox that God is indeed everywhere and yet people need to be shown where to look.

*God of surprises,
when I think you are not present in my life,
you reveal yourself in the love of friends and family
and nurture me in your never ending affection.*

*God of surprises,
when we think you are not present in our community,
you labour to make us of one heart
and cause us to share gladly and generously.*

*God of surprises,
when people think you are not present in our world,
you bring hope out of despair
and create growth out of difficulty.*

*God of surprises,
you are ever with us.*

*When the days go by and our vision fades,
keep surprising us.
When our hope dims and our patience wears thin,
keep coming to us.
Teach us to keep our lamps lit
and to be prepared,
that we may see your loving presence among us.
Amen*

Love and Peace

Martin