

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND **NOVEMBER 2020 • £2.00**



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WELCOME TO THE NOVEMBER RECORD



HIS MONTH, SOME OF YOU WILL BE READING THE PRINT EDITION OF THE RECORD FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS CLOSED IN MARCH. We are grateful to Simon Kennedy at the Free Church Offices for making the magazine available online during the intervening months.

A number of this month's articles have a historical focus. I'm grateful to Innes Macleod for sharing the research he has carried out into the history of Dunblane Free Church. It is both interesting and encouraging to reflect on God's faithfulness and the ways in which he has worked through a local congregation. We would love to share the stories of other Free Church congregations in these pages, too.

Dr Adam, who has graciously agreed to challenge and inspire us by sharing some of his experiences in the mission field, takes the time this month to reflect on his personal history, on the way God called him to faith and prepared him to serve the persecuted church.

I'm grateful to those who have sent emails and letters in recent months commenting on articles which have appeared in *The Record*. As we discuss together how God's truth directs our path, we sharpen each other, as iron sharpens iron (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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A people's history of the church **FAITHFULNESS**

BY THE EDITOR



People who raise, disciple and pray for only a few, loving them intensely, have been used by God to move mountains. Some didn't see the fruit of their labours. But they were willing to do the work and leave the future with God.

E HAVE RECENTLY PASSED 'REFORMATION DAY', THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF MARTIN LUTHER'S NINETY-FIVE THESES. 31st October 1517 was the date Luther sent his disputation with church practice to the Archbishop of Mainz. It is probably also the date he posted his Theses on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenburg, in order to invite debate on the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.

Reformation Day has been commemorated in Germany since at least the Reformation's Centenary, and maybe as early as its 50th Anniversary. Over the years, it has taken on the guise of an official public holiday, a focus for anti-Catholic sentiment following the Thirty Years' War, a vehicle for German nationalism in 1917 and, more recently, an occasion for ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran and Catholic churches.

In recent years, the commemoration has become more prominent in English-speaking Protestant churches as a contrast to our culture's increasingly occult-focussed celebrations at Hallowe'en. One of the effects of this rising prominence has been to call attention to the importance of church history.

LOOKING BACK

As a Reformed church, the Free Church's theology is founded on the Bible, not on the way things have been — on tradition or history. Nevertheless, we are foolish if we don't take from the treasury of wisdom left to us by those students of Scripture and faithful Christians who have gone before.

Historians have called *Sola Scriptura* the 'formal principle' of the Reformation. We still affirm that Scripture Alone is the source of 'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life' (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6). Yet, even a cursory glance around contemporary Christianity reveals the extent to which Scripture is misinterpreted and misapplied. The prosperity gospel and the remarkably frequent — and conflicting — forecasts of Judgement Day are among the most obvious examples. Attempts to set aside a substitutionary atonement or to 'move beyond' Paul's sexual ethics are more subtle, and more consequential.

Roland Bainton, a former professor of church history at Yale University, has written, 'Christianity, rooted in history, affirms a revelation once and for all given. But still, that revelation has to be explicated...The history of Christian thought is the record of man's wrestling with the implications of the self-disclosure of God in the man Christ Jesus.' We must use the history of the church to learn from past mistakes and to build on true insights, testing everything by the Bible.

In a 2018 survey, three-quarters of evangelical Christians said they agreed with the statement, 'Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God'. While it seems likely that, in giving this answer, many were seeking to affirm what sounded like a positive description of Jesus ('first...greatest'), they were — wittingly or not — signing up to the Arian heresy, an idea which was debated and rejected by the First Council of Nicea in 325 AD. If every generation begins its study of Scripture from scratch, the church will be endlessly required to re-formulate the Apostles' Creed.

In 1159, John of Salisbury wrote one of the earliest known references to a familiar metaphor. 'Bernard of Chartres,' John recalled, 'used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.'

Looking back through the history of Christianity, God has provided us with giants of great and undeniable genius. These Christians were used by God to make vital and enormous contributions to our understanding of the Bible. But, we read the Minor Prophets as well as the Epistle to the Romans as we seek 'the whole counsel of God'. Similarly there are other shoulders, not as lofty as Luther's or Calvin's, but whose vantage also shows us the way ahead more clearly.

05

2020

The history of the church is the history of a faithful God. History records examples of perseverance upending societies, of whole communities set ablaze by the Spirit.

LOOKING BEYOND THE GIANTS

The study of secular history has broadened since the 19th-century Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle wrote, 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men'. Economics, culture, demographic change and geographic factors like the location of oil deposits are all given their place in the shaping of events. Today's historians have another major advantage over Carlyle. Digital technology gives them access to information about the lives of ordinary people in a way which has never been possible before. The study of 'history from below' has never been more fruitful, and a previously silent majority is having an increasing influence on our understanding of the past. A re-balancing can easily over-balance. Under God's sovereignty, individuals do shape events. And powerful individuals find it easier to shape events than those with little power. Even so, in seeking to learn from the history of the church, we must avoid falling into Carlyle's trap. We should not - and cannot - set aside Christianity's giants. We need to hear from Origen, Athanasius, Aquinas, Knox and Barth – whether we agree with them or not. But we should not stop there. The Apostles were the giants of the New Testament church. But they were not the entirety of the church. We also hear from Lydia (Acts 16:14), the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:30), Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3) and from the fellowship of the believers (Acts 2:42). The same principle applies to Christian history.

LOOKING AT THE FAITHFUL

The history of the church is the history of a faithful God fulfilling the promise that 'he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:6). This is a promise made to every believer. 'They whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved' (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 17.1). History records examples of this perseverance upending societies, of whole communities set ablaze by the Spirit. Evangelists like George Whitefield and Billy Graham stand among the giants. But, more often, the good work begun in a Christian is less outwardly dramatic.

One such example is a woman whose evangelism was focussed within her own household. Her husband possessed a violent temper and was adulterous. She had three children and she taught the Gospel to them. Her eldest son was rebellious, actively pursuing a hedonistic lifestyle contrary to his mother's Christian faith. This woman devoted herself to prayer for the conversion of her family — prayers which were eventually answered. Her son was converted only a few months before she died, but she passed away happy that both her husband and her son were saved. Her name is Monica, and she is not afforded a place among the giants of history, though she was used mightily by God as he built his church. Her son's name is Augustine of Hippo, the most prominent of the Church Fathers and a theologian whose work remains foundational to our understanding of Scripture. In his *Confessions*, Augustine remembers her as 'the mother, now dead and hidden awhile from my sight, who had wept over me for many years so that I might live in [God's] sight.'

There is a similar account in Tim Challies' book, *Devotion – Christian Men and their Godly Moms*. He tells the story of Mary Machen, godly and intellectual, who taught her children the Bible, trained them in the Shorter Catechism, and read them *Pilgrim's Progress*. Her custom was to prepare Bible lessons which she led her children through on Sunday afternoons. The second of her three sons, John, was a talented student. He professed faith in Jesus aged 15, and thereafter proceeded to study at Johns Hopkins University and Princeton Theological Seminary. While studying for a year in Germany, in 1905, his worldview was challenged by an encounter with liberal theology – an understanding of Christianity which competed with the Reformed tradition in which he had been raised. It was to his mother he turned for counsel, and her wisdom

If every generation begins its study of Scripture from scratch, the church will be endlessly required to reformulate the Apostles' Creed.

and graciousness led him back to sound doctrine. Returning from service in the First World War, John Gresham Machen found liberal theology's influence increasing in America. In response, he would go on to help establish Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and to write an influential defence of Reformed faith, *Christianity and Liberalism*. He concluded, 'My mother seems — to me at least — to have been the wisest and best human being I ever knew.' Mary Machen knew the importance of training a child up in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6). She knew that the Catechism is more than a cultural marker or an academic discipline, that it is a roadmap to God's truth revealed in Scripture.

Accounts of the Lewis revival of 1949 usually begin with Peggy and Christine Smith, sisters in their eighties who lived, and prayed, together in Barvas. They are known as people who were faithful in prayer, desiring to see the whole community praising their Saviour and helping to prepare the ground for the preaching and conversions which were to follow. It is said that, as they prayed continually, God directed their minds to Isaiah 44:3, *'I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground'*. The sisters also encouraged their church leaders to pray for revival. Peggy and Christine Smith were not alone in the endeavour. Margaret Macleod, who also lived in Barvas at the time of the revival, reports that 'the Christian church was a community at prayer' (Colin and Mary Peckham, *Sounds from Heaven*). Nevertheless, the Smith sisters were a prominent example of Christians who were faithful in prayer, and their story is testament to a God who answers.

LOOKING TO JESUS

These women were faithful in 'small' things. They taught and counselled their children. They prayed. Monica of Hippo did not set out to change the course of church history. The Smith sisters did not expect that their persistent prayers would encourage believers around the world. More than that, even if they were aware of the impact that their lives would have, I don't think it would have increased the satisfaction they had in trusting and obeying their King. They echo the pattern set by Ruth when she put her faith in Naomi's God. She was content to live the life of an ordinary Israelite, worshipping God and loving her family. She would have been as surprised as anyone to discover that it was through her that God chose to fulfil his promise to Abraham.

Church history beyond the giants is full of stories like these. The influence of faithfulness on family and community is profound. People who raise, disciple and pray for only a few, loving them intensely, have been used by God to move mountains. Some didn't see the fruit of their labours, in the way that Mary Machen did. But they were willing to do the work and leave the future with God.

We risk our contentedness when we confuse faithfulness with ambition. On the outside, both look like diligent striving. However, the former is satisfied to persevere in the work, trusting the One who set the task. The latter works in order to achieve satisfaction in the end. Thus, when there is no achievement, there is no satisfaction.

That is not to say that we cannot lift our heads to the horizon and plan towards a goal. Sometimes the task we have been set involves looking ahead. But it is to say that we do not measure success in the way the world does. For us, it is not judged by numbers but by faithful perseverance.

The Kingdom can feel small in our day. It is easy to covet the growth the church is enjoying in other places. It is easy to look back and envy the blessings of former times. But who are we to answer back to God? He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy (Romans 9:15-20). We are not called to succeed. We are called to be faithful. Keeping on is easy when great success follows. Faithfulness is hardest in a headwind. And yet, it is liberating to realise that the outcome of our labours does not depend on us. Neither does finding the strength to persevere. The example of these faithful women from church history is – trust and obey. It is for us to be obedient to the task set before us. The outcome is in God's hands.

WORLD NEWS AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

BIBLE TRANSLATION MILESTONE

Wycliffe Bible Translators report that the entire Bible has now been translated into more than 700 languages, meaning that over 5.7 billion people can read Scripture in their native tongue.

James Poole, executive director at Wycliffe, said the milestone represents the tremendous work that Bible translators are doing across the world.

'Every time we hear of the Bible being translated into another language, we know that, for the first time, the people in that language group can fully access the complete picture of God's story.'

It is impossible to know which translation was the 700th because several were published around the same time by different organisations. However, it is likely that either the Huichol (Wixáritari) Bible in Mexico, the Ellomwe Bible in Malawi, or the Igede Bible in Nigeria was number 700. The pace of Bible translation is increasing due to new technology and cooperation between Bible societies. The number of translations has doubled since 1990, and the goal of the American Bible Society is to see Scripture translated into 100% of the world's living languages by 2033. ●



POLAND ABORTION BAN

The BBC reports that Poland's most senior court, the Constitutional Tribunal, has ruled that abortions in cases of foetal defects are unconstitutional. The



decision follows the governing Law and Justice party's legal challenge to a 1993 law permitting abortion in cases of severe foetal disability. Such cases account for 98% of legal terminations carried out in Poland. Once the ruling is enacted, abortion will only be permitted in cases of rape, incest or when the mother's health is at risk. Demonstrations have been held to protest the court's decision.

There were just over 1,000 legal terminations in Poland last year, but it is estimated that between 80,000 and 120,000 women travelled abroad to seek an abortion.

MEXICO ASKS FOR COLONIAL APOLOGY

Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has written to Pope Francis asking that the Catholic

church apologise for its role in the oppression of indigenous people during the Spanish conquest of the Americas. López Obrador has also asked that ancient indigenous manuscripts held in the Vatican library be loaned to Mexico as part of planned events to mark the 500th Anniversary of the arrival of Spanish conquistadors.

López Obrador said the Spanish crown, Spain's government and the Vatican should apologise to native people for the 'most reprehensible atrocities'.

'They deserve not just that generous attitude on our part but also a sincere commitment that never again will disrespectful acts be committed against their beliefs and cultures.' The Vatican has not yet responded to the request.

PROTESTS IN CHILE TARGET CHURCHES



Two Catholic churches were burned during protests involving tens of thousands of people in Santiago. The demonstration was held to mark the anniversary of a protest movement launched in October last year demanding greater equality in Chile, and came a week before the country voted in a referendum to replace the Pinochet-era constitution. The 2019 protests resulted in more than 30 deaths and saw thousands injured. One of the churches targeted this year was San Francisco de Borja, which is regularly used by local police for institutional ceremonies, according to *The Guardian*.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

Nagorno-Karabakh is recognised by the United Nations as being part of Azerbaijan, but it is controlled by its majority Armenian population, who are backed by the Armenian government. The dispute over control of the region led to war in the late 1980s, and a ceasefire in 1994 never resulted in a peace



treaty. The fact that more than 95% of Azeris identify as Muslim while more than 90% of Armenians identify as Christian have led to the situation being described as a religious war. The Turkish government's support of Azerbaijan and references to Armenians as 'leftovers of the sword' has called to mind the Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians between 1914 and 1923, and raised fears of a repeat.

Harout Nercessian, of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, told *Christianity Today* that evangelicals should side with Christian Armenia. Hovhannes Hovsepian of the Evangelical Church of Armenia has said, 'We understand this is an existential issue, not just a war.... We are for peace – but sometimes you have to fight for it.' In contrast, Johnnie Moore, president of the Congress of Christian Leaders and a frequent visitor to the region,

says, 'Armenia is allied with Russia and Iran. This is not as simple as people are making it.' Moore's view is

that this is a conflict over land, not religion, and he is calling on both sides to agree to a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. An open letter written on behalf of Azerbaijan's evangelical churches and the Azerbaijan Bible Society argues similarly that the war is a 'purely political confrontation, it has no religious context. In fact, this history and [the] continuous attempts of Armenia to present this war as a religious one, can become a stumbling block for many Azerbaijani people who hear [the] gospel nowadays.'.



OLD TESTAMENT LITERACY

A rare archaeological find in Gush Etzion seems to support the theory that literacy rates were high in Second Temple-era Judea, according to *The Jewish Press*.



An inkwell was found in a building which dates to the period between the completion of the Second Temple in 516 BC and its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD. Researchers speculate that the item belonged to a writer or merchant who lived in the area. The inkwell adds weight to the hypothesis that literacy was fairly common among the Jewish population of the period.

GAMBIA'S CONSTITUTION

Following the deposition of dictator Yahya Jammeh in 2016, The Gambia's transitional government has been working to draft a new constitution. However, the party of the interim president has

voted to reject the proposed document. If adopted, the constitution would have limited his term in office. Along with presidential term limits, the new constitution would have protected religious freedom and precluded a state religion. Yet, Christians in the majority-Muslim nation are somewhat relieved the constitution has been rejected.

Truly important positive changes were made in this [draft] constitution,' said Begay Jabang, a member of the Gambia Christian Council, 'But at the same time, provisions were introduced in the judiciary that would have changed the face of our nation, moving it down the path of an Islamic state.' The proposed legislation introduced the concept of 'sharia courts' which would have had jurisdiction over Christians in interfaith marriages and families. It also left open the possibility that sharia could be extended beyond family courts into banking and criminal law.

Politicians are debating what to do next. Jabang suggests, 'We should all take a pause, think deeply, and come back to the table of dialogue in order to find a winwin solution for our people.'. \bullet



INTIMIDATION IN SRI LANKA



A pastor in Sri Lanka has been forced to

stop his ministry in Bakamuna, Polonnaruwa District after being intimidated by police and threatened by Buddhist monks, according to Barnabas Fund. The pastor was ordered to report to his local police station on 18th October, and was met there by a group of monks who made a series of threats against him and his congregation. 8% of Sri Lanka's population is Christian, and they regularly experience persecution, often led by the monks. •

FREE CHURCH NEWS (>>

FREE CHURCH MISSION DIRECTOR MEETS WITH SHADOW FAITHS MINISTER

AS SHADOW FAITHS MINISTER IN APRIL 2020, FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND MISSION DIRECTOR REV. DAVID MEREDITH JOINED WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE AFFINITY COUNCIL, AN EVANGELICAL GROUP OF CHURCH LEADERS FROM AROUND THE UK, IN WELCOMING THE MINISTER TO THEIR SEPTEMBER MEETING. The leaders were able to share their thoughts on a range of subjects, including how churches are responding to the current pandemic.

After meeting the Shadow Minister earlier this year, Director of Affinity Graham Nicholls invited her to consult church leaders who often feel their voices are unheard, compared to the larger denominations. As a network, Affinity represents over 100,000 evangelical Christians across the UK.

The meeting with Janet Daby lasted around an hour, in which a robust and honest conversation took place. Alongside the many difficulties church leaders face at the present time, they also shared with Janet some of the good news stories arising from their communities across the UK.

The discussion also highlighted the mental health of church leaders, the lack of evangelical church representation on the Government's Places of Worship Task Force and issues around free speech.

Graham Nicholls said, 'Over the last couple of years, Affinity has sought to develop its links in the political sphere, as we continue to encourage Christians to engage. I am delighted that the next step in this process was welcoming Janet Daby MP to our Council Meeting to share with some of our national leaders.

We enjoyed a good-spirited conversation and were grateful that Janet sought to address the challenges and concerns that we have within the evangelical community.

'Janet's willingness to be a strong and robust voice for the concerns of Christians, particularly of our biblical views, within Parliament are welcome and we look forward to seeing how our relationship with her can build as she continues in this important role."

Reflecting on the meeting, Mr Meredith said, 'It was a great opportunity to engage with higher-level politicians on issues which concern Christians. However, I am under no illusion as to where the real power is to be found. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the gospel which brings radical change to our increasingly sick society. Political engagement is part of what we do, but it's a small part.

'Remember, a prayer meeting in a small rural church has access to more power than all the parliaments of the world combined. I pray for the day when politicians will seek meetings with us.'

Janet Daby added, 'One of the greatest privileges of my role is having the opportunity to meet with the dynamic and driven people who make up our religious communities. Their commitment to putting their faith into action to serve our wider society is a consistent inspiration to me.

'It was a pleasure to be invited to the meeting of the Affinity Council, and have the opportunity to hear the perspectives of evangelical leaders from across the UK. It is difficult to think of a time in recent history when church leaders have been under more pressure to support their congregations, but it's clear they are rising to the challenge.

'However, it is evident that churches and their leaders need urgent support. Pastors are being stretched in all directions, and their own health is suffering. Places of worship are also struggling to manage the financial losses following lockdown, so for many, the future of their ministry isn't certain.

'I am committed to getting ring-fenced support for places of worship so their great work and fellowship will prosper. I will continue to be a voice for the evangelical community, alongside all our faith communities, in Parliament.'

BIG FREE RALLY ONLINE

BY SUSAN MACLEAN

HE BIG FREE RALLY IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST EVENTS IN THE YEAR, where around 300 young people gather in Smithton Free Church, Inverness to meet their friends from camp, make new friends, play games, eat food, sing praise to God and hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This year, the audience of the Big Free Rally got even wider! A small team had been working behind the scenes prior to the rally to try to work out the best way forward for the 2020 event. Our choice was online or not at all, and we all agreed that online was the way to go. After some discussion, we agreed to release a series of short video clips on YouTube, shared on social media, every half hour on Saturday 26th September from 11am to 4pm – the planned date and times of the Big Free Rally this year, had it gone ahead in Inverness.

The first video was an introduction and welcome to the Big Free Rally Online (myself with Cameron and Jacob MacRae) and then, throughout the day, the following videos were released: camps over the past 60 years (Martin Maclean), one of the favourite songs from the youth camps, 'Love the Lord your God' (Ishbel, Katrin and Elspeth Murray), photos from camps, and an update on camps 2021 (Kirsten Macdonald). There were videos with answers to the Big Questions: 'Does God exist?' (Lachie Macdonald, with video editing by Dan Paterson), 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' (Jo Hulks), and 'What should our response be to the Black Lives Matter movement?' (Abe & Kirsten Abioye). The main talk videos were on 'Keeping on as a Christian' (Davi & Emma de Paula) and 'Following God when things don't go to plan' (Peter Turnbull). The BFRO finished with a video from the leaders and cooks amazingly throwing a note from person to person until it had gone right round Scotland to finally read: 'We have missed you and can't wait to see you next year!'

With the videos being online, this has meant that anyone, of any age, can access them at any time. Feedback from adults is that they are delighted that they got the opportunity to see the videos as they would not normally be at the Big Free Rally. People have enjoyed watching them with their children and with their grandchildren. Young people have enjoyed tuning in and watching these for themselves. The videos are still available on YouTube (youtube.com/ freechurchyouthcamps), and I would encourage you to go on and watch them.

The Big Free Rally organising group would like to say a big thank you to everyone who contributed in any way to this year's event. We would also value your prayers. Please pray for everyone who watches any of these videos, that they will learn about Jesus and that they will grow in their faith – even just a little step. Pray that the Lord will work deeply in their hearts so that the seeds sown in these videos will come to bear much fruit and a generation of young and old who will bow the knee before our Lord and Saviour.

Susan Maclean is a member of Lochewe Community Church and serves on the Big Free Rally Planning Committee

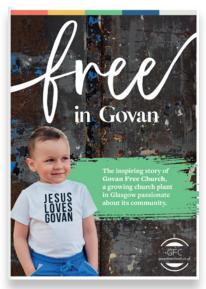
GOVAN FREE CHURCH LAUNCHES MAGAZINE

OVAN FREE CHURCH HAS PRODUCED A NEW MAGAZINE, FREE IN GOVAN, TO TELL THE INSPIRING STORY OF THE CHURCH PLANT, SEVEN YEARS ON. Members and office-bearers write about the early days of the work, outreach in Govan and the discipleship of those who have joined the church. At the heart of the story are people who love and are committed to their community, and who are deeply rooted in Jesus.

Govan Free Church minister Rev. Norman Mackay writes, 'It's hard to imagine a church-planting work with smaller beginnings than our own here in Govan, Glasgow. One family – no committed resources to speak of – in a housing scheme of multiple deprivations overrun with drugs, crime and trauma.

'Today, seven years since our church-planting proposal was endorsed by the church, we are beginning to experience something of the growth dynamic to which Jesus was drawing our attention in his parable [of the mustard seed].'

A copy of *Free in Govan* will be sent to each congregation, but you can read it now online at: **my.flipbookpdf.net/27q7o** •



WOMEN FOR MISSION UPDATE



BY FIONA MACASKILL

S THE COLOURS CHANGE AND WE MOVE INTO THE COLDER MONTHS, WE WILL ALL BE MISSING THE WARM EMBRACE OF OUR FRIENDS AND WIDER FAMILY EVEN MORE AS WE CONTINUE TO LIVE IN THIS STRANGE NEW NORMAL. All hugging is not banned, though, and we would love to see you all join with us in Embracing the World. Yes, this is the title of our new 2020/21 project. We launched the project online with a series of videos available on the WfM website. The full title is 'Embracing the World with the Touch of the Gospel'. When we met online to discuss which projects we should support this year we were drawn to ones where a gospel touch would impact on lives. These past few months have brought many challenges to individuals worldwide and the touch of the Gospel has never been needed as much as now. Our focus for fundraising in 2020/21 covers four areas:

THE LEPROSY MISSION (INDIA)

Leprosy is still hugely prevalent, with more than 200,000 people diagnosed every year. It remains one of the world's most stigmatised diseases. Funds raised will help the Purulia Leprosy Hospital in West Bengal provide essential medical help and counselling to those suffering from the disease.

SCRIPTURE UNION SCOTLAND.

The largest ministry of SU Scotland is their work in schools. Funds raised will help Scripture Union deliver ministry, training and support to young people in schools. During COVID-19, most of this work will need to be done through online initiatives.

MOLDOVA SUPPORT GROUP

Funds raised will help the congregation in Nisporeni, Moldova as they equip and develop a new Christian community hub in their town. This day centre will benefit the elderly, orphans and single parents in the area, who are often neglected.

WFM DISASTER & RELIEF FUND

Five percent of the total raised will go into the WfM Disaster & Relief fund. The income from this fund goes directly to help those who have been affected by famine, war and other tragedies.

You can now donate simply and easily online. We are so grateful for every donation. Your donations provide direct financial aid to the range of mission projects we will be supporting in Scotland and overseas. If you would prefer to send donations by bank transfer or by post, see the website for details: **womenformission.org/donate**

Please help us to make this project year one to remember despite the challenges. You will need to think outside the box for fundraising ideas, but we know that the people of the church will rise to the challenge and help us embrace those who need the Gospel to touch their lives.

ETS NEWS BY REV. THOMAS DAVIS



ETS AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

AST MONTH, ONE OF THE KEY BOOKS WE HIGHLIGHTED IN REGARD TO STUDYING AT ETS WAS THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH. This month, we are going to think a little bit more about the importance of this little book for the life and work of ETS.

As an institution, ETS is avowedly confessional. That means that ETS is openly and explicitly committed

to the theology summarised in the Westminster Confession and all full-time members of staff have to vow that that they own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith. It also means that the teaching of the Confession shapes the content of the courses that ETS delivers. That doesn't mean that you have to subscribe to the Confession to study at ETS; the Seminary has always warmly welcomed students with different theological backgrounds. But it does mean that if you come to ETS, you will be taught by people who do.

But what exactly is the Westminster Confession, and why is it so important? Well, very simply, the Westminster Confession is a summary of Reformed Theology. That means that it is presenting the theological viewpoints that were recognised, organised and fought for during the Reformation. So, in other words, if you ask someone, 'What does a Reformed Church believe?', they could hold up the Confession, point to it and say, 'This!' When the Confession was written way back in the 1640s, it was with the hope that it would be a summary of belief for a united Reformed Church across the British Isles. Sadly, that great united church never happened, but nevertheless the Confession has been an immensely valuable resource ever since.

The Confession is made up 33 short chapters, each of which is divided into numbered paragraphs. Not everything in the Confession arises directly from the Reformation; much of it repeats the great truths about the Trinity and Christology which were formulated in the great Creeds of the Early Church. It covers a wide range of topics, and although some of its emphases are very much related to the historical context in which it was written, it nevertheless remains an absolutely outstanding summary of the Reformed faith. There are three things in particular that you will find in it.

First, you will find profound theology. Although the Confession is very short, it is incredibly rich. For example, the chapter on God (ch 2) describes him as 'immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth.' What a description! You could spend days thinking about just one of those words. The God who is utterly immense and beyond our comprehension is also the God who is most loving, most gracious and most longsuffering. In other words, if you can stretch your mind to reach further and further into the immensity of God, then what you will find there is more and more of his immeasurable love for you and the fact that

he'll never, ever give up on you. The other chapters are just as brilliant; the shortest one of all is chapter 12, but it gives an amazing description of all the privileges and blessings we enjoy as adopted children of God. Go and read it — if you are a Christian, then that is describing you!

Secondly, you will find *practical teaching*. It's easy to think that a book like the Confession is just for the classroom and is all a bit too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly use. Not true! One of the brilliant things about the Confession is that it deals with issues that are hugely relevant to our day-to-day lives as disciples. So, for example, it gives helpful teaching about how we should understand the relationship between the church and the government; it talks about oaths and vows; and it gives very helpful guidance about good works, liberty of conscience, marriage and prayer. All these things highlight the fact that theology should never be kept separate from day-to-day life. It is the opposite; the amazing truths of the Bible should shape the way we live every single day.

Thirdly, you will find *pastoral concern*. The Confession isn't just dense information or detailed instruction. It is also very sensitive and pastoral in its tone. For example, there is a very moving chapter on assurance (ch 18), there is a great concern for care in regard to the doctrine of predestination (ch 3), and even when it talks about people falling into sin, it states that when we do that we may experience God's 'fatherly displeasure'. That's a powerful reminder that although we will never stop mucking things up in this life, we will also never stop being *his* children.

These three things – profound theology, practical teaching, and pastoral concern - run right through the Confession. And they are some of the many reasons why it's such a brilliant document. But of course, these three things are also utterly essential in theological education. If people are going to be prepared for ministry and other areas of Christian service, then they need to learn more and more of the profound theology in the Bible. They need to be able to apply that teaching to the practical needs of daily life. And they need to ensure that everything they do is done with a constant pastoral concern for the people that God will bring into their path. That's why ETS has absolutely no hesitation in saying that the Westminster Confession is brilliant and is crucial to everything we do.

QUOTATIONS:

The essence of Christianity consists therein: that the creation of the Father, destroyed by sin, is again restored in the death of the Son of God and recreated by the grace of the Holy Spirit to a Kingdom of God.

Herman Bavinck

IAN MACLENNAN (1925–2020) BY THE KIRK SESSION OF KILTEARN FREE CHURCH

T IS WITH A DEEP SENSE OF LOSS THAT WE HEARD, ON 21st JUNE, OF THE VERY SUDDEN DEATH OF MR IAN MACLENNAN, AT THE AGE OF 95. Ian was an elder, a friend to all who knew him and an example to be imitated in every area of life. It could well be said of Ian, 'this is what God requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8).

Ian was a quiet man who loved peace but not at the expense of truth. He faithfully served as an office-bearer for 26 years, rejoicing in the preaching of the gospel and the exposition of God's Word. He was a man of prayer who yearned for God to come and work in the lives of his family and in the lives of the residents of Evanton.

We may well be the ones who witness the Lord's answer to those prayers. May it please God to prosper the work of his Kingdom at this present time, not only locally, but also among the nations of the earth.

Ian was born and brought up in Coigach. During World War II he served with the Seaforth Highlanders and took part in the Normandy Landings. For his part in that campaign Emmanuel Cocher, the French Consul General, awarded Ian membership in the Légion d'honneur, France's highest medal of honour, on 16th August 2018. The way Ian carried himself, the upright posture which belied his 95 years, stemmed from his army days.

When the war ended, lan opted to stay on the east coast, where there was more opportunity for employment than back in Coigach. It



was in 1949, while working as a driver at Foulis Estates, that he met Ella. They were married in 1951 and were blessed with four children: Isobel, Lorna, Kenneth and Helen. Theirs was a family built on love. As a family they experienced the sorrow of the premature death of Lorna, in 2008, at the age of 50.

Attending church was the regular habit of the family and it was under the ministry of the Rev. D. McNair that lan professed faith in Christ as his personal Saviour. Ian served faithfully as an office-bearer since 1994. During that time he saw many changes, but hearing the preaching of the gospel remained his delight. It gave him much joy that, after a long period of vacancy, and in answer to his and the congregation's prayers, Kiltearn Free Church was granted permission to call a minister this year, on a five-year term. God has answered above and beyond what we asked for.

The Kiltearn pulpit is once again occupied by one who seeks to preach Christ and him crucified. The few weeks that lan sat under the Rev. Gavino Fioretti's ministry were a real joy for him.

The service, at the graveside, was well attended despite the coronavirus restrictions. It was conducted by Mr Fioretti, who spoke from John 14:1-7. During the short sermon he highlighted lan and Ella's earnest desire that their family would come to know Jesus as Lord and King of their lives. He also made reference to lan being welcomed by his Saviour with the words 'Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.'

May it please the Lord to raise up leaders to fill the place which is now vacant. May Ella and the family also know the comfort of God's faithfulness.

NOV/DEC 2020 PRAYER DIARY

'Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.' Habakkuk 3:2

Sat 7th Tomorrow is Remembrance Sunday. Give thanks for the service and sacrifice made by so many and pray for all those in service today.

Sun 8th Pray for the vacant congregation of Glenelg & Arnisdale, Lochalsh & Glenshiel. Remember Rev. Duncan Murchison as he is acting interim moderator.

Mon 9th Pray for Rev. Roddie Rankin and his wife Margaret as they live through the process of preparing for a kidney transplant and the recovery from that.

Tues 10th Pray for those attending the Bible Alive Training by Scripture Union today. Give thanks for this programme that teaches the whole storyline of the Bible as part of RME curriculum.

Wed 11th As this day is observed as a Memorial Day throughout the Commonwealth, pray for all those who serve to defend our democratic freedoms and way of life.

Thurs 12th Pray for Andrew Giffen as he settles into his role as Chief Executive Officer.

Fri 13th Pray for Rev. John Johnston and the Kirkaldy congregation. Their church is located in one of the poorest areas in Fife and has a positive reputation in the local community after years of serving through various forms of community work.

Sat 14th Tonight many churches around the country will be hosting a 'Big Quiz Night'. Give thanks for the work of Tearfund as they fight poverty throughout the world.

Sun 15th Pray for the vacant congregation of Trotternish and Rev. Gordon Matheson, their interim moderator, as they witness in their community.

Mon 16th Pray for those in government dealing with the negotiations on our relationship with Europe as we come close to the end of the transition period.

Tues 17th As the Board of Ministry meet today, pray that they will be guided in all their discussions.

Wed 18th Continue to remember all our young folk in prayer. This year has had disappointments for many who have not been able to meet up with friends at youth clubs and fellowships and camps.

Thurs 19th Pray for Rev. David Miller as he builds up his strength and increases his involvement with the Duirinish congregation and community.

Fri 20th The final SU Spotlight event for this term takes place online this evening. Pray that the young folk who attend will be encouraged to continue sharing about the Bible with their friends.

Sat 21st Pray for women studying the 'Titus 2 Women's Ministry' course with 20schemes to help them grow in their understanding of what it means to be a biblical woman.

Sun 22nd Raasay has a population of less than 150. Pray for the congregation there and Rev. Marcos Florit, their interim moderator, as they witness in that small and remote community.

Mon 23rd Give thanks for all the possibilities there have been for hearing and studying God's Word throughout lockdown. Pray that those who have listened but are not yet believers would find fellowships to join and be discipled.

Tues 24th Pray with CARE as they work for freedom for all to manifest their faith and for Christians to be at liberty to live out their lives according to their faith without fear of recrimination.

Wed 25th The Bible Society have a new magazine-style copy of the gospel of Mark, 'Mark: The Time Has Come'. Pray with them that this will be used to spread the good news in our land.

Thurs 26th As the Blythswood shoeboxes wend their way to places in need, pray that the gifts inside will be a blessing and show the love of Christ to those who receive them.

Fri 27th Today has been designated as a Day of Prayer by the church. Pray for the Trustees' vision of a healthy gospel church in every community in Scotland. **Sat 28th** Pray for all those who work to keep our communities safe places to live in.

Sun 29th Remember the vacant congregation of Back in your prayers. Pray for them and Rev. Ewen Matheson as they look for a pastor to head their witness in the community.

Mon 30th A WfM project is raising funds for Purulia Hospital in India. Pray for all those suffering from leprosy and for those working to alleviate their problems.

Tues 1st SU is also being supported through a WfM project, and while they need financial support, they really value prayer for the work of SU, especially the problems caused by the virus.

Wed 2nd Pray for the Moldova Support group which is going to benefit from WfM's project. The church in Nisporeni provides afterschool support and counselling services to single parents., education and medical spheres.

Thurs 3rd SASRA headquarters are really busy trying to keep the ship afloat. Pray for the needs of this association and others as they pass through this difficult time.

Fri 4th As nursery and primary schools begin to make preparations for Christmas, pray that the birth of Jesus would be highlighted as the reason for the celebrations.

Sat 5th Pray for the royal family and particularly the queen as she prepares her Christmas message, looking back at what has been a difficult year for many.

Sun 6th Pray for the vacant congregation in Carloway and Rev. Murdo Campbell as they work in the community and look to the Lord for guidance for a new minister.

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.

Naomi: after darkness, light

In the This is my story devotional series REV. DAVID J RANDALL

imagines how some of the Bible's characters might tell us their story. Some are not headline characters, but they all had a part to play in the great drama of God's plan, given to us in Scripture. Hebrews 11:4 says of one character, 'though he died, he still speaks'. May the stories of these Bible characters from yesterday help us today to trust, follow, love and serve the Character of the Bible.

OME PEOPLE HAVE THOUGHT OF ME AS A MATCHMAKER. I'm not sure that I like the description. But I was indeed delighted when my dear daughter-in-law ended up marrying Boaz. And then when little Obed was born, my joy knew no limits. I had given up all hopes of happiness in my life, but what a thrill to hold that little bundle of joy. He was the grandfather of the great King David – and, further down the line, there was a very special Baby born 'of the house and lineage of David'.

But my story wasn't always one of happiness. I knew many dark days. My name is Naomi and I lived in Bethlehem with my husband and two sons. Severe famine forced us to relocate to Moab (ironic when you consider that Bethlehem means 'house of food'). There, my dear husband Elimelech died. I was devastated. Eventually the boys were married themselves. As Jews, we weren't supposed to intermarry with people of other nations, but Mahlon and Chilion would have said they didn't have much choice if they were going to marry at all.

For ten years life went on. But tragedy struck again. Both of my boys died and I was left there without my husband and sons. 'Naomi' means 'pleasant', but I can tell you my life was far from pleasant; I wanted my name changed to 'Mara' (bitter). I had gone through so much that when I eventually returned to Bethlehem, people there hardly recognised me.

My consolation through it all was that I had two fine daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Lovely girls they were and very precious to me. But, as the saying goes, blood is thicker than water. When I planned to return

and settle in Judah, I felt it only right that I should let them go their own ways. Their mothers were in Moab and I didn't want them to feel obligated to stay with me just because I was a widow. I really did mean it and I have no gripe with Orpah, who decided to take my advice.

But Ruth insisted on coming with me to Judah, and I thank God that she did. She was a tremendous comfort

to me, and if she hadn't made that decision – well, God always works out his plans, but things would have been very different. It was one of the happiest days of my life when Ruth said to me that she wanted to go wherever I went, stay wherever I stayed, and even be buried where I would be buried. And then she also said, 'And your God shall be my God also'. That brought tears to my eyes and joy to my heart.

These were days when the sea of faith was at a low ebb. There was a saying at the time: that people did what was right in their own eyes instead of seeking to conform to the ways of the Lord. Ruth's faith and commitment shone all the brighter because of the darkness of the times. And surely all believers long for their relatives to put their trust in the living God and become part of the fellowship of faith. I was thrilled.

But life wasn't easy for us. We were two widows who had to somehow make ends meet, so Ruth set out to find employment. And it 'so happened' that she found work in a field that belonged to a man called Boaz who was from the same clan as my late husband.

I say 'It so happened', and to some people it might have seemed like mere coincidence. But God had his hand on the whole situation. She came home after a long day's work with the barley that she'd been allowed to glean from the field. When she told me the field belonged to a man called Boaz, I nearly fell off my stool.

From then on she went out every day to work in the barley and wheat harvests. Boaz had noticed her, and some time about then I started to imagine I could hear wedding bells! The levirate law meant that the nearest relative of a deceased husband should marry the widow and give her children to continue the family line, and I began to wonder...

I suspected that Boaz wouldn't let the grass grow under his feet. But there was a closer relative than him, who could have thrown a spanner into the works. However, Boaz was both honourable and astute. He wanted to give the other relative the chance to marry Ruth, but he must have thought it out pretty carefully. He told the relative that I was going to be selling a plot of land that had belonged to my husband. The relative was ready to buy it, but then Boaz pointed out 'by the way' that part of the transaction would involve taking Ruth as his wife to perpetuate the name of the dead. That's what changed his mind. He probably didn't want to damage the inheritance rights of his own children, and so the way was open for Boaz to be the kinsman-redeemer - and husband.

After so much sadness, here was something to celebrate. And it was even more wonderful when, months later, Ruth came to see me one day and asked if I was ready to become a granny! Sometimes when I was looking after little Obed, I thought of how I once felt I would never know happiness again, but the Lord had blessed me. My beloved daughter-in-law became part of the family line that would lead to another Redeemer who would be born at Bethlehem. He would be known as the Son of David. They would call him Jesus because he would redeem his people from their sins.

Looking back, I realise that God was at work even through all the dark and difficult days. David would write later, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me' – words which have become famous and have brought light and comfort to millions of people through the ages.

And I can only encourage people to trust that God is working out his purposes, even when dark days come. It's tempting to turn away from him when troubles come; it's far better to turn to *him*. He works in everything for good for those who love him.

When Elimelech and then my two sons died, I was devastated. It would have been easy to give way to despair and faithlessness, especially when so many around me gave little thought to the Lord. But God has planted something eternal in our hearts and we will never be what we were made to be unless we recognise his rule and authority and seek to honour him in our hearts.

Ruth said to me, 'Your God shall be my God.' May he be your God, too.. ●

Rev. David J. Randall spent forty years in pastoral ministry before retiring. He has served as Chair of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity. He is the author of several books, including *Come and Behold Him: Christmas Through Different Eyes* (Christian Focus).

2019

Heas and Thank Hou

DAYSPRING MACLEOD celebrates a topsy-turvy Thanksgiving

S YOU READ THIS, I WILL BE HARD AT WORK PREPARING FOR THE EVENT OF NOVEMBER. Not the election (which looks like a decided non-event), nor my birthday (which is now nearing a number that a lady cannot admit to in print!). No, the event of November is Thanksgiving. If there were a gift I could give Scotland as a nation, that would be it. It's like Christmas without the commercialism; a time just to enjoy God's many blessings and enjoy a good meal with loved ones.

For many years I was a strict traditionalist on this holiday. Alas, Scotland has defeated a number of my favourite elements. The candy corn my family always served with peanuts? These have to be carefully planned for if I am to source them before the big day. Watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade? Impossible. Turkey? Nope, now I make chicken for Turkey Day — the traditional bird tastes too different from the American variety, and I never could get used to it. Pumpkin pie? I usually manage one of those, but since only the five-year-old and I will eat a slice, most of it goes to our grateful Chinese neighbours! I'd love to tell you what IS on the menu this year — but it seems rude when the social distancing rules won't allow me to invite you for the feast!

Anyway, the really essential thing about Thanksgiving is to consider what we are thankful for. And even that looks a little different for me this year. It would, in 2020, wouldn't it?!

The book I'm currently working on has required me to read quite a few Christian biographies, the latest of which was Corrie ten Boom's classic *The Hiding Place*. There is a powerful section in the book where, on arriving at their barracks in Ravensbruck and finding it packed with inmates and even more packed with fleas, Corrie asks her sister Betsie how they will bear living there.

"Corrie!" she said excitedly. "He's given us the answer! Before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!"

..."Oh yes: '...to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus'-"

"That's it, Corrie! That's His answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!'..."

Begrudgingly, Corrie joins her, but balks when Betsie insists they give thanks for the fleas. Their ministry in Ravensbruck thrives, as the overcrowding allows hundreds of women to hear the sisters read from the Bible, and they are blessed with relative freedom to lead their 'worship services'. Months later, Betsie has a gleam in her eye when Corrie comes back from her work shift. She has overheard the guards talking. Why had they given this barracks such freedom? They had stayed away because of the fleas!

The co-authors of *The Hiding Place* clearly recognised this story as one of the book's essential lessons. In the back of the book, they urge us to write down the five things for which we are currently most grateful, and pause to give thanks for them several times a day; 'watch your sense of goodness and love in the world – and especially of His love – grow accordingly.' And then, of course, it asks us to write down five things for which we are not grateful. 'Now set yourself the discipline of giving thanks daily for these things as well. See how God is able to use your changed attitude to change facts.'

Let's see if it works!

The next President of the United States. As I write this, I don't know who has won the American election. We might know by print time, or it might be tied up in recounts and courts. Folks, I have not done well with giving thanks for the last four years in this regard. And yet I know that, whether or not the President is a Christian, even if there is corruption or self-interest or different values than mine, God can still use anyone he chooses to further his kingdom. Sometimes that will mean good policies; sometimes it will mean the refining of the church. Whatever happens, I thank God for this man and for the power God has given him, because all things are under his control.

Covid-19. Living in the coronavirus days is like being in the hospital or taking a continuous medication. It's not pleasant, but it's good for you — if you are willing to let God do his perfect work and bear fruit through the trial. The loneliness throws us more upon his comfort. The Church has to be more intentional and creative about worship, and at the same time has learned to long for the fellowship we had taken for granted so long. We are collectively learning resilience and, I hope, caring for one another well.

Homesickness. This is a constant pain, and yet I am so thankful that I have a loving home and family that cares for me. Thank you, God, for giving me that goodly heritage, but for teaching me now that my comfort is not in my earthly parents but my Heavenly Father. How I feel his goodness in my sad moments.

My house. I've found, while thinking through this list – and of course there are other things in mind that I've not included – that many belong both on my 'grateful' and 'ungrateful' lists! This year I've had a special gratitude for a house big enough to accommodate home-working, home-schooling and a garden. I've also been driven crazy by the number of repairs, renovations and clutter that seem impossible to deal with. But there will be time to get to all those things, and we have been blessed in 2020 to have MORE than enough – enough rooms, enough garden, an excellent park practically next door, and wonderful neighbours to keep us from feeling too isolated. God has provided perfectly.

My children. Yes, I am grateful for my beautiful children, that I waited and prayed for so long! How I love them. When they are asleep.

In practice, am I grateful for my children while home-schooling them, or mid-tantrum, or when someone can't find/won't put on their shoes, or the fourth time someone calls me back to their bedroom for a drink of water after I've said 'Okay, now, STAY IN BED'? Nope. Not grateful in those moments. Fuming and grumbling and snapping in those moments, and excusing myself for it too, on grounds of tiredness. Many's the time I have stomped up the stairs muttering, 'I can't believe it, I have to be self-sacrificial AGAIN', as if the muttering didn't completely negate the sacrifice. God, forgive me for despising your abundant gifts!

I wish I could hear your 'unthankful' list too, and know whether God is changing your heart toward it as I hope he is changing mine. Whatever you're doing on 26 November, whether serving up a feast or opening a tin of soup, I hope you take time to give thanks for your 'fleas'.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

²hoto by Element 5 Digital on Unsplash

19



THEY SHALL RUN AND NOT BE WEARY; THEY SHALL WALK AND NOT FAINT. Isaiah 40:31

CHRISTIAN AID'S CANCEL THE DEBT CAMPAIGN

BY CHARLIE MEIKLEJOHN

E KNOW THAT WHEN CRISIS THREATENS SOME OF THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST PLACES, LOVE BUILDS HOPE. In Ethiopia, and around the world, people living in poverty are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Locusts are swarming, encouraged by the long droughts and heavy rains.

Farmers like Mekonnen are digging for water with their bare hands. 'We pray for rain', he says. 'But when there is no rain, we have to dig.'

Women like Borgodo Tsobe have witnessed plagues of locusts larger than ever before. 'The locusts suddenly came out of nowhere and ate every green plant in their path. They left us nothing useful,' she said. Borgodo's crops were so quickly destroyed that she didn't know if anything would grow again.

We have all been affected in some way by the devastating impact of coronavirus. As the pandemic has spread in many of the poorest countries, our neighbours around the world have been hit even harder, often without the safety nets we've been provided.

The most vulnerable have been falling ill, and the economic impacts have left people, who were already struggling, without a way to feed their families and survive this crisis. Debt re-payments take away resources which are vital for coping with the health, social and economic crises resulting from the pandemic.

We need rich nations, private creditors and multilateral bodies to cancel the debt of the world's poorest countries. Ahead of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's annual meetings in October, a group of more than 140 church leaders from around the world signed a letter urging these institutions to cancel debts owed by developing countries. The letter argues that cancellation 'is the most immediate way to release the finance required to prevent millions of our sisters and brothers being needlessly pushed into poverty by the pandemic.

'Without the cancellation of debts, there remains a grave risk that developing countries will not have the money so desperately and urgently needed to halt the spread of the virus, to treat people suffering from the virus and to mitigate and recover from the economic and social destruction threatened by the virus.'

Debt repayments from developing countries were suspended by G20 Finance Ministers at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and this initiative was extended for a further six months in October.

While it is welcome that bilateral creditors have accepted a payment holiday, Christian Aid's new report, *Under the Radar*, shows that private institutions like HSBC and BlackRock are still being paid in full. Bond holders in Nigeria, for example, are paid between 6.5% and 9.3% in interest.

Most private sector debt remains 'under the radar' and lacks transparency. Our research could only identify \$295 million of the \$1bn of total bondholders in Zambia. Meanwhile, 64 developing nations spend more on debt servicing than on health financing, and 44 countries spend more in debt servicing than on life-saving spending for the poorest.

Many developing countries will struggle to meet financing costs to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and its dire economic consequences if a more ambitious debt cancellation is not agreed.

Matti Kohonen, Christian Aid's private sector advisor, told us that, 'the IMF says that global economy, growth between 2020 and 2021 will be negative, and that some regions like Latin America will see negative growth for even longer — possibly until 2023. To protect the poorest and those most impacted by the crisis, we must see the cancelling of all debt payments - government and private sector - extended until the end of 2022.'

Christian Aid was founded in 1945 by British and Irish churches to help refugees following the Second World War. The organisation went on to provide humanitarian relief in countries around the world, including in the aftermath of natural disasters. Christian Aid also campaigns for public policy reforms aimed at addressing poverty.



FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR OWN HOME VIA ZOOM



6 March 2021 • 10AM to 1PM Theme: 'Steadfast In A Changing World' Speaker: Debbie Urquhart

> TO BOOK, EMAIL: ENSPIRE.WOMEN@GMAIL.COM BY JANUARY 2021

'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Hebrews 12:2

OVID-19 GIVES THE OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON OUR EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNION, WHICH WE MISS AND LOOK FORWARD TO RESUMING. Art in the catacombs, created by early Christians living under threat of death, depict a Supper we would not recognise. There are tens of thousands of art items. The two predominant symbols are bread and fish, both symbols of resurrection, easily understood as such when the post-resurrection stories are read. There are no depictions of a cross dating prior to 313 A.D., when Christianity was legalised.

Explore the book of Acts and you will find that the focus of all the preaching is the resurrection of Jesus. Bear in mind that the word 'Lord' refers to the risen Jesus, as does the word 'Christ'. '*God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,*' said Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:36). In the New Testament church believers were very conscious that the Supper they enjoyed was that of a resurrected Saviour.

When Jesus was instituting his Supper, his words were not restricted to his death. A few years later Paul wrote 'I have no praise for you', as he started to give guidance about the Supper. Perhaps among other errors the Corinthian church had lost balance because his guidance included the information that when partaking of the elements '...you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:17, 26). Space here does not permit exploring this. But I do not believe the precise words of Scripture restrict our understanding of the Supper to reflection on the death of the Saviour.

There are two aspects of the Supper which communicants, and commentating scholars, find particularly difficult. In what respect is the Lord present at the Supper? And how do we commune with the Lord so that the occasion becomes for us a means of Grace? In practice we tend to think about the death of Jesus, to think of his suffering and to remember it was our sin that put him on the cross. We sometimes struggle to know just what to reflect on and especially how to recognise the Presence.

How different was the church in its early years, when the memory of the resurrected Jesus was fresh in the minds and hearts of his followers. The Holy Spirit enlightened minds at Pentecost and three thousand people responded to Peter's sermon. When the early believers 'broke bread' they were brimming over with joy. Not only was their Lord alive, he was given 'all authority in heaven and in earth'; he was Head of the Church. He was active in their midst, giving 'repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel'. He had poured out the Holy Spirit on his church. Believers were 'filled with awe' and broke bread 'with glad and sincere hearts, praising God' (Acts 2:43-47).

The death and resurrection of Jesus are inseparable. Each depends on the other. One on its own is meaningless. We have to view the cross and understand its enormous significance in the light of the resurrection. The life we have in Christ, the life for which we give God thanks as we bow in the solemnity of partaking of the elements, is resurrection life. The presence of Christ which he has promised and which we know at all times, the presence that we can know as we participate with fellow believers in the Supper, that presence is not that of a Saviour hanging on a cross or lying in a tomb. Remember that it is not just the tomb that is empty. The cross is empty too.

As you worship in a communion service, by all means bow beneath the cross and grieve for your dying Saviour. In your mind visit Jesus' tomb where the dead Saviour lay. Weep for the sin which made his death necessary. Grieve that God should suffer such pain on your behalf. But don't stop there; that's not where God wants you to tarry.

Lift up your eyes and behold the glory of the risen Christ. Know the power of the resurrection; rise in the power of an indestructible life; feel the power of God's Holy Spirit, poured out by a risen, ascended Saviour. Experience the presence of your Saviour, who is alive, not dead, present symbolically in the elements, present in your heart by the Holy Spirit and speaking to you in his Word. Bless God for all that Jesus' sacrificial death accomplished, thank God for raising his Son in a demonstration of approval of that death and as a seal for us of our future resurrection. And so rise from the table of the Lord fed, filled and refreshed.

PART 11 THE RESURRECTION AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

BY IAIN GILL A series of short articles about Jesus' resurrection

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DUNBLANE FREE CHURCH

EBENEZER

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us." 1 Samuel 7:12

DISRUPTION AND UNION

The Free Church of Scotland's presence in Dunblane dates back to the Disruption of 1843. Siding with Thomas Chalmers and the Evangelical party in the established church, the minister of the parish church at Dunblane Cathedral, the Rev. William Mackenzie, along with eight of the nine members of the Kirk Session, came out to set up the new congregation of Dunblane Free Church.

No longer able to worship in Dunblane's historic Cathedral, the Free Church congregation had to find another building. By October 1843 a new church, seating 521, had been built and was packed on the opening Sunday. For some reason, however, it was soon found to be unsatisfactory. There seems to be no surviving record of what went wrong, but in 1854 a second church was built across the road, on the High Street in Dunblane. The original Free Church building has since been converted into private houses.

In 1900 the Dunblane congregation, along with the majority of Free Church congregations, joined the United Presbyterian Church to form Dunblane East United Free Church. The congregation re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929, eventually becoming St Blane's Church of Scotland, the congregation which still worships on the High Street today.



St. Blane's Church of Scotland

THE FREE CHURCH RETURNS TO DUNBLANE

Moving ahead now to the year 1979, church services of the Free Church began again in Dunblane, following an almost 80-year absence. There were a number of folk from Free Church backgrounds living in Dunblane at this time, some of whom worshipped in Cumbernauld, their nearest Free Church congregation. The minister of Cumbernauld Free Church, the Rev. – later Rev. Dr – Fergus Macdonald, was offered the use of the Cathedral Chapter House by the Rev. Dr John Gray, the minister of Dunblane Cathedral. This kind offer was accepted, and so Free Church services were re-established in the building where the original congregation had its roots. Monthly services were held on Sunday afternoons thanks to the kindness of the minister and Kirk Session of Dunblane Cathedral.

Moving on a few years, Dunblane Free Church was duly established in 1984, and some sixteen members of Cumbernauld Free Church moved to the new Dunblane congregation. With the Rev. Fergus Macdonald having moved from Cumbernauld to work for the Scottish Bible Society, his successor, the Rev. Donald Maciver, served as Interim Moderator.

The Rev. Kenneth Larter became the first minister of the new congregation of Dunblane in 1985. The congregation left the Cathedral and was meeting in Dunblane Primary School, and it continued to grow over the following years.



Dunblane Cathedral

In late 1988, Mr Larter returned to his native land, the United States, to minister. After a fairly short vacancy, Rev. Allan Macleod was inducted. In March 1993, the congregation moved to their newly acquired and greatly renovated building at 1 Beech Road, Dunblane. This building had once been the Dunblane Town Council Office, and still bears a large plaque reading 'Parish Council Chambers 1928'. An interesting piece of local history in itself!

This move thus marked a significant development in the life of the congregation. The years that followed saw considerable growth and much encouragement as the church became established in this central position in the Cathedral City. North America came calling again, however, and in June of 1997, the Rev. Allan Macleod accepted a call to the Free Church congregation in Toronto, Canada.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

The Rev. Alasdair Macdonald was inducted in 1999. Mr Macdonald became, and remains, well-known in Dunblane. He led the congregation with much grace and wisdom for almost fifteen years – during which time the congregation continued to grow and to work well with other churches and schools in Dunblane and the surrounding area, in many different areas of Christian work.



The current church building on Beech Road, Dunblane

Mr Macdonald retired in September 2014. The ensuing vacancy continued until mid-September 2016, when Mr John Caldwell joined us as a church worker. Mr Caldwell served us in leading services as well as in other areas of church work on a part-time basis, as he was also studying for the ministry at Edinburgh Theological Seminary. Mr Caldwell went on to study full-time at the Seminary after a year with us, so the search continued for a new full-time minister.

The vacancy continued for the next two years. During this time, we were well supplied by excellent preachers from the wider Free Church, for which we were most thankful.

However, in October 2019, the induction of our current minister, the Rev. Allan Shearer, was held and we now begin an exciting and encouraging chapter in the life of our congregation. We were further greatly encouraged when the General Assembly, meeting in October 2020 via Zoom, supported the proposal from the Missions Board to extend the Dunblane ministry from a three-year to a five-year renewable ministry as from the induction of Mr Shearer in October 2019, in view of the much improved financial position of the congregation and increase in numbers attending.

It is interesting to note at this point that our congregation was again most thankful for the friendship and support of the folk in the St Blane's and Lecropt church. Given our relatively small premises, they kindly allowed us to hold the induction service for Mr Shearer

in their church — the pre-1900 Free Church building! — as, indeed, they had done for the induction of Rev. Alasdair Macdonald some twenty years before.



Rev. Allan Shearer and his wife Joanna

In the last few years we have been much encouraged by the goodly numbers attending our morning and evening services on the Lord's Day, as well as the Bible study and prayer meetings on Thursday evenings. Some new families joined us recently, adding to our crèche and Sunday School. We have been meeting with others from neighbouring churches at our monthly Men's Prayer Breakfast and Ladies' Bible Study groups.

Although it is currently on hold as a result of the COVID pandemic, we have had the privilege of hosting a community lunch in our church each month. Originally set up to serve the older folk in the community of Dunblane, we now seek to widen this to local folk of all ages. We have for some time had a close relationship with the local Memory Café, which meets each week in Dunblane. As a result of this connection, we are now a 'Dementia Friendly Church' and we regularly have folk from the Memory Café joining other friends from Dunblane and the surrounding area for our Community Lunch.

We have also, for some years now, had the privilege of putting on our 'Crafts for Kids' event as part of the Dunblane Extravaganza celebration around Christmastime, when we have in attendance many local children and their parents who enjoy making up and taking home a large variety of items on the theme of the real reason for the Christmas season.

As always, the preaching of the Gospel is our core activity, supported by prayer and praise. We are grateful to God that some of our number have returned to meeting together following lockdown, while others are able to join in online. After some thirty-six years here, we look forward in Dunblane Free Church to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as we continue to play our part in the work of the Gospel in this lovely Cathedral City and its environs, God willing, for many years to come.

Innes Macleod is Session Clerk at Dunblane Free Church

We would love to publish the stories of other Free Church congregations and share the encouragements that are to be found in the majesty of God's providence. Send your congregation's story to: editor@freechurch.org



BY DONALD MACKAY

HE NAME OF MOSES IS REVERED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD — BY CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND MUSLIMS. How then does it come to be confidently asserted that 'the modern scholarly consensus is that the figure of Moses is mythical'? The reason seems to be that some academics have excluded the text of the Bible from historical consideration. This appears arbitrary and unscholarly.

In fact, the text of the first five books of the Bible is rich in historical allusion and depiction of character. Of none is this more true than Moses. We get a vivid impression of the man – of his strengths and weaknesses, his triumphs and disappointments, his intellectual stature and his greatness, summed up in the closing verses of the book of Deuteronomy: 'There was none like Moses'.

Moses' destiny was marked out by God from his birth. It was no accident that as a baby he was found by the Pharaoh's daughter and brought up in a palace as her own son. There, in a memory preserved by Stephen twelve centuries later, he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Although cut off from his native culture and religion, Moses clearly had fellow-feeling with the Israelites when, at the age of forty, he went to visit them in their bondage. But he was hot-headed and impulsive, and committed manslaughter, if not murder, against an Egyptian overseer. When the matter became known, Moses, overcome by fear and shame, fled to Midian, to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba — still in his Egyptian dress. He was taken in by Jethro, the priest of Midian, and employed as a shepherd. He married Zipporah, one of Jethro's seven daughters, and had two sons.

When Moses was eighty years old, and was shepherding in the south of the Sinai peninsula, he had a vision of God. He was told that he was to return to Egypt and to lead the Israelites out of the country into the promised land of Canaan. Moses' reaction was violent. 'Are you joking? Don't you realise that I've had a nervous breakdown? I was never a leader or an eloquent speaker. No, this is out of the question!' Yahweh responded patiently but firmly: 'Who made man's mouth? I will equip you suitably: your weakness will be my strength!' Moses argued long and hard, until Yahweh's wrath was kindled against him, but in the end he had to accept that God was God.

So Moses went back to Egypt, with his brother Aaron, and armed with miraculous powers. He confronted the sceptical elders of Israel, and the might of Pharaoh – grumbling all the while about his personal inadequacy. In the end it was the persuasive power of the plagues of Egypt, and the destruction of Pharaoh's horses and chariots in the Red Sea, that won deliverance for the Israelites and called forth their song of thanksgiving to God.

If Moses ever thought that his task was over after the exodus from Egypt, he was to be sorely disappointed. The task was scarcely begun. True, God had made himself responsible for guiding and provisioning the multitude in their march through the desert sands, and for speaking from heaven the Ten Commandments which were to inform their behaviour and belief. But the details of the law, and the administration of the camp, were left to Moses to work out and promulgate. It is clear that, to begin with, he was totally bogged down, and he had to learn the art of delegation, with the help of his father-in-law.

Crucial to the success of the journey was the nation's acceptance of God's authority and Moses' leadership. This however was not forthcoming, and as a result the journey was prolonged until a whole generation of rebellious Israelites had perished. Moses himself was in despair at their unbelief and indiscipline, and was provoked into hasty words and actions. For this he was later punished by being prevented from crossing over into the Promised Land. Aaron sinned in the same way and died on the march, near the land of Edom.

After a successful campaign against the Amorites and the king of Bashan in Transjordan, led by Moses' lieutenant Joshua, Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab, in preparation for the crossing of the Jordan. Here there was another grave defection, caused by the seduction of Israelite men by Moabite and Midianite women, who enticed them into the worship of Baal, the Canaanite god. Moses must have been unaware that this was going on, but when he found out he took swift and decisive action. Plague ensued and took the lives of 24,000 Israelites. Afterwards vengeance was taken on Midian. Moses has been much criticised for ordering the execution of Midianite prisoners, but this was in line with the general treatment of Canaanite tribes whom God decreed were to be eliminated.

During all this time Moses was building up and applying a far-reaching code of civil and religious law which was to serve Israel for the next thousand years — and indeed forms the basis of much of present-day European law. It is remarkably humanitarian and, in modern language, inclusive in spirit. It demonstrates how belief in a just and benevolent God is needed to underpin a just society. Along with this, Moses was compiling a comprehensive history of ancient times up to and including his own day.

From a faltering start Moses had developed into a leader of enormous strength and intellectual capacity, yet one of profound humility, as testified by numerous incidents throughout his life. He was a poet and a prophet. Those who question his existence as a real person have a problem. Take Moses away and you are left with a yawning gap, which would have to be filled by half a dozen anonymous geniuses working in close harmony. As the editor of Deuteronomy said: 'No prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses'. And he went on to identify the reason: 'The LORD knew him face to face' (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Donald Mackay is a member of Perth Free Church

PAGES FROM ADAM'S DIARY, PART 4: Testimony: Who is this Dr. Adam anyway?

HE APOSTLE PAUL, IN HIS LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS, WRITES, 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son' (Colossians 1:12-13). This is true of the past and present state of every Christian, whether born in the heart of the American Bible Belt or the heart of the jungles of the Amazon. Undoubtedly, however, there is a great privilege extended to those who are born where His Word is proclaimed and his light shines brightly. I was not born in the jungles of the Amazon, but neither did I have the blessing of being born in a nation and a society, such as Scotland, with such an immensely rich Christian heritage, overflowing with the knowledge of God and where the light of his Word has been burning for centuries. There is no greater gift given to a person, to a community, to a society and to a nation than the gift of the One whom we know as the Light of the World, the Lord Jesus Christ, with His message and His Church (John 4:10: Matthew 13:44-46).

In the nation in which I was born and brought up, the Word of God was scarce. Mosques, and not church buildings, are on every street corner. Rather than hearing the beautiful uplifting sounds of the Psalms praising God, we heard the recitations of the Quran coming from the mosque or the radio. As a child it used to plunge me into depression, and it still does! As I look back, it seems to me that sadness is woven into the fabric of Islam, and it is viewed as a virtue. To be joyful, buoyant, and colourful is considered lewd and impious.

However, in my homeland, it has not always been like this. In the first seven centuries of the Christian era, until the coming of Islam, that nation was one of the launchpads for the expansion of Christianity into the world. There were hundreds and, by some accounts, thousands of churches across the land. That nation had also been used by God to liberate the Jews from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, offering them protection for centuries, sheltering them and blessing them with wealth. The people of my homeland were also the harbingers of the birth of the Messiah to the Jewish people. They were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. They were among the most mission-minded followers of Christ. They were the ones who introduced the Christian faith to China centuries before Hudson Taylor. They took the Gospel to Central Asia as far north as Russia and Siberia and as far south as India. They had a delegation at the Council of Nicaea.

Islam changed all of that. Like wildfire, it destroyed everything in its path. It sacked and demolished churches, burned irreplaceable libraries, obliterated historic cities, sites, buildings, and monuments in order to wipe out the identity of the nations in its destructive path. Islam eradicated pre-Islamic history wherever possible. Where it could not, Islam belittled and scorned it as a sinful and polluted past which should be forgotten. Its messengers and spokesmen still do that today. The evidence of this devastation is irrefutably borne out in the pages of



The people of my homeland were also the harbingers of the birth of the Messiah to the Jewish people. They were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

history, past and present. By the time the armies of Islam were finished, very little was left of the church and Christianity. Nations in which the Word of God had been proclaimed for centuries today live under the call of the minaret and do not know anything of that bright past. I was born in such a place.

My parents were moral people, and they brought up their children as such; but we did not know the Lord, and what little we knew about Him was the misunderstood and misguided false teachings of Islam about our Saviour and the Christian faith. Our closest encounter with Christianity was in Hollywood films. I had never heard and did not know *'Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord'* (Luke 2:11). I can hear that beautiful announcement a thousand times, and it is just as uplifting and precious to me now as it was when I heard it for the first time. Every year I look forward to Christmas, when we listen to those words over and over again as the children line up in front of the church dressed like shepherds and angels. There is peace, grace, forgiveness, love, and optimism in those words in a dark, hate-filled and hopeless world.

Islam does not have this hope because it does not have such a Gospel and such a Saviour. Many in our world do not have this hope because they do not know our Lord– hence the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel in season and out of season. Islam, at best, is an austere religion which drowns its adherents in sadness and straitjackets them into a set of burdensome, inflexible laws called sharia or the 'clear/straight path' (i.e., to God). It authorises, and indeed demands from its followers, violence upon those who would not adhere to its laws. It rejects the claim of our Saviour, who asserts, 'I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father, except through me!' (John 14:6). I never read anywhere in the Quran, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you' (Matthew 5:43-44). I never heard or read, 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God...God is love' (1 John 4:7-8). If those verses were the only teaching of our Lord, I would still choose to follow Him.

But I did not know anything about Him and His teaching until I was about 22 years old, living halfway on the other side of the world as a foreign student in North America. For the first time, I was introduced to our Saviour and read: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved' (John 3:16-17). I have now been walking with our Lord for nearly 40 years. I tell my children, who heard the Gospel read out loud to them by their mother when they were still in her womb, that I wish I would have had their heritage and their privileged position. I wish I would have met the Lord when I was five years old. I can't imagine a greater gift in life! How blessed is that person who knows the Lord! How blessed is that nation whose people live and walk in the light of the Lord! How blessed is a society in which the Word of God is the lamp unto their feet and the light unto their path, and the name of Christ is honoured in their midst, precious to them and treasured by them!

I had already been in North America as a foreign student for nearly seven years before I heard the Gospel for the first time—an encounter which changed my life forever. In the university where I was a student, one afternoon in the early spring of 1981, I was going from one lecture hall to another when, on the sidewalk, I passed a stranger who, without any introduction, stopped me and asked, 'Young man, do you know that God loves you?'

Unknown to him, my young life was in turmoil. I was descending into the abyss of despair. God allows crises to enter into our lives to get our attention, to expose our spiritual thirst (Psalm 63:1), to show our weakness and helplessness without Him, to demonstrate the emptiness and hollowness of our lives without Him. He lets us see that all the idols of this world with which we surround ourselves and upon which we place

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It was in John that I saw the face of God in Christ. I was not taken through the temple; I was taken directly into the Holy of Holies.

our confidence — our positions in life, the family into which we were born, the schools we attended, our jobs, our social connections, our big homes, our bank accounts and wealth, our fast cars, and whatever else we trust to bring us happiness — in the hour of our need cannot help us, cannot take our hands and pull us out of the slough of despond. They are as helpless and as worthless in that hour of testing as Dagon, the God of the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:1-5). Otherwise Solomon would not have written Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, and hundreds of seemingly successful people, rich and famous men and women at the pinnacle of their careers, would not commit suicide every year.

That is where I was when the Lord extended His hand of unmerited favour, His matchless grace toward me. I was all alone in a foreign land, terribly homesick, missing my parents and siblings and living in fear at a time of tremendous upheaval. From the outside, if someone looked at my life, he would have thought everything was going well for me. I was attending a prestigious university, I was on track for a brilliant career as a medical doctor, but inside I was empty. Without the Lord, it is always so! He is the breath of life without which we are dead.

To make a very long story short, for the next 45 minutes that brash and tenacious stranger, for whom I can never adequately thank the Lord, prevented me from going to my class and engaged me in one question after another: 'What is your name? Where are you from? What is your course of study? What is your religion? Why do you look so sad?' and on and on. At last, he realised that I was exasperated and asked, 'Have you ever read our holy book?' 'No!' I replied. I had never read the Bible. 'Will you read it if I give you a copy?' he asked. I felt that if I said, 'No,' he was not about to let me go. For that reason, I said, 'Yes, I will read it.' He insisted, 'Do you promise to read it?' I thought I would read a page or two, just to fulfill my promise, and therefore, I said, 'Yes, I promise.' He reached into his bag and pulled out a simple English translation, took a bookmark out of his coat pocket, put it at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, handed it to me and stressed, 'Start reading here.' I took the book from his hand, thanked him and scurried away as fast as I could before he started a fresh round of questions.

That evening in my room, I opened the book which the stranger had given me. The bookmark, however, which he had put at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, was now moved to the beginning of the Gospel of John. Nearly 40 years has passed since that pivotal encounter, and to this day, I am persuaded that the Lord moved the bookmark to the beginning of John's Gospel. For it was in John that I saw the face of God in Christ. I was not taken through the temple; I was taken directly into the Holy of Holies. It was through the reading of the Gospel of John that I was introduced to our Saviour, my Saviour! Unbeknownst to me, twelve years later, I would write a doctoral thesis on the echoes of the Old Testament in John's Gospel: this is that hope of the ages, of whom Moses and the prophets wrote (John 1:45; 5:46). Every word in John's Gospel, as with all Scripture, was and is to me the word of life and light. That was the beginning of a journey which is now 40 years of walking with our Lord. And how I bless Him for so graciously reaching out and taking my hand as I was drowning in a sea of sorrow!

There is much more to this story, much, much more, but this is the gist of it. This is how I was saved from darkness and spiritual death and transferred into the kingdom of the Light of life. 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him, all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!'

The Lord does not save us to leave us to a life of self-indulgence, but for service. He calls us out of the world and, through His beloved Son, He liberates us from the condemnation of sin. He takes from us the filthy rags of iniquity, washes us in the cleansing blood of the Lamb of God, dresses us in the white robes of His Son's righteousness, gives us the Holy Spirit who sculpts and fashions the image of Christ upon the tablet of our souls, sanctifies and equips us with virtue and spiritual gifts, and then sends us back into that darkness out of which we were called, into the city of destruction, to bear His light in its midst. Do you remember when the seraphim took the coal from the altar and touched Isaiah's mouth and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for' (Isaiah 6:7)? The next event in that story is the voice of the Lord calling, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' (Isaiah 6:8). Our redemption and sanctification is never an end to itself—we are called out of the world into the light of the countenance of the Lord Jesus, redeemed, sanctified and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and then sent back into the very dark place out of which He has rescued us in order to bear His light in that darkness. Since the time of the patriarchs, Noah and Abraham, it has always been so with the people of God. This is true for every believer. Every believer is called to be the light in this present darkness.

We make plans for our lives but God determines our destiny. Before I came to faith, I had intended to be a medical doctor and the thought of serving the Lord was alien to my thinking. In fact, even in the early days of my salvation, I did not know exactly what it meant to serve the Lord. However, our walk with the Master is a journey, a pilgrimage of learning in which our orientation, purpose and destination in life are changed from self-absorption and preoccupation with those things which are temporal, and we are reoriented toward God and toward what is meaningful and enduring. We are set in the direction of that City whose foundation, architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). After I came to faith, I never even thought that I was going to serve our Lord amongst refugees or minister to His suffering followers. But this is what I have been doing for the last 34 years. I did not plan this-the Lord did. The God who took my hand and led me one step at time and taught me precept upon precept, line upon line about Himself, about life and the purpose for my existence, gradually changed my direction and goals in life. He shut doors which I had opened and He opened doors through which He wished me to pass. Before coming to faith, I had planned to become a surgeon and enrich myself with the material goods of this world. The Lord changed the design. He made me to be a spiritual physician and to bring the riches of His goodness and grace to others.

After I came to faith in Christ, I left medicine and pursued a theological, academic career. When I finished my studies in Cambridge and subsequently in Oxford, I was planning to teach theology in a university setting. The Lord closed that door as well. I did become a Bible and theology teacher, but not to university students. Instead He directed me to bring the comfort of His Word to Christians who live under persecution – believers who, for no other reason than their faith and fellowship with our Saviour, for bearing His name, 'Christians – followers of Christ', are persecuted, slandered, branded as national security threats, put in prison, beaten and insulted, some of them even tortured and murdered. It pleased Him the most if I served them. The Lord also made me a teacher of His Word to refugees in refugee camps, some of whom do not know how to read and write. I did not perform surgery on bodies, but the Holy Spirit took my hands and put the Word of God in my mouth to perform surgery upon their hearts, to bring the comfort and healing of Christ to men and women who are looking for the celestial city. I was sent to alert them that they are pursuing a mirage and point them to the City of God, the city which Abraham was seeking while travelling in Canaan.

So, if you have been wondering, 'Who on earth is this Dr. Adam anyway and what are these stories in his name appearing in *The Record*?' Here is the man and this is His work—less than an ordinary servant of our Saviour, whom the Lord has immensely favoured by His unmerited goodness and used in extraordinary ways.

Of course, I was hesitant when I was asked to write and say even these few words. I have always felt very strongly that we, as servants and ministers of the Gospel, are called to make known the King of Kings and not ourselves. Servants are to cover their feet and stand aside in the presence of the King of glory. And I must hasten to add and emphasize that the stories I have agreed to publish are not about my accomplishments but are God's accomplishments. They are accounts of the marvelous work of our Lord and His achievements to whom be thanksgiving, and praise, and blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever!

Every believer is called to be the light in this present darkness.

BOOK REVIEWS

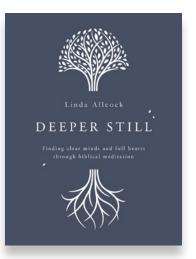


All of our books this month come exceptionally highly recommended, and it's a pleasure to share them with you. All are available at https://thefree. church/shop, unless otherwise stated.

DEEPER STILL LINDA ALLCOCK (2020)

No matter how long you've been a Christian, spending time with God as part of your devotional life can wax and wane. We can easily fall into viewing our Bible reading as something to tick off our to-do list before we move on with the rest of our day. In the face of that, Linda Allcock has written a clear, biblical and challenging book to cause us all to pause and refresh our time with God.

In the first section of the book Linda helpfully draws a distinction between biblical meditation and what the world understands meditation to be. She draws out the need for us to slow down and orient our minds to hear God's voice above all the other competing voices in our world. I was challenged to reflect upon how much time I devote to listening to God through his Word, compared to other things in my life. I also realised I need to repent of the times I come with low expectations for what God will do through

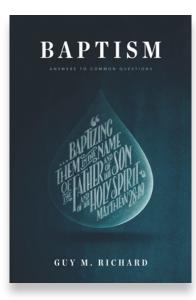


his Word. Instead I need to be 'calling out for insight', expecting God to teach me when I come to him. The rest of the book is very practically focused with Linda explaining how biblical meditation might look. She shares and unpacks her five-step 'meditation tools', which are 'Lord, Look, Turn, Learn, Live'. Each chapter is full of helpful questions and examples of how we could use this technique in our own time with God.

I was so encouraged, challenged and inspired by *Deeper Still* that I went straight from reading it to ordering new notebooks so I could try this for myself. I recently taught a session to our teenagers on spending time with God and wish I'd read this beforehand. I will be wholeheartedly recommending this book to anyone wanting to grow deeper in their relationship with God.

Linda captures so well the delight we long to have when reading God's Word and helpfully articulates the discipline needed to cultivate that delight. In this time of uncertainty, *Deeper Still* is a timely reminder to set aside time with our Heavenly Father so we can withstand whatever the world throws at us and rejoice in our Saviour Jesus. This book is available to purchase from Free Church Books.

Rachel Sloan, Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh & FIEC Women's Ministry Co-ordinator



BAPTISM: ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS GUY M. RICHARD (2018)

Guy M. Richard introduces this book as an opportunity for him to explain the Presbyterian beliefs about baptism in a way which is quick and accessible, while giving more depth than would be possible in a quick chat after the service. He achieves this goal very successfully.

The book begins with the most fundamental question, 'What is Baptism?' and the answers to more specific questions are then built on this foundation. This helps Dr Richard address the question many people will be asking as they pick up this book, 'Why do some churches baptise infants?' by explaining baptism in connection with the big picture and covenant structure of the bible.

The book ends with a really helpful and encouraging chapter on why all this matters, and the great privilege baptism is as a covenant sign of the eternal promises of an unchanging God. A helpful and short read for those asking questions or seeking clarity on what baptism is all about.

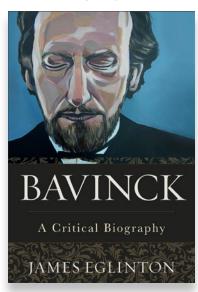
This book is available to purchase from Amazon.

Ali Sewell, Haddington Community Church

BAVINCK: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY JAMES EGLINTON

Herman Bavinck was one of the premiere theologians of the modern era and arguably the most able theologian of the late nineteenth century in the Netherlands. In recent years, many of Bavinck's works have been made available in English for the first time, most notably his four-volume Reformed Dogmatics. The surge of access to Bavinck's works has fuelled greater curiosity in his theology and of course the context that gave rise to it.

James Eglinton is the foremost expert on Bavinck today and has done us an immense favour by writing what is certainly a definitive biography of the Dutch dogmatician. This book is a serious piece of scholarship, but is also supremely



accessible. It is serious in that Eglinton has done an immense amount of work in tracing Bavinck's life through Bavinck's own personal papers, journals, and letters and providing us insight from the primary sources themselves (which he reads in Dutch) about the twists and turns of Bavinck's story. This book is also accessible though in that it is well-written, non-technical, and gives enough backstory about the Dutch context and Bavinck's family that no one is lost as the story develops.

This is a must-read book. Bavinck's story is gripping, inspiring, and soul-stirring. It certainly provides new light and brings new life to the books that Bavinck has left to us. Scholars will find a well-crafted biography to inform their reading of the theologian himself. Aspiring theologians will find a kindred spirit in Bavinck as he balances love for the church with ambitions as an academic. Ministers will see someone wrestling for the good of the church in his nation. And Christians will be moved by a man who gave his life to work for the best for God's people in his own day and for the future.

Harrison Perkins is assistant minister in London City Presbyterian Church and visiting lecturer in Systematic Theology at ETS

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH: A CRITICAL TEXT AND INTRODUCTION JOHN R. BOWER (2020)

Anyone who has been involved in drafting a Doctrinal Statement for a new Christian organisation will tell you how frustrating an exercise it can be, even when all those sitting round the table are Bible-believing evangelicals. Therefore, we are left all the more amazed by the very existence of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which did not fall from heaven fully complete, but is the result of painstaking committee work.

Dr Bower's book is part of a series where the principal documents of the Westminster Assembly are introduced with discussion of the critical text. This book was a revelation to me. As Sinclair Ferguson says in in his Foreword: 'Here the door into the Jerusalem Chamber is opened for us and we catch something of the very Sitz im Leben of the assembly and the atmosphere of the debates.'

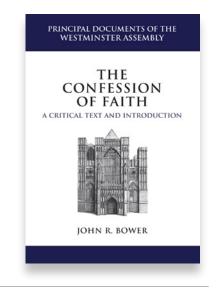
The book is divided thus: Nine chapters describe the work of the three sub-committees among which the various doctrinal headings were divided. Then a critical text of the Confession is presented, followed by a comparison of the four authoritative texts. The order of the Confession is then compared with the Irish Articles, the other Reformed Confession which the Westminster divines found most helpful. Finally, there is the text of the revised Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which was the initial project required of the divines by Parliament.

This is a scholarly work, and anyone wishing to understand the formation of the WCF, and therefore the theology behind it, will benefit greatly from it. Charts comparing the original committee drafts of the chapters with the final version provide insight into just how careful and exact the divines were. It's interesting to note where there was no controversy, and what generated heated debate (e.g. the Eternal Decree). The fault lines between the Presbyterians and Independents are explored; and it is gratifying to note just how willing the Presbyterian majority were to accommodate their Independent brothers.

There is a helpful glossary of words which are now obsolete or are used in an archaic way.

This book is available to purchase from CLC Bookshops.

lan Watson, Hope Church, Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Re: How the mighty have fallen, October 2020

Dear Mr Macdonald

I refer to your Editorial in the October Issue of *The Record* entitled *'How the Mighty Have Fallen'*. I am disappointed at how in this article you appear to portray a bias towards the American Democratic Party and an almost antipathy towards the Republican Party. I find this astonishing because of the position you hold as Editor of the Free Church Monthly Record! Nowhere in your article do you mention the policies of the Democratic Party and particularly those of Joe Biden, the leader. Indeed his name is not even mentioned!

These policies range from support for same-sex marriage, pro-abortion, abolition of Christian teaching in schools and other policies which many Christians in the Free Church and outwith do not support. Yet all you mention is the 'abuse' the present Republican administration make of their 'minority' status in US political life!

Nowhere, in all my years, have I heard the suggestion, or as you call it 'refrain', that Donald Trump 'must take after his father'! Neither have I heard the suggestion that 'rather than celebrate the fulfilment of America's promise, we'd rather ignore our association'. This is pure sensationalism!

You also state that it would be 'more profitable for us and our neighbours when we seek the common good in our communities' than for the Free Church to attempt to 'lobby the Scottish Government in line with biblical morality'. Here you are totally missing the mark! Surely, in common with Scripture precepts the Church is to do both! With such a philosophy or, should I say, vision, is it little wonder that the Free Church has lost its voice both at a political and societal level in our modern-day culture? The Church of a past generation did good both to communities and society at large!

Christ's church was always a 'little flock' but that did not mean that she was to be silent when it came to making her voice heard when political decisions were being made that were contrary to God's Law. At her best the Church had a voice but, alas, that voice is too often silent in our day. Sadly the lament you suggest for America is only too true for the church in our day, 'How is the mighty fallen.'

Rather than involving ourselves in American politics, over which we have no locus whatsoever, it would be much more profitable for the Editorial in the Record to be about matters which are much more relevant to us in the UK society of the present day!

Regards

Calum Maclean Back, Isle of Lewis

We would love to hear from you...please write the editor at: The Record, Free Church Offices 15 North Bank Street, The Mound Edinburgh, EH1 2LS or e-mail **editor@freechurch.org**

POETRY PAGE

ON ISAIAH LXIII. 1-8 BY PHILLIS WHEATLEY

Say, heav'nly muse, what king or mighty God, That moves sublime from Idumea's road? In Bosrah's dies, with martial glories join'd, His purple vesture waves upon the wind. Why thus enrob'd delights he to appear In the dread image of the Pow'r of war? Compres'd in wrath the swelling wine-press groan'd It bled, and pour'd the gushing purple round. 'Mine was the act,' th' Almighty Saviour said, And shook the dazzling glories of his head, 'When all forsook I trod the press alone, 'And conquer'd by omnipotence my own; 'For man's release sustain'd the pond'rous load, 'For man the wrath of an immortal God: 'To execute th' Eternal's dread command 'My soul I sacrific'd with willing hand; 'Sinless I stood before the avenging frown, 'Atoning thus for vices not my own.' His eye the ample field of battle round Survey'd, but no created succours found; His own omnipotence sustain'd the right, His vengeance sunk the haughty foes in night; Beneath his feet the prostrate troops were spread, And round him lay the dying, and the dead. Great God, what light'ning flashes from thine eyes? What pow'r withstands if thou indignant rise? Against thy Zion though her foes may rage, And all their cunning, all their strength engage, Yet she serenely on thy bosom lies, Smiles at their arts, and all their force defies.

Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) was one of the best-known poets of colonial America. She was enslaved in Western Africa aged 7 or 8, taken to Boston aboard the ship *Phillis* and sold to John and Susanna Wheatley. The family intended her to work as a domestic servant but, recognising her precociousness, provided her an education. The publication of Phillis Wheatley's elegy to the evangelist, George Whitfield, brought her international acclaim. 'On Isaiah Ixiii. 1-8' was included in her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), the first published volume of poetry by an African American. Wheatley's poetry often uses biblical symbolism to evangelize and to comment on slavery.

MISSION MATTERS A monthly take on some of the mission

work the Free Church is involved in by our Mission Director, **DAVID MEREDITH**

HE JEWISH RACE IS BY ANY STANDARD REMARKABLE. 20% of Nobel laureates are Jewish, receiving awards in all six categories. We can thank Jews for everything from Google to USB flash drives and even Israeli super cows who produce more milk than any other national cow – 10% more than American and even 50% more than German.

More importantly, Jesus was a Jew, and the most famous letter writer of all time, the apostle Paul, was unashamedly Jewish. Indeed, there is an argument that the only true Jew is in fact a Christian. Christianity is not a development of Judaism; it is the purpose of Judaism!

The question for this this month is why has Jewish mission dropped off the radar within the Free Church? This is remarkable, not just because the main engine of modern Jewish mission can be traced to Free Church fathers like Murray M'Cheyne and John 'Rabbi' Duncan. Such collective amnesia is difficult to understand when the great Paul saw Jewish mission as so critical that he said that he had 'great sorrow and unceasing anguish' in his heart at the lostness of his own people (Romans 9:2). In the larger scale of things there is an even more positive incentive to reach out to the lost of Israel, because we have a promise in Romans 11 that God will once again move among his ancient people and that their ingrafting back into the vine of the kingdom will bring greater riches.

The situation among Scottish Judaism has never been more needy as it is today. We concede that the numbers are small. There are only about 5,800 Jews living in Scotland, only 2% of the entire UK Jewish population. Compare this to 15,000 during the middle of the twentieth century. For many years Scotland was known as the only nation in Europe where a Jew was not killed for their faith. But, in recent years, cases of antisemitism have increased.

Ephraim Borowski, director of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC), said last year that Jews living in Scotland felt 'alienated, vulnerable and not at home'. This is an invitation for us to love unconditionally. When the wider culture goes low in hating God's covenanted people, we go high in displaying grace-saturated love.

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As Christians we are at the front of the queue of those who love our Jewish neighbours. They gave us the scriptures, they gave us our Saviour. The greatest antisemitic act that we could ever commit would be to withhold the gospel from them. It is our privilege and duty to tell them that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is Jesus of Nazareth and that his wounds will bring healing to their race.

There are close links with the premier Jewish mission organisation in the UK, the International Mission to Jewish People (formerly CWI). We would love it if a new generation of Free Church people got on the website and read about evangelism all over the world to Jewish people. You may want to talk to Rona Matheson from Ferintosh, who is now on the Council of Management.

Remember one thing: mission does not require expertise. If you find yourself in Jewish company there may be an opportunity to find out about their wonderfully rich culture. Judaism is as diverse as Christendom, ranging from the highly secular to the strict Hasidic variety. Do not be afraid to tell them about how you found the Messiah and how you love the story of the Old Testament. Tell them how the promises, prophecies and great feasts of the past point to Jesus as the Messiah.

Murray M'Cheyne famously preached on his return from a mission to the Jews in November 1839, 'our Church must not only be evangelical, but evangelistic also, if she would expect the blessing of God. She must not only have the light, but dispense it also, if she is to be continued as a steward of God. May I not take the liberty of adding to this striking declaration that we must not only be evangelistic, but evangelistic *as God would have us be* — not only dispense the light on every hand, but dispense it first to the Jew.'

First may not mean priority; that point is open to debate. What is not an option is our forgetfulness of the people of Israel. \bullet

For more info see www.cwi.org

A' lorg leigheis (Searching for a cure) LE JANET NICPHÀIL

IG AN ÀM-SA ANN AN EACHDRAIDH, nuair a tha an tinneas gabhaltach-sa air feadh an t-saoghail, tha spàirn mhòr ga dhèanamh airson leigheas a lorg a dhèanadh feum do dhaoine, nan tigeadh an tinneas orra.

Bidh e a' cur mòr-iongnaidh oirnn' na sgilean a tha an Cruthaidhear air a thoirt do dhaoine,'s tha sinn taingeil airson gach adhartas feumail a th'air a dhèanamh gus cunngaidhean eadar-dhealaicht'a thoirt do dhaoine a dhèanadh am beatha nas fhallain, agus a shìneadh an làithean glè thric.

Ach fhathast, tha iad a' sireadh an nì a dhèanadh feum do chorp a'chreutair gu bhith a'neartachadh am bodhaig, nan tigeadh an tinneas- sa orra.

Nach toir seo oirnn' smaoineachadh air-ais gu Gàrradh Edein? Anns a'ghàrradh bha Adhamh agus Eubha coileanta, ach, an-dèidh an Tuiteim, cha robh ìocshlaint ri lorg air thalamh airson peacadh don robh iad ciontach.

Dè idir a thachradh don chinne- daonna? Is e seo iad, air an dèanamh ann an ìomhaigh Dhè, 's tha iad a-nis air a bhith eas-umhail. Càit' am biodh freagairt a riaraicheadh an Cruthaidhear? B'e seo ceist nach b'urrainn iad a fhreagairt, oir cha robh freagairt air thalamh ann dhith.

B'e Athair na Tròcair a rinn fuasgladh air a' cheistsa. Cha robh freagairt air an talamh no dìreach ann an nèamh. Dh'fheumadh Mac Sìorraidh an Athar a thighinn gu talamh, mus biodh leigheas ann do shliochd Adhaimh.

Le fhulangas air Crann-Ceusaidh, riaraich E ceartas Athar, agus b'urrainn an Cruthaidhear daoine mìdhiadhaidh a bha a' creidsinn ann an Criosd a mhaitheadh. Nach b'iongantach gràdh an Athar agus àithne air a briseadh, gidheadh bha tròcair na chridhe agus bha A Mhac umhail anns gach ceum.

Thàinig an leigheas-sa gu saor bhon Trianaid, agus nach sinn a bu chòir a bhith taingeil gu robh Gràdh an Athar cho mòr don t-saoghal a chruthaich E.

B'e seo ìocshlaint no leigheas nach robh an comas an duine a lorg. Thàinig seo a-nuas thugainn gus an talamh-sa a dhèanamh na 'thalamh tròcair'. Nach prìseil na facail sin?

A-mach à fulangasan Chriosd, tha maitheanas a'sruthadh, agus faodaidh sinn smaoineachadh air maitheanas mar nì no lus a rugadh anns an Trianaid nuair a thuit ar ciad pàrantan.

Cha ghabh prìs a chur air maitheanas, oir bidh sluagh Dhè gu sìorraidh a'moladh an Uain, airson gun d'ionnlaid Criosd iad om peacaidhean na fhuil Fhèin.

Mar a tha am bàrd, Iain Chaluim Ruaidh, anns a' bhàrdachd,'An Crann -Ceusaidh' ag ràdh,

' Se an Crann-Ceusaidh an aon àit'

'S am faigh luchd-àmhghair fuasgladh;

Chaidh an dìteadh anns a'chùirt

Mar chiontaich bhrùite bhuaireasach.'

Nach e cridhe Dhè a tha agus a bha tròcaireach? Nach eil gu cinnteach leasan an sin dhuinne, agus sinn fhìn cho peacach, a bhith tric a' cuimhneachadh air an truas a sheall an Cruthaidhear do dhaoine a bhris an aon àithne a thug E dhaibh. Abair adhbhar-taingealachd don t-sluagh a chuala guth Dhè agus a thàinig thuige len uallaichean.

(Is e seo taghadh de rann no dhà a-mach à pìos bàrdachd mun chiad ghàrradh.)

Ach choimhead Mis' sìos air an talamh an èiginn Is thuirt Mi nam chridhe, mar mheall esan Eubha Ach rinn Mise cinnteach gum biodh fhathast ann Gàrradh 's air taobh a-muigh an àite bhiodh milltear na nàire.

Thig iad don bhaile-s' le bunait a dhealbh Mi Is leanaidh mo Mhac-sa, oir is E mo dheagh Shearbhant Gu tobraichean sonais bheir Esan gu bràth iad Is cha bhi ann breugan mar bh'anns a' chiad ghàrradh.

2020

BY CATRIONA MURRAY

EMEMBER, REMEMBER, THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER: GUNPOWDER, TREASON AND PLOT. Little heed is paid nowadays to the origins of this orgy of fireworks and toasted marshmallows. Children in knitted bonnets, wielding sparklers, do not see themselves as the natural heirs to Guy Fawkes's legacy of conspiracy. They are simply having a good time, lighting up the winter night with warmth and colour. The original group, whose aim was to replace the Protestant regime with a Catholic one, could scarcely imagine that their murderous plans would, centuries later, be treated with such levity.

A little later on in the month – the eleventh, of course – we commemorate another event: Armistice Day. Originally, this marked the formal cessation of hostilities in the First World War, but has become an occasion for remembering loss of life in all subsequent warfare. This is sadly necessary because the 1914-18 conflict was not, in fact, the war to end wars.

War does not end war, just as darkness does not drive out darkness. Violence breeds violence, and hostility more of the same. Yet, as bonfire night demonstrates, the further we move away from an event, the less we memorialise, and the more we mythologise. For a variety of reasons, we are inured to the horror of what the Gunpowder Plot sought to achieve. So many centuries separate us from Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators that we can infantilise the whole episode into a celebration for children.

War is different; its realities are still with us, unfolding even on our television screens with depressing inevitability. We honour those who defend us in armed conflict, and we feel it fitting to draw aside once a year to remember the ones who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

These are words which hide the brutal truth of war, and especially the finality of death. In the end, those who laid down their lives in conflict are really a sacrifice to no purpose. This doesn't diminish their bravery, or the horror we should feel at their loss; far from it. Indeed, it should encourage us to reflect on our readiness to take up arms against our fellow men, beating our ploughshares into swords at the least provocation.

And why? Why did the Gunpowder Plotters believe that the death and destruction of so many people was justified? In wartime, how do we decide which deaths are heroic, and which are merely expedient?

It is because we constantly lose sight of the fact that this world is not everything. We may say otherwise, but the human race in its entirety is inclined to act as though this is a continuing city. Our conflicts, our persecution at the hands of others even, God does not wink at. He takes it all in, and he knows better than any of us what is right and what is wrong. He will handle it. God will weigh everyone in the perfectly calibrated scales of his own justice. We know this, as deals with this for us. Even here, though, we must be careful to make a distinction between what IS holy, and what we perceive as just. If God commands his people to do battle, that is a war both holy and just; when human agency takes the decision to fight, however, we must always take account of sin and its influence over our minds.

In this month of remembering violence in its differing forms, then, what is the safe path for a Christian to take? It is always the same answer. The passage of many centuries, indeed, two millennia, does not diminish the power of one death: the death of death.

Two thousand years ago, there was a plot to kill Jesus. No one thought to issue warnings to the innocent then, as they did in 1605. In this case, anyway, the Innocent was also the guilty. Perfect and without flaw, he took our guilt upon himself and surrendered to the plot that mankind made. Instead of being shamed by their own violent hearts, these people put him to death, and in the process demonstrated his utter perfection.

This was the ultimate sacrifice in every sense of both words. Because he died, we do not have to; because he remembered us in his death, no commemoration of ours comes close to that beautiful truth.

Remember, remember — not just in November — goodness, and mercy and love. He took death to its final resting place, not to glorify it, but to lay it down once and for all. ●

Christians - and yet, and yet.

There is, of course, such a thing

as just war. The Old Testament