



Banish the autumn blues with great recipes and fantastic wines



TIMES ONLINE

PRINT THIS ARTICLE



CLICK HERE TO PRINT

CLOSE WINDOW

The Sunday Times

December 04, 2005

Kirk members reject 'liberal' ministers

JONATHAN LESSWARE

CHURCH of Scotland leaders are out of step with ordinary members on ethical and social issues such as abortion and homosexuality, a new report has claimed.

The survey reveals that only 13% of churchgoers believe public statements made on behalf of the Kirk reflect their own faith and beliefs.

In a poll of 1,200 church-goers, 60% said they thought the church had lost its way spiritually and theologically and three-quarters said the appointment of moderators did not reflect the church membership.

The report reveals a widening gulf between the leadership of the church and its grass roots. The issue of homosexuality split the church in 2003 when more than a third of ministers challenged the view of Professor Iain Torrance, the then moderator, when he said that he would be "utterly untroubled" by the ordination of openly gay clergy.

"There are two competing movements in the Church of Scotland — the establishment 'top-down' movement and the grass roots membership movement," said Robert Anderson, a minister in West Lothian and the report's author.

"Moderators tend to be from the liberal political wing and there is frustration among members that their views are not being represented. Our moderators never seem to say anything that reflects the central purpose of Christianity.

"People feel there is too much fear of giving offence and too much fence-sitting."

A survey of readers of the Church of Scotland's Life and Work magazine shows 86% of respondents agreed that decision-making powers should be given back to congregations, Kirk sessions and presbyteries.

Members were asked to suggest what single thing would most help the Church of Scotland. The largest response was to reduce the power at the Kirk's Edinburgh headquarters.

"There is a feeling things are far too centralised," said Ian Watson, secretary of the evangelical group Forward Together. "There are certain people in positions of influence who feel that, if they contradict the politicians, they will be marginalised. They have a left-wing, liberal

TIMES ONLINE



agenda but it runs counter to the general feeling of ordinary numbers.”

Watson said the church should make a statement distancing itself from supporting gay adoption despite Scottish executive plans being backed by the Kirk's church and society council last month.

Harry Reid, author of *Outside Verdict*, a study of the workings of the church, said the findings were “devastating”. “There is a constant criticism that the church does not speak out on public issues in a way the Catholic church does,” he said. “A lot of people think back to when the Church of Scotland used to be a voice in the land.”

A spokesman for the Church of Scotland said opinions within it reflected the diverse nature of contemporary Scottish society.

“The central administration of the Kirk had undergone a period of radical restructuring over the last two years, and this is a process that has been debated in, and endorsed by, the general assembly,” he said.

Copyright 2005 Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' **standard Terms and Conditions** . Please read our **Privacy Policy** . To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from The Times, visit the **Syndication website** .