

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND JUNE/JULY 2020 • £2.00



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The Record • ISSN 2042-2970

Published ● The Record is produced by The Free Church of Scotland, Free Church Offices, 15 North Bank Street, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH1 2LS 0131 226 5286 offices@freechurch.org

Advertising • Anyone wishing to advertise in *The Record* should contact the editor.

For Subscriptions • The annual subscription price for The Record is £33. Cheques should be made payable to: Free Church of Scotland. Please contact the offices for overseas subscription costs.

Details of the church's activities, latest news and people to contact are all available on the church's website: **www.freechurch.org**For the visually impaired: Please contact Norman Kennedy on 01463 240192 for details of how to

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WELCOME TO THE JUNE/JULY RECORD



HIS MONTH'S EDITION IS THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY NUMBER, AND INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES YOU WILL FIND A REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS WHICH TOOK PLACE AT THE FREE CHURCH'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 18TH MAY. The Assembly was held via video call, given the continuing lockdown, and business was restricted to essential and timesensitive matters

Nevertheless, significant work was done, including welcoming a new minister into the Free Church and establishing a full-time ministry in the Golspie congregation.

As was noted several times during the meeting, the Christian's calling has not been furloughed. God continues to work his purposes out, the gospel advances, and discipleship and pastoring are as crucial as ever.

Also repeated throughout the Assembly was a call to pray for more ministers. As is clear from The Record's prayer diary, we have many vacant congregations within the Free Church. The retiring Chairman of the Board of Trustees called this the biggest obstacle that we face as a church.

In the coming months, we hope to feature a series of articles on ministry as we try to gain a deeper understanding of the joys and challenges set before our ministers. In the meantime, let's heed the call to pray.

'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest'. Matthew 9:37-38

If you have any news articles please send them to dayspring.macleod@icloud.com.

Yours in Christ

John

That in all things he might have the pre-eminence Colossians 1:18

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Patience, panic and seeking blessings from bricks

BY **THE EDITOR**

The priority is to love our neighbours by limiting the spread of a deadly virus.

HERE IS GROWING DISCONTENT IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD ABOUT THE CONTINUED CLOSURE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS. But the visible church is not architectural.

The present lockdown conditions were initiated to protect us from COVID-19. They are made more bearable by the technology which allows us to communicate, worship together and hear preaching from God's Word. But, in April's *Record*, I argued that we should be longing for the day when we can be together again. Video calls are not an adequate substitute.

Nevertheless, in our longing there is room for patience. The help God has provided to us — telephones, broadband, pens and paper — will tide us over until the worst of the danger has passed. Our desire to see each other must be tempered with the reason the lockdown was necessary in the first place. We still need to protect each other from harm. But some people's patience is wearing thin.

As people begin to tire of life in lockdown, some Christians are agitating for the re-opening of church buildings. This has involved civil disobedience – holding services in defiance of local laws. It has brought legal action – deploying teams of lawyers to sue the church doors open. It has also brought PR campaigns in a bid to influence decision-makers. Roman Catholic leaders in the UK, for example, have been lobbying the government to bring forward the reopening of church buildings. Cardinal Vincent Nichols, archbishop of Westminster, told Radio 4 that Catholic churches should be allowed to open before others because their form of worship more readily allows physical distancing.

The Free Church has not joined this international chorus. Should we?

SOMETHING MISSING

Differing justifications have been offered to explain the need to prioritise the reopening of churches. Religious liberty has been cited frequently. Brian Gibson, a Pentecostal megachurch pastor in the United States, has said, 'I believe that every day a church is closed, a bit of liberty dies...We're taking care of everything, but we want to know our religious freedom isn't going to die with us.' There seems to be a certain sense of resentment that takeaway restaurants and some shops have been allowed to open before churches.

Religious liberty arguments have changed policy in cases where churches have been treated differently to other gatherings which carry a similar risk of spreading coronavirus. Small worship meetings are now allowed in France, for example, in line with broader guidance.

But the arguments being made have rarely been limited to achieving equal treatment under the law. For example, in an attempt to lift a restriction to 10 worshippers per service, two churches in the US state of Illinois have petitioned the courts stating: 'with each passing Sunday, churches are suffering under the yoke of the governor's unconstitutional orders prohibiting churches from freely exercising their sincerely held religious beliefs requiring assembling themselves together to worship God'.

Meanwhile, Danny Carroll, Senior Pastor of Water of Life Community Church, a Pentecostal megachurch, told the press that California State officials 'don't understand that people of faith need contact, that they need to worship together'.

This goes beyond an argument for equitable treatment for religious practice. The Illinois churches are permitted to meet in small groups; Water of Life are allowed to hold services on a 'drive-in' basis where people attend an open-air service and stay in their own cars. What is being expressed here is the view that meeting in large groups is a requirement of Christianity. A similar thing was expressed by Cardinal Nichols during his Radio 4 interview. He said that 'there is a big, big feeling in the religious communities of wanting to get back to a fuller practice of their faith'. Along with the Pentecostal leaders, the

...while God allowed Moses to draw water from a stone, we do not expect to draw blessings from bricks.

Cardinal is arguing that we get something from attending church services that we cannot get elsewhere; and that something is necessary for our faith.

WHAT IS CHURCH?

In the thought and practice of Pentecostalism, gathering together for worship is an important way to experience the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Church meetings also allow the laying on of hands for healing. Gathering in a church building is even more important in Roman Catholicism, whose doctrine requires that a penitent and priest must be in the same location for absolution from sin to be granted. It is not permissible to do penance over the phone. Moreover, Catholicism teaches that the ceremonial consecration of church buildings means they are places where blessings are more readily granted by God.

Given these beliefs, it is unsurprising that members of some other Christian traditions are so keen to get back into their buildings. But, while God allowed Moses to draw water from a stone, we do not expect to draw blessings from bricks. We may be guilty of imprecise language at times, but the Reformed understanding is that the constructions we worship in are not the 'house of God', but simply a building which serves as a location for the church to meet together.

To suggest otherwise is to imply that Chinese believers in their own houses, Ugandan Christians meeting in the shade of a tree, church planters worshipping in community centres, and even people confined to their homes by illness or age are somehow further from God than those with the freedom to attend a church building.

The church is not limited by architecture. The church is where the Word of God is preached, where the sacraments are administered, where the Lord is worshipped, where practice is governed by biblical principles and where our neighbours are loved and served.⁰¹

PATIENTLY DID BEAR

During the current pandemic, we continue to fulfil these hallmarks of the church, apart from taking part in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Should we agitate for a return to our buildings to administer the sacraments? There can be no doubt that they are a blessing to the church. But the New Testament does not mandate their frequency. Through our own church history, Communion twice a year is fairly common. In the present circumstances, a fellowship meal could prove dangerous, and we have licence to be patient.

Furthermore, we have no reason to suspect that our government is seeking to keep churches closed indefinitely, nor even any longer than is judged necessary for the containment of the virus. Indeed, the Scottish Government's lockdown exit plan makes specific reference to the stage at which places of worship will be able to reopen. The priority, then, is to love our neighbours by limiting the spread of a deadly virus. We will enjoy the sacraments together again when God determines it is time.

We long for the joy of meeting, of singing praise together and taking Communion. But we have no need to worry that we haven't been to our church buildings since March. We are learning what the persecuted church has long known. In revealing how he is to be worshipped, God established a pattern which has not been derailed by the fearsome oppression of Rome, the devastation of World Wars or the intrusion of Chinese state surveillance. Coronavirus won't stop it, either. We are not susceptible to the panic induced by building-centric religion. If COVID-19 has hampered the practice of your faith, it is time to take fresh look at your theology. •

Donald Macleod, A Faith to Live By, chapter 18

JUN-AUG 2020 PRAYER DIARY

See, I am doing a new thing! ... do you not percieve it?.

Isaiah 43:19

- **Mon 29**th Give thanks that we have a Father who cares for us, and pray that many people will turn to him and put their trust in his Son in the midst of this time of trouble.
- **Tues 30th** Pray that the Lord will sustain Rev. Donnie G Macdonald, as his term as Moderator of the Assembly has been extended to 2021, and all the added work this means for him.
- **Wed 1st-Thurs 2nd July** Ask God to help Rev. Malcolm Macleod, Rev. Nigel Anderson and Rev. Stephen Allison as Clerks of the Assembly as they deal with the church business in this unusual year.
- **Fri 3rd** At a time of social distancing around the world, the Bible Society are praying that their app, Bible 2020, will bring people together with the timeless truth and eternal hone
- **Sat 4th** Since the Board of Ministry invited the church to pray for workers in December, they have received six applications to train for or join the Free Church ministry. Praise God for this, and continue to pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up labourers (Luke 10:2).
- **Sun 5th-Mon 6th** Pray for the congregation of Grace Church Montrose and Rev. Alberto de Paula, their interim moderator, as they work and witness in their community.
- **Tues 7th-Wed 8th** The congregation in Aberdeen and their interim moderator, Rev. I Martin, would value prayer as they look for the man who will lead them in their witness and ministry.
- **Thurs 9th** Women for Mission (WfM) have been raising funds for World on Our Doorstep (WoOD). Pray for this ongoing work in the needy area around Govanhill Free Church.
- **Fri 10th-Sat 11th** Operacion San Andres (OSA) value prayer and financial support as they work to transform the community of Collique (Peru) with the power of the gospel.
- **Sun 12th-Mon 13th** Pray for the WEC International College in Holland, and Donald and Rosangela Fraser as they serve there.

- **Tues 14th** Pray for all those involved in the education of our young people. Pray that there will be many lessons learnt through the trauma of the coronavirus.
- **Wed 15th** WfM have been raising funds to help with the running of Free Church Camps, which have been going for 60 years. Pray for this ongoing ministry, which has been blessed over these years.
- **Thurs 16th-Fri 17th** Pray for all the children who have enjoyed camp in the past and are disappointed that they are not able to go to camp this summer because they have been cancelled
- Sat 18th-Sun 19th The Dundee congregation and Rev. Paul Clarke, their interim moderator, would value prayer as they look to find the man of God's choosing to work in that community.
- **Mon 20th-Tues 21st** Pray for the congregation in Arran and the Rev. Duncan Peters, their interim moderator, as they look to the Lord for guidance for their future ministry.
- **Wed 22nd** Praise God that since lockdown restrictions are being lifted in many parts of China, the Amity Printing Press in Nanjing has begun printing Bibles again. It is the largest producer of Bibles in the world.
- **Thurs 23rd-Fri 24th** Pray for the Lord to give the 20schemes teams wisdom as they plan the way ahead.
- **Sat 25th** Pray that God would grant wisdom, peace and grace to all involved in Colegio San Andrés as they deal with the problems caused by COVID-19, and pray for the pupils themselves.
- **Sun 26th** Give thanks with FEBA as they have been having record numbers of listeners. Pray for those who seek to respond to individuals searching for answers to big questions.
- Mon 27th-Tues 28th This is a time when people need to know God and to grow in their trust that he is with us. Sadly, the Bible Society tells us that some Bible distribution programmes have had to be put on hold and some areas of ministry suspended for the time being. Pray that problems can be resolved.

- **Wed 29th** Greenock has a large population. Pray for Rev. Alasdair MacDonald as he guides the small congregation in their witness through their vacancy.
- **Thurs 30th-Fri 31st** As the Ayr congregation settle into a vacancy, pray for them and Rev. Kenny Boyd. Pray for unity and strengthening in their fellowship as they look to the future.
- Sat 1st-Sun 2nd Aug At the beginning of another month, let us pray for all those who have been bereaved in recent months as a result of COVID-19 or other any other cause.
- **Mon 3rd** Pray for the congregation meeting in Dumbarton and Rev. Andy Longwe, their interim moderator, as they seek ways to build their witness in the town.
- **Tues 4th** Pray that the relationships formed as a result of distributing food during lockdown by 20schemes teams will continue to grow once lockdown ends.
- **Mon 5**th Give thanks for the many ways we have been able to join in worship through lockdown. Pray for the many Christians in the world who do not have the same access to the internet and social media.
- **Tues 6th** Pray for guidance for our leaders as they negotiate our country's future relationship with the European Union.
- **Wed 7th** Give thanks for the many ways we have been able to join in worship through lockdown. Pray for the many Christians in the world who do not have the same access to the internet and social media
- **Thurs 8**th Give thanks for the many ways we have been able to join in worship through lockdown. Pray for the many Christians in the world who do not have the same access to the internet and social media.
- **Fri 9th** The congregation in Partick and their interim moderator, Rev. Allan Shearer, would appreciate prayer for their work and witness in that part of Glasgow.

Prayer requests to: ian.macdonald57@btinternet.com.
Please take time to send requests for your congregation or ministry to be included in forthcoming Records.
These prayer notes are prepared 5 weeks in advance of publication.

WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S LOCKDOWN EXIT PLAN (EUROPE)

The Scottish Government's route map out of lockdown has been published. It sets out a phased approach, and the conditions required to move through the stages. Phase 2 of the plan, which can be enacted on 18th June at the earliest, would allow places of worship to be open for private prayer. Phase 3 (9th July at the earliest) will allow churches to be open to 'extended groups subject to physical distancing and hygiene safeguards'. Phase 4 (30th July at the earliest) would see the resumption of mass gatherings 'in line with public health advice'. Whether or not the Government will decide to move through these phases will depend upon evidence that transmission of COVID-19 is being controlled, including declining rates of new infections and hospital admissions.





COURT INTERVENES TO END BAN ON WORSHIP SERVICES (EUROPE)

France's highest court has ordered the government to lift a blanket ban on gatherings at places of worship, according to *EuroNews*.

On 11th May, it was decided that places of worship could only be used for funerals attended by no more than 20 people. However, the judge reviewing the order highlighted that the government has authorised public gatherings of up to 10 people in other settings, meaning the total ban on church attendance is disproportionate to the objective of preserving public health. The court said that the government's approach constitutes a serious and manifestly unlawful interference with the right to freedom of worship.

CHURCH BURNED AFTER DEFYING LOCAL COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

The New York Times reports that a church in Mississippi was burned down in a suspected arson attack. First Pentecostal Church had held unauthorised services over Easter, and subsequently sued the city of Holly Springs, arguing that a stay-at-home order aimed at preventing the spread of coronavirus violated the church's right to free speech.



Major Kelly McMillen from the local Sheriff's Department said that a message had been spray-painted near the church which read, 'Bet you stay at home now you hypokrits'. The graffiti also included an atomic symbol with the letter 'A' in the centre, a logo sometimes used by atheist groups.

A week prior to the fire, a judge ruling on First Pentecostal's lawsuit wrote that the church was 'proceeding in an excessively reckless and cavalier manner and with insufficient respect for the enormity of the health crisis which the Covid-19 pandemic presents'.

Nick Fish, president of American Atheists, the group which created the logo painted at the scene, condemned the church-burning, calling it an 'heinous act of destruction'.

CHURCHES OPEN IN GERMANY (EUROPE)

Deutsche Welle reports that, at the start of May, the German federal government gave permission for churches to reopen. For the time being, singing is prohibited given concerns that it causes the virus to spread more easily. Physical contact such as handshakes are also not allowed, and face-masks are required. Angela Merkel noted that the federal government and state authorities had agreed on an 'emergency brake' in the event of a significant increase in the infection rate, saying, 'If the infection curve becomes steep again, we need

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier told the press it had been 'nice' to attend St. Mary's Church in Berlin. 'This experience of community fills human beings with confidence and strength, even under special conditions such as the wearing of face-masks and gathering in smaller circles," Steinmeier said.

to have a warning system to notice it early and be able to act.'



70 CHURCHES LEGALISED WHILE ANOTHER IS DEMOLISHED (EGYPT)



Egypt's Committee for the Legalisation of Unlicensed Churches recognised 70 more churches in May, bringing the total number of legal buildings to 1,638. While this news has been welcomed by Christian advocacy groups, there are still problems surrounding Christians' freedom to worship in Egypt. The day after the latest churches were legalised, another church was demolished by local authorities in Koum al-Farag. Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports that the building had been used for worship for the last 15 years. A few years ago, a mosque was built next door so that the building could not be legalised as a church – this is a feature of current law. The Christian community had recently extended their building, which heightened local tensions. The authorities responded by demolishing both the church and the mosque, and arresting 14 Christians who were protesting the demolition. Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, is critical of this approach and has called on the government to 'work with local authorities to formulate civic interventions that address and transform the societal attitudes underpinning sectarian tensions 🔖

WUHAN PASTOR ARRESTED DURING **ZOOM MEETING** (ASIA)



A local pastor in Wuhan was arrested as he was leading an online meeting on evangelism and church planting, according to International Christian Concern. Pastor Luo was taken to a police station and interrogated for more than four hours.

Luo reportedly said afterwards, 'I rebuke them, calling them out that they are not minding business that they should be minding. Christians disregarded their own lives to do good things, yet the police treat them as the bad guys; this is unreasonable.

'I also told them a few times in all seriousness, I will only live for Christ, I will not argue on other matters. However, I will never change [my persistence] about evangelism.' The officials then let the pastor go. •

CHRISTIANS ARRESTED WHILE PREPARING FOOD PARCELS (ASIA)

Eight Christians putting together aid packages for their neighbours were arrested and assaulted by police in Uttar Pradesh, India. The police accused the group of breaking lockdown rules by holding a worship service. Pastor Ramesh Kumar said he tried to explain that the group were in fact responding to Prime Minister Modi's recent call to help feed poor families during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Despite explaining that the food they were attempting to distribute was donated by local people, the group were accused of receiving foreign funds and of paying people to convert to Christianity. They were released after the head of the village the donations were intended for signed a statement supporting their explanation.

However, Pastor Kumar told Morning Star News, 'When I called the police station the next day, we were shocked to know that a case has been registered against us. The policeman on the phone said that there is a lot of pressure from the authorities to file a complaint against us.'

Persecution Relief founder Shibu Thomas, who is helping Pastor Kumar, said, 'The police have wrongly arrested the Christians at the complaint of a few religious fanatics who wanted to intentionally frame the Christians.' The harassment is typical of mistreatment of Christians in Uttar Pradesh state, which has been the most hostile state against Christians for three years, Thomas said. •

REPORT FROM THE 2020 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH

BY THE EDITOR

HE PRESENT LOCKDOWN, WHICH HAS PREVENTED CONGREGATIONS FROM MEETING TOGETHER SINCE MARCH, HAS RESULTED IN A UNIQUE MEETING OF THE FREE CHURCH'S HIGHEST COURT. Following a video call on the 16th of April, the Assembly Business Committee agreed that the General Assembly should meet via Zoom on the evening of Monday 18th May for one session in order to deal with urgent and time-critical business.

Subject to the lockdown being lifted, the 2020 Assembly has been appointed to meet again between the 6th and 8th of October to continue its work.

With commissioners having logged in to the Zoom meeting, proceedings began with the singing of Psalm 61. From their homes around the country, commissioners sang praise to their refuge and tower of strength, thanking God for the shelter of his wings. This was followed by the reading of Romans 8 from verse 18: 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.'

The tone of the meeting having thus been set, the Assembly was constituted and turned to the matters at hand.

BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The report of the Business Committee was presented by the Rev. Malcolm Macleod, Principal Clerk. The Rev. Neil MacMillan had been elected Moderator-Designate of the 2020 General Assembly. However, the Committee was keen to ensure continuity of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition it is possible, if lockdown measures are not fully lifted by October, that no ordinary business will be addressed until May 2021. The Assembly therefore agreed to reappoint the Rev. Donnie G. Macdonald Moderator of the Assembly. Neil MacMillan's appointment has been deferred until 2021.

The Assembly also agreed that presbyteries should proceed with the appointment of moderators and election of representative elders following the rising of the Assembly on 18th May 2020.



Rev. Donnie G. Macdonald continues as Moderator until 2021

ASSEMBLY CLERKS

In their report, the Assembly Clerks noted that the current lockdown has radically — albeit temporarily — changed the way the Free Church goes about fulfilling the Great Commission. They are concerned to make sure that, wherever possible, congregations have a full-time pastoral ministry. The work of the Gospel continues regardless of coronavirus.

The Clerks therefore set out the way in which presbyteries can moderate a call, licence a student, and conduct an induction or ordination when they are prevented from meeting together.

The Assembly agreed that, when the Government enacts restrictions on physical meetings, audio-visual technology should be used to ensure that ministers can begin work in the congregations to which they have been called.

The provisions cover holding congregational meetings, the signing of the Formula and all of the other procedures required to establish a new ministry. In their report, the Clerks stress that these arrangements are for exceptional and emergency situations only and are not to be adopted for meetings of Church courts in normal circumstances.

The deliverances in the Assembly Clerks' report were moved by the Rev. Malcolm Macleod. In seconding, Prof. James Fraser commended the Clerks for the work they have done to put in place effective arrangements for the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

EDINBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In presenting the ETS report, the Rev. Dr Malcolm Maclean thanked two Board members — Mr Graham Keith (Ayr and Kilwinning Free Church) and Mr Murdo MacPhail (Stornoway Free Church) — who have completed their terms of service. He also thanked Mrs Heather Watson and Mrs Ruth Smith for their oversight of the Seminary offices.

Teaching posts at ETS are made on a five-year renewable basis. ETS Principal, the Rev. Ivor Martin, has now completed his first five years, and the Assembly agreed to re-appoint him for another term. The ETS Board believe that Principal Martin's vision, energy and strategic leadership has played a significant part in the growth in the number of students attending ETS.

The Rev. Dr Alistair Wilson noted the establishment of the Centre for Mission as a department of ETS, and thanked Prof. John A. Macleod and the late Rev. Dr David Ford for their central role in setting up the Centre. The Centre for Mission aims to prepare people for mission in Scotland and throughout the world.

Commissioners debated the oversight of appointments to the teaching staff at ETS. The Assembly decided that the ETS Board can make

appointments without seeking approval from the Assembly. It was noted during the discussion that, as the Church's highest

court, the General Assembly retains ultimate control over staffing at ETS and can intervene should it deem this necessary. •

MISSION

The Rev. Dr Bob Akroyd presented the petition of the Northern Presbytery requesting that Golspie Free Church be granted the status of a full-time, five-year, renewable charge. The congregation want the Rev. Eric Paterson, their minister since September 1991, to continue to serve as their pastor. The Assembly was pleased to grant this petition, and did so unanimously.

MINISTRY

The Rev. Angus MacRae began the Board of Ministry's report by paying tribute to the late Rev. Dr David Ford, who had been serving as the Board's Clerk until his sudden death in February this year. Mr MacRae expressed gratitude for Dr Ford's contribution to the work, and sympathy to his family. The Board's report records that 'David was a wise, gifted and humble servant of Jesus Christ and it was an honour for us to serve alongside such a delightful man. He blessed the Church and Academic Theology through his unstinting service rendered in Scotland, Peru and Colombia.'

Mr MacRae went on to say that the Board has called on the church to pray for sixty more gospel workers to enter service in the next decade. The Board renew this call to prayer, and will continue to encourage and challenge people to consider ministry. The Board's view is that the Free Church needs to foster a training culture which will support the development of new church leaders from the grassroots of local congregations.



Rev. Angus MacRae steps down from Chairing the Board of Ministry

The Assembly approved the Board's proposal to add an additional Board member who is a minister serving in a recognised training congregation. The Board will appoint the Rev. Derek Lamont to assist in making greater use of training congregations to prepare

candidates for the ministry.

Mr MacRae asked for prayer for the Rev. Paul Clarke as he takes over the Chair of the Board of

Ministry. He then moved the Board's deliverances. The Rev. Ivor MacDonald, in seconding the deliverances, told the Assembly that Angus MacRae has served the Board with wit and energy, expanding its scope and depth and extending both pastoral care and the rigour with which candidates are assessed.

Following the Board of Ministry's report, the Assembly agreed to admit the Rev. Dr Euan Dodds as a minister without charge, available for call. Dr Dodds answered the questions and signed the Formula in the presence of the Assembly, and according to the procedure set out in the Assembly Clerks' report.

The Board has called on the church

to pray for sixty more gospel workers

to enter service in the next decade.

Having initially trained in medicine, Dr Dodds has since studied at Cornhill Scotland and Highland Theological College alongside ministry in St George's-Tron and Holyrood Evangelical, Edinburgh.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Deferring a report on normal business, the Board of Trustees made a statement on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Free Church.

The Board's Chairman, Prof. James Fraser, commended ministers and members for their efforts to continue the Church's ministry, despite the current lockdown. Almost every congregation is now using

digital means to continue holding services, and ETS is continuing to teach by distance learning.

[COVID-19] has taken lives and it has wrecked economies. As Christians, however, we must serve our fellows and stick to our vision.

The initial indications are that the Church

could see a deficit of around £1 million in

2020 as a result of the coronavirus lockdown.

The Board is concerned to ensure that the Church receives enough income this year to sustain its ministers, training, mission and support functions. This will be a challenge under the present circumstances.

Prof. Fraser stressed that it is too early to be definitive, and that the figures will continue to be reviewed. Nevertheless the initial indications are that the Church could see a deficit of around £1 million in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus lockdown.

'We have been brought to our knees quite suddenly and unexpectedly by a pandemic,' said Prof. Fraser. 'It has taken lives and it has wrecked economies. As Christians, however, we must serve our fellows and stick to our vision.

'We are an ambitious organisation. We have a vision for the Kingdom of Christ across our denomination,

across our nation. We want to plant 30 new churches, to fill empty pulpits, to get established

churches moving so that they are vibrant and expanding and carrying out the Great Commission.

'We should be thankful. We have experienced the Lord's blessing and generosity as far as our finances are concerned in recent years. And we should try not to get derailed by the COVID crisis.'

Given the extent of the potential deficit in finances, the Board is asking each congregation to remit the same amount of money in 2020 as it did in 2019. This will allow the Church to maintain its current work and press on towards gospel growth in 2021.

In making this request, Prof. Fraser emphasised that people who are facing loss of employment, business and income have a duty to care for themselves and their families, and may not be able to continue giving to the church for now. The Board have also noted that a large proportion of the Free Church's income comes through the collection plate, and that this income may be lost unless donations can be switched to an electronic or other alternative method. It is hoped that

reduced running costs, also resulting from lockdown, may help congregations to maintain the amount they can remit to central funds. Equally, the Board will try to find savings where it can.

'The pandemic is dreadful,' continued Prof. Fraser. 'Who can measure or quantify the anguish people feel at the untimely demise of their loved ones? Who can measure the anguish we feel when we see courageous people putting themselves on the frontline to look after us when we're ill and losing their lives in the process?

'I hope we will go forward with confidence. We'll seek to raise the income required and pray that

we can return to church planting and development and to a greater penetration of our

society with the news of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

He concluded with reference to Joshua 1:9, 'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.'

The General Assembly accepted the Board's deliverances. The Moderator noted that, having chaired the Board of Trustees since 2007, and having served on a number of Free Church Boards and Committees since 1985, James Fraser is retiring at this Assembly. Scott Matheson, Chief Executive Officer, thanked Prof. Fraser for his work, which has reformed the governance of the Free Church and stabilised the denomination's finances. Mr Matheson noted

that congregations have been freed to focus on mission and evangelism. He praised Prof.

Fraser's work ethic and positivity, remarking that his vision and leadership, his hope in the church and the gospel, inspires others to serve the church.

Prof. Fraser replied that chairing the Board has been one of the most exciting and interesting things he has done in his life. He said that it has been a joy for him, and also a privilege to work with people like Scott Matheson, Iain Gill, John O. Sutherland and John Munro. He commented that the opportunity to meet ministers and elders across the denomination has shown him how blessed we are with the ministry in our church. He asked for prayer and continued support for his successor.

Following the Trustees' statement, the 2021 General Assembly was appointed to meet on the 17th May 2021, and the 2020 Assembly adjourned to meet on the 6th October 2020, if lockdown measures permit.

The session concluded with the singing of Psalm 95, and the Moderator pronounced a benediction.

FREE CHURCH NEWS

FREE CHURCH DONATES £10K TO COVID-19 APPEAL

BY REV. DR BOB AKROYD, CHAIRMAN OF THE MISSION BOARD

EARFUND, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DISASTERS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE, HAS LAUNCHED AN APPEAL ON BEHALF OF COMMUNITIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD AND IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH WHICH ARE DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Here in Scotland we have so many blessings, such as the NHS and our extensive social care system, but those who are already dealing with extreme poverty and dislocation are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus. For example, Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh, is the largest refugee camp in the world with almost a million Rohingya refugees who have fled persecution. Cox's Bazar has an average population density of at least six times that of Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak. Sanitation and hygiene facilities were already inadequate and social distancing is impossible.

One of Tearfund's straplines is 'following Jesus where the need is greatest'. Now is one of those times. In

response to Tearfund's appeal to step up hygiene and education work in response to coronavirus pandemic, the Free Church of Scotland has donated £10,000 from its Disaster Relief Fund. We are grateful to those throughout the church who have contributed to this fund over the year, which enables this donation to be made immediately.

If you would like to make a further donation in support of Tearfund's work responding to coronavirus around the world, please visit **tearfund.org/covidinfo**

To everyone reading this, can I ask you to please pray for these communities served by Tearfund and for their locally based partners and churches so that lives can be saved and even greater tragedy averted.

In the words of Psalm 62, 'My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.'

MOBILISING FOR MISSION IN LOCKDOWN BY FIONA MACASKILL

S YOU CAN IMAGINE, IN THIS STRANGE NEW WORLD, COFFEE MORNINGS IN CHURCH, BAKE SALES AND THE USUAL WFM FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN HARD TO COME BY OVER THE LAST EIGHT WEEKS. But we are encouraged that there is money still coming in towards our Mobilising for Mission project. We might not be allowed out to socialise, but there are plenty of good fundraising ideas going on from our own houses. Have you tried a Zoom quiz yet? Or Kahoot? Anyone who has tried to buy flour recently will know that there is a resurgence in baking. The great British coffee morning has gone virtual. Maybe some of the more green-fingered among us could help out a neighbour with some gardening. If you haven't already tried any of these, could this be a chance to socialise virtually while raising some funds for the Project? Donations can be sent either to Mairi Macdonald, Donations Secretary, or directly to the WfM by following the link www.womenformission.org/donate. We are supporting Donald and Rosangela Fraser, working with WEC in the Netherlands, the Free Church Camps (which we look forward to seeing back in 2021), World on our Doorstep in Govanhill and Operacion San Andres in Peru. Please remember to pray for all who are involved in working with these organisations as they seek to serve the Lord in the new ways we are all having to adapt to.

While we have had to cancel our AGM this year, we are still planning at the moment that our biennial Ladies' Conference will take place on 19 September 2020 in Inverness. Whether or not this goes ahead we will have to wait and see, but please note that this will be the last date for donations to the 2019/20 project, and the day the new project will be launched. If we are not able to meet for the conference, information concerning the accounts and the new project will be available online, as will any other formal business matters.

Life goes on around the world and we have had an update from Marsali Campbell, working in Uganda. She has sent some fantastic videos which you can see if you go to our website (womenformission.org) and click on her letter. Please continue to pray for Marsali and for the other mission workers we support. The ancient art of letter-writing is

2020 13 WWW.FREECHURCH.ORG

seeing something of a comeback. Maybe use some of your lockdown time to write a letter or a card to someone working in mission. Children might enjoy writing to a missionary kid. We would love to hear about any responses you might get. Please remember to like us on Facebook and share any encouragements you may have there.

APPEAL FOR INDIA

HE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND'S MISSION BOARD HAS RECEIVED A REPORT FROM REV. SAMIT MISHRA CONCERNING THE DESPERATE SITUATION IN CENTRAL INDIA DUE TO COVID-19.

Pastors and church planters received their salaries up to the end of February. Yet due to lack of offerings, they have not been paid since. This scenario is repeated in the two Mission Schools at Chhapara and Lakhnadon. As the schools are shut, no fees are coming in and the staff are not being paid. Many members of staff have extended families that rely on their income.

The local churches also have a burden to support the very poor in their area. Due to the lockdown in the cities, most workers have made their way back to their home villages. These journeys are 200-500 kilometres for those returning to the Madhya Pradesh area, where Samit and his colleagues are situated. With no income, the returnees are putting an extra burden on their

families. The churches in the region are helping as best they can, but they fear the situation will get much worse.

The Mission Board launched an appeal for donations at the beginning of May. More than £40,000 has been raised so far. The Board will match the first £5,000 donated, while the Government will also contribute 25% through the Gift Aid scheme, on top of donations given by those who have indicated that they are UK taxpayers.

Free Church Mission Board Chairman Rev. Dr Bob Akroyd said, 'We at the Mission Board are delighted and humbled by the generosity of all who have contributed to this appeal.

'These donations are a tangible expression of our prayerful concern and love for the people of India. Over many generations, men and women from the Free Church have served in India, and it is great to retain this connection now in vital partnership with local churches and their leaders.'

SHARING STORIES OF FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS

BY KIRSTEN MACDONALD

I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders. So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.

Psalm 78:2-4,7 (NLT)

plot, some engaging characters and an interesting setting can transport us away from our normal, day-to-day lives to somewhere different. Stories can help us to see things differently, to understand more about the world around us and about ourselves.

In the words of a well-known Scottish folk-rock song, the story of camps 'started long ago, with heroes forged and legends told'. A vast army of characters has contributed invaluably to its plot; different chapters have been set in different places; but throughout the past 60 years of Free Church Youth Camps, through all

the changes in culture and practice and personnel, the Main Character of the story remains the same, and his faithfulness endures to all generations (Psalm 119:90). The plot running through the whole story is one of serving The King and of living in willing submission to him; of spreading the good news of his Kingdom and of inviting people in.

As we know, all good stories should be shared. Over the next few months we'll be sharing one story a week on our website (freechurchyouthcamps.org/stories) from some of the people who have been involved in Free Church Youth Camps over the past 60 years, telling how God has worked in their lives through the camps.

We pray that, for those of you who are already Christians, you'll be inspired to share with those round about you your own story of how God has worked in your life. For those of you who are not yet Christians, we pray that you'll see what an amazing God we worship and that you'll want to know him for yourself.

As we share these stories, it is our hope that you'll be encouraged through hearing how God has been working in so many lives over these years, and that you'll be reminded of his faithfulness. We know that he 'is the same yesterday, today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8), and as we look back over the last 60 years and

see how he has blessed the work of Free Church Youth Camps, we entrust the next 60 years (and more) to him, with all the camps, campers and leaders he will yet use for his glory.

'Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power

at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.' Ephesians 3:20-21

With thanks to all who have brought this project together, in particular to Sharon, Kirsten S and Maddy.

TURKISH ARTIST GIVES LIFE TO OLD PHOTOGRAPH

OLGA UNKER, A TURKISH-BASED ARTIST WITH A KEEN INTEREST IN SCOTTISH CHURCH HISTORY, HAS USED HIS TALENTS TO BRING TO LIFE A BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND MODERATORS CAPTURED IN 1860. The digitally colourised image, taken in New College on Edinburgh's Mound, shows nine moderators who served from 1848-1860.

'Generally, I work in several different mediums such as acrylic, oil, watercolour, pastels, and charcoal,' Tolga says. 'I have also done the colourisation of old and iconic black-and-white photos. I do this with either printout or digitally.

'With black-and-white photographs, it is clear to the viewer that these pictures had been taken a very long time ago. A precise and detailed colourisation of these images transforms them into modern and relatable scenes that give the feeling of having been photographed more recently.'

Tolga has previously colourised holocaust images which were used for a memorial exhibition in the Quincentennial Foundation Jewish Museum of Turkey. He currently works as an assistant researcher in the graphic design department of Maltepe University, Istanbul.

For more on Tolga and his work, visit facebook.com/tolgaunkerart



SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM

After thirteen years in the role, Prof. James Fraser retired from his position as Chairman of the Free Church's Board of Trustees at the 2020 General Assembly. He told The Record about his experiences in the Chair, and shared the encouragement he has found in the denomination's renewed sense of mission.



How did you find participating in the General Assembly by video call?

I liked trying it out and for emergency business it was fine. I think however that debate and participation was minimal, but this may have been a function of the limited time and the limited agenda. Assemblies are often about persuading people as to an action or decision. For that, I think that debate in a chamber is still important, so I hope that we will not completely depart from it. At the same time, I hope we will now make more extensive use of video technology for the advantages it offers.

You have served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees since 2007, and have been involved in Boards and Committees of the Free Church since 1985. What is it that has kept you going?

I love challenges. I've spent a large part of my life helping transform the way institutions work, and this role allowed me to do that for the Free Church. For a large part of this period my daytime job was to help create the University of the Highlands and Islands. In my role as an elder in Kiltarlity Free Church I was privileged to participate in the redevelopment of a congregation which had

almost become extinct at the beginning of the $21^{\rm st}$ century. These roles complemented each other. They also force you to remember that in all things we are working for God — we must pray and trust and thank him. This makes for an exciting life even in moments of great challenge and difficulty.

During my time as chairman, the Free Church was emerging from a period of great difficulty.

The challenges of governance — an outdated bureaucracy and weak stewardship — gave me a very

I love challenges. I've spent a large part of my life helping transform the way institutions work.

interesting time. I also worked with some great people. We have many gifted ministers and elders, and the three CEOs were great people to work with — Iain Gill, Rod Morrison and Scott Matheson. The Church is the most important institution in the world and working for it is an immense privilege.

What is the goal of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees?

To lead a Board set up by the Assembly to ensure the Church is financially viable; that it manages its risks; and that it has systems, policies and activities which encourage ministers and others to fulfil the Great Commission on their frontlines in congregations. Also, to carry out specific tasks which the Assembly wishes done, like resolving the praise issue. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees needs to articulate and lead an agenda that addresses the barriers to the church's progress and stimulates changes to ensure that it improves its impact.

What has been your approach to making difficult decisions?

Firstly, prayer. The advantage of living in God's Kingdom is that we can trust God to help us find the answer and deal with the consequences even if we make mistakes. This makes decision-taking both very hard and very easy. Secondly, discussion with colleagues; seeking 'wise counsel'. The aim is to understand why a decision is needed, and what we're trying to achieve. Then, you have to identify

the available options and do your best to predict the consequences and the likelihood of success. To do all this

The Church is the most important institution in the world and working for it is an immense privilege.

well, you have to rely on collective experience and judgement as well as a degree of consensus, since you can never know everything that you need to for complete trust in the option you choose.

You have set out a vision to encourage and develop our congregations, to plant 30 more churches, and ultimately to proclaim the gospel across Scotland. We are a small denomination.

What about the Free Church makes us suited to this task?

Boards are made up of individuals. They get their vision sometimes from their members and more often than not from other people. Church planting was the vision of Derek Lamont and Neil MacMillan. It is a great vision and the wider Church picked it up with alacrity. But its success is down

> to the ministers and congregations which had the sanctified imagination to catch the vision and, of course, the blessing of

the Lord.

To answer your question, our relative size makes us agile. Our commitment to mission at congregational level, respect for the authority of the Bible, belief in the transformational power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the overriding imperative of the Great Commission gives us people with vision. Vision and prayer are key to assembling the components for success. We emerged from a crisis at the end of the last century that had focussed our attention inside our organisation and on a battle to maintain our identity, property and money. This led to a weariness and hunger for getting back to biblical business. The vision was born out of these conditions.

Also, God has blessed us in recent years, and this has affirmed the realism of the mission. In our smallness and weakness, we have to rely on God's strength. This is a biblical principle which should give us hope.

You told the General Assembly that, while we are blessed with exceptional preachers and pastors in the Free Church, they are too few. You called this 'the greatest obstacle to the onward march of our church'. What do we need to do to address this?

We need to challenge our members to ask themselves if they are called to ministry. And we need to give them encouragement to try themselves to see if they have gifts which others would recognise.

We need to search the world — the rest of the UK in the first instance — for minsters and invite them

into our church.

We must also improve our training systems. They should be more flexible so people can change career

without piling on barriers. This can be done by using digitally enabled learning as well as on-site training.

Our elders should be trained to focus on being leaders in teams which are committed to making their churches healthy and inspiring so that we can attract gifted people to lead them.

Modern technology can be used to maximise the reach of our preaching and teaching — a legacy, I hope, from COVID-19. ▶▶

You also told the Assembly that, from 2000 onwards, you were never happier in our church; that it felt like we had returned from the wilderness with a more passionate sense of mission. What brought about that change? And what has convinced you of our greater sense of mission?

I see the history of the Free Church in my lifetime in phases. The Free Church survived the Second World War and had grown from the beleaguered few in 1900 to be an alternative national church. Its ministry was dominated by the Island of Lewis — strongly evangelical and strongly conservative and led by strong-minded but not always united leadership.

From the 1960s, the Church was characterised by contentment with a large proportion of adherents; its culture was formal and legalistic as well as passionate and evangelical. It bit hard on the cake of history — the heir of the great and noble Disruption and the vindication of the 1900 struggle. As the Church of Scotland became more liberal

the Free Church became more self-righteous. The underlying secularisation of the post-war period and the 60s was not widely understood in the Free Church.

widely understood **give us hope.**in the Free Church.

Christendom had lost its heart; it was being dismantled, and the Free Church sought to extend its life and had little understanding of the changing

In our smallness and weakness, we

have to rely on God's strength. This

is a biblical principle which should

By the end of 20th century, the tension between the legalists and the progressives was contained by careful management of Assemblies and by studied ignoring of conflict. That containment broke down at the end of the 20th century and the tension manifested itself in a legal struggle for control of Free Church resources and re-setting of its identity. Two crucial events occurred. First, the departure of ministers to the Free Church (Continuing) and the subsequent failure of their campaign to secure the property and identity of the Free Church. That reduced the tension between the opposing visions for the Church. Second, the Free Church settled its 'Brexit question' — i.e. the praise issue.

cultural currents within which it ministered.

These events changed our outlook and our practice. The old legalism and self-righteousness took a hammering from the unedifying legal struggle with the FCC and the loss of clergy to the FCC. The resolution of the praise battle was a compromise that enabled both sides of the debate to live in harmony in a single church. For the most part this has ended the somewhat blind passion for uniformity which had characterised the earlier church. Ministers now have a greater degree of freedom, not only to decide which style of praise suits their needs, but to shape their worship

services with biblical rather than ecclesiastical parameters. The praise debate opened people's eyes to the massive freedoms which we have at a congregational level to worship and control our activities as we deem appropriate for our situations.

What do you find most encouraging about the position the Free Church is in now?

There are many encouragements. The focus on growth, the passion for training and equipping people, the commitment to planning, the vision for planting and revitalisation and an openness to change. Supporting all of this is the toleration of diversity in how we present the gospel and the claims of Christ in each of our communities.

Have you made any plans for your retirement?

I don't believe in retirement! If you are granted health and strength and energy, and others think you have something to offer when you are liberated from earning your living, you should carry on working. Retirement is unknown in the Bible. I am

chair of Solas in Dundee

— a hugely thrilling parachurch organisation
with great vision. I'm
Presbytery Clerk of
Inverness, Lochaber
and Ross — a work of

and Ross — a work of change in progress! I am also Chair of Highland Community Carers' Forum, an organisation funded by the NHS and the Local Authority to support carers in the community. I am Session Clerk of Kiltarlity Free Church. In addition to all of that I try to find time for reading, reflection, cycling and

How can we pray for Donald Forsyth, your successor?

seeing my grandchildren.

Pray that Donald will get time for the role. The management of time is the greatest challenge that people in leading positions in their industry and professions face. Pray also for wisdom and understanding so that he will articulate a dialogue for the Board to help it to focus on the things that will make a real difference for the ministers, elders and members in congregations who are seeking to fulfil the Church's mission. Is it impious also to ask that he will enjoy the role?

We must always remember that we work under the eye and direction of God — anything we do of any worth results from his kindness and mercy and we trust him to correct the impact of our failures and limitations. •





WHAT DOES 3 YEARS' STUDY AT ETS LOOK LIKE?

HE ACADEMIC YEAR AT ETS HAS COME TO AN END; STUDENTS ARE NOW ON THEIR SUMMER BREAK AND PREPARATIONS WILL SOON START FOR THE NEW 2020/21 SESSION BEGINNING IN SEPTEMBER. After the summer, many students will be returning and new ones will be starting. But what exactly is involved in studying the Bachelor of Theology degree at ETS? This month, we take a look at the different topics that go into the degree. For full-time students, the course is divided into 12 modules, and students do four of these each year. There is a lot of flexibility in terms of how the course is structured, so not everyone follows the patterns below. But in general, this is how the course is set out for students studying the degree over three years.

YEAR 1 The first-years study Old Testament 1, Greek, Church History 1 and Practical Theology 1. Old Testament 1 starts by looking at the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible. This explores topics like the Creation, the Exodus and, perhaps most importantly, the significance of the term 'Covenant' in Biblical Theology. Greek gets the students back to A, B, C - well, actually Alpha, Beta, Gamma. The aim of this Greek course is to allow students to read the original language when they start New Testament studies in second year. Church History 1 starts off with a big overview of the history of the Christian Church before focussing in much more detail on the Reformation in the second semester. Practical Theology looks at a wide variety of topics; things like counselling, apologetics, leadership and world religions.

YEAR 2 In second year, students take a break from Old Testament and Practical Theology, and in their place come Hebrew and Systematic Theology. So the Year 2 programme is made up of Church History 2, Hebrew, Systematic Theology 1 and New Testament 1. Church History 2 is entirely focussed on the history of the church in Scotland, and begins with the events of the Scottish Reformation in 1560. It then works all the way through to the 20th century, taking in big events like the Covenanters, the Marrow Controversy and the Disruption. At the end of second year, students have finished the whole of their Church History course, as it is not studied in the final year. Hebrew gets students learning how to read the Old Testament in its original language, so (hopefully!) by the end of second year, students have some basic skills for reading both Hebrew and Greek. For both of these languages, the

aim is to be able to read, not speak, so sadly the students don't tend to reach the level of chatting over a coffee in Ancient Hebrew! Systematic Theology 1 looks mainly at the Doctrine of God and the Doctrine of Scripture. The aim of Systematic Theology is to look at what the whole Bible says about a particular topic and to arrange it all into an organised summary of the Bible's teaching. Systematic Theology also looks at different viewpoints that have emerged over the course of history – some we agree with and some that we don't! Finally, New Testament 1 gets the students to use the Greek reading skills they learned in first year to study the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

YEAR 3 In the final year, the last four courses are covered. These are Systematic Theology 2, Practical Theology 2, Old Testament 2 and New Testament 2. In Systematics 2, the focus is mostly on the person and work of Jesus Christ. So there is a lot of attention given to Christology, and then after that students look in more detail at the Atonement. There is also some time given to ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church, and eschatology, the doctrine of the Last Things. Practical Theology 2 continues to look at how the truths of the biblical worldview are to be applied to life. Students look at topics such as pastoral care, mission and evangelism. Old Testament 2 focusses on the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament (books like Psalms, Proverbs, Job etc.) and the Prophets. The big difference now is that students are expected to study the Old Testament in Hebrew. Finally, New Testament 2 looks at the Epistles and, last of all, the Book of Revelation.

And that's it. Twelve courses spread across three years. A lot of topics are covered and students are given as a wide a range of knowledge as possible. However, perhaps the most striking thing of all in terms of the three-year degree is not how much you cover, it is how much is still left to be learned when you reach the end of it. One of the many evidences of how amazing the Bible is is the fact that you can study it for three years, ten years, or fifty years, and yet no matter how long you are able to spend learning, there is always so much more still to be discovered. And that is why Jesus Christ and his Gospel is the most fascinating subject we can ever study. When it comes to learning about the love of God and all that he has done for us in Jesus, the curriculum is never-ending. •

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Need a break from the current crisis on Planet Earth? Then take a look at what's going on elsewhere in the galaxy! **RODDIE RANKIN** presents...The Wonder of Extraterrestrial Life

As Christians, we should be excited about the universe whatever it contains. It is our Heavenly Father's creation. He can populate it with whatever creatures he pleases, and it will be 'very good'.

ERE'S MY PROMISE: IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE NOW, YOU WILL BY THE END
OF THIS ARTICLE!

Life is treasure. Let's go on a treasure hunt! Let's look for living things. Must we go far afield? We needn't even move from our seats! We are surrounded by life that is wonderful, complex, diverse and tenacious. From minuscule microbes to towering trees, life is in the air, the soil and the water. We find it wherever we go. In the past explorers encountered rampant life, often human, as they travelled to remote corners of the world.

Life is abundant everywhere, even in the most unlikely places. So whether we explore nearby planets or look out on faraway stars, we would expect to detect life of some kind wherever we search. Why would the rest of the galaxy be less fecund than the third planet from the sun? Why indeed? Yet we haven't found a trace of life anywhere else. Really. Despite endless Hollywood fascination with the subject, and although huge resources have been directed to the quest, there is not a shred of scientific evidence for life beyond our planet.

Is nobody out there? We might expect that ancient alien civilisations, if they existed, would have colonised the galaxy by now, and made contact. So, are we destined to cosmic loneliness? Is life only going to be found on other worlds if we take it there? Or maybe life elsewhere is too different for us to be able to recognise it? Perhaps it is showing what it considers to be good judgement by having nothing to do with us? Could it be among us in clever disguise? Maybe it has been and gone before us, or is yet to arise?

If science and exploration have not settled these questions, presumably the Bible does. Let's muster the 'there is/is not life on other worlds' texts. But the Bible too is silent on the subject. It is inevitably Earth-centred in its focus. When it does look 'out there', it sees the sun, moon and stars. It tells us their splendour declares a glorious Creator, ⁰¹ but doesn't say if he has endowed them with life or the ability to generate it.

A LOADED QUESTION

So is the absence or presence of life elsewhere a matter of indifference? Very much the opposite! Some Christians vehemently rule it out, saying the Bible only describes life being created on Earth, and God's Son was sent only to Earth. They say that this is where God's action is, not on other worlds. That assumes the Bible tells the whole story of God's cosmic focus. But while our Heavenly Father is undoubtedly giving our world a profoundly humbling level of sacrificial attention, 12 that does not preclude his doing the same for other worlds. We certainly believe he has the capacity to do so! You might retort that he hasn't told us about the other worlds. But then, his Word didn't tell us about the Far East, Australia or the Americas! There was undoubtedly life there, and life for whom Christ died. Indeed, no less a figure than Dr Thomas Chalmers (among many others) argued, with equal vehemence, for extraterrestrial 'creatures of God who people other regions and occupy other fields in the immensity of his dominions', and that Christ might have died for them too! So views about the scope both of biblical revelation and of the atonement polarise Christians who consider this issue.

The possibility of extraterrestrial life is also of considerable importance to many atheists. In their God-less thinking, life must have evolved by chance from non-living elements. They contend that life emerged spontaneously, knowing just how improbable and lacking in evidence that position is. However, if life is found elsewhere in the cosmos, they can say that it too must have evolved, and that the universe clearly possesses mechanisms to self-generate life with a reasonable probability of success. This 'cosmic imperative' would be proof to them that God is not needed for life. They could then, in better conscience, close the case for God.

THE TREASURE HUNT

With various motivations, then, the treasure hunt is underway. What could be more exciting and worldview-changing than to 'unEarth' the prize? But what is the nature of the quest? Is it an alien safari; a bug-eyed-monster-collecting trip?

Nothing so dramatic! Two main approaches are being followed.

The first is to seek intelligent life. Space is vast. At our present level of technology, visiting even the closest star systems is out of the question. Instead we listen.

Planet Earth has been broadcasting its intellectual life to the stars for more than a hundred years. Radio waves carry everything from Ayatollah Khomeini to Z Cars across the cosmos. Our earliest broadcasts have already reached more than ten thousand planetary systems. Assuming they've figured out how to decode our signals and language, are the wee green men boggling over Betty Boop, or believing Billy Graham?

By analogy, we might expect to detect alien signals. The universe makes a lot of noise. Some of what you hear when your TV is tuned off-channel is that cosmic noise. It is mostly random. We seek coherent, information-filled signals at frequencies we think ET might use to phone home. Enterprises such as the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) have been straining very big ears to the cosmos, panning for alien-gold amidst the gravel of space noise. In forty years we are not a mite the richer. If smart aliens exist they are either very scarce or communicating in ways we don't know how to hear.

The second approach to the treasure hunt is to seek any life. This mainly relies on sending robotic probes to reachable places in our solar system to look for life-forms capable of existing in the hostile environments of other planets and their moons. It includes sifting for evidence of past life.

One of the most astounding discoveries of recent decades has been how some bacteria can thrive in very inhospitable places. Look in lakes sealed under Antarctic ice, superheated vents at the bottom of the Pacific, boiling pools of sulphuric acid in Yellowstone, rocks several kilometres below ground, and even in nuclear reactor coolant water, and the common factor is that niche bacteria have found a home! Every nook is 'teeming' with God's little lives!⁰⁴

If these so-called 'extremophiles' can defy all expectations to survive in such severe conditions on Earth, why not somewhere else, like Mars? Mars has the next most Earth-like environment in our solar system. Orbiters and landers have scoured it, and robotic rovers have roamed the surface of Mars prospecting in them that hills for traces of life present or past. To date, the most that can be said is that Mars was once a more clement environment where water flowed. Anything beyond that remains speculation. However, in the ten tonnes of man-made objects now on Mars' surface, could some viable extremophile bacteria, inadvertently carried from Earth, be lurking patiently? Having survived the journey across space, does it await a fair wind to begin colonisation of its new home?

WHAT NEXT?

We have already mentioned that there are planets orbiting stars other than our sun. This is not guesswork — to date over 4,000 of these planets have been detected. In God's prolific creation it is a staggering fact that most stars appear to possess orbiting planets. Many of them sit within the zone where liquid water could exist on their surface. This is thought to be an essential condition for complex life, assuming it bears a chemical resemblance to life on Earth. There are likely billions of such potentially Earth-like planets in our galaxy. The next phase of human investigation of these 'exoplanets', subject to funding, is to determine what gases are in their atmosphere. This will use the beautiful and convenient fact that every element and compound has a unique signature which shows in the light shining from it. We can now make instruments sensitive enough to sample the light from exoplanet atmospheres. The treasure sought comprises the kinds and proportions of gases which only living creatures would be likely to produce.

As Christians, we should be excited about the universe whatever it contains. It is our Heavenly Father's creation. He can populate it with whatever creatures he pleases, and it will be 'very good'. 15 It is true that there is no proof of extraterrestrial life, but arguments from silence are never conclusive, whether the silence is the Bible's or SETI's. We must never be so conceited that we think there couldn't be anyone like us in the cosmos, nor so arrogant that we limit God's creativity. If extraterrestrials do show up they will neither dethrone God, 16 nor man's privileged place in his heart of love. 17 Like the angels, they may be sinless creatures who can show us how to worship our common Creator. 18

TREASURE FOUND!

But wait! There is somewhere we have yet to look. Ancient texts speak of an off-planet 'city of gold' vibrant with unimaginable life, with which communication and mostly one-way travel are already established. One of the few to have come from there to Earth is Jesus

Christ.⁰⁹ His presence here was no mere visit: he fully adopted our human condition, making a real human body his own.¹⁰ His return to the place of abundant life was not a fading out before his watching disciples to enter an alternative, ghostly realm. 'He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.'¹¹ His body was not discarded like Elijah's cloak;¹² it ascended to another place within the physical creation. A physical body needs a physical location! What he called *heaven*, *paradise* or the *Father's house* ¹³ is a special place God has made within this creation; a real place somewhere in this cosmos! Let's be certain about this, because clarity strengthens faith. Heaven has atoms, dimensions, directions, forces and hard surfaces! When we call heaven a *spiritual* place, we must remember that the Bible does not use that word of heaven, and we must not equate *spiritual* with insubstantial or fluffy.

Speculating about heaven's location is pointless; it is presently inaccessible except through Jesus. ¹⁴ Yet it is a 'definite portion of space where God specially manifests His presence' (Charles Hodge); a 'part of the Universe [where] Christ's glorified humanity now holds its court' (R.L. Dabney); somewhere which 'really does exist in our space/ time universe, and within which Jesus now lives in his physical resurrection body' (Wayne Grudem).

This leads us to an important conclusion: the word *heaven* always means a *physical* location in the Bible. It may be the sky (where rain falls from), the stars (outer space) or the present dwelling of God with the angels. ¹⁵ Three heavens — the latter being called the 'third' by Paul. ¹⁶ That does not mean God is *contained* in a created place called heaven. Yes, he is there, but he is more than there. Even the heavens above the heavens cannot contain him ¹⁷ — he also lives outside of creation as its Creator. Yet as the Son stooped to become incarnate on Earth, the Father stoops to dwell in his creation in heaven. ¹⁸

What a wonder this is! He wants to be in the creation so that he might dwell with his embodied Son. ¹⁹ And not only with the Son. It appears that Enoch ²⁰ and Elijah ²¹ went to physical heaven with physical bodies. And more. Hebrews 12 describes the heavenly city of the living God, out in some favoured region of creation, as also populated by angels, and by the spirits of the righteous made perfect ²² awaiting the re-clothing of the resurrection. ²³ So are we alone in creation? Certainly not! There is at least one location of extraterrestrial life: heaven! I have kept my opening promise, and led you to the treasure! You'd better believe in this extraterrestrial life, because, Christian, if you die before the Lord returns

But not for ever. At the denouement of this age the action will shift from heaven to planet Earth. Those perfect spirits will traverse the vastnesses of space with the angels and archangels, and the Glorious Returning King Jesus, and they will relocate to Earth.²⁴ The Lord will resurrect their bodies, and, re-inhabiting them, they will enter a new age. The Earth will be renewed — a new heavens and new earth.²⁵ With the Father and the Son beside them they will discover what the beautiful dominion of a redeemed mankind over creation can really mean. With glorified intellects, pure hearts and unlimited time, will they also develop the means to resume the treasure hunt, reaching out across the cosmos to discover what really is out there?

Further reading: *Science, Religion and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, David Wilkinson.

Rev. Roddie M. Rankin is minister of Kyle and Plockton Free Church

you'll be joining it!

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<sup>01</sup> Job 38:31-33; Psalm 19:1-6, 147:4,5;
                                                                            <sup>13</sup> Matthew 5:45; Luke 23:43; John 14:2
                                                                           <sup>14</sup> John 14:6
    Jeremiah 31:35
<sup>02</sup> 1 John 4:14
                                                                           <sup>15</sup> Nehemiah 9:6
03 Jeremiah 32:27
                                                                           <sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:2
<sup>04</sup> Psalm 104:24,25
                                                                           ^{17} 1 Kings 8:27; compare Deuteronomy 10:14
<sup>05</sup> Genesis 1:31
                                                                           <sup>18</sup> Psalm 113:4-6
of Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:5,6
                                                                           <sup>19</sup> John 16:32
<sup>07</sup> John 3:16
                                                                           <sup>20</sup> Hebrews 11:5
<sup>08</sup> Revelation 19:10, 22:9
                                                                           <sup>21</sup> 2 Kings 2:11
                                                                           <sup>22</sup> Hebrews 12:22-24
<sup>09</sup> John 6:38
<sup>10</sup> John 1:14
                                                                           <sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:4
<sup>11</sup> Acts 1:9-11; Luke 24:51
                                                                           <sup>24</sup> Revelation 21:2
<sup>12</sup> 2 Kings 2:13
                                                                           25 Revelation 21:1
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CHARACTER

I would describe Golspie Free Church as a happy church. People are happy in their walk with God, happy in the company of each other, happy being at church services and listening to God's Word, and happy living out their Christian faith in the community of Golspie and beyond. Although not a large church, they are faithful in the knowledge that the Lord has equipped them as he sees fit. They seek to live for him faithfully using the resources and the gifts he has given.

THE COURSE WE'VE TAKEN

As well as Sunday and midweek services, of which pastoral work has been central, GFC have also used alternative ways in going about our business.



Classical Cafe Church

Café Church involves an informal service around tables with tea, coffee, baking and music or another medium like art. The visiting artist will also share their story of coming to Christ. Our country

and classical music events are popular. We have also held themed Songs of Praise events of which one or two have been outdoors.

Although our Christianity Explored course has not been as effective at drawing people as we would have wished, we are persevering with it, praying that it would be beneficial.



COVID-19 Studio for Sunday Zoom meetings

We have increased the use of modern technology in services to showing testimonies, videos, and films like *Pilgrim's Progress the Musical*.

We have developed our website (golspiefreechurch.com) and Facebook page (facebook.com/golspiefreechurch) as ways of communicating with people. We have also enjoyed informal fellowship meals at a local restaurant.

CRAFT GROUP

Formed in 2000, our informal craft group has served to bring together people within the congregation and community. Crafted items are made at home or at the monthly gathering. The group participates in local sales and also runs their own events to showcase products and sell items. The profits go towards various causes decided by group members. GFC has benefited greatly through this. We now have 'all user toilet facilities', new comfortable seating, café-style tables and equipment and much more. Attendees enjoy the informal social gatherings, which draw a number of people from the local community.

GIVING

A major reason for stepping up to five-year, full-time ministry is that, for various reasons, our finances have improved. Thanks are due to those who took an interest in the work of GFC, remembering us prayerfully, and also those who wished to contribute financially: the congregation, the Golspie community and some outwith the area.



Golspie from the air

CHURCH RENOVATION

Central to much of the success of our church services and other ministries have been the ongoing renovations to the buildings and technical equipment. The next part of the project is a dedicated kitchen for Café Church, which can also be used before or after Sunday services. A new kitchen refit in the church hall is also on the radar.

COMMUNITY OF GOLSPIE

GFC is a spiritual family and the people of Golspie are the community in which we live and share. There is hardly a day we are not involved in some way with the life of the community, where everyone knows everyone else. The greatest connection between the minister and the community, however (apart from ongoing daily contact and friendship), is at times of bereavement, when the church and minister are able to show the love of Christ through the visits and services normally undertaken at such a time. GFC is also grateful for the support and encouragement which they too receive from the community. We also seek to support the wider denomination and recently raised money to sponsor a church camp which a number of our Youth Fellowship were attending.

OUR COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

Our draft 'road map' for the next five years carries on with much of what has been useful over the past number of years, and adds some new ideas. Our aim is to develop and grow so that we are able to share more effectively our love for God and for the community in which he has placed us. With his grace and help we seek to be faithful to him. •

Rev. Eric Paterson is minister of Golspie Free Church



Rev. Eric Paterson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



To the Editor.

I wish to make further enquiry on the matter of 'Evolutionary Creation' as in Alan Fraser's article (May edition). His quote below (the bit in bold about 'inactive zones of DNA') is not clear to me and I wonder if he refers to what scientists often call 'junk DNA'. If not, then I would like to know what it is:

'The latest and most compelling evidence comes from DNA. Widely varying species have common genetic material including inactive zones of DNA that are almost identical to active genes in other species, strongly suggesting common ancestry. One is left with the stark choice between believing that life has indeed evolved or believing that the Creator brought into existence living things that look as if they had common ancestors.'

I agree that we share many physical characteristics of mammals in particular, for DNA only requires slight tweaking to make big changes, and God is the originator of DNA. However, I cannot agree with the 'stark choice' Mr Fraser concludes we are faced with. If what he speaks of is what used to be called 'junk DNA', then my objections to his conclusions about it could not be put better than by this scientist (who is a Christian) from his book below:

'The study of genome sequencing in living species, begun in the 1980s, seemed to show lots of 'junk DNA'. This 98% of the total DNA in advanced organisms (to 80% in bacteria) was taken as clear evidence of evolution. It was said to be rubbish left over from failed evolutionary 'experiments'. When automated DNA sequencing techniques became available during the 2000s and it became possible to sequence entire genomes, including the massive, so-called junk ingredient, some curious things were noticed. First came the unwelcome surprise that humans had only 25,000 to 30,000 genes — compared with a similar number in a small plant called Arabidopsis and over 40,000 in rice and poplar trees.

It's a bit humbling to think that a city full of human beings has a smaller gene pool than a paddy field.

We also now know that humans share 96 per cent of their DNA with chimpanzees (it used to be claimed as 98 per cent). What this proves, of course, is not that chimps are 96 per cent human, any more than rice is 133 percent human, but that genes and sequences as such are by no means the whole story. It is becoming increasingly clear that much if not most of the story resides in the junk DNA.' Who Made God? Searching for a Theory of Everything by Prof. Edgar Andrews, pp 234-237, The Mighty Mutation (EP Books 2009)

Anne Sanderson (Falkirk Free Church)

Dear Anne,

I would not use the term 'junk DNA' as it is open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. There are evolutionists who have used the term but it does not fit well with current understanding of genetics. I have no problem with the information contained in your quote from Edgar Andrews. It sits very comfortably with the evolutionary creation position. However, the implication that it somehow weakens the argument for evolution is not so welcome. It does no such thing.

Denis Alexander (a warm-hearted Christian) in his books, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*; *Is There Purpose in Evolution?*; and *Genes, Determinism and God*, has fascinating and up-to-date information on how large sections of DNA, not themselves specific genes, function in the whole process of heredity. He speaks at length on current appreciation of epigenetic factors. As Andrews says, 'much of the story resides in the *junk DNA'* (italics mine). What is interesting is that a lot of that so-called 'junk' is composed of molecular fragments that are identical to active genetic material in other species, but with a slight change that effectively switches them off as active genes. They may still play a useful part in the functioning of the live genes. They may also lie dormant for a long time before being converted into something useful by a small mutation. This fits very neatly into the idea of common descent.

Thank you for engaging with me in this debate.

Alan J F Fraser

Dear Editor.

In his article on Evolutionary Creation, Alan Fraser states that Adam is not the biological ancestor of all humans; yet Paul, speaking to the Areopagus in Athens, says, 'From one man He made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth' (Acts 17:26). Since all Scripture is God-breathed, this is not merely Paul's personal opinion but God's word to us, as the first chapters of Genesis state. This comes from Genesis 1-4 and on through the genealogies of Scripture.

When Jesus was asked a question about divorce, in Matthew 19:3, He referred His questioners to Genesis 1 and 2, saying, 'Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female" and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"?' Since He Himself was the Creator now incarnate, He should know.

Paul also took these early chapters as historical narrative in writing to the church at Rome: 'Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin and, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned.' (Romans 5:12) — a reference to Genesis 3.

These all take these chapters of Genesis as historical narrative.

Sincerely,

Andrew Fraser, Dingwall

Dear Editor.

In reply to Andrew Fraser's well-presented objection to my statement that 'Adam is not the biological ancestor of all human beings', I would offer the following comments.

The Greek manuscripts of the Acts 17:26 verse do not contain the word 'man'. This may or may not be significant. Paul's words, 'From one he made every nation' stop short of stating that every human being was a physical descendant of Adam by normal procreation.

Jesus' words in Matthew 19:3 make a very important point about marriage and gender. Whether one believes in evolutionary creation, young Earth creation, or any other variety of creation, we all believe that from the beginning man was created male and female. This does not say anything about how God brought males and females into existence. Nor does it rule out the existence of other human beings contemporary with Adam and Eve, who might well have wished to avenge Cain's murder of his brother.

Paul's words in Romans 5:12 speak of the transmission of Adam's guilt to all mankind. Adam is clearly presented as a representative head of the human race. Physical descent is not mentioned. What he did affected all human beings, whether contemporary or future.

I do believe that Adam was a historical character and the first truly human being, created in the image of God.

I have thought long and hard about these verses as I, too, believe the Scriptures are God breathed. I also believe that all truth is God's truth. Five hundred years ago wiser and godlier men than I believed the Scriptures ruled out the Copernican view of the solar system. The Psalms say 'the Earth is fixed and cannot move.' Today I know of no one who believes the Psalmist was talking about the movements of the planets and the stars. But it is worthy of note that it took a scientific discovery to make many aware of their misinterpretation of Scripture. Similarly today we have to look at the evidence gained by observing the physical world and bear that in mind when considering what Scripture appears to imply. I believe we need to be careful in looking for answers in Scripture to questions it was not designed to answer. God's revelation to physical creatures in a physical world is bound to make reference to physical reality, but we can so easily read our own traditions into Scripture, especially when searching for truths on matters other than 'what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.'

I welcome this dialogue as it helps me to think through my own views.

Sincerely

Alan J F Fraser

We would love to hear from you...please write the editor at: The Record, Beltone, Moray Street, Blackford PH4 1QF or e-mail editor@freechurch.org

REV. JOHN J MURRAY (1934-2020)

BY ANDY MURRAY

HE INITIAL NOVELTY OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN WAS BROUGHT TO A SUDDEN END ON THE 1ST OF APRIL 2020 WHEN I WAS CALLED BY A DOCTOR AT LEVERNDALE HOSPITAL IN GLASGOW. My 85-year-old father, Rev. John J Murray, who had been in isolation for two weeks with the coronavirus, was now deteriorating rapidly and my mother and I were asked to come to the hospital as quickly as possible. To my surprise I was given the choice to go into my dad's room to say goodbye. Gowned, gloved and masked, I stumbled my way through the last few verses of Romans 8 and Psalm 23. Parting is difficult at any time, but during an international pandemic it seemed even more traumatic and surreal. Hopefully, he heard the words of a grateful son as he slipped into eternity.

My father was born into a crofting family near Dornoch in 1934, the middle of three sons. It was a home where the Word of God was central and hard work was not an option. Dad described the local Free Church as 'orthodox but cold'. Throughout my father's ministry his desire was never just for a return to reformed theology but to see the best of experiential piety practised primarily in the home. Perhaps more than anything else my father's legacy will be in reviving interest in the best of Highland piety and family religion. He read good books at an early age and was greatly influenced by a Prof. John Murray sermon in Dornoch in 1953 on John 6:37. While in an unoccupied house on the croft one day, reading and praying, Dad spoke of an 'overwhelming sense of Christ crucified', and he dates this time as his conversion.

In 1955 my father left for Edinburgh to work for the Caledonian Insurance Company. In 1958 he began to publish a little magazine called Eternal Truth, which he continued when he returned home to Dornoch for further studies. He sent the magazine to Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in London, who, around this time, was supporting the set-up of the Banner of Truth Trust. After corresponding with lain H Murray in 1960 about the possibility of working with the Banner, a rail ticket to London was sent, and for the next twelve years Dad embraced London as his home. Marrying my mother in 1966, they went on to have two girls and a boy, who arrived just before their move back to Scotland in 1972. Despite being a regular visitor to Westminster Chapel, and being forever changed through the preaching of Lloyd-Jones, my dad threw his weight behind the Free Church in London, where he preached regularly. It was perhaps no great surprise, when the Banner of Truth moved to Edinburgh in 1972, that my father applied for the Free Church ministry.

After four years at the Free Church College from 1974-78, Dad was called to Oban, Argyll, where he had a happy and fruitful ministry. These were the heady days of the Highways and Byways Mission teams and I remember many of today's Free Church ministers passing through

our manse. Our time in Oban was overshadowed by the death of my sister, Lynda Joan, in December 1980. The death rocked the church and community, but out of the very deep soil of grief came fruit — Behind a Frowning Providence has now been read by thousands around the world. Called to St Columba's Edinburgh in 1989, my father began to exercise a much wider ministry and was invited to various conferences at home and abroad. Dad was at the epicentre of controversy in the Free Church before the bitter division in 2000. My father sided with the Free Church (Continuing) and remained in the pastoral ministry until 2002.

In retirement he was well-known as a conference speaker and preacher and had several books published: Behind a Frowning Providence and John E Marshall Life and Writings (Banner of Truth), Catch the Vision: The Roots of Reformed Recovery and John Knox (EP), along with countless booklets and articles. My father's retirement was again overshadowed with loss when my other sister, Anna, died in October 2019 from pancreatic cancer, which had a devastating effect on him.

It seemed very fitting that at the end of his life there were three books on my father's hospital bedside table: a Bible, CH Spurgeon's *Cheque Book of Faith*, and a book of sermons by Prof John Murray entitled *O Death, Where is Thy Sting?*, published by Westminster Seminary Press. And isn't that so true for the Christian? Death is not the end but the glorious beginning. As a family we are so thankful for gospel hope. We are so glad that Dad is free from his pain and sorrow and now knows the reality of 1 Corinthians 15:55-58: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'



ROBERT McGIVERN (1968-2020)

BY NICK MACKISON

HE DEATH OF ROBERT MCGIVERN, AT THE AGE OF 51 ON 28TH MARCH 2020, CAME AS A DEVASTATING BLOW TO HIS FAMILY, AS WELL AS HIS FRIENDS IN GOVAN FREE CHURCH (GFC). Born on 28th September 1968, he was the second of four children born to parents Robert McGivern Sr. and Ann McMillan. Shortly after his birth, Robert's family moved from Govan to nearby Pollok, where he would spend his formative years. Exuding many personal qualities including charisma, leadership and quick wit, Robert became an extremely popular member of Pollok's community. One of Robert's defining characteristics was his passion; whether it was his obsession for the music of Bob Dylan and UB40, or his commitment to fashion or, especially, his devotion to Celtic Football Club, Robert's enthusiasm bordered on zealotry!

Yet despite his great potential and gifts, Robert's youth through early adulthood was largely marked by criminality and suffering. Avoiding the violence prevalent in 1980s Glasgow was difficult for many young men living in the city's housing schemes, and it was no different for Robert who, though being small in stature, was described by a friend as having the heart of a lion. Routine drug and alcohol abuse would eventually become a 30-year-long cycle of addiction, and attendant encounters with the law saw Robert accumulating several prison sentences. Throughout his turmoil, bereavement seemed to stalk him like a dark spectre. After the untimely death of Robert's younger brother John, he suffered the loss of two long-term partners, one of whom, Terry Dore, was the mother of his young son, Robert Anthony. To the naked eye, it appeared that Robert had little by way of hope for the future.

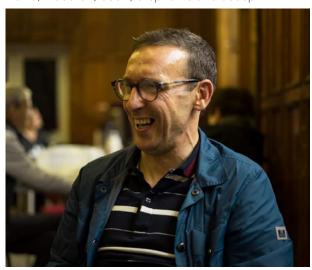
But God had plans for Robert, involving both hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). In 2016, having grown increasingly desperate in a search for meaning, Robert was led to GFC where, under the pastoral care of Rev. Norman Mackay, he embraced the lifechanging message of forgiveness of sins through repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the darkness he had experienced, Robert steadfastly refused the label of victim; he recognised his culpability as a sinner and, hence, that his deepest need was for God's grace in Christ.

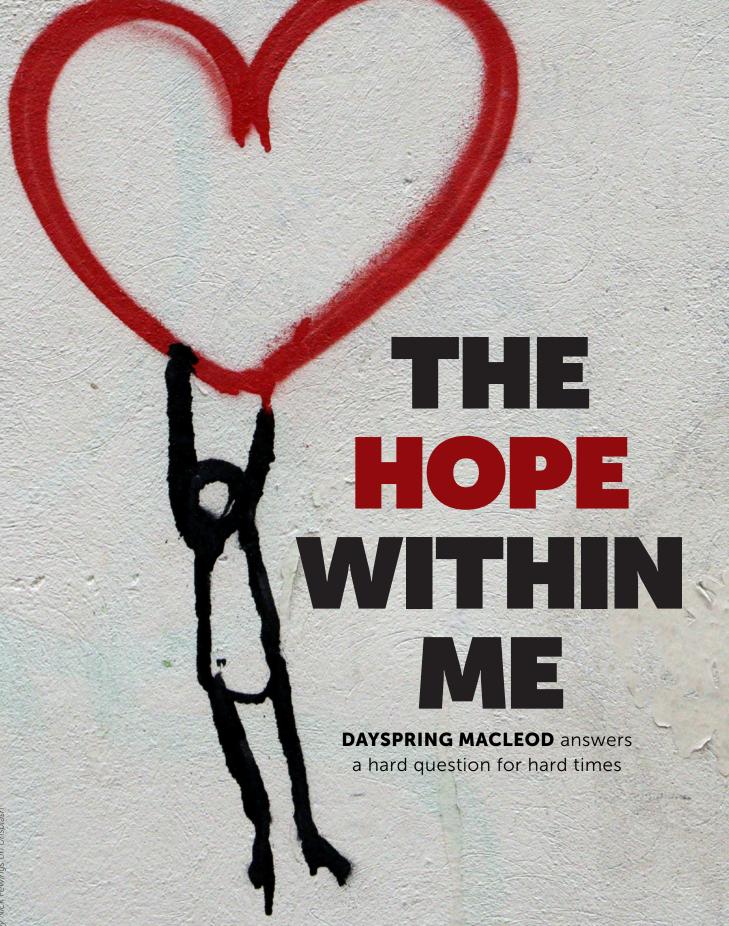
Robert's life since his conversion was a striking testimony to God's grace as restoring rather than eclipsing humanity. The varied remarkable character traits, that were apparent even in Robert's life of addiction, were redeemed so that his personality refracted God's light in a many-splendored brilliance. His aforementioned zeal became a particularly radiant light; his former

passion for Celtic was now repurposed into a single-minded devotion to Christ. Now Robert's lion-heart was turned towards fighting the good fight of faith. His tongue, formerly a weapon for ridicule, now overflowed with living water, as he spoke of the Lord to everyone he encountered, whether they were receptive to it or not. Such was his evangelistic fervour that, in Glasgow's drug-recovery community, he came to be known affectionately as 'Boab the Baptist' and 'the speccy Jesus'! Nevertheless, despite the friendly ridicule, Robert was instrumental in bringing many from the recovery community to GFC. There, he was a catalyst for the joy of the Lord; wherever uproarious laughter was heard, you could be sure that Robert was at the centre of it! However, Robert was not all talk at the expense of his walk. He threw himself into a life of rigorous discipleship and engagement with GFC's multiple ministries. Of the latter, his gifts shone particularly within the outreach café which runs on Tuesday mornings, where he was often to be found offering a listening ear, biblical counsel and even financial assistance to the broken people in attendance. With the help of Terry McCutcheon and Hope for Glasgow, Robert discovered a

Christ-based answer to his addiction battles and, as a shining example of recovery, immersed himself in the work of the organisation. In the space of four short years, Robert had burned with such ardour for Christ that he had accomplished more in that brief period than many Christians could in a lifetime. Maybe this is why Robert was taken so suddenly from us; his work here was finished. All that remained was for God to answer Jesus' prayer that Robert would one day be with him to see his glory (John 17:26).

Robert is survived by his parents Robert and Ann, son Robert Jr, and siblings Ann, Stephen, Anthony, William, David, Deborah, Scott, Stephanie and Joseph.





T USUALLY TAKES ME AN HOUR OR SO TO WRITE AN ARTICLE. I take whatever spiritual lesson the Lord has been teaching me lately, complain a bit about my kids, and shape a story around it. This article, however,

has taken three weeks to percolate and three days to write

It started in early May, when I talked to an American friend on the phone. He is a critical thinker, with a strong sense of ethics and both feet on the ground; he's also a Christian who has been disappointed with church life. He doesn't usually open up to me a lot, but there was so much on his mind that it was overflowing. He felt consumed and deeply troubled by the range of political debate amongst his own family, colleagues and friends. While I share his personal views almost to the letter, and I do occasionally feel my temper strain under the weight of my opinions, I don't feel consumed by them.

It will be no surprise to learn that this is because of ways the Lord has dealt with me, but I couldn't explain

how he had made difference. The best I could manage was 'I know Christ will make it all right in the end.' I could hear how lame it

If we look for our rock and salvation in this world, in government, in humanity, we will find nothing but temporary fixes for timeless problems.

sounded as I said it! This friend feels let down, as do I, by the moral vacillations of the American church and the Republican Party. It's not a grievance that can be mollified by vague platitudes. He deserves a real answer. So I've spent these weeks thinking of a reason for the hope that is within me.

I started this morning with a women's conference about finding encouragement in difficult circumstances. The speaker pointed out that the past few months have just exposed the uncertainty that really has always been there. We have never known what a day was going to bring - not on the world scale, not in our own lives — and we have never been in control. The passage she used was Psalm 62, which points to God as the only security we have. 'He alone is my rock and my salvation'.

This is especially true when others disappoint us. We find ourselves unable to understand the views of the people we love the most. Friends we thought would stick close forever walk away. Arguments flare up over inconsequential things and have devastating consequences. Churches fracture and hypocrisy pulses through the fault lines. And let's not forget those times we see our own sin, and horrify ourselves with a glimpse at our own hearts. I never understand those who think people are basically good. There is selfishness and thoughtlessness somewhere in the depths of even the kindest person (and generally much closer to the surface). If we look for our rock and salvation in this world, in government, in humanity, we will find nothing but temporary fixes for timeless problems. We can only throw up our hands,

with Peter, and say to Christ, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

I finished this day glued to coverage of the race riots in the US. There was so much ugliness: the police cars ploughing through crowds, the looting and burning, the terrible video of the death of George Floyd, the government adding nothing but oil to the flames. But of all the people who watch the news in horror, Christians are the least helpless. We can go to the one who softens and turns people's hearts. He is the one who holds history — past, present and future in his nail-pierced hand. He is the one whose coming kingdom cannot be delayed one second by anything we face here on earth, the one who calls the greatest deceiver and tyrant to justice, the one who says to the waters of trouble this far and no further – and the only one who can extend to us forgiveness for our own terrible guilt and rebellion.

To be honest, I look at our politics and pandemic and racism and I don't even know what to say to

> God much of the time. But I know that if I bring my grief and fear to him, the Holy Spirit interprets prayers my with groanings

cannot be uttered. I never bear my personal anxieties alone, and I never bear the burdens of the world. I can't. I can't take in the staggering amount of information on the news — virus, riots, corruption, lies, murder — and try to make sense of it. All I can do is lug it to the foot of the cross and say 'What about this? What's going to happen? What comfort is there?' and know that God says, 'It is mine to repay.' 'I will not allow the waters to overflow you.' 'I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through, as the old hymn says. We are never to get too comfortable here. When we become members of God's kingdom, we give up our citizenship in the secular world, and become Christ's ambassadors instead, crucified with him and living out his will, through his power. We will still be affected by the trouble and trauma of the world, we will be saddened by it, we will be wounded by it - but, no matter what happens, we will never be crushed by it. We are promised victory. We are promised life. We are promised joy. We are promised Home. And belonging to him, knowing my own rightful place under his care, is why I can say with Paul:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the death of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. •

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

HY WAS JESUS RAISED FROM DEATH?"

The question was asked early in this series and the brief answer offered was 'Jesus was raised for the same reason that he died.' That is a much bolder statement than it may have appeared at first sight. Was Jesus' resurrection really as important as his death? Was it not just proof of Jesus' messiahship, God's approval of the sacrificial death?

Professor William Milligan of Aberdeen University gave a series of lectures 140 years ago on the resurrection of Christ. Milligan was critical of his fellow evangelicals for their restricted understanding of the resurrection. He said: 'It is treated less as an essential and integral part of the work which the Lord Jesus Christ had been sent into the world to accomplish, than as something following that work.'

It helps to understand the importance of Jesus' resurrection if you think about the end purpose of God's salvation plan. Why did Jesus die? What, ultimately, is God aiming to achieve?

Beyond the consummation of time, in the renewed heaven and earth, we will have resurrected bodies and have perfect communion with God. All history moves in that direction. 'In this path ... the Lord Jesus Christ precedes us. ... His resurrection was the perfecting in His person — and that too according to God's own eternal plan — of a humanity which even our first parents had received only in its rudimentary ... stage ... It was the culmination of a great development for which man was always destined ... contemplated by the Creator from the very first.' Thus writes Milligan. He then talks of the union we have with God through Christ and its ultimate perfecting in eternity.

Let's backtrack a little. The last quote was from the fourth of Milligan's lectures. In it he refers to John 10:17-18: 'The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.' Then Milligan says: 'The two parts of the statement cannot be separated from one another.

'The taking of His life again is here spoken of by our Lord as the ultimate act in which both the will of the Father and the free adoption of that will by the Son are manifested. It is not a mere consequence of His laying down His life; it is the end for which the life is laid down. In the original commandment of His Father, not death but resurrection from the power of death, together with the life which followed, was the ... true completing of that obedience which in the scheme of redemption He was to render.'

Milligan continues: 'The Resurrection of our Lord ... according to the invariable teaching of Scripture, is not something consequent upon His redemptive work; it is a part of the work itself. It is not something merely designed to prove to us that that death upon the cross which the world scorned is "the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation". It is itself "power" and "wisdom"; it is one of the great redemptive acts of Jesus.'

Do other writers agree with Milligan, at least in his assertion that the resurrection was a critical part of Jesus' saving work?

Professor Louis Berkof, in the 1930s, penned this: 'The resurrection enters as a constitutive element into the very essence of the work of redemption, and therefore of the gospel. ... The atoning work of Christ, if it was to be effective at all, had to terminate, not in death, but in life.'

Professor John Murray in 1955 said: 'The death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable. Those for whom Christ died are those for whom he rose again and his heavenly saving activity is of equal extent with his once-for-all redemptive accomplishments.'

Professor Richard Gaffin (1978): 'As long as he remained in a state of death, the righteous character of his work, the efficacy of his obedience unto death remained in question, in fact, was implicitly denied. Consequently, the eradication of death in his resurrection is nothing less than the removal of the verdict of condemnation and the effective affirmation of his (adamic) righteousness.'

'Therefore, my dear brothers ... you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.' 1 Corinthians 15:58

PART 6
JESUS' RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL
FOR OUR SALVATION

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about Jesus' resurrection

WHYDDGOD RAISEJESUS FROM BEATER 2

BOOK REVIEWS



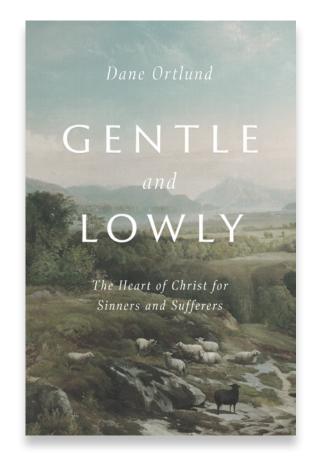
God is powerful and an ever-present help, and the really good books about him will make you believe that in a new and heart-convincing way. We hope all four of the books we have for you this month will do just that.

All are available at https://thefree.church/shop, unless otherwise stated.

GENTLE & LOWLY DANE ORTLUND (2020)

Who is Jesus? It seems such an obvious question. Many of us have been reading and hearing about Jesus since we were children. We know Jesus. We know all about him. We know every miracle, every sermon. We are experts in the incarnation, his transfiguration, his crucifixion and his glorification. Let me ask you another question: when was the last time your heart was flooded with the love of Christ? That is a very different question. Maybe it has been some time since you felt Christ's love. If so, *Gentle and Lowly* is for you. As Ortlund says in the introduction: 'This book is written for the discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanted, the cynical, the empty. Those running on fumes.'

In this book Dane Ortlund takes us on a beautiful journey in to the heart of Christ, a place many Christians have rarely been. Over twenty-three short Christ-centred chapters, the author shows us the love of Christ for weary sinners. Starting with Matthew 11:28-30 the author shows us that Jesus is gentle and lowly in heart. Contrary to so much of what we may have experienced from other Christians, Jesus' entire disposition towards sinners is gentleness and love. The book continues



with text after text that shows Christ's deep, deep affection for sinners. Ortlund humanises Jesus and makes him glow with love for wretched sinners and outsiders. I found myself becoming reanimated as Ortlund graphically described Christ's earthy ministry and his constant proximity to sinners.

This book is so easy to read and works well as a devotional. Ortlund beautifully weaves in the best of the Puritans: Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, Richard Sibbes and Jonathan Edwards. Reading this book has inspired me to go back to books such as *The Heart of Christ* by Thomas Goodwin, which, like *Gentle and Lowly*, is heartwarming and beautiful. Reading this book feels like a Sabbath rest. My soul felt warmed, restored and my love for Christ was rekindled. I felt deeply humbled at Christ's love for me and felt encouraged to go to him more often, confident that he is ready to receive me through his atoning sacrifice on the cross

If you are discouraged, frustrated, weary, disenchanted, cynical, and empty, this book is for you.

Andy Murray, Livingston Free Church

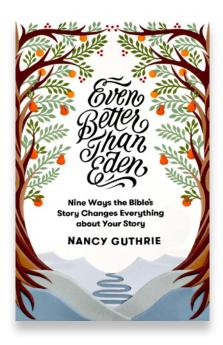
These books are only a small proportion of the ones we review.

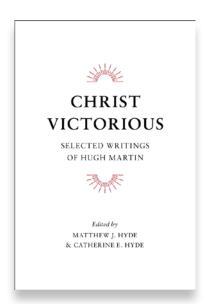
You can find all our reviews online at https://books.freechurch.org or sign up to our monthly email to get them directly to your inbox: https://thefree.church/books-sign-up

EVEN BETTER THAN EDENNANCY GUTHRIE (2018)

I heard Nancy being interviewed on one of the 'Generation' podcasts, so decided to try one of her books. She is a very passionate writer and teacher. In this book she takes each of the aspects of Eden as a story and weaves it into the fabric of our own lives. After looking at the Wilderness, the Tree, His Image, our Clothing, the Bridegroom, the Sabbath, Offspring, a Dwelling Place and the City of God, she then compares these things with a life in Christ, showing that the life in Christ is far deeper, wider reaching and more fulfilling than what man had in Eden. She is a heartfelt, well researched writer, and this is a book which is accessible to all and will inspire and strengthen you in your identity in Christ.

Fiona M. Talbot, Plockton & Kyle Free Church





CHRIST VICTORIOUS HUGH MARTIN (EDITED) (2019)

This is a challenging but rewarding book. Dr Martin (1822-85) was a prominent Free Church minister and author. This volume is a representative collection of his sermons and essays along with all of his letters still in existence. Much of the material has been unavailable for the past 150 years. Martin assumes that his readers have a very high level of scriptural and theological knowledge, and explores his themes with rigour, freshness of expression and warm personal application. Some of the material feels of its time, like where Martin, the 22-year-old firebrand, warns of the Son of Perdition, whom he identifies with the Pope. Most of the time we hear the mature Martin exploring exalted, glorious, timeless truths about Christ and his work. In this book readers will find a satisfying depth, and a sense of theology as worship and wonder..

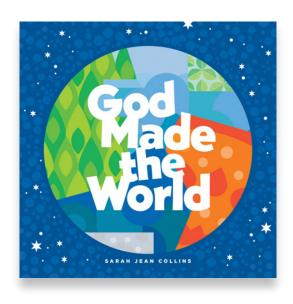
This book is available from Banner of Truth. Roddie Rankin, Plockton & Kyle Free Church

GOD MADE THE WORLD SARAH JEAN COLLINS (2017)

God Made the World is perfectly curated to infuse any young child with the joy of creation. It rhymes, the illustrations are delightful, and the content is spot-on. In our household, the mention of 'whales and guppies' (day five) was a huge hit, but every page is packed with details for children and parents to find and enjoy.

You might think the creation story is one of the easiest for children to grasp, at least at a superficial level, but it's amazing the difference it can make to engagement by taking the story out of a storybook Bible, and presenting it all by itself. This would make a perfect gift for a small person, whether from family and friends or from their church..

Miriam Montgomery, Free Church Books



HOW TO LOVE YOURSELF IN LOCKDOWN – CHOOSE THE RIGHT BOOK!

BY MIRIAM MONTGOMERY, FREE CHURCH BOOKS

REE CHURCH BOOKS IS PASSIONATE ABOUT BOOKS, AND MOST OF THE TIME THAT INVOLVES INTRODUCING OUR READERS TO THE LATEST PUBLICATION WE WANT YOU TO TRY, OR A NEW AUTHOR YOU MAYBE HAVEN'T ENCOUNTERED BEFORE. And for some of you, the current hiatus might be the perfect opportunity to tackle that stack of books you've been meaning to get around to for ages, or even to order a few new books online to read to pass the time. But for many of you, this may just not be realistic. Life may be much harder for you now than it was a few weeks ago – psychologically and spiritually, never mind physically. It's to you that I want to offer a piece of my mind, for your peace of mind.

What I have to say is very simple. There is nothing wrong with the familiar, the comforting and the old. That's it! This goes for many things just now which I can't speak to, but it certainly goes for reading material. Some of my favourite books are ones which I have read many, many times over. Reading them brings me a sense of homecoming that I don't often get with new books, however much I may enjoy them. These older books, some of which I've been reading since childhood, are not necessarily classics. I love C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, but I also adore Ellis Peters' 'Brother Cadfael' series — and they are books which tell the story of a medieval sleuthing monk. These

books don't offer an intellectual challenge like a Booker prizewinner might, but not seeking such a challenge is an acceptable, and even wise, choice right now.

Now, that's just fiction. The same principle also applies to Christian books. If you want to try the latest book on ethics or biblical interpretation, then please do (I'll have something to say a bit later about the urgent need to support our Christian booksellers, and this is a great way to do it). But if what you really, truly need is to return to a book you've read many times more – whether by J.C. Ryle, Tim Keller, Tim Chester or Irene Howat – then you should do it! God has blessed you with them before, and he will bless you with them again.

The same is true of Bible study. If you don't especially feel like diving into 2 Kings or Revelation just now, that's okay. I myself recently decided to go back to the Psalms once again, because I simply felt that I needed the reassurance and peace they offer. And what peace! Even as early as Psalm 5:11, the psalmist writes: 'Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them.' We too can pray this prayer, and seek the Lord's refuge and joy. And we can seek that joy in many places, including in a good, dog-eared, familiar book.

DO YOU LOVE GOOD BOOKS? WE NEED YOUR HELP

POSSIBLE (AND AFFORDABLE) BY THE TIRELESS GOSPEL WORK OF OUR PARTNERS, 100FTHOSE. However, their business model prioritises getting good books into as many hands as possible, so they don't have much spare cash to cover a season like this. Much of their money is made at Christian events, like our own camps and conferences, which leaves them needing help this year.

Their CEO, Jonathan Carswell, recently launched an online appeal via video (watch here: https://thefree.church/books-appeal). Here are three big ways you can lend a hand.

Number one: keep buying books through our online shop. This shop is a partnership with 10ofthose, so the Free Church receives a percentage of the profits, but the rest is ploughed back into enabling 10ofthose to continue producing resources and selling them at their characteristic low prices – which we then benefit from. Shop online: thefree.church/shop.

Number two: Would you buy gift vouchers? If you buy more than £50 worth of vouchers, you will

receive an additional 10% of the value to spend in the autumn. Could you buy a gift voucher today? Available here: thefree.church/books-voucher

Number three: Does your church buy stacks of books, whether to sell or for a children's giveaway? If these have been delayed, could your church put credit on your account, committing in advance the money you usually spend on books and resources anyway? You can then spend the credit as you need it. However, if you were to put £1000 on your account today and didn't use it until 1st September, you would receive an additional £200 to spend – as a way of saying thank you. Available here: **thefree. church/books-payment** (use reference 'Support').

And if you don't shop with us, but prefer to use Christian Focus, Banner of Truth, Faith Mission, Evangelical Bookshop, or one of the other good Christian booksellers? Well, don't forget them either! Shop online if you can, or get in touch with them to find out how you can offer support. We're all in this together!

POETRY PAGE

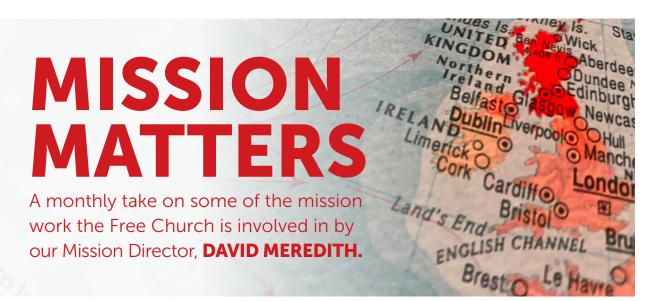
WERSES UPON THE BURNING OF OUR HOUSE, JULY 10TH, 1666 BY ANNE BRADSTREET

In silent night when rest I took. For sorrow near I did not look, I wakened was with thund'ring noise And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice. That fearful sound of 'fire' and 'fire,' Let no man know is my Desire. I, starting up, the light did spy, And to my God my heart did cry To straighten me in my Distress And not to leave me succourless. Then, coming out, behold a space The flame consume my dwelling place. And when I could no longer look, I blest His name that gave and took, That laid my goods now in the dust. Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just. It was his own, it was not mine, Far be it that I should repine; He might of all justly bereft But yet sufficient for us left. When by the ruins oft I past My sorrowing eyes aside did cast And here and there the places spy Where oft I sate and long did lie. Here stood that trunk, and there that chest, There lay that store I counted best. My pleasant things in ashes lie

And them behold no more shall I. Under thy roof no guest shall sit, Nor at thy Table eat a bit. No pleasant talk shall 'ere be told Nor things recounted done of old. No Candle e'er shall shine in Thee, Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be. In silence ever shalt thou lie. Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity. Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide, And did thy wealth on earth abide? Didst fix thy hope on mould'ring dust? The arm of flesh didst make thy trust? Raise up thy thoughts above the sky That dunghill mists away may fly. Thou hast a house on high erect Frameed by that mighty Architect, With glory richly furnished, Stands permanent though this be fled. It's purchased and paid for too By Him who hath enough to do. A price so vast as is unknown, Yet by His gift is made thine own; There's wealth enough, I need no more Farewell, my pelf, farewell, my store The world no longer let me love, My hope and treasure lies above.

Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) was born in Northampton, England. Along with her husband and parents, she emigrated to America as part of the Winthrop Fleet of Puritan emigrants in 1630. Both Anne's father and husband would later serve as governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and were important figures in the founding of Harvard University.

Although she never intended her work for publication, Anne was a prolific poet and became the first writer in the North American colonies to be published. In 'Verses upon the Burning of our House' she mourns the loss of her possessions, and the enjoyment she will miss now that they are gone. She then reminds herself that the house belonged to God and that the provision he has made for her is far better than what she has lost.



COTLAND IN 2020 LOOKS LIKE A TARTAN RUG MADE UP OF A WIDE VARIETY OF CREEDS, COLOURS AND ETHNICITIES. Our home nation was never culturally monochrome. We have the grey granite of Aberdeenshire, the windswept Shetlands and the beautiful green border country. The Gaelic lilt of the western Highlands mixes with the couthy Doric of the east. Increasingly, our Free Church reflects this diversity in planting and inheriting congregations in Banff and Buchan as well as deep Lanarkshire.

In the midst of this vibrant diversity we discover the Islamic faith, which has up until recent years been a stranger to these shores. If you are out and about you will have come across Muslim people. The Islamic faith can now claim 1.4% of the Scottish population; in real terms they are almost half the size of evangelicals.

As Ramadan ended on 24th May with the feast of Eid al-Fitr, we are reminded of our responsibility to commend the gospel of our Lord Jesus to our Muslim friends. A few brief guidelines.

Remember that Islam cannot be regarded as a uniform group who all share the same values. The term Muslim is as broad as the name Christian. Not only do you have Sunnis and Shias, you also have Sufis and many other shades from the secular to the fundamentalist. It is also not one big happy family! A South Asian Muslim recently rolled his eyes at me as he expressed his disdain for the extremism he saw in elements of Saudi Islam. At the end of the day we meet individuals at the office or driving the Uber. We take them as we find them.

Adherents of Islam are human. People of different faiths are not a separate species. They have joys and sorrows just like us. We share the same fears and have the very same ambitions and desires for our families. Our Muslim friends suffer from more than their share of racism and misunderstanding. It is not easy being given 'that look' when you enter a plane wearing a burqa or kneel towards Mecca in the airport. As Christians we must live

counter-culturally and show kindness to all people. Open hearts and faces will prepare Muslims to be receptive to hearing about Jesus. A first step will be to invite your colleague or neighbour to your home for a meal or a social evening.

Muslims have principles. The Bible is strong on not causing needless offence to folk who have dietary scruples. Just as we would not offer our Mormon friends a cup of coffee, so it would be grossly insensitive to offer any alcohol or porkbased products to Muslims. It would repay us if we took some time to study basic elements of Islamic culture and religion, simply to understand the mindset of a different group.

Muslims have prejudices. We all have our blind spots. Just as we do not understand all the nuances of the Islamic way of life, they have very little understanding of biblical Christianity. To the Muslim, Christianity is simply another word for the Western way of life. We may think that a Christian worldview involves looking at life through the values of the New Testament, but the average Muslim thinks that it's Beyoncé and Stringfellows. You will be surprised that when you speak about faith to Muslims there will be an openness to what you say. It is true that the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit unless there is spiritual enlightenment, but as you speak of Jesus and your faith in him you will find an acknowledgment that man does not live by bread alone and that there is a God.

The most important thing to know in witnessing to Muslims is that their faith will never bring them into a relationship with God. Allah, as portrayed in the *Quran*, is not our Lord and God as revealed in the Scriptures, enfleshed in Jesus and witnessing to the world in the Holy Spirit. Speak lovingly and accurately about Jesus and remember that you are not alone. You will not open your Muslim's friend's heart and mind. As your heart was opened by the power of the Holy Spirit, so theirs must be.

As-salamu Alaikum.

Coibhneas Coimhearsnachd

(Community Kindness)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

IG ÀM IONGANTACH ANN AN EACHDRAIDH AN T-SAOGHAIL AIR FAD, NUAIR A THA IOMADH DUINE GLAISTE NAN DACHAIGHEAN FHÈIN, is e togailinntinn agus adhbhar-taingealachd a th'ann a bhith glè mhothachail air coibhneas dhaoine. Tha iad ancòmhnaidh a'cuimhneachadh air duine sam bith a tha nan aonar agus ag iarraidh orra fios a chur thuca, ma tha nì air bith ann a cheannaicheas iad dhaibh ann am bùth, agus an uair sin ga thoirt chun an dorais.

Tha seo a' dèanamh feum ann an iomadh dòigh. Tha daoine a'faireachdainn nach eil iad leotha fhèin, gu bheil iad air chuimhne ann an coimhearsnachd, aig nàbaidhean agus aig càirdean. Ged a tha fios againn air an seo, chan eil an cothrom ann cho tric do choimhearsnachd a bhith a'sealltainn taic mar seo. Tha mi a'creidsinn gur ann aig àm call air chor-eigin as fheàrr a chì sinn seo.

Bha sinn an-còmhnaidh mothachail air aig àm bàs, agus gu dearbh is e call mòr a tha an sin cuideachd.

Tha mi cinnteach gun iarradh iomadh neach taing a thoirt dhaibhsan uile a nochd coibhneas dhuinn aig an àm-sa, agus a tha ga nochdadh do mhuinntir eile cuideachd. Is e nì brèagha a tha an seo, agus dìreach mar a chì sinn bòidhchead na talmhainn aig an àm-sa den bhliadhna, chì sinn fhathast ann an saoghal a tha a'fàs fuar, cùram do dhaoine, cuideachadh, deagh thaic agus mòr choibhneas.

Ann an saoghal far nach cluinn sinn càil ach cho truagh sa tha cùisean, dh' iarradh sinn taing a thoirt dhan Chruthaidhear gu bheil nithean prìseil fhathast beò mur timcheall. Is ann bhuaithe Fhèin a tha cùram do dhaoine a' tighinn, agus is e fìor adhbharmisneachaidh a tha an sin

Ged a dh'fhaodadh sinne a bhith a'faireachdainn glaiste nar dachaighean, tha an Cruthaidhear a'dol romhainn, a'fosgladh iomadh cridhe aig àm mar seo airson a bhith a'cuideachadh an co-chreutair.

A-rèist gu cinnteach ged as e aimsir teanntachd a tha an seo, tha e cuideachd na àm-fuasglaidh air iomadh seòrsa coibhneas aig nach robh cothrom iad fhèin a nochdadh nuair a bha a h-uile duine neo-eisimileach. Cò aig a tha fios ged a bhiodh saoghal an airgid a'crìonadh gu mòr, nach eil beartas nas maireannaich a' tighinn gu solas aig àm mar seo?

Canaidh sinn gu fìrinneach aig an àm-sa gur e an làmh a bheir, an làmh a gheibh, agus is e ar n-ùrnaigh gum bi an Cruthaidhear pailt-làmhach do na h-uile a tha an lùib a bhith a'cuideachadh sgìre ann an dòigh sam bith. Gu cinnteach, cha chaill iad air.

Tha beartas ann a bheir sinn leinn nuair a bhàsaicheas sinn, beartas spioraid, agus tha beartas ann a dh' fhàgas sinn às ar dèidh, mar a tha beartas saoghalta. Bu mhath dhuinn gur e na nithean sìorraidh a bhiodh sinn a'sireadh.

Nuair bhios Tu ri cagair cluinnidh do mhuinntir. Nuair thig neart dhan Ghuth-sa bidh barrachd a'cluinntinn. Nuair thig mòr neart dhan Ghuth-sa cuiridh stad air an t-saoghal e a'toirt buaidh air gach duine 's gun freagairt ri fhaotainn.

Chan fhaic sinn cò a labhair ach tuigidh A mhòrachd, E cho fad os ar cionn is mur eil sinn Air eòlach bidh e dualtach nach sir sinne cobhair tha saor bhuaith' le guth socair sèimh ciùin togaidh uallach de dhaoine.

Feumaidh sinne bhith strìochdadh ged nach biodh seo nar nàdar. Is e tha seo an Uil' Fhiosrach a tha eòlach air plàighean. Bheir E tròcair is sìth dhuinn am meadhan àmhghar an t-saoghail. Bheir E ùrnaigh do dhaoine Seo guth buadhach na saorsa.





THAS BEEN A DAILY HABIT OF MINE TO WALK THE DOG IN THE SAME PLACE — THOUGH AT DIFFERENT TIMES — DURING THIS PERIOD OF ISOLATION. A swathe of machair skirts prettily by the crofts in Tolsta, separating the village from Tràigh Mhòr, and the Atlantic beyond. There, a network of paths has been, over the years, trodden through the marram grass by the feet of Tolstonians, as well as the cloven hooves of their ovine stock.

On one of my very first walks there, when the mood of the nation and, indeed, the world, was pensive, I was surprised and delighted to spot a single wild primrose, almost hidden from view. It was like a promise of spring, and the hope of better days to come.

My favourite Scottish writer, Neil Gunn, often deploys the primrose as a metaphor for innocence — not so much the personal variety, but the vanished innocence of mankind. He, like many of his contemporaries, was a proponent of Golden Age thinking — the belief that earlier civilisations had been somehow purer.

When a hardline Wee Free such as myself contemplates loss of innocence, however, thoughts go further back, all the way to the Garden, indeed. The abundance of flowers it must have contained spoke of perfection: all creation in harmony with the Creator — even the man, with whom he walked in the cool of the day. There was no need for the primrose, or any other plant, to symbolise innocence, because innocence was.

How far we have fallen since then. Before COVID-19, we were reminded constantly of our failure as custodians of the environment. It was rarely attributed to its proper cause, of course. Green campaigners call it 'greed', or 'consumerism', or 'capitalism' — but never 'sin'. We are accustomed to hearing that we are out of step with nature, and that we need to learn to live more sustainably, yet God is never mentioned. No, no, we can fix it ourselves.

And, nature does seem to be reclaiming the corners we have been forced to vacate. My own garden teems with birds like never before, and wildlife, emboldened by the silence, it seems, is emerging from its long exile. When the world speaks of 'nature', I mentally substitute for it a different word: Creation. I think that, if we could only see it, God has given us a perpetual Sabbath, in order that we may remember our relationship with him. We may have forfeited the right to walk with him in the perfect garden, but this respite from the world's constant raging noise certainly permits the still, small voice to be heard.

Where can a locked-down world run to hide itself from him? He is declaring himself in all those small things that many of us now have the time to notice: the different voices that blend in the dawn chorus; the beauty of a full moon shining on water; the exuberant happiness of a child — or a dog — running along a windswept beach; the kindness of some people's hearts, and the generosity of their spirits; and, yes, the innocent face of a single wildflower.

Even though I still walk the same route almost every day, I can no longer find that single primrose.

We are like that sometimes with God's promises. In the beginning, our faith is rooted in the sufficiency of his grace. Accepting our own inherent weakness, Christians cling to him gladly. Yet, as we follow the well-trodden route through this world, we learn to forget God, and to be troubled if the way ahead seems problematic. Still, my own first thought in every difficulty is, 'What will I do now?' If there is darkness, I will sit in the gloom, and despair of ever seeing light; if the ground becomes boggy underfoot, I will doubt the possibility of finding a way through. Our loss of innocence has implanted in us that deceptive wisdom which is actually no more than fool's gold.

The reason, though, that I can no longer find that first flower is that the machair now is carpeted with so many of its kind. One pale, fragile herald of spring has been joined by an array of hundreds. That original promise has been fulfilled multiple times over.

We don't yet know where our politicians might take us in their frail attempt to lead. This is a crisis no human agency fully comprehends. And, even though we pray that they would seek God's wisdom, meantime we are safest putting our trust directly in him. Their leadership may well ultimately compare to Shakespeare's primrose path, which led to destruction; but the one that God has laid out for us is strewn with the fragrance of truth, and of promises worthy of the name.