



THE **RECORD**

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
MAY 2020 • £2.00

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The Record • ISSN 2042-2970**Published •** The Record is produced by

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Edinburgh, EH1 2LS
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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 obtain *The Record* in an audio version.

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The Free Church of Scotland is a registered charity SC012925 • Women for Mission is a registered charity SC03898

WELCOME TO THE MAY RECORD



A S WE CONTINUE TO LOVE AND PROTECT EACH OTHER
BY KEEPING OUR DISTANCE, I HOPE THAT THIS EDITION
OF THE RECORD FINDS ITS WAY TO YOU.

While we celebrated Easter over the phone and the internet, the news media gave attention to Christian thought and practice in a way I have never experienced before. The news carried some remarkable images of cavernously empty cathedrals and rituals being followed before empty pews. The quiet dignity of some of our brothers and sisters was reported favourably, as were acts of generosity and love of neighbour of the kind which have marked the church since the first century. But this was contrasted by the truculent behaviour of some others, as we report in World News.

This month's magazine sees the first instalment of a feature we mentioned a few months ago: Public Questions. Named for the former Free Church Committee, Public Questions will address topics which are important for us to think through with a Christian mind, but about which Scripture gives us liberty to disagree.

I'm very grateful to Alan J Fraser and Prof Tommy MacKay for agreeing to take part. The articles published here as part of Public Questions are intended to be the beginning of a discussion. If you have any thoughts on what either Alan or Tommy have to say, please share them by post, email editor@freechurch.org or on the Free Church's social media channels. •

'Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another' (Proverbs 27:17).

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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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds, and a large, dark, winged figure is visible in the upper left portion of the sky. The water in the foreground is dark blue with gentle ripples.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW TOMORROW

Jesus' command is the answer to the question
the world is asking

BY **THE EDITOR**



Photo by Peter Kasprzyk on Unsplash

P EOPLE ARE FINDING THE SILVER LININGS IN COVID-19'S DARK CLOUD, AND HOPING THAT WE CAN HANG ONTO THEM WHEN THE LOCKDOWN LIFTS.

A recent poll conducted by YouGov found that only 9% of people in Britain want life to return to the way it was before the coronavirus lockdown. The poll's respondents have noticed cleaner air, more wildlife and stronger communities since social distancing measures were introduced.

It would seem that many people have been reflecting on how the world can be made a better place when the spread of coronavirus has been brought under control. They are longing to play their part in bringing joy from despair.

A poem written this year by retired teacher and chaplain Kitty O'Meara has been widely shared online. O'Meara's words have struck a chord. In fact, she has been referred to as 'the poet laureate of the pandemic'. Her poem, *In the time of pandemic*, offers an optimistic vision of the post-lockdown world. O'Meara writes:

'...in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

'And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.'

It is an inspiring thought, and a laudable aim. Even a way to find hope amid fear. And the poem's sentiment is finding a voice.

There is a collective willingness to use this enforced pause to forge a brighter future.

WE HAVE A PROBLEM

The government has taken a hard look at the jobs we can get by without. As a result, the value of work is being reconsidered. Bloomberg, the financial data and media company owned by billionaire and sometime-US presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg, last month published an article entitled: 'Anybody Need a Management Consultant Right Now? Thought Not'. The piece argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the illusion that the market can recognise what matters most. The work that is truly essential to the functioning of society — from food harvesting to bin collection to healthcare — attracts less money and less respect than work we can live without. It is a brave take from a company whose work falls into the latter category.

Meanwhile, Emily Maitlis took the unusual step of editorialising on BBC's Newsnight. She criticised political rhetoric which had suggested that the pandemic is affecting everyone equally. 'The disease is not a great leveller,' she told viewers, 'This is a myth which needs debunking. Those on the front line right now — bus drivers and shelf stackers, nurses, care home workers, hospital staff and shop keepers — are disproportionately the lowest paid members of our workforce. They are more likely to catch the disease because they are more exposed.

'Those who live in tower blocks and small flats will find the lockdown a lot tougher. Those who work in manual jobs will be unable to work from home.'

Alongside the workplace, the climate has been at the top of the agenda for those demanding change. Worldwide lockdown measures have caused demand for oil to

There is a deeper recognition that something is wrong and that things should, and could, be better.

fall through the floor. An accompanying price war saw prices in some markets turn temporarily negative: sellers would pay a buyer to take their oil. Some analysts expect the oil and gas sector to bounce back. Others side with Kitty O'Meara, predicting that life

under lockdown will change perspectives, leading people to make different choices about car journeys and air travel in the future. Advocates of green energy are urging that the huge sums governments are assigning to stimulate economies be invested in renewables. Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, believes there is an 'historic opportunity' to fund technology that cuts greenhouse gas emissions.

Nicola Sturgeon has also taken up the cause of post-lockdown reform, writing in *The Herald*, 'When things come apart — when the kaleidoscope of our lives is shaken — there is an opportunity to see them put back together differently, and see a new way of doing things.

'We can go further than rebuilding, and look seriously at social and economic reform. It means helping businesses deal with the transition out of this crisis by aiding their efforts to change their business models and practices, with an eye to the markets that will grow in the future.

'The pandemic has changed the way societies and economies across the world operate, and Scotland is no different.'

It feels as if there is a collective willingness to use this enforced pause to forge a brighter future. This is significant because it amounts to a recognition that — for all our claims to national greatness — we don't have it all figured out. These are not ordinary, surface-level gripes; and the demands for reform are not coming from the usual suspects. There is a deeper recognition that something is wrong and that things should, and could, be better.

But can things be different? Can we really reshape society for the better?

AN INSUFFICIENT ANSWER

A contemporary socialism has recently staked a claim as the answer to this question, but has failed to find electoral acceptance here. Our society seems to default to versions of Enlightenment liberalism to find a solution. Perhaps this is understandable — it is the political philosophy which has accompanied us through both World Wars and the Cold War. Its practical outworking, a democratically governed market economy, is still functioning. It remains the least-worst system available. But, in places, liberalism is getting threadbare.

Former Supreme Court justice Lord Sumption, outlined a liberal response to coronavirus on *The World at One*. He accused the government of bowing to public pressure in imposing lockdown measures, and suggested enforcement of them was reminiscent of a 'police state'. 'Hysteria is infectious', Lord Sumption asserted, 'We are working ourselves up into a lather in which we exaggerate the threat and stop asking ourselves whether the cure may be worse than the disease.'

'Is this serious enough to warrant putting most of our population into house imprisonment, wrecking our economy for an indefinite period, destroying businesses that honest and hard-working people have taken years to build up, saddling future generations with debt?'

The high level of approval for the government's approach would strongly suggest that 'Yes' is most people's answer to his question. Liberalism would trust citizens to act for the greater good. But, unfortunately, as a consequence of sin we cannot even be trusted to refrain from sunbathing in the park.

Individual freedoms and inalienable rights were exhilarating — and revolutionary — when Thomas Jefferson wrote of them in 1776 and proceeded to declare the thirteen united states of America a self-governing people. Today, when the Prime Minister bemoans COVID's infringement on 'the inalienable free-born right of people born in England to

Liberalism would trust citizens to act for the greater good. But, unfortunately, as a consequence of sin we cannot even be trusted to refrain from sunbathing in the park.

People are dissatisfied because our system has come up short. Questions are being asked. The church should have answers.

go to the pub' it sounds pale, a parody of the concept's former glory.

The cognitive dissonance of declaring a right inalienable, then in the same breath curtailing it indefinitely, occurs because liberalism has no sufficient answer to the problem of sin. (That, and a lackadaisical approach to speechwriting.)

On top of this, we have become cynical about the sort of high-minded political ideals which classical liberal thinkers saw as solutions. That is because we've seen them before and they have failed to deliver. It should come as no surprise, perhaps, that illiberal politics have regained their appeal as a result. There is nothing new under the sun, of course. But authoritarianism isn't the answer, either.

The question still remains: how can we achieve a better future? People are dissatisfied because our system has come up short. Questions are being asked. The church should have answers.



RELEVANCE

By God's grace, it is our privilege to know where the answers are to be found. But will people come out of lockdown more receptive to the gospel?

Certainly, we should spend this time preparing to give an answer to anyone who asks us the reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). The age-old question about a good God who allows suffering will be, and is being, asked.

The prospect of welcoming people who are asking big questions like this prompts a question in us: will they find what they are looking for here? Sometimes it raises another question: will people find that our church is relevant to them? There is danger inherent here. We know, because we have seen, that the church does not achieve 'relevance' by aping the prevailing culture in worship services.

But God is wise, and the prominent role the church has held in our country's history has left a mark. People know what to expect at church. Occasionally, people know what to expect from Christians. It is not form, it is substance that people are hoping to find.

That's just as well, because we don't have the budget to stage Glastonbury. And in a culture saturated with entertainment, we could never be confident that anyone would listen on the strength of form alone. The way the truth is presented is secondary. The truth we have built our lives upon resonates with people when it answers the questions they are asking.

A NEIGHBOUR-LOVING ECONOMY

If the question is: how can the world be a better place after lockdown? then the answer is Matthew 22:39.

Jesus, having the wisdom of one who is fully God, as well as sympathy with our condition through being fully human, kept it simple. Love your neighbour as yourself. This command, applied to the economy and to public policy, is the change we need.

In the realm of work, policymakers remain unduly reliant on the idea that labour is best motivated with a financial incentive. Certainly, very few of us could afford to work if we weren't being paid. Fair wages are required because income is necessary to pay the

The truth we have built our lives upon resonates with people when it answers the questions they are asking.

bills, but that doesn't make money the only reason we work. As economists and politicians debate the cost of the furlough scheme, they should consider the social care workers who

have turned down the opportunity to stay off in order to be there for the people they support. They are not paid enough to take such a risk. It is their love for the people they work with that motivates them.

When we become convinced that income is the only meaningful aspect of work, our jobs are not a positive experience. It's the way we're made. *'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it'* (Genesis 2:15), not to work it and profit from it. We were not created to exploit and consume; but to tend and nurture.

Adam Smith, while laying the foundations of liberal economics, noticed that creating wealth benefits society. He also wrote that 'No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.' The creation of wealth should not be considered an end in itself. Rather, it is a means to provide the resources with which to love our neighbours.

Prioritising the love of neighbours has consequences. It changes the decisions we make, and the way we make decisions. Applied to business, the environment and day-to-day work, it will bring the change that our locked-down society is longing for.

True love of neighbour, of course, requires love of God too. Things will be different across our economy and in our society if God wills it to be so.

It is for us to find our motivation in Jesus' command. Faithfulness, too, has consequences. Eusebius, an historian in the fourth century AD, writing about a plague that swept through the Roman Empire, noted that the Christians' 'deeds were on everyone's lips and they glorified the God of the Christians.'

It can be so again. *'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven'* (Matthew 5:14-16).

God's wisdom will determine the future. •

MAY/JUN 2020 PRAYER DIARY

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Fri 15th Pray for our ministers and other ministry leaders as they try to create new ways to shepherd their people during our enforced time of isolation.

Sat 16th The WfM Annual meeting was due to take place today. Pray that the committee will be able to work through the business that needs to be dealt with in other ways.

Sun 17th As we have all had to come to terms with isolation, pray for the remote congregation in Raasay and Rev. Marcos Florit, their interim moderator.

Mon 18th As the General Assembly would have been having its opening meeting this evening, pray that church business meetings being held in virtual settings are God-honouring.

Tues 19th Give thanks for our National Health Service and pray for all those you know who are working at the front line through this pandemic.

Wed 20th Pray that at this time of uncertainty we will stand with people in our communities who have nowhere else to turn, and make sure they are not left to face this crisis alone.

Thurs 21st Pray for survivors of trafficking who are finding it hard to get the help they need for their recovery, as specialist services struggle to cope, including the provision of safe housing and medical and psychological care.

Fri 22nd Pray for India as the government takes measures to stop the spread of the virus and yet the number of patients keeps increasing every day.

Sat 23rd Pray for all the families who have suffered loss as a result of the coronavirus. Particularly remember those you know as they come to terms with their loss.

Sun 24th Pray for the Back congregation in their vacancy as they consider the way forward along with their interim moderator, Rev. Ewen Matheson.

Mon 25th Due to the challenges of coronavirus, small businesses in Pakistan have ceased to trade,

and therefore those whose meagre rations barely kept them alive are now hungry. Pray for them and Mission International's partners who are helping to distribute food.

Tues 26th Pray for the inhabitants of Kandaria village in Kenya who have to contend with coronavirus while evacuating their village and farms due to prolonged rainfall and severe flooding. Pray for MI as they seek to help these subsistence farmers.

Wed 27th Many Christian women around the world are persecuted because they are Christian and because they are women. Pray for them and the agencies who are working with them.

Thurs 28th Pray that efforts by MPs and others in Westminster to bring Britain's abortion legislation in line with the new law in Northern Ireland will fail.

Fri 29th Pray for the nine church planters of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The presbytery is mainly focusing on them being established in doctrine so that they can soon start functioning as two separate regional councils, while still being accountable to main presbytery for next few years.

Sat 30th Pray for our Queen and all the royal family. Give thanks for her faith and witness.

Sun 31st Pray for the vacant congregation of Carlaway and Rev. Murdo Campbell, their interim moderator.

Mon 1st Despite the unusual induction at the end of March, give thanks for the ministry begun in Fortrose and pray for Rev. Rory Stott and family as they settle into work in that community.

Tues 2nd Again, rejoice with the Free North congregation as they begin a new phase under the ministry of Rev. Angus MacRae. Pray for blessing as they work together in the city.

Wed 3rd Give thanks with the Kiltarn congregation as they rejoice in having a settled ministry. Pray for Rev. Gavino Fioretti and his family as they work in that community.

Thurs 4th Pray for all in government, especially those making difficult decisions dealing with the virus.

Fri 5th Pray for the children in our communities who have abusive homes as the schools remain closed due to the virus. Ask for the Lord to protect them and make himself known to them as they are stuck in a terrible environment.

Sat 6th Pray for all our young folk who had been looking forward to going to camp this summer and are disappointed that the camps have had to be cancelled.

Sun 7th Pray for the vacant congregation of Garrabost and the Rev. Andrew Coghill, their interim moderator.

Mon 8th Pray for Safe Families as they continue to work with churches and local authorities to find innovative ways of helping those most in need throughout the current crisis.

Tues 9th We do not know the outcome of the coronavirus crisis, but praise God that we know that he is in control. Pray that many more people will realise this and trust him.

Wed 10th Pray for the Salvation Army as they work with the government to be able to identify and help vulnerable people and those with mental health issues. will know God's will for the future.

Thurs 11th Pray that the Bible Society's resources, developed for use in after-school clubs to help address the falling literacy levels in Scotland, will help children discover the joy of learning about God.

Fri 12th Pray for Robin MacLellan, who took over leadership of SU Scotland on 1 April, at a time when many difficult and challenging decisions had to be made.

Sat 13th Pray for the 20 schemes planters and other ministry leaders as they try to create new ways to shepherd their people. Many neighbours and friends in the schemes are afraid of what will happen to the economy and are scared of becoming ill.

Sun 14th Remember our brothers and sisters in the North American Presbytery and Rev. Kent Compton and Rev. Peter Aitken as they serve there.

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

PASTOR FEARS EARLY END TO LOCKDOWN RISKS LIVES (AMERICAS)

Megachurch pastor Jamal Bryant of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Stonecrest, Georgia, has criticised Governor Brian Kemp for his decision to begin reopening businesses across the state. During a Facebook Live broadcast Bryant said Kemp's decision is 'contrary to the will of God', and 'an assault on the minority community in Georgia'. To date, more than half of those who have died from COVID-19 in Georgia are black. Bryant told his listeners, 'We've got to deal with the inequity of healthcare that is provided to black and brown people in this state...we have not addressed the fact that many people in our community are living in food deserts. Many people in our community do not have access to affordable healthcare. Many people in our community only end up seeing a doctor when they come through an emergency room...New Birth will not be holding church because we understand that life is valuable...Something is wrong with the moral fibre of our community when we put commerce over the value of human life.' ●



PREACHER DIES AFTER REFUSING SOCIAL DISTANCING (AMERICAS)

Weeks after defying social distancing instructions by holding a large church service, Bishop Gerald Glenn of New Deliverance Evangelistic Church in Chesterfield, Virginia died from complications due to COVID-19. His wife, three of their children and their son-in-law also tested positive for the virus and required treatment in hospital. Bishop Glenn had insisted he would keep his church open 'unless I'm in jail or the hospital' according to the *Christian Post*. His widow, Marcietia Glenn, said he was 'a loving, compassionate, fair man', while Senator Tim Kaine, Democratic nominee for Vice President in 2016, wrote, 'He was a friend and pillar of [the] Richmond faith community. May all do as much for so many.' ●



LAWSUIT TO CHALLENGE CHURCH CLOSURES (AMERICAS)

A legal battle is underway in Kansas over the enforced closure of churches. Pastor Stephen Ormord of First Baptist Church, Dodge City, and Pastor Aaron Harris of Calvary Baptist Church, Junction City, are seeking an exemption from Kansas Governor Laura Kelly's executive order banning gatherings of more than ten people. Governor Kelly considers the restriction necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19. The legal challenge to the order, being made on the grounds of religious freedom, was rejected by the Kansas Supreme Court. But a US District Court Judge found in favour of the two churches, granting them temporary relief from the Governor's order ●



LOCKDOWN ARREST (AMERICAS)

Pentecostal megachurch pastor Rodney Howard-Browne was arrested after holding two large church services in contravention of local coronavirus legislation prohibiting gatherings of more than ten people. Following his arrest, he decided to close his church, saying, 'I have to do this to protect the congregation, not from the virus, but from tyrannical government.' Howard-Browne criticised the sheriff of Hillsborough County, Tampa, Florida, where the church is based, telling the *Tampa Bay Times*, 'It will be on his record that he shut down a body of Christ.' However, the sheriff commented that the church is well-equipped to broadcast its services online. ●



LESSONS LEARNED FROM EBOLA (AFRICA)



Nigeria was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to confirm a case of COVID-19, and at time of writing had reported more than 600 cases. Health services in West Africa are already stretched dealing with Lassa fever, a viral illness endemic in the region. However, African states are coordinating their efforts to tackle coronavirus. Dr Abimbola Bowale, medical director of the Mainland Infectious Diseases Hospital in Lagos, was on the team that led the response to Ebola. 'Africa has learned from the last Ebola outbreak. I will say we are better prepared today,' he said. After the crisis in 2014, Lagos State built a biocontainment facility where COVID-19 patients are now being treated. Churches, too, have returned to social distancing practices established during the Ebola outbreak. Betty Nicholas, a 26-year-old Lagos resident, told *America Magazine*, 'We now just put our hands together and bow rather than hug each other. And when we meet for church gatherings and meetings, they're less crowded.'

CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE QURAN (ASIA)



Evangelical publishing company Zondervan has just released a precise English translation of the Quran, including a Christian commentary, to equip Christians to interact with Muslims. *The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam* by Gordon Nickel was published at the end of April. 'No one can understand the Muslim mind without some solid knowledge of the contents of the Quran,' says Nickel, director of the Centre for Islamic Studies at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies in Bangalore, India. 'I wanted to comment on all passages related to Jesus and the Gospel. The apostle Paul wrote certain penetrating words about 'a different gospel'. Christians are the custodians of the good news of salvation through the death of Jesus on the cross, the "People of the Gospel" as the Quran describes them. As such they have a stake in the portrait of Jesus offered by a scripture written 600 years after the New Testament.'

CHURCH CLOSES FOR FIRST TIME IN SEVEN CENTURIES (ASIA)



The Via Dolorosa was empty this Easter as a result of lockdown in Jerusalem. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, considered by its custodians to be built on the sites of both Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, is currently closed. The last time the church was closed to the public was during an outbreak of plague in Jerusalem in 1349. As a result, local people who depend on Christian pilgrims for their income are feeling the economic impact of COVID-19. The Greek Orthodox Church, one of the denominations which shares custody of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, also owns more than a third of the land in Jerusalem's Old City. *The Jerusalem Post* reports that the denomination has exempted all tenants in the Old City from rent for 2020 to help alleviate the hardship.



RIVER JORDAN CLEARED OF MINES (ASIA)



Qasr al-Yahud (the Castle of the Jews) is a complex of monasteries and churches built on the River Jordan at the location traditionally considered the site where the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land. The area is also associated with Elijah's ascent into heaven, and the baptism of Jesus. The site has been closed for more than 50 years. Following the Six-Day War in 1968, Israel's army laid more than 6,000 landmines to prevent attackers crossing the shallow riverbed. The last of the mines were exploded by UK-based demining specialists HALO Trust in time for Easter, only for the site to be closed again by the coronavirus lockdown. Even so, when the lockdown lifts, the area will be ready for restoration. 'In the time of COVID, these grim times, it's really nice to have a story like this. There's actually a bit of hope,' HALO's CEO, James Cowan, told *Christianity Today*.

ENSPIRE 2020

BY **ROSEMARY MACDONALD**

ENSPIRE IS A DAY ARRANGED FOR THE BENEFIT AND SUPPORT OF MINISTERS' WIVES, ORGANISED BY A TEAM OF WOMEN FROM THE FREE CHURCHES IN THE NORTH.

This year, the theme was 'Sisterhood'. The whole day was planned with care and sensitivity, which was shown in some lovely touches throughout. We had the pleasure of listening to well-prepared and godly speakers, eating a wonderfully prepared lunch, drinking coffee and being encouraged by meeting with women in similar situations to our own. This year was very well attended with 43 ministers' wives gathered together. The event was altogether excellent, and we were even given a beautiful gift on leaving!

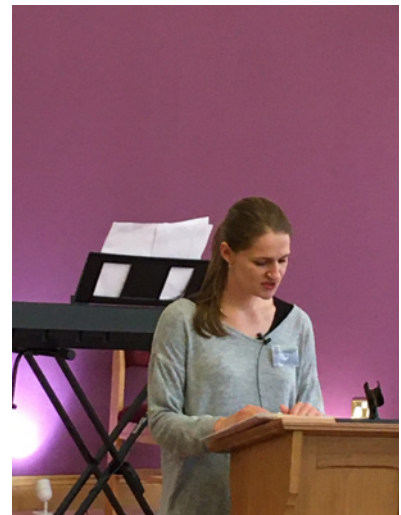


Delegates enjoy making and renewing friendships

This year, we were blessed by Ann Allen, speaking on the theme of 'Sisterhood' from Titus 2. She illustrated her talk, with references to several pairs of women in the Bible and how their relationships, good and not so good, can be helpful examples to us. The type of positive relationship that Naomi and Ruth shared was contrasted with the negative effect a relationship like Euodia and Syntyche's can have, both on the individual and the church. Ann shared about her experiences from years of being a minister's wife in an honest and open way, encouraging us to avoid comparisons with others, to listen, and to accept that God is doing his work in our lives and in the lives of our congregations.

Katherine Davidson (Merkinch Free Church, Inverness) spoke about discipling women in the local church. She shared some of the blessings and challenges of different models of discipleship. We are called to be faithful. We do not change hearts — that is God's work — and we need to keep checking our own hearts while discipling others. Mentoring was another key focus of the day and some shared from their personal experiences of what that looks like in practical ways.

The Enspire day has always been an encouragement to ministers' wives, but this year, I feel there was a particular closeness experienced as we lingered over our time together. We sang God's praises, were fed from the Word, and the whole day modelled the title theme of



Speaker Katherine Davidson (Merkinch)

'Sisterhood'. Times of prayer together are always precious and, having heard from some of the group who had gone through challenging periods, it was a privilege to pray for and with each other. We were reminded of the importance of 'rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep', and there was a real sense of caring for one another as we sought to live this out.



Hetty Macaskill and Elisabetta Fioretti.

We were challenged to put into practice in our own contexts all that we had learned and left feeling more united as sisters in Christ and more equipped to encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

One of the struggles of being in ministry is a sense of isolation, and days like this give opportunity to feel part of a greater whole and link with others in a similar situation.

Huge thanks to the committee and all who were involved in organising this day. ●

A LETTER FROM WfM

Dear Supporters and Friends of Women for Mission,

This is an incredibly difficult time for many, facing challenges that six months ago we would have considered almost unbelievable and for which we certainly were not prepared. We have all been affected, some more painfully than others.

Further to last month's notice in *The Record* concerning the WfM Annual Meeting, it will come as no surprise to you that the Committee has had to make some unwanted but necessary decisions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As advertised, this meeting was due to take place on Saturday, 16 May 2020, but this, like many other events, has had to be cancelled in line with government measures of which you will all be very aware. As well as having a number of speakers (and a live video link to Stornoway) we would be carrying out the necessary business required, namely to report on and approve the accounts and bring to a close Project 2019/20. The amount raised for the Project would also be announced and we would launch Project 2020/21. I know that some of you had fund-raising activities specifically for the WfM Project planned for early spring and right on into early May, but these too have had to be abandoned. From past experience this is the time of year when the majority of donations to the Projects are made. In light of this the WfM Committee has decided to extend the closing date for the Project until our biennial Ladies' Conference, due to 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 the financial statements for WfM to 30 April 2020 will be published as usual and donations for the 19/20 Project will remain open until the date of the conference. If we are not able to meet for the conference we hope to have information concerning the new Project available online.

Despite the curtailment of fundraising activities, we do hope you, your congregation or WfM group will still feel able to contribute to the Project. Donations can be sent either to Mairi Macdonald, Donations Secretary, or directly to the WfM account; further details can be found on our website at www.womenformission.org. In this technological age you may be able to hold a virtual coffee morning (but only be able to sample your own baking)! As a reminder, we are supporting Donald and Rosangela Fraser, working with WEC in the Netherlands, the Free Church camps (which, sadly, had to be cancelled this year), World on our Doorstep in Govanhill, and Operacion San Andres in Peru. If you do not feel able to make a financial donation, please do pray for these four fields of Christian service, all of which will have been affected by COVID-19 in one way or another.

May you know a special measure of God's grace and peace in these times. ●

With many thanks,

Janet Murchison
Chairwoman

THE DUMISANI LIBRARY

BY JACK & NANCY WHYTOCK

ACCCESS TO A THRIVING LIBRARY IS AT THE HEART OF ANY BIBLE OR THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE. The library at Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School in the Eastern Cape of South Africa has undergone major changes over the last few years. Over the Christmas holidays and Term One 2020, further significant changes and upgrades were made. We are pleased to report these here.

NEW FLOOR

Before we could address any other upgrades to our facility, the rotting floor had to be dealt with. For years there had been wood bores attacking the

joists and floor boards of the library.

Since there were no students over the Christmas holidays, this was the ideal time for the crew (headed up by our dear Christian brother, Lawrence) to remove the rotten wooden floor and replace it with concrete and tile. Obviously, to get to the floor required that the entire collection of books and all of the shelving had to be moved. The end result is that now we have the entire building with a renewed floor, and (by the end of the first term) we finally have all of the shelves and books back in their proper place. ►►

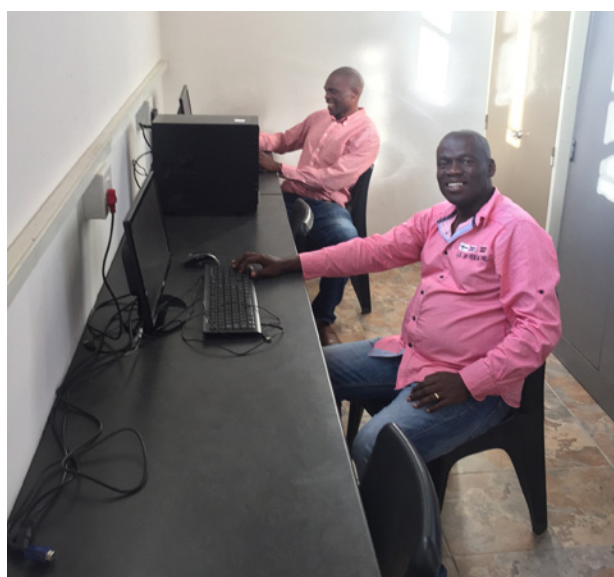
COMPUTER LAB

Through an anonymous donor, ten new personal computers were donated; this allows us to have a fully functioning computer lab and provides a wonderful learning environment for our foundations and advanced computer courses. Also, students have internet access for research – this is not new but is improved. These computer upgrades are all part of the evolution of the modern library and Dumisani is pleased to now be part of a more up-to-date approach in library services.

New computer counters were built around the interior perimeter of the library and proper electrical outlets have been installed above the counter-top level. New plastic black chairs have been purchased to refit the library and provide adequate and affordable seating for our library users.

B.Th. COMPUTER ROOM

In order to honour our memorandum for the new B.Th. programme, the B.Th. room now has three personal computers as well as ports for laptops. This brings us to a new juncture in being able to meet the needs for online delivery of the B.Th. programme.



Phambili Gxashe and Thembelani Bente with new computers

SECURITY

We thank the Lord for a major donation which allowed us to deal with anticipated increased security problems due to the above upgrades of the library. The new computer lab room has been completely secured with wire mesh and bars as well as a security gate. Also, the circulation desk has been renovated to include a buzzer system for security gate access to the library. Rear gates on the library building have all been re-made to ensure that access by intruders is made as difficult as possible. Also, mesh and iron grating has been placed over our vulnerable, heritage stained-glass windows. We now feel that, humanly speaking, we have done all that we can do to protect the library property and to ensure safety for staff and students as they use our upgraded facility.

LIBRARY ASSISTANTS

At the end of Term One, two library assistants were put in place at Dumisani, Mr Phambili Gxashe and Mr Thembelani Bente (pictured). Both of these men are graduates of Dumisani and have been with us for many years. They are also both part-time B.Th. students. Please pray for these two men as they take up their responsibilities as assistant librarians for the remainder of this year.

SHIPMENT OF NEW AND USED LIBRARY BOOKS FROM AUSTRALIA

We are currently awaiting a large shipment of books from Australia that are designated for our library. However, due to the global pandemic, it appears this shipment has been delayed. We do hope that this situation will soon be resolved and that we can add this significant donation to our developing collection.

LIBRARY BOOK SALE

The Term One Library Book Sale was a big success. Just over 1,000 new and used books were sold right before the South Africa lockdown took place due to the COVID-19 virus. In God's providence, this literature was distributed at a very crucial time, and we trust that over the coming weeks and months much good will come to many from the influence of this literature as there are quiet days of lockdown and time to read.

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

The entire Dumisani community would like to express their sincere appreciation and thanks to God for the donors who made these renovations and upgrades possible. By God's grace, we hope and pray that this significant work will greatly affect the impact of the college for years to come and will help us with our accreditation goals. We have already seen that it is helping our students with their studies and at the same time is encouraging even more private users (local pastors and church leaders) to make use of our excellent facilities and resources. ●

Dr Jack Whytock is a Lecturer and Governor at Dumisani Theological Institute. Nancy Whytock is a Lecturer and Consultant Librarian at Dumisani.



Dumisani library bookshelves

GIVING THANKS FOR FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS

BY DONALD MACLEOD

THE FREE CHURCH HAS TAKEN THE DECISION TO CANCEL THIS SUMMER'S FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS (FCYC) DUE TO CORONAVIRUS.

After monitoring the situation very closely, following Government advice and consulting with partners, the change in the national and local picture made it clear that whatever the situation is in the summer, there will still be significant restrictions in place.

FCYC would like to express a personal note of gratitude to all the leaders and cooks of the camps for their support and dedication to the young people of our church over the years. The work and prayers they have already put into this year's camps will not be wasted; nothing ever is in God's economy.

We would also like to thank those who had booked to go to camp for their support and encouragement. We are praying for the many who are affected in different ways during this crisis, and especially the youth of our church for whom we run the camps each summer. We would encourage you to join with us in praying that God would be at work in their lives. FCYC will be looking to arrange some kind of event as soon as practical, later in the year. As well as this, 2020 marks 60 years of FCYC, and we plan to celebrate and give thanks over the coming months. More information will follow on our website (freechurchoyouthcamps.org) and social media channels (@fcyouthcamps). •

TRIPLE ONLINE INDUCTIONS

BY REV ALASDAIR MACLEOD

WHETHER IT IS FINAL-YEAR DOCTORS AND NURSES WHO ARE BEING FAST-TRACKED TO ENABLE THEM TO SERVE ON THE FRONTLINE DURING THIS COVID-19 PANDEMIC, OR THE STORY OF MATTHEW POXON, WHO WAS THE FIRST PERSON IN 157 YEARS TO TAKE PART IN A PASSING-OUT PARADE AT THE BRITANNIA ROYAL NAVY COLLEGE IN DARTMOUTH ENTIRELY ON HIS OWN, LONG ESTABLISHED PROTOCOLS ARE HAVING TO ADAPT TO A FAST-CHANGING SITUATION IN A WAY FEW OF US COULD HAVE FORESEEN.

Into that category would fall the event streamed online on the evening of 29th March 2020 where, for the first time in 177 years, three ministries began in the Free Church on the same night, with none of the ministers or their new congregation present in the building where the service took place. These are unusual days indeed. This short article is a 'behind the scenes' look at what took place that Sunday evening.

The background was straightforward. The congregations of the Free North (Inverness), Kiltarn (Evanton) and Fortrose

had their calls accepted by the Reverends Angus MacRae, Gavino Fioretti and Rory Stott respectively. Dates were set for a series of inductions by the Inverness, Ross and Lochaber Presbytery. Then lockdown happened. Within a fortnight church buildings were shut, church services moved online, pastoral care was being exercised by telephone, and plans for the inductions were about to be scrapped. Except there were three congregations about to head into unknown territory for an unknown period of time without a pastor – on top of extended periods of vacancy. These considerations, along with warnings of expected multiple casualties throughout the country due to COVID-19, led the Presbytery, through its Executive, to brainstorm how to induct these men into the ministries to which God had called them.

Two problems loomed: logistics and legalities. Government guidelines changed so frequently that the original plan to utilise the Smithton Church livestream with the ministers and congregational reps

present had to change. As did back-up plans to simply have the ministers present. A plan was finally decided: livestream via Zoom and YouTube, where the Presbytery Moderator for the occasion (yours truly) would lead the service and preach from his home, the Presbytery Clerk oversee the legalities from his home, the precentor lead us in praise from his home, and each of the ministers be visible in their homes to answer the necessary vows and sign the required paperwork. Despite the potential for disaster, the presbytery agreed this to be a way forward.



Rev. Rory Stott (Fortrose)

Inductions are rather strange, convoluted events at the best of times. Yet certain components ►►

need to be included: an opportunity for complaints, vows to be taken, signing a summary statement of the vows (called the Formula), and a declaration connecting the minister with the congregation he now serves. These and other legalities were carefully thought through with



Rev. Gavino Fioretti (Kiltearn)

sanctified common sense used to satisfy them.

To the night itself. Some six hundred people watched the service on YouTube from the three congregations involved, as well as other congregations and families from throughout the country. They watched as people contributed from homes in Inverness, Kiltarlity, Elgin, Dingwall, Fortrose and Evanton. From the inside, as it were, it seemed to run smoothly. Where I feared internet connection may be lost or the evening would give rise to a whole new level of oddness for inductions, it seemed, by the grace of God, to pass without incident. Anything new causes a degree of strain. Let's just say I'll not be offering my services to conduct a triple online induction again!

The day will hopefully dawn where

each congregation can mark the gift of a new pastor that God has given to them. Until then we are grateful to God to have three gifted, experienced men begin these new ministries. May God bless each ministry abundantly, and in his time provide a pastor to love and lead the now vacant congregations of Ayr & Kilwinning, and Dingwall & Strathpeffer. ●



Rev. Angus MacRae (Free North)

FREE CHURCH WELCOMES NEW MINISTER AND CONGREGATION

THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND WAS PLEASED TO WELCOME REV. DAVID CARMICHAEL AND THE CONGREGATION OF ABBEYGREEN INTO THE DENOMINATION ON THE 31ST MARCH.

Mr Carmichael has served as minister of Abbeygreen for the past 38 years, having been inducted in 1982, something of a record in modern times.

Mr Carmichael said of the congregation's joining, 'Together we step into the destiny that the Lord has prepared for us. Exciting times. We actually feel as a congregation that we are in a way returning home. When Abbeygreen first opened its doors in 1844 it did so as a Free Church.'

Situated 25 miles south of Glasgow in Lesmahagow, Abbeygreen was one of the first Free Church congregations

established after the Disruption in 1843. Along with many other Free Church congregations, Abbeygreen joined the United Presbyterian Church in 1900, and reunited with the Church of Scotland in 1929.

Rev. Ian Watson, minister of Hope Church and the clerk to the Presbytery of Glasgow and Argyll, knows Mr Carmichael and the Abbeygreen congregation well, having lived in the neighbouring parish for over 16 years.

Mr Watson said, 'It is a great pleasure to welcome David and the Abbeygreen congregation. I know they will be an asset to the Free Church at large.'

'David is known for his leadership within Scottish Reformed circles and is a popular conference speaker, particularly in the US and South Africa.'

'Personally speaking, he has been an encouragement to me over the years. Abbeygreen was one of the first churches I preached in when I was a student for the ministry. It's good to know that there is now another Free Church congregation nearby.' ●



EARLY DAYS IN THE GLEN AND FORT AUGUSTUS

REV. SEAN ANKERS reflects on the start of his new ministry in the Highlands

MY WIFE GIN AND I MOVED TO DRUMNADROCHIT IN JANUARY TO START MY NEW WORK PASTORING GLEN

Urquhart and Fort Augustus Free Church. In December we had taken a three-week trip to Nepal to see our friends Suraj and Roshani and their daughters. Just before starting a new work was a great time to go and visit God's church in another part of the world — to see how they are facing challenges and being faithful and to feel, despite the barriers of language, the unity that comes from faith in Jesus. This chance to gain perspective also brought with it the testing circumstances that being in a developing country brings — the everyday hazards like traveling or crossing the street; things not going to plan and simply feeling completely out of control. In this I learnt a lot from how Suraj always brought our plans and our safety before God. Living somewhere that has lots of unpredictable factors does teach you to rely on the only thing that is truly certain. Returning home, I have made an effort to keep these lessons in view, especially as we navigate building new relationships, and as the elders and I make plans for our congregation.



Sean, Gin and Lucy the dog hill walking on Beinn Dorain

January and February were an exciting blur of new faces, visits, meetings, connecting with Presbytery and linking up with neighbouring ministers. I also met the local Church of Scotland minister, Hugh Watt. He was keen to share with me his chaplaincy for two of the local schools. I was grateful for the opportunity. My first assemblies were a bit out of my comfort zone but very worthwhile.

Preaching-wise, I decided to start the year with an 'Exploring Our Bible' series, exploring some lesser-known or more obscure stories and themes. During our weekly Bible study we followed up with further discussion on these, which opened up lots of interesting conversation and, for some, highlighted particular areas where they felt they had gaps in their understanding. In

turn I was able to address these new questions in the Sunday teaching. This tied in well with an event hosted by Kiltarlity Free Church, 'How to talk about Jesus without looking like an idiot', at which Andy Bannister of Solas spoke on using good questions in conversations about faith. A fair number of our congregation attended and were inspired to be wise, kind and bold in conversations with non-Christians. In one of our following Bible studies we reflected on Andy's material and found it really beneficial to practise together answering some challenging questions. For me and Gin, this led to a good and balanced conversation with a man in the Health Suite at Inverness Leisure!

In March, as will be the case for all of us just now, the lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic led to an abrupt halt of ordinary congregational life. This has probably affected how we might otherwise have continued settling in, but in some ways it has pushed us to do things that we would not have otherwise done. The elders and I have taken the time to phone round members of the congregation each week. This has given us the opportunity to have quality, one-to-one conversations which don't always happen in weekly church life. Gin came up with the idea of a weekly newsletter, 'Isolation Insights', inspired by a new church member who commented that they didn't know anything about anyone. Each week there are contributions from across our church family, and through it people are sharing what their daily lives are like, their passions and their hobbies. It's bringing joy to all of us in our respective homes. For now we continue to keep in touch with each other via telephone and meet via Zoom on Wednesdays and Sundays, and to work on innovative ways of reaching out to our community. Please pray for the Christians here in the Glen and Fort Augustus, that we would remain full of faith, and have courage to share our hope in Jesus with our neighbours. •



The Glenurquhart (Drumnadrochit) church building

DUNCAN MURDOCK MACLEOD (1939-2018)

BY **RON VAN DYKE**

DUNCAN MURDOCK MACLEOD WAS BORN ON 22 AUGUST 1939 IN ROGERS CITY, WHICH IS NEAR THE NORTHERN TIP OF MICHIGAN'S LOWER PENINSULA ON LAKE HURON.

When he was nine months old and his sister Dunina was four years old, their mother passed away. Their father, Donald MacLeod, worked on the Great Lakes aboard freighters carrying calcite to the Detroit area, so he was out on the lakes most of the year. The O'Tool family, which Donald knew very well, raised Duncan and Dunina for the next six or seven years. When the freighters docked in the Detroit area, Donald MacLeod would attend the Free Church located on Schaeffer Avenue in Detroit. It was here that he met Effie Ferguson. They married in 1948 and Donald brought Duncan and Dunina from Rogers City to Detroit to live.

As Duncan grew, he attended Cerveney Middle School and then Cooley High School. It was during these years that his father taught him a most beautiful style of cursive penmanship, which became something he was noted for everywhere he went.

After high school, Duncan attended Alma College from 1957 to 1961. This college was founded in 1886 through the efforts of the Presbyterian Synod of Michigan. Meeting at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, members resolved to establish a church-affiliated college that ultimately became Alma College.

In those early years of existence, for lack of a better name, Alma was known as the 'Fighting Presbyterians'. In 1931 a challenge was issued to the student body to come up with a new name. The winning entry was 'The Scots'. Because the Presbyterian Church was originally founded in Scotland the name seemed fitting. Since that time Alma College has

embraced the Scottish Traditions.

Duncan graduated from Alma College in 1961 and became a teacher of English, French and history. He loved history and there was always an excitement in his voice when talking about many periods in the history of the United States and of the world.

Duncan went back to Rogers City after graduation and taught there for one year before moving back to the Detroit area in 1964. Once back in Detroit, he taught at Cerveney Middle School for the next 41 years, from 1965 to 2006. (This is the same school he attended as a student.) Duncan not only taught his students during these years, he loved and nurtured them. He gave them hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, showing them his light in a dark world. He taught them not to give up but to persevere in the face of difficulties and discouragements. He took personal time with them and they came to understand that he really did care about them. The faculty too he cared for and spread the love of Christ to as many as he could. This wasn't just a job, it was his calling and his life.

Duncan attended the Presbyterian Free Church, and in 1985 he confessed the Lord Jesus Christ to be his Saviour and became a communicant member of that congregation. He was elected to be an elder of the church in 1987 and served the congregation to the end in that position. As an elder he was always easily approachable and very knowledgeable. He would help in any way possible and in doing so glorified his Saviour. Duncan always gave of himself; he was never standoffish or proud. He was always gracious and generous with a gentle spirit.

Duncan and Dunina were brother and sister, but they were also the best of friends and were inseparable. After the death of

their father, when Duncan was just 13 years old, they lived together with their stepmother Effie.

In 2004 Dunina became seriously ill. Duncan cared for her closely, taking her to doctors and providing for her needs at home. Sadly, she passed away in July of 2005. Duncan continued to live in the house they shared in Lathrup Village until his death.

Behind the scenes he was very busy writing to friends and former students, visiting them and the church members. He preached when a minister was not available and conducted the mid-week prayer meeting.

Duncan Murdock MacLeod was called to be with his Lord and Saviour on the Lord's Day, February 18th 2018. It was a shock to all of us in the congregation to hear of his passing as we gathered together to worship our God. Duncan is greatly missed and only God understands the timing of his departure. James chapter 2 tells us that faith without works is dead. Duncan had a very lively faith and many works to show its action. Listening to the people at his funeral and reading the posts on the tribute wall lets us see how he reflected the love of his Saviour, and he did these things cheerfully. ●



NEIL MURRAY (1936-2019)

BY IAIN A. MACKINNON

IT WAS WITH A DEEP SENSE OF LOSS AND SORROW THAT THE NEWS OF THE DEATH ON THURSDAY, 16TH MAY 2019 OF NEIL MURRAY WAS RECEIVED BY HIS MANY FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES IN THE DISTRICT OF BACK AND INDEED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE ISLAND OF LEWIS. His brethren in the Kirk Session were particularly saddened by the loss of one who had served the church and community with energy and faithfulness over many years.

Neil was the youngest of a family of four sons and two daughters born to the late James and Marion Murray, both of whom were renowned in their own generation for their faithful Christian witness and hospitality. Neil was born on 5th March 1936 and brought up under the sound of the gospel in Back Free Church and in the close and loving fellowship of the many visitors to the family home. These influences were to have a deep and lasting impression on him throughout his life.

On leaving Back School, Neil attended the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway, thereafter proceeding to Aberdeen University and teacher training. On completion of his training he taught for five years at Laxdale Junior Secondary School. As a result of the changes and opportunities given to young people in Lewis with the opening of Lews Castle College, Neil was appointed to a teaching post there, where he served with customary diligence until his retirement as Head of the Business and General Studies Department.

After their marriage on 27th December 1962, Neil and his wife Catriona set up home at the Anvil, Vatisker, where they were blessed with son Seumas and daughter Margaret Mary. Their home, in close proximity to Back Free Church, became a replica of his own family home where many shared hospitality and friendship over many years.

The ministry of the late Rev. Murdo MacAulay had a profound influence on both Neil and Catriona, and on 28th September 1972 they professed faith publicly for the first time along with nine other people. This was a time of great blessing in the congregation and a time of revival.

Neil was blessed with a very retentive memory and this, combined with a sound understanding of the doctrines of grace, endeared him to his many friends and acquaintances not only at Back but also throughout the whole island of Lewis. In due course Neil was elected as a deacon in November 1981 and ordained as an elder in August 1992.

His usefulness to the cause of Christ was much evidenced by his ability to take services of public worship at Back and in other congregations as required.

No description of Neil would be complete without mention of his keen sense of humour and his ability to lighten the mood of any gathering if this was appropriate. He had a fund of stories and anecdotes which he used effectively if the situation required it. We who were his companions on the journey of life miss his wise counsel and fervent prayers and his loving concern for the souls of his fellow men and women. He leaves a rich legacy in respect of his input to the publications addressing the history and culture of his native soil, but most of all in relation to his witness for his Master and Lord.

His many friends and acquaintances remember with affection one who gladdened their hearts and encouraged them on life's turbulent way. Most of all he is missed by his loving wife Catriona, daughter Margaret Mary, son Seumas, grandchildren Eilidh, Catriona Mairi, Isla, Seumas and Evaline, son-in-law Michael, daughter-in-law Joey and remaining brother, Duncan, in Canada. We thank God that we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. ●

'Ach cuimhn' is iomradh maith a chaidh bidh air an fhìrean choir', Salm 112:6



CORRECTION

In our tribute to Dr Ian R. Macdonald (page 18, April 2020), the title noted that Dr Ian passed away in 2018. In fact, he passed in December 2019. Our sincere apologies for this error.



GRAVITAS

RODDIE RANKIN is drawn in by the wonder of gravity.

THE RECORD EDITOR MADE ME CHUCKLE! I SENT HIM A FEW SUBJECT OPTIONS FOR THIS ARTICLE, AND ASKED WHICH HE PREFERRED. HE CHOSE GRAVITY, 'BUT DON'T BE BOUND BY THAT'!

Oh well, it made me smile. If there's one thing we are all bound by, it is gravity. Whether you see those bindings as shackles or safety harnesses, their presence dominates our lives. As with previous articles, our aim is to see the wonder in this ubiquitous everyday phenomenon, and to give the glory to God.

It takes genius to see the extraordinary in the commonplace. What can be more familiar than our experience of gravity? Isaac Newton was that genius who recognised that the fall of an apple from its tree is an event of profound mystery. Why should that apple fall? There are no strings pulling it, yet it always falls straight to the ground. Why are we stuck to the ground, so that even if we jump upwards and escape momentarily we inevitably land again? You answer that it is because of our weight. But what is weight? And why do objects with weight always fall down? The Earth has weight too: does it fall slightly upwards towards the falling apple? Are all weighty objects attracted to one another? If so, why? Wouldn't we expect them all to just float around free from any effect caused by their neighbours?

And then there is Australia! Look at the world as a whole and people 'down-under' are standing upside-down compared to us. Why don't they fall off? Or since they don't, why don't we fall off? Is the Earth actually flat?

We'll not lapse into Christian Flat-Earthism in an attempt to explain what is counter-intuitive. Let us see that the Creator has fashioned a wonder in governing the world and all things by gravity. When I consider *the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them?*⁰¹ God uses gravity to set the moon and stars in place. Gravity is truly a mighty giant before which we tremble in view of our weakness and apparent insignificance.

The Bible is full of descriptions of the effects of gravity. Things fall. Crumbs fall from the table.⁰² The grass withers, the flowers fall.⁰³ Where the tree falls it lies.⁰⁴ Children, oxen and sheep may fall into wells or pits.⁰⁵ The sparrow ultimately falls to the ground,⁰⁶ as does a man felled by the sword.⁰⁷ Gravity wins. We cannot stand up against it indefinitely. If we don't keep holding them up with a smile, even our faces will fall!⁰⁸

GRAVITY IN SPACE

But its reach extends far beyond the Earth. Everything with mass exerts gravity and sends its pulling power out across the vastness of space. Weighty things call out to other weighty things, across light years, and at light speed. There is no escaping the clutches of gravity. Everything pulls everything else! As a result it is a myth that things are weightless in space. It's just that in space you're not standing on anything to resist your fall. So, if an astronaut was released a million kilometres from Earth, the Earth's gravity would immediately

begin to accelerate them towards it. After about 20 days they would enter the upper atmosphere, which would begin to resist their fall, generating intense, consuming heat. Don't try this at home!

To illustrate the way gravity sends its fishing nets out across the cosmos, take the example of the Andromeda Galaxy. It is incredibly far away from the Milky Way Galaxy, which is home to our sun and planet. It is 160 billion times further away from the Earth than the sun is. Yet our Milky Way is in its nets, and the force with which it pulls those nets in is equivalent to the force 12,000 planet Earths would exert if placed on your kitchen scales!

So now you're asking why everything doesn't just get pulled together by gravity into one almighty car crash? Why don't satellites fall back to Earth? Why doesn't the moon smash into us, and we into the sun? That's where God's fine-tuning of the universe reveals another trick: just about everything is spinning around! The moon *is* falling, but it is also orbiting. Its motion would take it in a straight tangent line away from Earth, but gravity keeps pulling it down towards Earth. The speed at which its trajectory would take it away from Earth exactly matches the speed at which gravity would pull it towards Earth. So it stays orbiting at the same distance! The same is true for satellites, the planets moving around the sun, and even the whole galaxy rotating around its centre. The whole universe is God's clock shop, with countless wheels turning in perfect balance and unison to the glory of the great Horologist!

Since we've mentioned the centre of the Galaxy, let's take a look there! Lurking in splendid isolation, with 250 billion stars (and our sun) orbiting around it, is a black hole. This nightmarish object is so dense that the gravity it generates prevents anything from ever being able to travel fast enough to escape it — even light itself. This is gravity gone mad: a tyrant appetite devouring anything that comes near to the cavernous maw of its dark lair. Stars and planets disappear without trace down its gaping throat. *Record* readers should admire at a safe distance!

GRAVITY ON EARTH

Here on Earth gravity is usually more benign. It binds us to the sun and her beneficent warmth. It holds our atmosphere in place, without which there would be no life. Gravity pulls heavier cold air down more forcibly than warm air, creating circulating air currents which dominate our weather. It draws rain from the clouds, rivers down mountains and holds the lakes and seas in their basins. By gravity God decrees *this far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt.*⁰⁹ Gravity makes life predictable and stable, keeping everything in its place. Imagine if we did not know from day to day where the sea would be! Even the tides of the oceans, which are determined by the gravitational pull of the moon and the sun, follow exact laws, so I know precisely the few days each year when I can collect clams for dinner! ►►

Although gravity consistently obeys the laws God gave to govern it, the strength of gravity decreases as we move further from the object associated with it. Double the distance and gravity drops to a quarter of its value. This means that its attraction is about 1% stronger at the North Pole than on top of Mount Chimborazo — the highest point on the equator. One is about 28 kilometres further from Earth's centre than the other, and experiences a small outward force from the spin of the Earth, which reduces the measured weight by a further 0.3%. We might take advantage of this by purchasing gold weighed at the equator and weighing it again in the Arctic to sell it for a small profit! Perhaps this would fall foul of God's prohibition on dishonest weights!¹⁰ This variation in weight with height means that weight is not an absolute. Technically, this is why mass is a better measure, because it recognises the amount of material actually present.

OVERCOMING GRAVITY

It is in overcoming gravity that many of man's greatest achievements have been recorded. The Tower of Babel was an early, doomed attempt.¹¹ Samson had more success carrying the doors of Gaza's city gates to the top of a hill, in what was an extraordinary feat.¹² Every mountain climbed and every tall building constructed represents a triumph over gravity. Without great care, gravity will raze those buildings through neglect, earthquake or destructive invaders.¹³ As for leaving Earth to travel in space, that takes a prodigious amount of effort, which gravity resists inch by inch. The cow does not jump over the moon! As a result, space travel will remain the privilege of a very few for a long time to come, and the fact that it has been achieved at all is probably humankind's greatest technological masterwork.

Gravity is the outworking of a universal law our Creator has written into the fabric of all things. We are able to describe that law, as Newton discovered and Einstein further refined with General Relativity. However, we still have no clear conception of what causes it. The mass of objects seems to be imparted by our Scottish Nobel laureate's Higgs particle. Some say that as-yet-undiscovered particles called *gravitons* zip between the Higgs particles to cause the pull we call gravity. It's all profoundly weird and impenetrable. To us. But to our God it is just another thread on his loom. Even gravity bows to him. He can lift mountains.¹⁴ To prove he is the Gravity Governor, he made the iron axe-head float,¹⁵ and enabled Jesus to walk upon water.¹⁶ Jesus himself calmed the storm by halting the colder air which was being pulled down by gravity from Hermon's heights to trouble the Sea of Galilee.¹⁷

GRAVITY KILLED JESUS

This makes it all the more marvellous that God allowed gravity to kill Jesus! Of course gravity kills many people. It brings down devastating avalanches and landslides, and ferocious rivers in spate. People

have fatal falls from high places,¹⁸ and the collapse of buildings adds to the casualties.¹⁹ The occasional millstone falls from above under gravity's duress, and cracks skulls!²⁰

When we say that gravity killed Jesus, then, we mean that its effects made his life non-viable. Our Good Shepherd, as he laid down his life for the sheep, was suspended upright from a cross. The pain was literally excruciating as gravity locked the iron spikes into the bones in his wrists and feet, and caused his shoulders to dislocate. As his wounds bled, gravity pulled his remaining blood downwards, dangerously lowering his blood pressure. Simultaneously, to breathe he was compelled to haul himself up on the nails to empty his lungs. The pain was searing; the effort unsustainable; asphyxiation with concomitant heart failure inevitable. There was only one outcome of crucifixion in a world of gravity. Jesus submitted to it, and surrendered to the laws of nature he had created, that he might serve us and give his life as a ransom for many.²¹

PRAISE

Today it is our turn to fall down, not under the influence of gravity, but compelled by wonder, love and praise, that we have a Creator God willing to go to such lengths for his creatures.²² He let the gravity he created crush²³ him, that we may be lifted high and seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.²⁴ And how did Christ get to be in those heavenly places himself? By having the last word over gravity: having risen from the dead he ascended into heaven, defeating gravity, *being taken up before their very eyes!*²⁵

Many of our joys in life are gained when we point downhill, after an upward slog against gravity. What thrills may be had through sledging, skiing, roller-coasters, downhill mountain biking, or chasing a Double Gloucester cheese! So keep fighting gravity and reaping the rewards. Keep getting up, against its pull, to serve God, that you may sit down in satisfaction when that service is complete. And may your praises, over which gravity has no power, rise from earth to heaven, to the God of wonders. ●

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

⁰¹ Psalm 8:3,4

⁰² Matthew 15:27

⁰³ Isaiah 40:8

⁰⁴ Ecclesiastes 11:3

⁰⁵ Luke 14:5; Matthew 12:11

⁰⁶ Matthew 10:29

⁰⁷ Leviticus 26:8

⁰⁸ Mark 10:22

⁰⁹ Job 38:8-11

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 25:13-16;

Proverbs 11:1

¹¹ Genesis 11:4

¹² Judges 16:3

¹³ 2 Chronicles 34:11;

Acts 16:26; Mark 13:2

¹⁴ Matthew 17:20, 21:21

¹⁵ 2 Kings 6:6

¹⁶ Matthew 14:25

¹⁷ Mark 4:39

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 22:8

¹⁹ Luke 13:4

²⁰ Judges 9:53

²¹ Mark 10:45

²² Psalm 95:6

²³ Isaiah 53:5,10

²⁴ Ephesians 2:6

²⁵ Acts 1:9; Hebrews 4:14

FAMILY WORSHIP

Although social distancing is preventing us from gathering in church, worship of our heavenly Father is never ceasing. **REV JAMES MACIVER** shares some thoughts on family worship.

MANY PARENTS BELIEVE IN THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY WORSHIP BUT STRUGGLE WITH THE PRACTICALITIES. No parent, I'm sure, would claim to be an expert, qualified to advise others as to how to arrange and maintain family devotional time. That is certainly true in my own case, but I offer the following points from my experience as a parent and grandparent in the hope that they may prove helpful.

1. WORSHIP

It is important to remember that family worship, or devotional time, is *worship*. It should, therefore, contain the elements which constitute worship – reading of scripture, prayer, and praise. While some parents may think this daunting, it need not be so. 'Less is more', should be our approach, as indicated in the following points. Family worship times should be marked by joyful thankfulness, confession seeking forgiveness and a love of communion with God, all of which should make a positive impression on our children, encouraging them to seek and worship God for themselves.

2. PRAYER.

Prayer at family worship should not be long! Begin with giving thanks to God for the Bible, his word. Ask him to bless it to the family and to give understanding of its meaning in the passage to be read. This is really all that is required, to begin with at least. It's also possible to choose psalms which are in the form of prayers such as Psalm 67, or Psalm 25 verses 1-7. This is especially useful for parents making a start on family worship.

3. READINGS.

As with prayer, so the readings should be relatively short. Modern translations like the ESV and NIV provide headings for each passage, which greatly assists with this. There is nothing wrong with reading the Bible from beginning to end, but for family worship it will often be more suitable to vary this, although the whole Bible should be covered in the course of time. For example, take one of the Gospels and go through it using a brief commentary if needed. Or the book of Acts, showing the way in which the early Church grew and faced opposition. Parents should make prior preparation for times of family worship, setting up a reading plan, selecting items for praise and getting materials in good time.

I also found it beneficial to involve the whole family in the readings, each person taking a turn verse about, which gives a sense of participation and also acts as an aid to memory. It is a good idea to choose a verse from the passage read for the children to memorise.

4. REGULARITY AND TIME.

Ideally family worship should be on a daily basis, either morning or evening, or both if possible. This is what the Bible requires of us, to worship God each day, not just once a week. In the busy schedules of daily life the discipline of setting time aside for this is important.

Parents will know in their own family setting what the best time of day will be for family worship. For many it will be just before the children go to bed, but that should not mean a hurried run-through of worship. To avoid when children are most tired, some families will have worship around the table at supper time, when the family is most likely to be together.

Irrespective of when family worship is set in the family timetable, it should never come across as an adjunct to all the other activities of family life. Our children should get the clear impression from family worship that it is central to the life of the family, so that they come to believe that the worship of God is what undergirds and gives strength to individual and family life.

5. PRACTICAL HELPS.

There are many useful resources that can be used along with the Bible, some of which will help to structure the time given to family worship. For example, those with younger children could use *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones. *Family Worship* by Joel R. Beeke gives valuable insights into how to do family worship, answers common objections raised against it, and encourages continuing with it faithfully. Many other reliable resources are easily available. •

'And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise' (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Rev James Maciver is minister of Stornoway Free Church

EVOLUTIONARY CREATION

BY ALAN J F FRASER

GENESIS 1 IS AN AMAZING PIECE OF LITERATURE. IN A FEW WORDS THE SCENE IS SET FOR SOME OF THE BIGGEST ISSUES THAT HUMANS THINK ABOUT.

It gives us God's view on these issues in a way that has been meaningful to millions of people over thousands of years, from ancient nomads to modern scientists. If we had not been expressly told by the Apostle Paul that the Scriptures were 'God breathed' (1 Timothy 3:16) surely many reading Genesis 1 would have concluded that these words could never have been of mere human origin.

However, I do not think Genesis teaches cosmology, rather it challenges pagan beliefs. It tells us God exists; that he is something other than the universe; that he created everything in heaven and Earth; that he speaks and is personal. It tells us that we share something with the dust of the earth and the other animals, yet are created in the image of God, moral creatures with the capacity to relate personally to our Creator. It tells us we have been made male and female; that the Earth is the Lord's and we must look after it. It tells us that sin is our biggest problem and begins God's revelation of his solution.

We are physical beings in a physical world so must expect any revelation from our Creator to make reference to the physical. But that does not mean we should expect to be taught science. A past generation rejected the idea that the Earth revolved around the Sun because the Psalms twice tell us 'The Earth is fixed.' Today we wonder why anyone would read science into these words. Scripture is a vital revelation to us to teach us 'what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man' (Westminster Shorter Catechism). 'It is profitable for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16).

Paul commended the Jews in Berea for searching the Scriptures to see if his apparently new teaching was consistent with them. We too must search the Scriptures, willing to change our received traditions, and accept the prompting of general revelation to look again at our fallible interpretations of God's infallible word. The 'God breathed' (2 Timothy 3:16) Scriptures must not be subservient either to scientific theories or to cherished human interpretations.

In spite of the number of Christians, past and present, working at the cutting edge of scientific research, a belief has arisen that science and the Bible are poles apart. This is most acutely felt in the area of evolution. Atheists often cite evolution as proof that the Bible is unbelievable. Many Christians respond by attacking the theory of evolution. As a

consequence evangelism is made more difficult. Children brought up in the faith are suspicious of science or feel inhibited in sharing their thoughts about science in the church. Older Christians can feel unnecessarily threatened by evolution.

The cumulative evidence, from many different scientific disciplines, points unanimously to Earth having been around for 4.5 billion years. The evidence includes geological deposits, igneous and metamorphic rock embedded in sedimentary rocks, radioactive decay, tectonic plate movement and galaxies light years away. Either our world is very old or the Creator made it look that way from the start. I see no Biblical evidence to force me down the latter road.

Likewise the cumulative evidence from the fossil record, the geographical spread of current species, and from molecular biology points clearly to the conclusion that life has evolved. 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. Again I see no Biblical evidence that would force me down the latter road.

A robust Theism in line with the Hebrew Scriptures sees the Creator at work through the phenomena we observe in the material world. Nature is not an autonomous entity in which the Creator intervenes from time to time. Even the weather is God's activity (Psalm 29). The 'Laws of Physics' are our way of seeing the Creator's pattern of working as he sustains, moment by moment, the world he created. He is a God of order who is free to change that order at any time but chooses to do so only for very important reasons, usually in the unfolding of the story of redemption, e.g. the miracles of Jesus. In this view Adam is seen as an historical figure, the covenant head of the human race although not the biological ancestor of all humans. He is still made from the dust of the earth although not by a brief process but rather a much longer process, the evidence of which is written so clearly in our DNA.

Life evolving within the framework of the laws of physics is perfectly consistent with the idea of God creating and sustaining the universe. '*Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who take delight in them*' (Psalm 111:2). •

PUBLIC

A YOUNG EARTH

BY PROF. TOMMY MACKAY

QUESTIONS

TO SET OUT IN AROUND 800 WORDS AN ARGUMENT REGARDING THE AGE OF THE EARTH REMINDS ME OF LEADING A CRUSADER HOUSE PARTY AT THE LAKE OF MENTEITH SOME YEARS AGO.

Over 20 excited boys, some away from home for the first time, arrived in the games hall of the venue on a Friday evening. Amidst the resulting cacophony, I heard the piercing cry of a boy sitting at the far end of the hall with his hands poised over the piano – ‘Tam, how do you play the piano?’ This article will no more do the job than whatever answer I gave then. This is perhaps even more the case for those, like myself, in a minority in the scientific community, who argue for the traditional Christian interpretation of what is usually now called a ‘young earth’ of a few thousand years old, a timeframe which for most things we might in fact think is rather old.

I set out my position here under two heads, the biblical argument and the scientific argument. These are necessarily intertwined, since God as creator is the origin of science, of its methods and rationale, and of all knowledge. Both arguments have been undermined by apologists on each side – for example, by some ‘young earth’ proponents who pontificate on Hebrew idiom while unable to read a Hebrew letter, or by facile ‘old earth’ arguments (‘Genesis 1 and 2 are contradictory’, ‘It could not have been ordinary days since the sun was not created till Day 4’, ‘Some of our brightest stars needed thousands of years for their light to reach earth’). There are many writers more capable than I to argue the position on both counts, and I would point the reader to some of these sources.⁰¹⁻⁰⁵

THE BIBLICAL ARGUMENT

We normally approach Scripture by asking what is the most obvious meaning of what we read and how our understanding of it comports with the teaching on the subject throughout the whole Bible. I would argue that the most obvious meaning of the early chapters of Genesis, and of the Gospel doctrines which derive from it, is the traditional one.⁰⁶ While there are many variants of ‘old earth’ and evolutionary frameworks of belief, all of them raise either a major biblical or a major scientific conundrum. Is it tenable, for example, to believe in an ancient earth and still believe, in any way that even broadly considers biblical chronology, that God made Adam? That from the body of that one man he made woman? That ‘*by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin*’ (Rom. 5:12)? Or, instead, do we believe death came first, with the death of countless millions of animals before Adam?

If I believe in a God who made a mature man, and from him a mature woman, with a fully mature body, a reasoning mind and the gift of language (all of it for ‘science’ a biological, psychological and linguistic

absurdity), then it is not difficult to believe, *inter alia*, that when he made the stars, for me and for you, he made the beam of light by which to wonder at them, without the need for aeons of time to reach us.

THE SCIENTIFIC ARGUMENT

Those of us who believe in a ‘young earth’ are used to being viewed by many as if we were the equivalent of flat-earthers. However, while I know of no serious body of mainstream scientists who argue coherently for the latter, there are many in the minority who argue for the former across every relevant scientific discipline. Nevertheless, when writing of scientific arguments, whether as Christians or as scientists, we need very considerable caution. We often hear that ‘science tells us...’, but science in this field of enquiry is not a unified body of agreed knowledge. The issue is that no individual is expertly qualified to assess the whole corpus of evidence, which covers many scientific disciplines including geology, nuclear physics, astrophysics and every branch of biology. In every one of these fields, while the majority hold to a broad ‘old earth’ consensus, there are uncertainties of fact and many assumptions (much of which is discussed in detail in the literature cited). These raise major questions regarding, for example, the geological record, the fossil record and radiometric dating. I am a Chartered Scientist, and my charter depends not only on maintenance of expertise but on a full commitment to evidence and to the scientific method. But, like others, I work in one field. It is a field just as much underpinned by ‘old earth’ and evolutionary assumptions as any other. I am qualified to make expert assessment of the issues in that field, but not in another, just as others cannot do in mine.

It is not only Christians who work from a priori beliefs. Scientists also operate from belief systems. There is only one reasonable alternative to believing in evolution and an ‘old earth’. For most, that is the inadmissible alternative that there is a God, and that he designed and created all things. For very many of us, the conclusions, hypotheses and supporting evidence they propose for their position does not represent any reasonable basis on which to reconstruct our traditional interpretation of the biblical text. •

⁰¹ Lloyd, S. (2017). ‘Chronological Creationism’. *Foundations*, 72, 76-99. <http://www.affinity.org.uk/downloads/foundations/affinity-foundations-72-spring-2017.pdf>

⁰² McIntosh, A. (2017). *Genesis for Today* (6th Edn). Leominster: Day One Publications.

⁰³ McIntosh, A. (2016). *Genesis 1-11: A Verse by Verse Commentary*. Leominster: Day One Publications.

⁰⁴ Batten, D., Catchpoole, D., Sarfati, J., & Vieland, C. (2017). *The Creation Answers Book* (7th Edn). Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers.

⁰⁵ Carter, R. (Ed.) (2014). *Evolution's Achilles' Heels*. Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers.

⁰⁶ For the argument that this is the traditional position of Christians, including Augustine and Origen despite their allegorical writings, see Batten et al., *op. cit.*, pp.32-35.

The Chosen is the first multi-series TV show based on the biblical accounts of Jesus' life, told through the eyes of those who knew him, including his disciples and Mary Magdalene. Distributed by VidAngel, the series received a record amount of crowdfunding, raising over \$11 million from those who wanted to see the finished product. The Chosen prides itself on its character development and 'gritty' feel; while extra dialogue and backstories have been included, the writers emphasise that there is nothing that contradicts what is actually portrayed in Scripture. The series has not been reviewed by major secular publications, but has received excellent reviews from Christian platforms and almost unanimous acclaim from viewers on the well-known IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes review websites. The Record asked one Christian mum to give us her thoughts on the show.

THE CHOSEN – REVIEW

BY **ANGIE MELUGIN**

OUR FAMILY BEGAN WATCHING THE CHOSEN SERIES DURING THE STAY-AT-HOME ORDER WHILE SEARCHING FOR MORE THINGS TO FILL OUR TIME. I have seen many different visual presentations of the life of Christ and it took several recommendations before I decided to give it a try, because they often lack in being able to keep one's attention. But this series has kept my attention better than the others. The first one or two episodes were a little slow, but other people recommended staying with it, so we did and it has not disappointed us! So far, the series has taken the stories that many are so familiar with and brought life to the characters in a way I've never seen. The scriptural accounts appear accurate. And as a friend stated, 'The character development and side stories are realistic things that could have happened behind the scenes. I loved Jesus' sense of humour.' These aspects make the story come to life and help us connect on a more personal level.

The characters' personalities align with things that are recorded in the Bible and it helps me connect more with the way the life of Christ may have intersected with others' instead of just viewing each event as a single, separate entity. It has also caused me to want to read the Gospels again to determine which details are added to make the story more enjoyable, and which details are in the scriptures. The Chosen brings to light how each Gospel writer highlights different aspects in more detail while others leave them completely out or barely mention them. This continues to remind me that the writers had different lifestyles and characteristics and viewed the same events with different eyes!

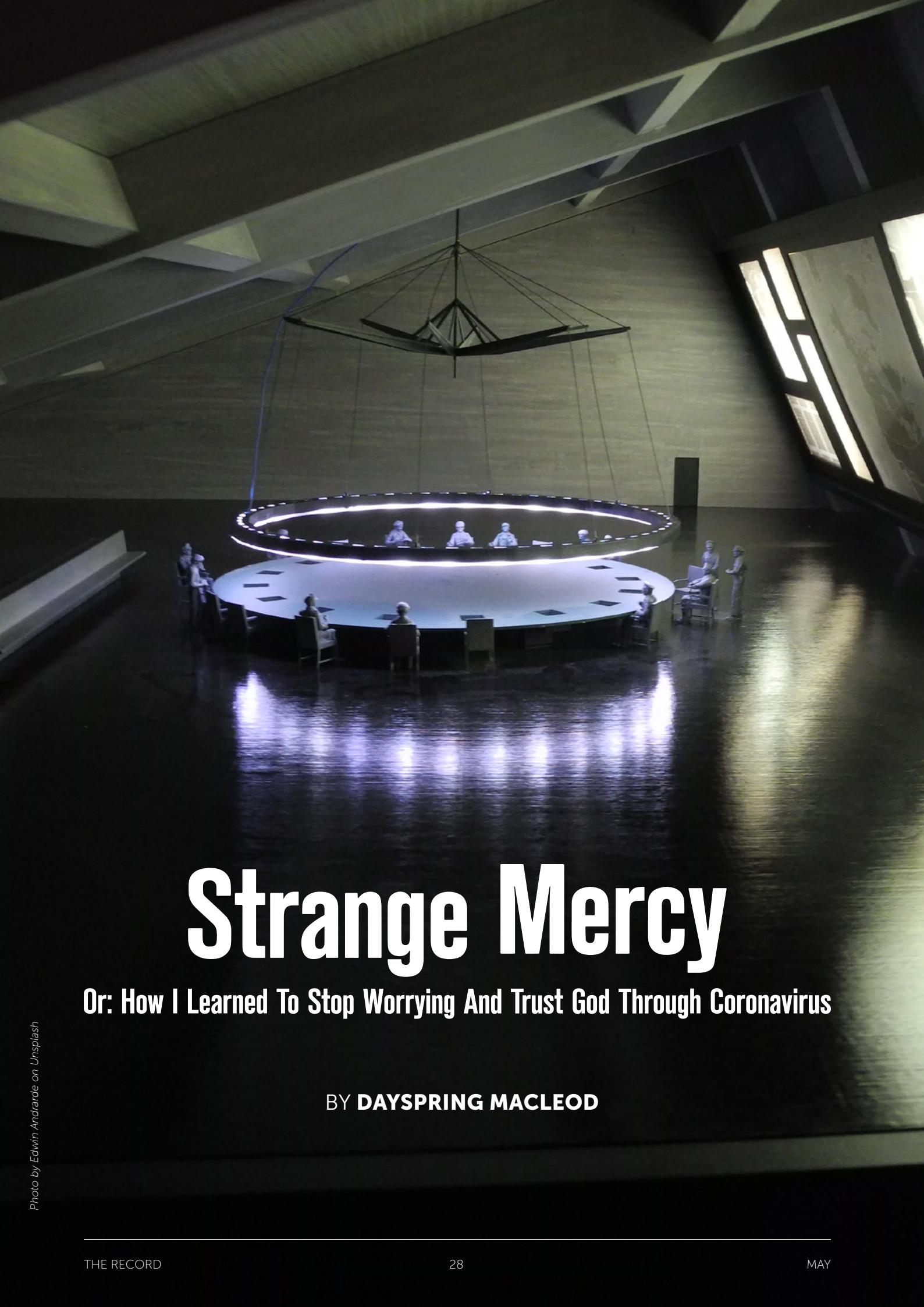
As the series goes on, I have found more connection and understanding of how amazing it really is that these men would so easily leave all and follow Jesus. I can relate better to how they must have felt in some ways, realizing this was the Messiah they had learned about and longed to see for so long. But I also consider the turmoil of learning what it means to 'follow Him' and what their role was to be: protector, provider, student? There were so many unknowns that we often overlook!

Each episode has drawn me in a little bit more and I'm hoping the next season continues to bring new life to the biblical account of Christ! For me, it just makes the names on the pages become more alive and relatable.

Watch for free on YouTube or at www.thechosen.tv/app.

Angie Melugin attends First Baptist Church and lives in Brookville, Indiana with her husband and two daughters. They have been blessed to be in church ministries for over twenty years.





Strange Mercy

Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Trust God Through Coronavirus

BY **DAYSRING MACLEOD**

Photo by Edwin Andrade on Unsplash

HOW IS LOCKDOWN TREATING YOU? ARE YOU GOING STIR-CRAZY, OR ENJOYING HOBBIES YOU'VE NEVER HAD TIME FOR BEFORE, OR JUST DOING YOUR BEST TO CONTAIN HALF-FERAL CHILDREN? Like most

of you, I've had bad days and good days. But I'm often aware of a great blessing in that our greatest worry is lockdown boredom. Occasionally someone in the house will cough or get a low-grade fever (at one point the baby had a temperature for two days — it turned out to be a reaction to his measles vaccine!) and the danger feels very real. Then I welcome the return of noneventfulness.

One of the things that has cheered me up during quarantine is the funny cartoons and pictures going around social media with COVID-related captions. A weary-looking photo of Yul Brynner in *The Ten Commandments* reads 'Pharaoh seeing us all freaking out over just one plague.' In another photo, a copy of the novel *Twilight* sits near a loo with a sign saying 'Emergency toilet paper'. But lately what I've seen on Facebook are atheist friends posting angry questions. They want to know the truth: is God powerless to stop coronavirus? Or is he just unwilling? Does he want all these people to die?

Generally I don't engage with these questions on social media, because I don't think the people really want an answer. They want someone to blame, and once they've already criticised the government and the Chinese, they look for someone else. Of course, since they don't actually believe in God, they're really blaming Christians for clinging to their faith in a time of trial. These folks want God to stop all suffering in the world, and hold him to ransom if he doesn't — but they are also unwilling to live by the laws that such a God demands; their sinful actions (like mine) add to the very suffering they condemn. They cannot comprehend that the God we believe in is one who suffers with his people; all they can imagine is a Santa who, failing to bring every outrageous demand on Christmas morning, must be a lie.

Far from wondering where God is during this crisis, I am deeply comforted by this demonstration of his control.

On the opposite end of the scale are some hardline Christians who attempt to assign meaning to the virus: that this is God's judgment on the world for homosexuality, or abortion, or transsexuality — or whatever that particular person's own bugbear happens to be! These sins rarely seem to have any overt connection to the virus itself, so one wonders how they know the mind of God quite so well. More moderate Christians have said that it's not our responsibility to figure out 'why' we have the virus, but to walk with God through it.

That's quite right, of course, and in many ways we will not know the 'why' for a long time. But I think we can still trace God's purposes in it. And I can define, in one word, the 'strange mercy' that I see in coronavirus. That word is *sabbath*.

As a former Baptist, sabbath has never been my strong suit in Reformed theology. I didn't grow up with any particular observation of it; in my youth I understood it to have been mostly a distinctive of the Jewish faith. Yet the sabbath is enormously important to God. It was built into the very foundation of creation itself, keeping it was one of the Ten Commandments, and breaking the sabbath was a desecration (yet works of necessity and mercy, as Jesus showed, had a holiness which preserved the sabbath's purpose). The sabbath was made for man — it was a mercy given to us — not man for the sabbath.

But in the twenty-first-century West, we have written off the sabbath. It's a day for sports, for shopping, for recovering from the previous night's excesses. Everything in our world, in our culture, was wrung dry seven days a week for the sake of profit and entertainment.

Until God intervened.

With a speed that we all found breathtaking — as if He had just said the word — so much of our world simply stopped.

The debate about sexual identity and gender redefinition? Silenced.

The enmity of 'remain versus leave' and Britain's divorce terms with the EU? Irrelevant.

The busyness of a culture which has no time to listen to itself think? Placed under house arrest.

A world environment being choked by nonstop flights, vehicles and manufacture? .

Leviticus 26:34 says, *Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths.* We are not in the country of our enemies, but there is a similar meaning: the people, with their relentless, restless activities contrary to God's laws, were giving their land no rest. So God would enforce a rest for a weary, thirsty land.

All throughout the developed world, people are peeling their eyes from their screens and looking around their gardens, their parks, their

horizons. They are wondering if the birds were always this loud, the daffodils this yellow, the snowdrops this delicate, the water this clear. It's just possible that God has used coronavirus

In many ways we will not know the 'why' for a long time. But I think we can still trace God's purposes in it.

to extend the very life of our planet, and at the same time give us space to consider what is worth keeping from our old way of life; what things we might simplify, what systems we really need. (May our churches do this as well as our governments and employers!)

Far from wondering where God is during this crisis, I am deeply comforted by this demonstration of his control. I've always read Revelation's verses about Babylon falling with the image of New York City in my mind. It felt like an eternal city, beyond imagination that it would ever stop. But now its streets lie empty, while we wonder if the all-important economy, as we know it, still exists. There is a scary element to such huge change, but it has demonstrated to me as never before that God transcends even the most defining, monolithic elements of human life. As a race, we are humbled. Let him, then, be glorified.

On a smaller level, this is a time for families to reset. After a week or two to clear my head, I realised I was getting less angry with the children. Why? We weren't *hurrying* all the time! The older children have made leaps in their learning. Both Mum and Dad are always around, and we've played with them more imaginatively, in ways we never had time to do before. I think our children will look back on the months of coronavirus as a good memory. We are upholding our goal, as I wrote last month, to 'not waste the hard'.

I know there will still be bad days: bad days of boredom, and bad days of real danger from the virus. There is terrible pain in many thousands of families who have lost loved ones. New York is burying victims in mass graves. I am already mourning with friends who have lost parents. But still, I'm resting in the God who walks through the horror with us, and rejoicing in the sabbath he has provided for the human race. May this be marvellous in our eyes. •

STUDYING DURING LOCKDOWN

THE CURRENT CORONAVIRUS CRISIS HAS AFFECTED ALMOST EVERY PART OF LIFE; SCHOOLS, SHOPS AND EVEN THE COUNTRYSIDE ARE ALL CLOSED. Daily routines have changed for almost all of us. And that of course has affected the Seminary. The lockdown has meant that the routine and format for studying have had to change. So, what has studying at ETS looked like over these past few weeks?

At the end of March, the ETS building was closed and all staff and students were asked to work from home, along with the rest of the country. This has meant that all classes have been running via distance learning. Thankfully, ETS has had these facilities in place for a number of years. Indeed, for some students, distance learning is their normal mode of studying. But for the students who studied onsite in Edinburgh, the lockdown has meant that instead of making the daily journey up the Mound, they just have to open their laptops or fire up their desktop computers at home. Perhaps the biggest change is not for the students, but for the lecturers. Up until now, distance learning still involved lecturers being in the classroom at ETS where they would deliver their classes. But now lecturers have also had to lecture from a distance, speaking into a webcam rather than a classroom, sometimes with a dog or cat wandering around at their feet.

Being in separate locations brings a different dynamic to classes. You lose much of the benefit of being together in the classroom, so you don't get quite the same interaction as a group and you can't copy the notes of the person next to you! But the distance learning facilities still make up for a lot of what is lost. Students can still ask questions, and the software allows for sharing of documents between participants. It has made learning languages more interesting. Often languages are learned through reciting words and patterns as a group. That is definitely more challenging online and can make for some very funny-sounding online Greek!

One of the big questions that the lockdown raised was what to do about exams? Usually, students will sit exams at the beginning of May. These are generally sat onsite in the Seminary in very tense classrooms, where students are lined up at individual

desks feeling very nervous. The lockdown has of course made that impossible. One option was for students to sit exams at home. Some institutions do that in certain circumstances. However, one of the major hurdles created by the lockdown is that students are not able to access the library facilities at ETS. This makes studying for exams very difficult, especially if students have been looking at specialist areas for which rarer books are needed. So this meant that although we are sure that students could be trusted to sit their exams at home without cheating, they couldn't actually get access to the books they needed for studying. So, in consultation with Glasgow University, the Seminary agreed that students would not have to sit their final exams and would instead be awarded their credits on the basis of having already completed 75% of the course. The students, of course, were devastated not to have exams to sit, and showed their sorrow by cheering even louder than usual in the weekly applause for the NHS.

The forced closure of the ETS building has given us all cause to reflect, just as the closure of church buildings has done the same for congregations. The lockdown has been a powerful reminder of what a privilege it is to be together. It has reinforced the fact that being at ETS is about a lot more than just studying. It is also a place where friendships grow, where people spend time together and where everyone enjoys each other's company. The discipline of study is helpfully complemented by the fun, laughter and friendship of a group of students and staff being together. That has been at the heart of ETS for generations, and these unprecedented circumstances have temporarily taken away something that is very precious, perhaps more precious than any of us realised.

It is all a great reminder that togetherness is at the heart of the gospel. That togetherness is part of the amazing accomplishments of the cross. We are united to Jesus and united together in Jesus. To be forced to stay apart is difficult because it is the opposite of what the cross has achieved for us. Whether we are studying as students or serving a local church, our current circumstances are a great reminder that it is an amazing privilege to be together.. •

THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CLERIC CAMPANELLA GAVE THIS ADVICE TO ARTISTS: 'PAINT CHRIST NOT DEAD BUT LIVING ... THE CONQUEROR OF DEATH ... THE LORD OF LIFE ... IRRESISTIBLE VICTOR ... MIGHTY TO SAVE.'

Donald Macleod writes that 'The interval between his first and his second coming is filled with redemptive activity' (IVP *New Dictionary of Theology*).

What picture does the Bible paint? What authority does the resurrected Jesus have? What is he doing?

WHAT IS JESUS LIKE NOW?

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3). He has eyes like blazing fire ... feet like bronze glowing in a furnace ... voice like the sound of rushing waters ... his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (Revelation 1:13-16).

And at the same time, he is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24), who says: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 12:28-30).

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:19-20).

WHAT AUTHORITY DOES JESUS HAVE?

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matthew 28:18). Through the Spirit of holiness he was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:1-4).

He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 1:3), far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:19-23).

The Father granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those God has given him (John 17:2).

WHAT IS HE USING HIS AUTHORITY TO DO?

He sustains all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:3). He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31). He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3). He has gone to prepare a place for you (John 14:2).

Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34). Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18). If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25).

He opens hearts to respond to the gospel (Acts 16:14). His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).

He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

He is with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

HOW DOES JESUS CARRY OUT THE TASKS ON EARTH?

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. You know him [the Holy Spirit], for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you (John 14:16-18).

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27).

WHERE IS GOD THE FATHER IN ALL THIS?

God will make the nations his inheritance, and he will rule them with an iron sceptre (Psalm 2:7-9). Those who love him will be loved by the Father (John 14:21).

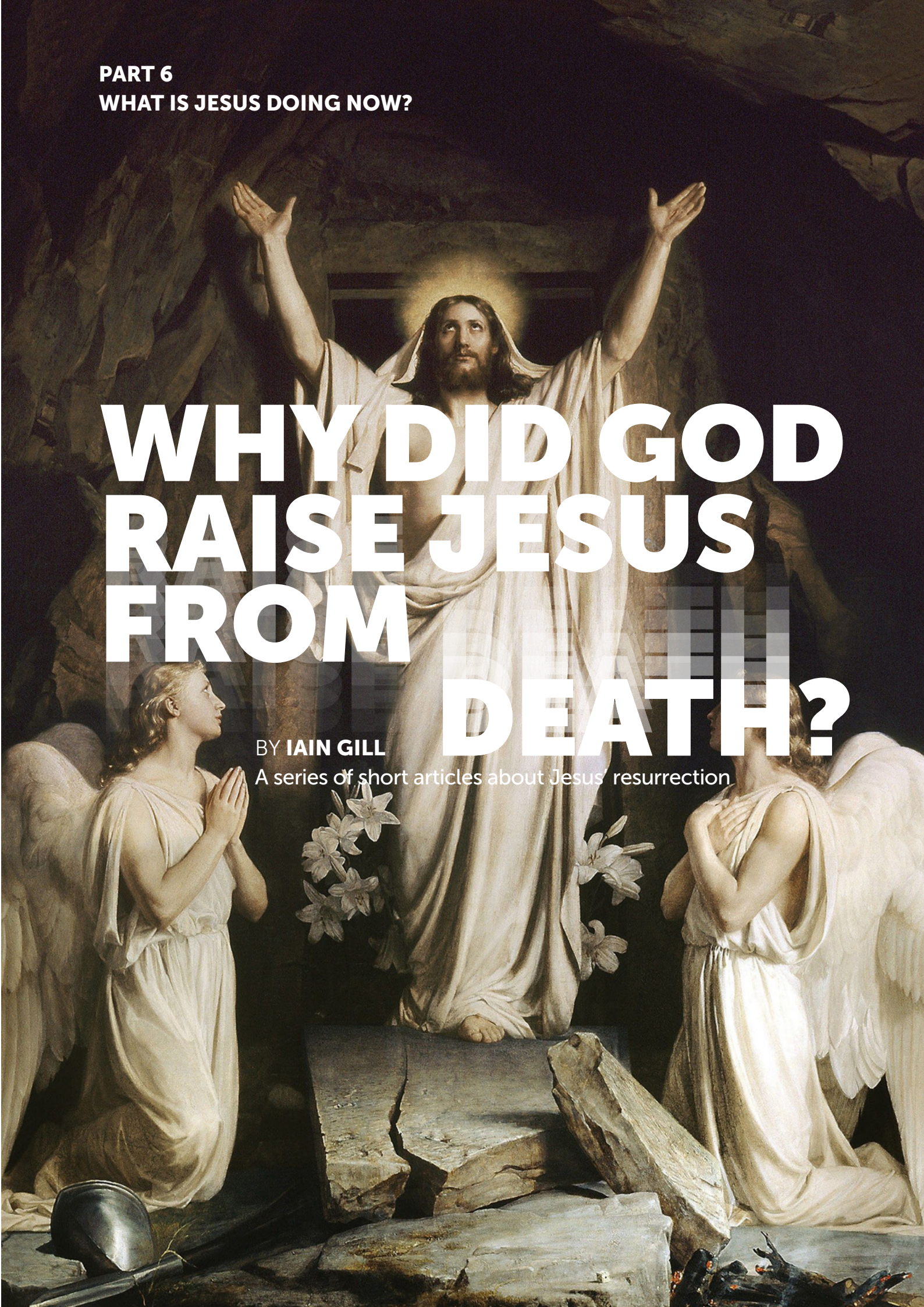
If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. ... We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). ●

PART 6
WHAT IS JESUS DOING NOW?

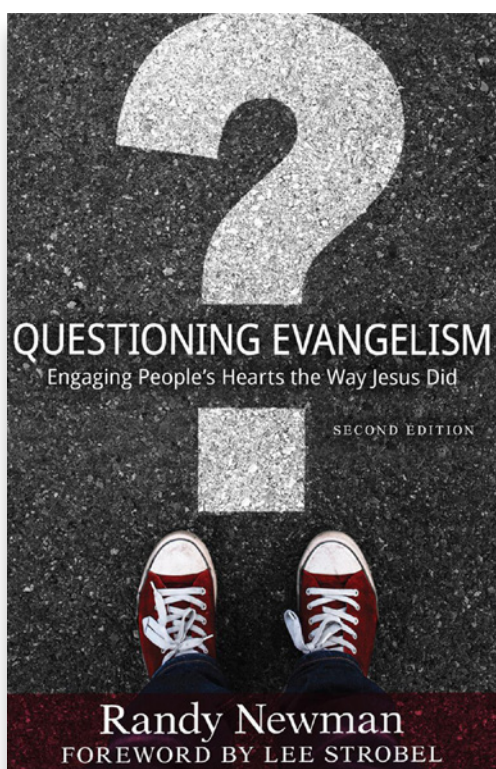
WHY DID GOD RAISE JESUS FROM DEATH?

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about Jesus' resurrection



One factor in life that hasn't changed is our freedom to read, and our online shop is (at the time of writing) still open and fulfilling orders. There are many excellent books out there on anxiety and suffering, but we've decided not to focus on those this month. God's Kingdom is greater than this pandemic, and we all need a break sometimes. These four books will give you just that. All are available at <https://thefree.church/shop>, unless otherwise stated.



QUESTIONING EVANGELISM RANDY NEWMAN (2018)

Last year, I signed up for an evangelism conference in Edinburgh. It was on a Saturday morning. As a minister, I have always battled to keep Saturdays as my day off (ahem, in theory anyway), so when the day actually came round, I found myself dragging my feet. It had been a busy month for events, and this seemed like one conference too many. I am so grateful to God that he overcame my reluctant feet (and heart, if I'm honest).

Randy Newman was the speaker – a senior teaching fellow for evangelism and apologetics at the C.S. Lewis Institute in Washington. He introduced himself as a reluctant evangelist. (You had to be there!) It immediately got my attention. I expected the usual guilt-inducing truisms that would ensure that I came away feeling useless and guilty at my poor efforts to share Christ with others. I was very wrong. You know the moment that you hear someone or read something that makes you shout 'Yes, that's exactly how I feel'? A eureka moment. I had one at the conference. I came away so challenged, uplifted and encouraged – I had to read his book.

There are so many books being published – surely we must be discerning and, with time being so short, only read the ones that stand out. This book absolutely stands out for me. It is fresh, helpful, empathetic, biblical, and practical. It scratches where I itch with the challenge of personal evangelism. Its premise is using the power of questions to engage people in spiritual conversation in a post-Christian world. It reflects deep and common sense biblical wisdom and challenges our sometimes simplistic notion of simply machine-gunning truth to whoever is in front of us – regardless of their circumstances or needs.

And as a bonus, it is funny. He uses self-deprecating humour to expose his own evangelic faux-pas. His razor-sharp wit, interspersing such a weighty subject, made the book a joy to read. It is the kind of book I will read again and again. It has helped, encouraged and changed me. I wish it had been written 30 years ago and I had read it at the start of my life in ministry. I have still so much to learn! ●

**This book is available to purchase from The Good Book Company.
Derek Lamont, St Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh**

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>

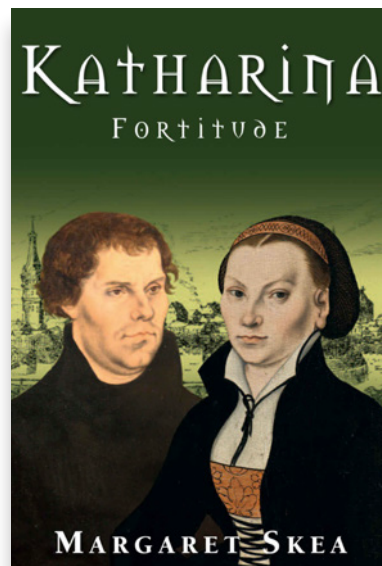
KATHARINA: FORTITUDE MARGARET SKEA (2019)

This historical novel is the sequel to 2017's *Katharina: Deliverance*, and it is a worthy end to Katie Luther's fascinating life story. *Fortitude* picks up where the first book leaves off, at Martin and Katharina's wedding in June 1525. It then leads the reader through the next 27 years, up until Katharina's death in December 1552. As with the prequel, the storytelling is compelling, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The years of the Luther marriage were ones of great challenge and development for the Reformation, and this story offers a fascinating insight into the household at the heart of it. As readers, we share in Katharina's struggles to be accepted as Luther's wife, and the work she put in to making the 'Lutherhaus' welcome to all of Martin's friends, students and supporters, not least in helping to establish the famous 'Table Talk' evenings. However, this is not a fairytale, and so the details of everyday life in the sixteenth century are evoked in all their messiness and heartbreak. Friends move away, and you may never see them again. Children die far too young, and it's devastating. Travelling accidents happen, and you may never recover. This atmosphere underpins the religious-political tumult which is once again captivantly drawn here, as it was in the earlier novel.

Readers may remember that my main criticism of *Deliverance* was the framing device used, which was set in 1552. This device is also used in *Fortitude*, to far better effect. As one is introduced to the Luther household, and begins to better understand the context of the flash-forward, it offers a poignant portent of things to come. Of *Fortitude*, my only critique is perhaps more subjective. In *Deliverance*, I particularly warmed to Katharina because she struggled with theology for herself. She sought to personally understand the Reformation's teachings before she accepted them. In this, she felt real. In the sequel, as her time is taken over by more practical concerns, she is no longer described in this way, for all that she is fully involved in all that goes on in their home. As a reader, I found this change a little saddening, although it may well be believable, at least to an extent.

Taken as a whole, this book is a welcome conclusion to Martin and Katie Luther's story, and if you enjoy historical fiction, you must read it. You'll gain a new perspective on the Reformation, and perhaps understand better the obstacles these faithful Christians faced to gain many privileges we now take for granted. ●

**This book is available to purchase from many good bookshops, including Waterstones.
Miriam Montgomery, Free Church Books**



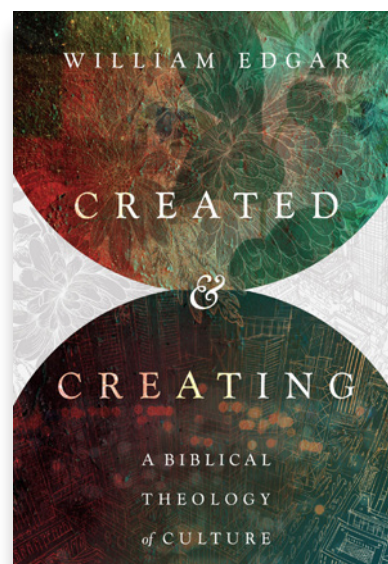
CREATED AND CREATING WILLIAM EDGAR (2017)

Understanding the world that we live in is an essential aspect of communicating the gospel of Jesus in every generation. And this is the reason William Edgar has produced a biblical theology of culture. *Created and Creating* is an excellent book which seeks to help the reader engage with some key thinkers who have had a global impact, and then work out the points of connection which exist between scripture and culture.

To do this Edgar sets out three main sections. First of all there is an overview of social, philosophical, political and theological thinkers who have shaped many cultures in the world. Following this, we are taken through a series of sections in the Bible which seem to state that engagement with culture may not be part of the church's primary responsibility.

Having looked at these texts, Edgar revisits them. He suggests that instead of operating with a perspective which holds to an imposed sacred/secular divide we would be better served, and also more biblically faithful, to view these passages through the lens of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1. As Edgar demonstrates, this opens up fruitful avenues for the church to interact with the surrounding culture so that the gospel may be proclaimed more clearly.

I was impressed with both the scope and readability of this book. For those who find themselves in positions of leadership in the church or who are preparing for this task, Edgar's book is an essential read as we seek to share the gospel and make disciples of all peoples. ●



**Martin Paterson,
Cumbernauld Free Church & OMF International**

CLUAINTAN UAINÈ (GREEN PASTURES)

SEÒRAS MOIREACH

DÒMHNALL MACILLÌOSA (2020)

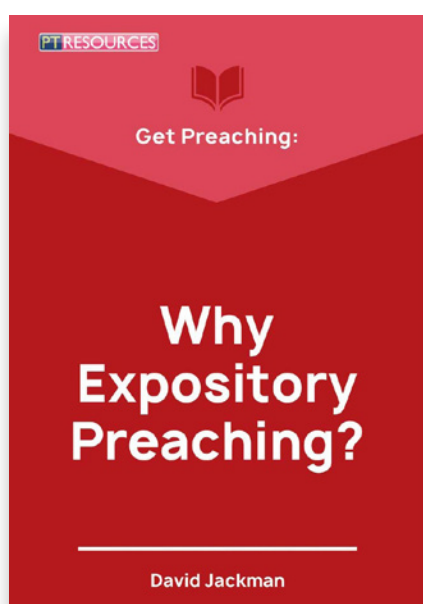
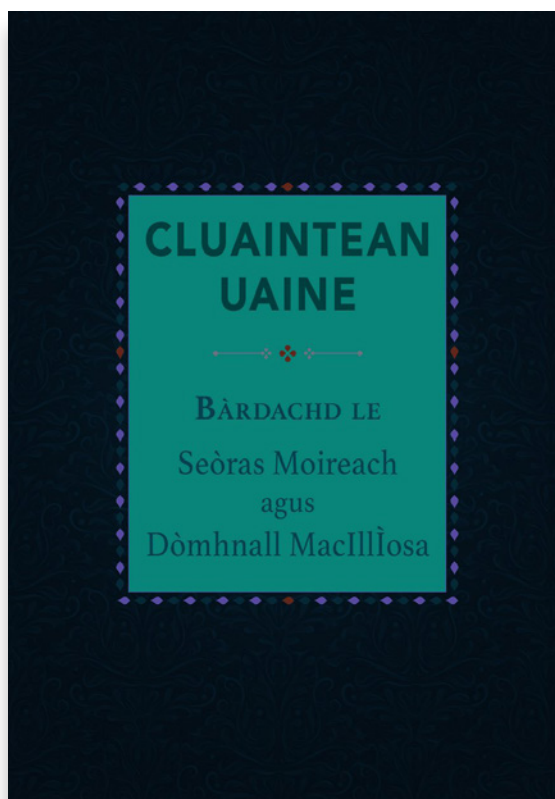
Many Gaelic speakers will warmly welcome this book containing hymns and songs written by two highly esteemed ministers from last century. Revs George Murray and Donald (Doilidh) Gillies were both natives of Ness in the Isle of Lewis, and we are greatly indebted to Kenneth Macleod (George's great-grandnephew and Donald's grandnephew) for going to such lengths in lovingly collating the material, and also to Acair for its publication.

The foreword by another native Niseach, Roddy John Murray, provides us with some biographical information on both these servants of God. There are still many (this reviewer among them) who have fond memories of the genial gentleman that was Donald Gillies, whilst, due to the passing of time and the fact that his ministry was conducted in Canada, not so many will be aware of George Murray. For these reasons the (albeit brief) foreword is one for which all readers will be grateful.

The first part of the book introduces us to songs and hymns written by George whilst the (longer) second part is devoted to Donald's compositions. One is struck by the variety of topics covered. In George's section, understandably with him being in Canada, there seems to be a strong nostalgic element in quite a number of the songs in addition to the deep Christian spirituality which one would of course expect to find coming from his pen.

As well as Donald's deeply moving and very challenging hymns, where the gospel message is presented with crystal clarity, we also find some light-hearted village bard-type songs that will surely raise a smile on the face of all who read them. (If not there's something seriously wrong with the reader!) The book ends with some more information about Doilidh Gillies from his grandnephew's pen, some of which will be new even to those of us who had the privilege of having known him as a highly esteemed friend and colleague. As a paperback the book may seem to be a little pricey at £15, but as one reads through it, most will concur that it really is worth every penny! ●

Duncan Macleod, Dornoch Free Church



WHY EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

DAVID JACKMAN (2019)

This is a very useful book exploring the nature and basis of expository preaching. It is part of a wider series entitled 'Get Preaching', developed by the Proclamation Trust to promote sound biblical exposition. In three short chapters Jackman explores the motivation and method of expository preaching along with the use of preaching throughout the Bible. Contrasting it with other methods he speaks of expository preaching as putting '...the Bible firmly in the driving seat, at the wheel'. In addition to discussion of the practice, the author includes two worked examples of how he prepared different texts for preaching and the notes of a sermon in an appendix. A further appendix reprints another pastor's article on 'Expositional Imposters', which, unfortunately, all too many of us will recognise. It will make a good read for those looking to start preaching and for those preaching already who may need reminded from time to time of the basics of good exposition. ●

Duncan MacPherson, North Harris Free Church

POETRY PAGE

PSALM 46 (PARAPHRASED)

BY ISAAC WATTS

God is the refuge of his saints,
When storms of sharp distress invade;
Ere we can offer our complaints,
Behold him present with his aid!

Let mountains from their seats be hurled
Down to the deep, and buried there,
Convulsions shake the solid world;
Our faith shall never yield to fear.

Loud may the troubled ocean roar;
In sacred peace our souls abide;
While every nation, every shore,
Trembles, and dreads the swelling tide.

There is a stream whose gentle flow
Supplies the city of our God;
Life, love, and joy, still gliding through,
And watering our divine abode.

That sacred stream, thine holy Word,
That all our raging fear controls:
Sweet peace thy promises afford,
And give new strength to fainting souls.

Zion enjoys her monarch's love,
Secure against the threat'ning hour;
Nor can her firm foundations move,
Built on his truth and arm'd with pow'r.

Isaac Watts was a Congregationalist minister and logician whose textbook, *Logic*, was a standard text at British and American universities for well over one hundred years. Today, he is best known as the writer of around 750 hymns. In 1719, Watts published a collection of hymns called *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the language of the New Testament, and applied to the Christian state and worship*, from which the paraphrase above is taken. ●

MISSION MATTERS

A monthly take on some of the mission work the Free Church is involved in by our Mission Director, **DAVID MEREDITH.**

WE NEED STRONG EVANGELISTIC PREACHING. Consider two neglected characteristics of effective communication of the gospel.

A COMMUNITY DOES IT

As we listen to a preacher open up God's Word, realise that it's never a solo effort. If we are tempted to ever speak of the pulpit, in whatever shape or form that takes, as a lonely place, then we do not see the real picture. Believers are communicating with head office, requesting power and unction for the speaker. I remember once having an old friend, Neville Rees from Swansea, preaching for us. At the end of the service he asked who the old man in the wheelchair was. I told him that was Donald Lamont, one of our retired ministers. He then went on to tell me that as he preached there was a palpable sense of being helped by his prayers. One may smile and conclude that Welsh piety met Highland mysticism, but I don't think so. Do you?

The joint effort continues as we reflect on who is present. These are days of opportunities, and we cannot dismiss regular Sunday services as passé relics of old-school thinking. The gathered people of God is never a closed shop; the 'unbeliever' or 'inquirer' (1 Cor 14:24) has normally been taken to the gathering by someone. One of the hallmarks of churches which are growing through conversion is that their members have confidence that the gospel will be communicated truthfully, lovingly and relevantly. Are you are embarrassed to take someone to your church? Then we have a problem.

THE BIBLE IS AT THE CENTRE OF IT

There is no such thing as evangelistic preaching. Where do you ever find a sermon which was labelled in such a way? Real preaching is rooted in exposition, so every sermon has to be accessible to the unbeliever. Jesus and the apostles were

steeped in the Bible and directly quoted or alluded to the Old Testament to the point that, if you put a pin in any part of the New Testament, you would find a scriptural reference nearby. The Bible is not a scholarly book, a record of a distant God who engaged with a minority people with strange ideas. It's a book, but it's also the breath of the Spirit. The Bible is a sword as well as bread, the source of both frightening insight into the sinful human condition and good news of liberation. Just as the chef is conscious of the discerning diner, leading her to present the food on the plate attractively, so the preacher unfolds the riches of the text to a culture hungry for truth.

Preaching that follows the contours of the Bible will also inevitably be full of Christ. The gospel is essentially the announcement that the kingdom of God is now here. In a broken world we need a king like no other. In Jesus we have that king. Those of you who are familiar with *Lord of the Rings* remember that Aragorn son of Arathorn, the rightful King of the realm of Gondor, appears, and most noticeably, not as king, with all the fanfare, pomp and circumstance that would accompany the arrival of so great a figure, but unannounced, and, for all intents and purposes, in secret. He enters the city and makes for the houses of healing, where the wounded and afflicted are cared for, and there tends to three wounded heroes who have played great roles in the tale: Faramir, son of the Steward, Lady Eowyn of Rohan and Merry Brandybuck of the Shire, giving truth to the old adage of Gondor, 'The hands of the king are the hands of a healer.'

May we pray, agitate, cajole, flog, blog, appeal, implore for a culture of evangelistic preaching in your local church. May the hands of the healer be found all over our nation. ●

Taisbein do thròcair dhuinn

(Show us your mercy)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

THA AN CRUTHAIDHEAR AIG AN ÀM-SA, AIR SAOGHAL AN DUINE A STAD, MAR GUM BIODH, AGUS E A' SEALLTAINN DHUINN ANN AN DÒIGH IONGANTACH, GED NACH LÈIR DHUINN E, GUR E E FHÈIN A THA A' RIAGHLADH.

Tha obraichean air feadh an t-saoghail air an cur bun os cionn, agus gu dearbh tha seo a' bualadh air a h-uile duine beò.

Tha lighichean agus banaltruman ag obair bho mhoch gu dubh airson beatha dhaoine a chaomhnadh.

Tha rioghachdan an domhain a' fulang aig an àm-sa agus e cho eu-comasach dhuinne a' chùis a leughadh.

Tha adhradh Sàbaid gu bhith anns an dachaigh 's cha bhi sluagh a' tional còmhla airson tachartasan sam bith.

Tha e do-chreidsinneach, agus sinne cho eòlach air a bhith beò ann an linn, 's ma tha ceist glè mhòr oirnn' a thaobh nì sam bith, glè thrìc tha freagairt aig cuid-eigin. Chan e sin an seòrsa là a th'againn an-dràsta. Is e a th'ann là anns an còir dhuinn a bhith a' tagradh Ris-san le èiginn, airson gun caisg E Fhèin an tinneas a tha a' dèanamh a leithid de sgrios.

Cha dèan ar togail ach an Cruthaidhear Fhèin, ach is e ar gliocas a bhith iriosal na làthair, a' tagradh Ris airson gun tog E A chorraich dhinn.

Aig an àm èiginneach-sa, tha sinn taingeil airson gach coibhneas a th'air a shealltainn dhuinn, agus 's e beannachd glè mhòr a tha sin.

Tha sluagh ann an iomadh àite ag ùrnaigh, oir tha fios aca cò an Neach a-mhàin aig a bheil comas ar cuideachadh.

Bha ar làithean mus do thachair seo, cho làn

de nithean a bha sinn a' cur romhainn a dhèanamh, ach, seallaidh an Cruthaidhear dhuinn ann am prioba na sùla, 'gur àrd thar gach tir lehòbhah mòr.'

Bidh sinn an dòchas gun tig milis às an t-searbh, agus tha seo na Làmhnan-san cuideachd.

'Nì Esan mar as àill Leis ann am feachd nèimh, agus a-measg luchd-àiteachaidh na talmhainn'.

Feumaidh ar dòchas a bhith Ann, 'anns gach àm', biodh iad nan làithean socair no nan làithean àmhgharach'. Is e A shaoghal Fhèin a th'ann, a chruthaich E, agus a dhealbh E, ach nuair a thig làithean teanntachd mar seo, bidh eagal air an duine ghlic, 's gun fhios aig aon duine dè as crìoch do na nithean-sa, ach, is Rìgh mòr Esan a tha a' faicinn na crìch bhon toiseach, agus Annsan, cuiridh sinn ar n-earbsa.

Nuair sheallas Tusa neart do ghàirdein

's a thig plàigh le làithean sàraicht',

nì sinn ùrnaigh an àm-èiginn

gu nochd Thu coibhneas do gach creutair.

COIBHNEAS DHAOINE.

Tha coimhearsnachdan air a bhith glè choibhneil a'smaoineachadh air na tha nan comas a dhèanamh dhan co-chreutair. Bheir e misneach agus dòchas dhuinn a bhith a'faicinn, ged a chaill sinn mòran ann an Gàrradh Edein, gu bheil fhathast anns an duine a chruthaich Dia, co-fhaireachdainn, coibhneas agus mòran de fheartan eile, ged a tha am peacadh a'folach sin aig iomadh àm.

Nach math gu bheil dòchas ann dhan duine, ma chreideas e ann an dòigh-teàrnaidh Dhè, oir tha seo a'treòrachadh gu àite cho iongantach 's nach gabh cainnt a chur air.

Nach biodh e mìorbhaileach gun tigeadh mòran chun a' Chruthaidheir aig àm mar seo, 's gun tuigeadh iad, chan e a-mhàin A chumhachd, ach cuideachd A thròcair.

Nach seall Thu dhuinn tròcair 's nach coimhead Thu'n truas rinn

ged nach eil sinne airidh, tha Fear do dheas-làimh-sa buadhach.

Chreach Esan an Nàmhaid is gach nì a bha'n tòir oirnn', air A sgàth-san dèan èisteachd is dèan Thusa fòir oirnn'. ●





BY CATRIONA MURRAY

POSTTENEBRAS LUX

I HAVE REKINDLED A GREAT LOVE SINCE GOING INTO LOCKDOWN. He's full of himself, smart, eccentric and given to strange moods. 'Oh', I hear you say, 'she's missing the Kirk Session.' Well, perhaps it is the loss of their intellectually stimulating company that has driven me into the arms of one Mr Sherlock Holmes, 221b Baker Street.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tried to depict Holmes as an entirely cerebral man, one thoroughly lacking in human emotion. Yet, the author was not entirely successful in his endeavour to portray Holmes as an emotionless automaton. After all, when you think of Sherlock Holmes, do you not also think of his faithful friend and confederate, Dr John Watson? 'Not without my Boswell!' Holmes once exclaimed, at the mere thought of embarking on adventure without his companion by his side.

Humanity, you see, seeks out its own kind. While we are in lockdown, therefore, it is undoubtedly what we miss the most, particularly those of us who live alone. Perhaps that is why I am so enjoying watching the onscreen friendship of Holmes and Watson once more.

There is a moment in *The Final Problem* when Holmes, concealing himself so that his enemies believe him to have perished in a ravine, sees Watson and hears him calling Holmes' name. The detective starts to call back, but restrains himself with some effort. If his deception is to work, Watson too must believe that he is dead, so that both their lives may be spared.

Sometimes — as now, with the threat of COVID-19 hanging over the world — love means staying away.

Human love, that is. God's love, on the other hand, means never having to be without him. Solitary though my existence might appear from the outside, no one need be anxious for me, because he is here. He closes my eyes at night, he opens them gently in the morning; when I walk outside each day, God is at my elbow. In fact, the single greatest example of God's love for us was surely the incarnation and all that followed on from it. Jesus Christ assuming a human nature for our sake was the ultimate expression of all that we crave: security, fellowship and love.

Why do we find particular comfort in the love of God, though? Is it disingenuous of one such as me to say that I prefer it to any human companionship that I might enjoy during this period of lockdown?

My friend, Mr Holmes, has a lesson for us here as well.

One of the reasons I am drawn to him is his irrepressible self-belief. In one story, Holmes presents his card, only for the recipient to sneer that '221b is hardly an address to inspire confidence'. The detective, unfazed, replies that he does not seek to inspire confidence in others, having plenty of his own.

This is why people seek out his services too. His confidence is born out of something more than mere vanity. Indeed, he said of himself, 'My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems...give me the most

abstruse cryptogram...and I am in my own proper atmosphere. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.'

We exist precisely because God is the only one. He made all of Creation to be at one with him. As far as we are concerned, his purpose is to be God; ours is to both glorify and enjoy him. Often, when Christians find themselves in dire straits, they quote Simon Peter's 'To whom else shall we go?' This is not a cry of despair. Believers do not go to God in prayer as desperate Victorians consulted Holmes. God is not a last-ditch attempt at salvation, a safety-net when all our other devices fail.

He is the only one in the world. Creation is his, and all that we experience is God's providence, easy or difficult. We have, to a man, repeated the mistake of looking elsewhere for help. In doing so, we have not only caused a terrible, tragic mess, but we have systematically excluded the one source of assistance from every sphere of life.

Mercifully, God is free for consultation at any time. We do not have to seek out his address, nor ask whether he is engaged on another case. Rest secure on his reputation, because it gives us every reason for confidence in good times and bad. And, when it comes to prayer, let's follow Holmes's one-time appeal to Watson:

'Come at once if convenient. If inconvenient, come all the same.' ●