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Editor • John Macdonald The Editor, Free Church Offices, 15 North Bank Street, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH1 2LS editor@freechurch.org

News Editor • Dayspring MacLeod dayspring.macleod@icloud.com 07974 261567

Missions News • Sarah Johnson Free Church Offices, 15 North Bank Street, Edinburgh, EH1 2LS sarah@freechurch.org

WfM Editor • Fiona Macaskill 8 Campsie Drive, Glasgow, G61 3HY rfmacaskill@me.com

Gaelic Editor • Janet MacPhail 24 North Bragar, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9DA 01851 710354

Seminary News • Rev. Thomas Davis St. Columba's Free Church, Johnston Terrace Edinburgh, EH1 2PW thomas@stcolumbas.freechurch.org

Prayer Diary • Mairi Macdonald ian.macdonald57@btinternet.com

Design & Layout ● Fin Macrae @DUFI Art www.dufi-art.com

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WELCOME TO THE AUGUST RECORD



VER THE LAST TWO MONTHS, TWO EVENTS HAVE DOMINATED THE NEWS, AND BOTH HAVE PROVOKED CONVERSATION ABOUT EDUCATION. The closure of schools as a result of the COVID lockdown has started a conversation about the joys and the trials of homeschooling. Not only that, but taking full responsibility for their children's learning has led parents to consider their options for the long term — are children getting the right balance from the state?

Since George Floyd's death on May 25th, international protests have broadened an ongoing debate about racism, especially racism within western democracies. In response to expressions of surprise that racism is still a significant issue in our society, those privileged enough not to have been on the receiving end have been encouraged to get educated about black history and about the difficulties people continue to face today because of the colour of their skin.

We attempt to participate in both of these conversations this month. I want to thank, in particular, Dr Ann MacDonald, Melanie and Dr Josh Mann, and the Rev. David Robertson for their excellent contributions to this month's *Public Questions*.

As we attempt to think through these matters as Christians, we trust that God knows the end from the beginning. And as we quickly find the limits of our own understanding, we rely on James' instruction: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him' (James 1:5).

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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Education and God's mercy are the solutions to racial injustice BY THE EDITOR

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BLACKLIVEST

This iniquity has been allowed to stand for far too long. We must not allow it to be passed on to yet another generation.

ACISM IS THE BESETTING SIN OF WESTERN CULTURE. Although it stands at odds with the Christian heritage and Enlightenment philosophy of liberal democracy, racism persists. We have been raised in a society which has failed to love adequately, and in a theological culture which has too often forgotten that all of humanity is created in God's image. We are not permitted to consider others to be less than ourselves. Just the opposite (Philippians 2:3).

RACISM TODAY

Recently, the permeating influence of racism has been overlooked, even played down. A complacency, and an assumption that we have consigned race to history, has been allowed to develop. Such negligence is no longer permissible.

The moment which has brought this about is the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, U.S.A on May 25th 2020. Mr Floyd, a black U.S. citizen, was killed while being arrested by a white police officer. The circumstances surrounding his death resemble so many other high-profile examples of racially motivated injustice. Rodney King was beaten by police in Los Angeles in 1991. In 1998, a public inquiry found that the Metropolitan Police was 'institutionally racist' following the failure to properly investigate the murder of Stephen Lawrence. In 2014, Ms Dhu died in police custody in South Hedland, Western Australia after officers decided she was exaggerating claims of feeling unwell. The inquest found that both police and medical staff had been 'influenced by preconceived ideas about Aboriginal people.' Following his arrest in a suburb of Paris, Adama Traoré died while being transported to the police station. Conflicting autopsy reports variously record heart failure and asphyxiation as the cause of his death.

These are not isolated cases. In fact, reports like them have become grimly familiar to us. Statistics from the UK Home Office and Ministry of Justice show that, in 2018-19, black people were more than nine times as likely to be stopped and searched as white people, and more than five times as likely to have force used against them by the police. There have been hundreds of moments in the last few years when we should have stopped to reflect, to seek forgiveness and to change. Those opportunities were missed. In God's providence, it has been Mr Floyd's death which has sparked a global movement and has made plain the ongoing injustice of racism in our society. We cannot miss it this time.

KNOWING OUR HISTORY

In God's grace, we are not condemned to repeat our history. History is not a cycle, devoid of hope. It is linear, with a beginning, an end and a purpose⁰¹. It is moving ever onward towards that purpose under the sovereignty of the Alpha and Omega. And yet, we repeat our mistakes. More than that, today's injustices are built on yesterday's sins. The Lord visits 'the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation' (Exodus 34:7).

We need to gain understanding, then, of these past sins in order to tackle the institutional, societal injustices which have resulted from them. We would be wise to heed the call from anti-racism activists to educate ourselves about black history and the legacy of racism. It will be uncomfortable to confront failures in forbears we have revered, even more so to discover hidden faults in ourselves. But this iniquity has been allowed to stand for far too long. We must not allow it to be passed on to yet another generation.

THE CHURCH AND SLAVERY

The body of Christ is called to recognise that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). Yet, Christians have often failed to understand what it means that everyone is created in God's image. The church — even the Reformed church — has been complicit in racism.

The legacy of institutionalised racism in the church began with Portugal's exploration of the African coast in the 15th Century. In 1452, Pope Nicholas V granted Afonso V of Portugal the right to enslave 'Saracens, pagans and any other unbelievers' whom they should encounter. Then, in order to ensure they could fully exploit the lands they had newly discovered, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand made sure the same rights were granted to Spain in relation to the Americas.

Having been thus introduced to the New World, slavery became the foundation of the hugely profitable Caribbean sugar plantations, which came to dominate the economy of the region in the 1640s. Britain played a prominent role in the Atlantic Slave Trade. At the time the Church of England, and other Protestant denominations, tended to condemn the enslavement of Christians while declining to challenge an institution which provided labour for the plantations.

^ohoto by Clay Banks on Unsplash

To this day, the church in the West has not unshackled itself from its racist past. We need to humbly address this aspect of our church culture and theological history.

Churchmen took a more active role in sustaining slavery in North America. The first enslaved Africans were brought to the British colony of Virginia in 1619, and in 1641 Massachusetts became the first colony to formally legalise slavery.

The General Assembly of Virginia, whose commissioners all had to be members of the Anglican church, passed an Act in 1667 which declared 'that the conferring of baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom... masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of Christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of greater growth if capable to be admitted to that sacrament.'

This broadened the enslavement of black people beyond even that which the Medieval Popes allowed. The colony of Virginia did not challenge those whose concern for the loss of enslaved labour was preventing them from sharing the Gospel. Instead, they legislated so that conversion to Christianity was no longer accompanied by emancipation. This act of codified racism helped to normalise slavery in a way which would become a stumbling block to generations of American Christians.

Jonathan Edwards is considered, particularly in the Reformed tradition, to be 'America's greatest theologian'. His preaching on justification by faith in 1734 was used by God to begin a revival in his parish, and his writing on the subject underpinned the Great Awakening in 1739. Less often discussed in Reformed circles is the fact that Edwards owned slaves.

In 1731 he purchased his first enslaved African: a girl, probably 14 years old, named Venus. Records indicate that he also enslaved a boy named Titus. Another enslaved woman named Leah is also recorded as being in his household, though some scholars suggest this is because the family eventually gave Venus a biblical name.

Edwards' view of slavery was considered 'moderate' in his day. He, unlike some other Christians at the time, believed black people could be spiritually equal to white people. He admitted nine black people to full communicant membership of his congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts. He condemned the cruelty of the slave trade. Yet, he never advocated for bodily freedom for enslaved people. In fact, he wrote in 1741 to defend a fellow minister's right to own slaves following criticism from parishioners.

The sin of slavery in the U.S. had consequences felt much closer to home. In his book, *Send Back the*

Money, the historian lain Whyte recounts an episode from early Free Church history which saw a delegation sent to America in the aftermath of the Disruption to seek support for the nascent denomination. The men were warmly received, including in the slaveholding Southern States, and given generous financial contributions. On their return, they were met with sharp criticism from the anti-slavery societies of the day and accused of hypocrisy for advocating for 'the Christian peasantry of Sutherland' all the while accepting support from those who denied enslaved people access to the bible, denied them the freedom to choose the church they attended and broke up families for financial gain. Kirk Sessions within the Free Church insisted that the money should be sent back, and the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale petitioned the second General Assembly, in 1844, to rebuke the American churches for their support of slavery. John 'Rabbi' Duncan told the Assembly that the Free Church would have blood on its hands and a 'slave stone' in every church built using the money. But the money was never sent back. Thomas Chalmers, William Cunningham and Robert Candlish constructed an argument to allow them to state opposition to slavery while keeping the donations. They argued that sending the money back would damage the Christian unity enjoyed with the American churches.

This did not impress the prominent American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, who told a meeting in Dundee in early 1846 that Dr Chalmers had been praised in an American newspaper notorious for supporting slavery. 'Well might the Doctor exclaim,' said Douglass, in an echo of Rabbi Duncan's warning, "What have I done that the wicked speak well of me?"... He need not look far to know what he has done. He has struck hands with them in Christian fellowship, and sanctioned the taking of the blood-stained money to build churches.'0

SINS OF THE FATHERS

These episodes do not negate the good work of Edwards, or of Chalmers. We 'abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good' (Romans 12:9). So, what is the benefit of educating ourselves about these dark episodes from our past? Surely we have moved on and these are mere historical artefacts. It is not so.

The American evangelist, Billy Graham, was considered a 'racial moderate' at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. He desegregated his rallies and invited Dr Martin Luther King Jr. to pray at some

Forgiveness is so obviously required for the racial injustice which continues to damage both society and the church. It is vital that we understand what the problem is, and where it came from. And we must not stop there.

of them. He also believed that the way to solve America's racial crisis was 'one soul at a time'. In other words, convert enough people and they will act as Christians should. This is inadequate because it ignores institutional influences on racial injustice. As the Colony of Virginia proved, laws can create division between people, and can prefer one over another. It also ignores the plain fact that Christians have often been racist.

Dr King wrote, in his Letter from a Birmingham jail in 1963, 'I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.'

It has been argued in the pages of *The Record* that the Free Church's decision to hold onto donations from slaveowners in the American South in the 19th Century paved the way for the denomination's accommodation of Apartheid in South Africa in the 20th Century. The Moderator of the 1986 General Assembly went as far as to call the ruling National Party 'praying Calvinists'.

To this day, the church in the West has not unshackled itself from its racist past. We need to humbly address this aspect of our church culture and theological history. Doctrinal soundness is not the same as perfection. Diversity is God's plan for his creation (Revelation 7:9). We need to be willing to learn from our brothers and sisters despite different theological traditions. There is more to African thought than St Augustine.

RACISM'S LEGACY TODAY

Since the Roman Empire, Europe has been the focal point of Christianity. But the church's future is not white. There are already more Christians in Africa than any other continent. As the number of Christians in Europe declines, it continues to explode in Latin America.

We profess, with Spurgeon, our love for 'these strong old doctrines, that are called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus'. But we need to contend with the fact that, where the church is growing today, it is not Reformed. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are experiencing extraordinary growth in Africa, Latin America and Asia, growing almost twice as fast as global Christianity as a whole.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., there is a significant movement of black people away from mainstream evangelical churches. Many cite the church's failure to address the legacy of racism as the reason. Jemar Tisby, an author and the president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective, has said, 'when I became a Christian, I found myself in a lot of white Evangelical settings. There are some really good things about it: some lifelong friends that I've made, some really foundational spiritual truths that I've learned. But at the same time, there was always a racial and cultural gap.' Tisby concludes that recent, high-profile examples of racial injustice in America brought this divide 'to the surface more starkly in a way you couldn't ignore and revealed just how big that gap was. So, in the past few years especially, the church unfortunately has been a place of pain and mistrust and difficulty for me and I think a lot of others.' Racism's legacy hurts Christians, today.

GOD'S MERCY

God will not clear the guilty. Yet, he is 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exodus 34:6-7). Forgiveness is so obviously required for the racial injustice which continues to damage both society and the church. It is vital that we understand what the problem is, and where it came from. And we must not stop there. We must be part of the solution. It is for us to call out racism wherever we find it — in our society, in our homes and in our hearts. It is for us to love everyone with the love of Christ. It is for us to write to our members of Parliament and demand that the criminal justice system respects everyone equally.

Let us pray with the Psalmist, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!' (Psalm 139:23-24).

⁰¹ Blassingame, John (et al, eds.) *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One*, 1979

⁰² David Bebbington, Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought, 1990



PRESIDENT CRITICISED AT FUNERAL (AMERICAS)



Floyd, whose killing by a police officer sparked protests around the world, have condemned President Donald Trump's response to accusations of police brutality against the black community in the US. Renowned civil rights leader, the Rev. Al Sharpton, told mourners, We are fighting wickedness in high places, and accused Trump of 'scheming on how you can spin the story rather than how you can achieve justice'. In addition, the Rev. William Lawson, whose Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church is located in the community where Floyd grew up, called for societal change. To applause from the gathering, he said, 'Obviously the first thing we have to do is to clean out the White House.'





NI ABORTION REGULATIONS (EUROPE)

In mid-June, MPs at Westminster voted 253-136 in favour of the UK Government's



Northern Ireland Abortion Regulations. CARE reports that the law allows for abortion on demand up to 24 weeks; allows for babies with a disability to be aborted up to birth; removes safeguards such as the requirement for two doctors to sign off on an abortion; and no longer protects women who are coerced into an abortion.

CARE's Chief Executive, Nola Leach, said: 'MPs from England Wales and Scotland have voted for abortion taws in NI that are more extreme than Great Britain-They have ignored the calls from disability campaigners. like Heidi Crowter that the regulations make them feel like second-class citizens. Sadly, these regulations will harm, not help, women and babies. We will continue to advocate for life-affirming laws that respect the right to life and provide proper support for vulnerable women experiencing a crisis pregnancy."

CUBAN PASTOR RELEASED (AMERICAS)

Ramón Rigal, a pastor who has spent the last year in prison and in labour camps for homeschooling his children, has been released on probation, according to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association. Along with some other families, Rigal and his wife, Adya, decided to homeschool as they did not want their children to be taught according to state schools' atheist ideology.

Cuba's Municipal Office of Education has said that it is a criminal offence to lead a child to be absent from school, and that 'in our system, homeschooling is not considered an educational institution, as this term is basically used in countries with capitalist foundations."



U-TURN ON SUNDAY TRADING (EUROPE)



Boris Johnson has set aside plans to suspend Sunday trading laws following opposition from some of his own MPs, and from the Labour Party. The Prime Minister wanted to relax restrictions on Sunday trading as part of measures to boost the economy following lockdown. However, backbench MPs warned Johnson that he would face a significant rebellion from his own MPs, while Labour raised concerns about the impact on shop workers.



KILLINGS 'PAVE THE WAY FOR GENOCIDE' (AFRICA)

The Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), the largest Christian denomination in northeast Nigeria, has claimed that Boko Haram terrorists have carried out more than fifty attacks in the first six months of 2020. The denomination's National President told a press conference that more than 700,000 of their members have been displaced, eight pastors and over 8,370 lay people have been killed and many more have been abducted. The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief has published a report which asserts that Christians in Nigeria are being targeted because of their faith, and that the ideology underlying the violence 'readily mutates into crimes against humanity and can pave the way for genocide'. Human rights organisation The Jubilee Campaign goes even further. In a report submitted to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the group argues that the standard for

genocide has already been reached in this case. Advocacy groups are calling on the international community to put pressure on the Nigerian government to confront the militant groups. However, the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group has concluded that current inaction demonstrates 'at least, wilful negligence; at worst, complicity' on the part of some in the Nigerian security forces.

REVOLUTIONARY GUARD ARRESTS CHRISTIANS (ASIA)



At least 12 Christians have been arrested by Iran's Revolutionary Guard in what has been described as a 'coordinated operation' across three-cities. Article 18, a charity which advocates on behalf of persecuted Christians in Iran, reports that the arrests were made during meetings of house churches. Dozens more of those in attendance were ordered to give their contact details and informed they would be summoned soon for questioning. The arrests come shortly after the Iranian parliament passed a law which could make it easier for Christians and other religious minorities to be targeted. The law must be approved by the Guardian Council before being implemented. The International Organization to Preserve Human Rights believes the new law enables the regime to designate any group as a 'sect' and allows harsh punishment, including the death penalty, to be used. •

EVANGELICAL TV CHANNEL SUSPENDED (ASIA)



Israeli regulators have taken an American evangelical TV channel off the air, according to *Haaretz*. Israel's Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Council said GOD TV's Shelanu

channel hid its intentions when applying for a licence. The channel appeals to Jews with Christian content,' the Council said, but claim its original request stated that it was a 'station targeting' the Christian population'. However, the broadcaster argues the decision is political, saying they were open about their intentions in their application and the regulator has bowed to pressure from anti-missionary groups.

Israeli law protects freedom of religion, and proselytising is permitted as long as missionary activity is not aimed at children and does not include economic coercion.



FREE CHURCH NEWS (

UPDATE FROM WfM

BY FIONA MACASKILL

N MANY WAYS IT FEELS MORE LIKE THE START OF SPRING THAN THE START OF SUMMER. There is a sense of change coming as things start to open up again. As we come out of these dark few months, though, we can look back and see that God's work has been continuing and flourishing. Despite the months spent at home, the WfM ladies have continued to keep the current Mobilising for Mission project alive and we are encouraged by the donations which are steadily coming in.

We have some exciting new developments on our website. We are now set up to take donations online when you fill in our donations form. It is simple and easy to use and a few donations have already been made this way. Please check it out at: womenformission.org/donate

For those who would prefer not to donate online, they can still do so by post or by bank transfer – all the details are online. It is also now possible to apply to our Support a Volunteer and Heart for Home funds online. Please have a look at the information on the website about both of these funds and share the details with anyone you think may benefit from either of these opportunities.

Usually we are able to share with you at the AGM about some of the encouraging ways in which the money given from Support a Volunteer and Heart for Home is used, but sadly this year that wasn't possible. All was not lost, however, and, in true corona style, the committee held a Zoom AGM from the comfort of our own homes. There was no afternoon tea and no visiting speakers, but the work of WfM must go on and we were able to make several important decisions.

We are sadly going to have to postpone the conference planned for September this year. It was felt unlikely that things would have relaxed to the extent where such a large gathering would be permissible. The conference is not cancelled, however, merely postponed to September 2021, when we hope to bring you a day of encouragement and fellowship.

Please keep an eye on our website as we will soon be putting up details of a short series of videos which will go live on 19th September, the day we were supposed to meet. We hope to bring you a word from some of the speakers we had already booked and will also launch our new 2020/21 project that day with videos from the organisations we will be supporting.

Calling all missing cookbooks! Do you have any new copies of either of the cookbooks? You may have heard that the printer who was storing our remaining copies had a fire and we lost the remaining stock. Before potentially reprinting we are keen to find out if there are any new copies stored anywhere that we are not aware of. If you have any in your church could you please email: **recipebooks@womenformission.org**

NEWS FROM LAKHNADON CHRISTIAN HOSPITAL BY REV. DR DONALD M. MACDONALD

NUMBER OF PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME HOW LAKHNADON HOSPITAL IS FARING. Medical mission has always been an integral part of Christian witness in India. The Free Church medical work begun by Dr Annie Mackay in the early 1920s has been developed over the years by missionaries from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Australia, as well as by national staff. In 1974 Lakhnadon Christian Hospital was incorporated into Emmanuel Hospital Association, an indigenous evangelical organisation in North India, with headquarters in New Delhi (eha-health.org). I was seconded by the Free Church to EHA while I worked in Lakhnadon from 1973 to 1988 and enjoyed

an excellent partnership, especially in the provision of staff and of training.

In recent years EHA has had difficulty staffing the smaller rural hospitals, due largely to new government regulations. For well over a year EHA has been unable to appoint a doctor to Lakhnadon, so income has dried up. Lakhnadon has received financial help from other EHA units while they are working out a plan for the future of the hospital. While most of the staff have been transferred to other EHA units, the remaining staff have continued to carry out the community palliative care programme, which is a crying need in rural India, where many people die at home in unrelieved suffering

and pain. They care for about thirty patients within a 30-km radius of the Hospital. As in Britain, palliative care in India has been pioneered by voluntary agencies, including Christian ones.

Recently I met an Indian doctor, a Hindu, who saw the need for palliative care in South India many years ago and came to the UK to study the hospice movement before returning to set up a palliative care programme. He has devoted himself to promoting palliative care throughout India. I asked him if he thought there is still a place for mission hospitals in India, and he assured me that there is, especially in fields like palliative care which are neglected by government and other agencies.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown, Lakhnadon Hospital is now facing extra pressure due to shortage of funds, while continuing to support suffering people through palliative care and food distribution. Although the Mission Board no longer sends regular support to LCH, anyone who wishes to give some financial support to the palliative care work may contact the Mission Coordinator, Màiri MacPherson, at **mission@freechurch.org**.

For further information about Lakhnadon Christian Hospital, please contact **dmmacdonald16@tiscali.co.uk**

FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS STORIES

VERTHE SUMMER WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARINGA'FCYC STORY' EACH WEEK ON OUR WEBSITE (FREECHURCHYOUTHCAMPS. org/stories). The stories are told by some of the people who have been involved in Free Church Youth Camps over the past 60 years, and show how God has worked in their lives through the camps. We thought we'd share two of these stories with you here — one from a camper who attended camps in the early years, and one from a camper who went to camp more recently, and is now one of our leaders •

I owe an enormous debt to Free Church Youth Camps.

I began to attend back in the 1960s. I recently met a young student who seemed to know a whole lot about the '60s. I discovered she had chosen the period as a module in her history degree!

So how did Jesus use these long-ago summers in my life?

Camps were used by him to open my eyes. Growing up in two small churches in Easter Ross, I assumed Christianity was just for older people. I remember my surprise when I met other teenagers at camp who had the same interests as me (mainly football and music) but who were also committed to Christ. I came to realise that Jesus was for my age group too and he opened my eyes to the relevance of his gospel.

Camps were used by him to widen my circle. Every year I would meet friends from past camps and make new friends. When I went to university in Aberdeen, I already knew lots of young people in the Free Church there, from all over Scotland, almost every one of whom I had met at camp.

Camps were used by him to open my mouth. As a camper and then a leader, camps gave me my first opportunities to share my testimony, lead discussions and give talks. This led eventually to full-time ministry in very different contexts: a Highland village, a theological college, a city congregation, a church plant and then part-time preaching in the Hebrides. All because of camps!

May Jesus continue to bless the ministry of our Camps for a long time to come.

Rev. Alasdair I Macleod, Edinburgh

I have been involved in Free Church Youth Camps for five years, as a leader at Kincraig Girls Camp. It is always a pleasure to be part of a team, teaching young people about Jesus, and to be part of FCYC. Before being a leader I was a camper myself as a teenager - I attended two summer camps as a camper. One year I even talked my friend into coming along to a Free Church camp with me, and we decided on a pony-trekking camp, despite neither of us having any experience of horses! We mistakenly thought we might be intermediate riders, which caused some fun moments...! As a camper I was always so nervous and shy, but I always had fun when I was there, and was always inspired by the amazing leaders. After attending a few local presbytery camps under the leadership of Susan MacLean, she asked me to help, firstly as a 'young leader' at these camps, and from there I was honoured to be asked to be a leader at FCYC. That was five years ago, and I have led at camp every year since!

I love working with such inspirational leaders and amazing young people, and I love the confidence it gives me. Sharing my faith with young people has made me surer in myself and in my faith, and working with other Christians of different ages is such a special and encouraging experience. God has used camps to bring me closer to him as we have had the pleasure of seeing him work through us as leaders, and working in the lives of the young people we serve. Being involved in camps has given me confidence, brought me closer to God, and I have made so many great friends through serving at camps.

Eilidh Talbot, Kyle of Lochalsh

AUG/SEPT 2020 PRAYER DIARY

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Matthew 24:35

Mon 10th Pray that all our politicians and other leaders will govern us with integrity and transparency as we move on from months of lockdown.

Tues 11th As teachers and pupils prepare to return to school, pray that they will be able to settle into their school environment without too much difficulty after such a long absence.

Wed 12th Pray for the 20schemes teams in Maryhill and Barlanark (Glasgow), that they would be able to share the gospel with those in their community as the mass stabbings in June come up in conversations.

Thurs 13th Pray for all those who have been made redundant over the past months due to the lockdown and will be facing financial difficulties.

Fri 14th Give thanks with the congregation of Kilmallie and Ardnamurchan as they welcome Rev. Dr Euan Dodds and his family into their manse. Pray for the growth of the gospel in that area.

Sat 15th As lockdown eases and we are able to meet in our buildings, pray that many of the people who have listened to messages online will be happy to join a group of believers and find a welcome even though there may be rules that make fellowship different.

Sun 16th Pray for the Lochgilphead and Tarbert congregation and Rev. Rodger Crooks, their interim moderator. Pray for blessing in that community.

Mon 17th Continue to remember our schoolchildren and young adults as they face the future with some trepidation after months of lockdown.

Tues 18th Continue to remember those who have been bereaved during lockdown as grieving with family and friends has been so restricted. Pray they will be comforted.

Wed 19th Give thanks for the work of Scott Matheson as he steps down from his role as CEO, and pray for the Board of Trustees as they work to secure a suitable replacement. **Thurs 20th** Remember all our brothers and sisters in India who are grateful for the financial support they received from our denomination. Pray for wisdom as this is distributed.

Fri 21st Give thanks for the licensing of Peter Turnbull last month and for the encouragements there have been in the Burghead congregation.

Sat 22nd Today Scripture Union's Big Celebration is going online. Pray for good connections as they celebrate what God has done in the past year and look forward to the year ahead.

Sun 23rd Pray for our Christian brothers and sisters on the islands of Mull and Coll and Rev. James Beaton, their interim moderator.

Mon 24th The Scottish Bible Society is supporting young girls in Guatemala who are pregnant and unable to receive education or health services. Pray that these young mothers will find hope in God.

Tues 25th Recent floods wiped away 90 per cent of the crops in one of the regions where Tearfund works in South Sudan. Pray for the workers and those they serve in a place where nearly one in ten do not live to see their fifth birthday.

Wed 26th Pray for all those who have suffered physically or mentally as a result of lockdown, that many would hear the Gospel and know the peace of God that passes understanding.

Thurs 27th Give thanks for the many efforts that were made to facilitate online holiday clubs by SU, the Bible Society and individual congregations. Pray that blessing will follow these.

Fri 28th Pray for Street Pastors and other Christian ministries who offer reassurance and support to vulnerable people at night in many of our towns and cities.

Sat 29th Pray for our gracious Queen and the royal family. Give thanks for her faithful service to the country and her faith in God, and pray that her family will come to faith in the Lord Jesus. **Sun 30**th Continue to pray for the Badenoch congregation and Rev. John de la Haye, their interim moderator. Give thanks that Rev. Alistair Wilson is able to support them in their vacancy.

Mon 31st The ETS opening service is scheduled to take place this evening. Pray for the work of the seminary as it begins a new year in unusual circumstances.

Tues 1st Pray for all the students in the Seminary, especially those just starting their course. Give thanks for the variety of courses available to study.

Wed 2nd Give thanks for the Bible 2020 app which was created as a way to let the global church join together and cover the earth with God's Word. Now, more than ever, there is an opportunity to speak truths aloud and encourage one another.

Thurs 3rd HaGefan Publishing's OT app 'HaEdut' has been widely downloaded during the lockdown. Pray that it will be used by God to bring Jewish people to himself and strengthen existing believers.

Fri 4th Pray for all those in the community around Govanhill church who have not been able to go to the various activities run in the building. Pray that as lockdown eases these can be resumed.

Sat 5th Pray for all those working with 20schemes as they often encounter situations where abuse has broken people. Pray that lives are transformed and turned to Jesus.

Sun 6th As the Dingwall and Strathpeffer congregation became vacant during lockdown, pray for them and Rev. Calum Iain Macleod as they begin the work of finding a new pastor.





EDUCATION – STIMULATE, ENCOURAGE & TEST

HIS MONTH, THE RECORD IS FOCUSSING ON THE **THEME OF EDUCATION.** For ETS, this is a topic that is very close to home. The Seminary has almost 180 years of history in providing education. Shortly after the Free Church was formed in 1843, a training college for ministers was founded. This initially became New College, located in the beautiful building which is now part of Edinburgh University. In the aftermath of the 1900 union (when most of the Free Church joined with the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church), education continued at the Free Church College. And just over 100 years later, the College was renamed Edinburgh Theological Seminary. So, from 1843 right through to today, theological education has been a huge part of the life and work of the Free Church of Scotland.

The priorities of the first generation of educators in the Free Church hold important lessons for us today. At the heart of their vision for higher education was the local church: training men to go and serve congregations and share the good news.

William Cunningham was one of the early professors of Free Church's college and the second Principal, replacing Thomas Chalmers after he passed away in 1847. In his speech at the opening of the New College building 1851, Cunningham set out three key objectives of a theological education. Education, he thought, should stimulate, encourage and test. And these are three helpful lessons for us to remember today.

So, first, education should stimulate — it should never be boring! And yet often, that can be our experience. Cunningham is reminding us that, whether it is science, technology, history or the arts, learning new stuff should never be dull. And if that is true of these subjects, it is definitely true of theology. That is because the subject being studied is God, who is most definitely the most mind-blowing subject we can ever study. But that stimulation isn't just confined to the seminary classroom. The weekly preaching of God's word should provide exactly the same stimulating education in the whole message of Scripture. Every week, we want to learn something new about our amazing God.

Secondly, Cunningham says education should encourage. Learning any subject is daunting, and the mind-blowing depths of theology are the most daunting of all. Very often we can feel that, because we've got so far to go, there is little point in even starting. Of course, that is not true. Whether we are teaching a child their first words or teaching a 90 year old to use Zoom, learning something new should be encouraging. We need to encourage people to have a go, to ask questions, to keep going, to try again, to learn from mistakes and to try things they didn't think they could do. It's a reminder that at every stage, education should be given in an environment where mistakes aren't criticised, where lack of knowledge isn't mocked, and where expectations are fair. We must never forget that every Christian is a disciple, and every disciple is a learner. So whatever educational context we are in, encouragement is essential, and that is especially true of studying theology. So if you are thinking of studying theology, William Cunningham would be shouting, 'Go for it!'

Thirdly, education should test. This doesn't feel so friendly. Indeed, often we can be put off education, or crippled during it, because of the pressure of assessment. So what is Cunningham saying? Well, one of the big emphases that Cunningham made in his life was that knowledge must always be useful. And that is where testing becomes helpful. Testing is not about showing who is smartest. It is about ensuring that something is useful. If you are building a bridge, you test it, not to prove that it's the best, but to prove that it will stay up. And for Cunningham, exactly the same applies to theological education. Testing is important, not so that we can produce academic geniuses, but so that we can produce useful pastors. And that brings us back to the point made at the start: that at the heart of the vision of the early Free Church educationalists was the longing to see the local church being served by well-equipped pastors. That's the goal of education in the Free Church. In the years since, there have been many other helpful things learned about education. But alongside these, there is much to be gained from remembering what Cunningham said: Education should stimulate, encourage and test. •

2020

WHAT I LEARNED FROM HOMESCHOOLING

DAYSPRING MACLEOD submits her end of term review

T MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT EIGHT OR NINE MONTHS AGO THAT I LAST VISITED A PARTICULAR CHURCH IN EDINBURGH WHERE I ALWAYS ENCOUNTERED ONE OF MY HOMESCHOOLING FRIENDS. 'I could never do that,' I told her. 'I just don't have the patience.' 'Oh, I'm sure you do,' she said. 'No, really...I don't,' I assured her.

I had this exact same thought every time I met up with a homeschool mum. It sounded awful. In the house all the time, breaking up fights, eking out lesson by painstaking lesson, devising crafts to fill in the time, making up lesson plans in the evening. I did not want to do that. I wanted my children to go away for several hours a day, where the learning could be invisible, presented to me over the months like unexpected gifts. I liked it when the eldest would come home using Gaelic phrases I didn't know. I liked finding out she could write her name. I even liked it when she recognised a song on the radio and said she'd heard it on the school bus. I especially liked it when both older children were at school and nursery, and the baby slept — quiet time to myself! I could not imagine even a single scenario in which I would ever attempt homeschooling. Yes, there are things being taught in state schools that worry me, but I reasoned that I would simply teach the children the biblical truth at home, and equip them to go into their schools as salt, light, and card-carrying members of Scripture Union.

Few of us had ever imagined lockdown. No school for three months? At the beginning of the year — even at the beginning of March! — it sounded ridiculous, impossible. But by the third week of March, my household had decided to self-isolate, and since schools were not yet sending materials for home learning, I took matters into my own hands.

It sounds funny now: I planned to fill the whole day with different subjects. I bought a maths practice book, a wipe-clean handwriting book, a myriad of blank notebooks and pens, a set of watercolours and 'classic paintings' cards (because my five-yearold and three-year-old were going to make copies of these paintings), and fancy illustrated children's books on the Bible, Egyptology (!), animals, and, of course, sticker books of Viking life and world landmarks. There was also Gaelic CBeebies to keep them going in their second language, plus all the materials the school sent home the following week. So what did homeschooling look like?

Well, it turns out that sitting a five-, three- and oneyear-old around one table is never going to be quiet and orderly, so there were a lot of Cheerio bribes. The Egyptology has barely been touched. The five-year-old did paint the Mona Lisa – in rainbow colours, with a unicorn horn. The Viking stickers mostly have people sitting in dogs/on houses/ in the sea, inaccurately. The children tolerated Gaelic CBeebies for about three weeks. The many notebooks have all been cannibalised for paper dolls. So did we learn anything?

Well, the five-year-old learned her letters and made some progress in numbers; a few fundamentals of reading and writing; thirteen new Bible memory verses; and, erm, roller-skating.

The three-year-old, whom I had previously completely underestimated, was potty-trained within the first two weeks, mastered all his phonetic sounds (he has a speech difficulty), and saw massive improvement with his motor skills and words.

I learned quite a lot myself.

I learned that I like my children a lot more when I see them as people, with thoughts and ideas and personalities, rather than as objects to be moved in and out of a car as quickly as possible.

I learned that, while I really do lack patience, this grows through being tested — and through the encouragement of air-punching, shouting, leaping exultation when a child has a real breakthrough.

I learned that when I said 'I can't', or 'they can't', what I really meant was 'I can't be bothered.'

I learned that the best days often took the most

effort — setting up an obstacle course in the garden or building an enormous spider web with toilet roll is tiring, but it's also memorable and wholesome and, in the end, so much more satisfying than putting on another *Paw Patrol*.

I learned that the children are much more versatile than I am; while I was thinking about my fears and my homesickness and pining for the garden centre, the kids loved being home. They loved spending so much time together just pottering around the garden or walking down to the park. Which is pretty instructive when I remember the pressure I used to put myself under to make sure they got out and did something fun or interesting every day.

I learned how blessed we really were to have a garden and house. I used to look around and see nothing but the repairs and cleaning needing done. Now I see long afternoons outside in a hot April, eating ice lollies, as the privilege it is.

I learned about racism and prejudice and privilege from watching the news, and finally had that hard conversation with my daughter about how some people face terrible hardship just because of the way they look.

I learned the joy of teaching my oldest child the Bible and talking about the verses she learned – when else would I have found time for that?

I learned that things which seem like they will pass quickly actually go by in the blink of an eye. The days of separation from Granny seem a long time ago. The walks where I would veer wildly off the path if someone looked like they would pass within six feet of me – gone. I saw two airplanes overhead today. Two! The months of hearing no aircraft overhead felt like a dream. I've been in traffic jams, got delayed by construction, gone back to the grocery store, had a few takeaway coffees from McDonalds. There is no end in sight for this virus, but it won't be forever; it will pass. I wish, and perhaps you're like me when you look back on your own hard times, that I had kept that sense of proportion when actually walking through the valley.

Some days I'm a good mother and teacher. Other days I have a lot of repenting to do by bedtime. Often I wish I were still the child, carrying no burdens, letting my parents worry about the big world. And then I remember that I am, for God has said *'Even to old age...I will carry you'* (Isaiah 46:4). I am so glad to know that even at the end of a bad day, when I've been fearful and lost my temper and, frankly, had a big tantrum or two — I can still say sorry and know the Lord's gentle presence saying 'This is all too big for you, let Me carry it.'

Life goes by so fast. I was a child, and now I'm a mum; before I know it my children will be worrying about how to raise their own! And for me, and my children, and their children, the best lesson we could learn is 'Rest your head on the Father's shoulder, and let him carry you.'

A PLACE FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS? BY REV. DAVID ROBERTSON

'The tendency [of those who promote public education] is to hold that this system must be altogether secular. The atheistic doctrine is gaining currency, even among professed Christians and even among some bewildered Christian ministers, that an education provided by the common government should be entirely emptied of all religious character' (AA Hodge – 1880).

EAR AFTER YEAR I HAVE SUGGESTED TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THAT THE FREE CHURCH NEEDS TO TAKE

EDUCATION SERIOUSLY and that we need to start preparing for the day when it would be impossible for any Christian parent, in good conscience, to send their children to the local state indoctrination centre (what we used to call 'schools'!). Year after year that plea was ignored. But thanks to the kindness of the editor, I will, like Bruce's spider, try, try and try again.

Consider this. Christian children spend perhaps one hour per week in church and Sunday School. They spend over 30 in school, where as well as being taught the three 'R's – reading, riting, and rithmatic – they are indoctrinated into a liberal secular humanist worldview. They are the subjects of a social engineering experiment which is totalitarian and illiberal. An experiment which is backed up both by mainstream and social media.

The rot is in too deep for Scotland's formerly Christian state education system to be reclaimed. We need an educational revolution.

The basic problem is that we have moved away from the foundation of Scottish education – Christianity. When the root is removed, the fruit will soon decay.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There is no reason why we just have to accept the atheistic secularist agenda as the default one. The United Nations Charter on Human Rights declares in Article 26 that 'everyone has the right to education' and that 'education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages'. It also states as an absolute principle that 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. The European Convention on Human Rights Protocol 1, Article 2, states, 'in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and teaching, the state shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions'.

Given that the State schools are rapidly becoming centres of secular humanist and Queer theory indoctrination, is it not time for the Church in Scotland to return to the vision of Knox – that where there is a church, there is also a school?

OBJECTIONS...

In the 25 years that I have been arguing for this, the objections have always been the same. Are Christian schools not elitist? Socially divisive? Are things really that bad? Who is going to pay? Often those who make the objections are remembering with fondness their time as school pupils decades ago.

It is important to note that Christians are not just concerned with protecting our own children. We want to serve the poor.

The current school system is increasingly elitist and socially divisive. If you have the money you can send your children to expensive private schools (as do one-third of parents in Edinburgh), or you can pay the financial premium to buy a house in a nice suburb with a good state school. But Christian schools would be for all. It is important to note that Christians are not just concerned with protecting our own children. We want to serve the poor. We need to remember and repeat our history – think not just Knox and Chalmers, but also Thomas Guthrie and his Ragged Schools.

Yes – things really are that bad. All is not well in Scotland's education system. Declining standards, lack of aspiration, educational apartheid, the lack of parental involvement, the remodelling of schools into centres for social engineering rather than education, the low morale amongst many teachers, and the obsession of politicians with figures and targets are all indications of a struggling system.

WHO IS GOING TO PAY?

We pay taxes which are used for education. Why should those taxes not be used for Christian schools? It is after all our human right. They are used in Scotland for Catholic, Jewish and Muslim schools. It would surely be religious discrimination for the government to refuse to grant those same rights to the Free Church or other evangelical churches? Perhaps we could operate a voucher system or be like the Dutch, with their state-funded church schools?

It's possibly already too late, but if the Free Church is serious about education, the poor and reclaiming Scotland for Christ, then we must do more than complain, shrug our shoulders and walk away. The rot is in too deep for Scotland's formerly Christian state education system to be reclaimed. We need an educational revolution. All the churches in Scotland need to take education seriously again. We need to pray, think, invest resources and look for the highest quality education for all. It's time for Christians in Scotland to regain the Christian vision for education in Scotland. 'In the absence of a coherent worldview, secular education is fragmenting knowledge. Unrelated bits of information give no basis to grasp a vision like Comenius's to change the world through education. The secular university knows no Messiah that promises a kingdom to the poor, the weak, the sick and the sorrowing destitute.' Vishnal Mangelwadi, The Book That Made Your World

Rev. David Robertson is Director of Third Space, an evangelism project based in Sydney, Australia. He is a Free Church minister and former Moderator of the General Assembly.

HOME EDUCATION: SHOULD YOU MOVE FROM PART-TIME TO FULL-TIME? BY MELANIE MANN AND DR JOSH MANN

SIT ON OUR WELL-LOVED COUCH AT HOME WITH TWO WARM BODIES LEANING HARD AGAINST ME. We are lost in a book experiencing life from the vantage point of a young boy who lived centuries before us. His life is in danger. We wonder if he will survive. He is tucked up in a bundle of straw and secretly whisked away from his captors. We wonder what will happen next. He safely reaches his homeland. We rejoice. We are being educated. And our home (or wherever we happen to be) is our 'classroom'.

Taking on our children's education is not to be taken lightly. It can feel very daunting. Isn't this a job for someone who has had years of training? Will I ruin my children? What will people say? Will my kids turn out 'weird'? What about the socialisation concerns? These are good questions, but the truth is that most Christian parents are capable of home the command to 'be fruitful and multiply'. Children are viewed as God's blessing, and parents have a special responsibility for teaching them God's ways. Consider too how that intuitive sense of duty naturally occurs when your helpless babe is placed into your arms to nourish. We remember that sense of responsibility when we left the hospital with our firstborn child thinking, They're letting us go home by ourselves!? (We did fine as, I'm sure, did you.) Children are born with this intrinsic need to be fed, clothed, and, in due course, guided to understand the great big world and the things in it. We are educating our children from day one, and we have a particular responsibility to disciple them, and to teach them about God.

So what about 'full-time' home-educating? When a work situation meant we would move from the

educating, and the fears associated with it can be overcome with a little learning. But before

Every parent has a God-given responsibility to educate their children. The question is whether it will be part-time—in conjunction with a state or Christian school—or full-time.

we mention reasons to homeschool, we would like to suggest that every parent has a God-given responsibility to educate their children. The question is whether it will be part-time—in conjunction with a state or Christian school—or full-time in what is usually called homeschooling. We have chosen the latter for this season of our life, and we will share some advantages below. But first, Scripture shows God initiating the marriage relationship and issuing support groups, and other resources. These come in a variety of Christian perspectives (and even some non-Christian), so one must set stereotypes of homeschooling aside. (We feel our children's education is more robust and diverse than our state or Christian school experiences.)

Homeschooling can have many advantages. You can educate from an explicitly Christian perspective, exploring a broad range of subjects

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with love and respect for knowledge and learning as God-ordained.

You can tailor your child's education. Children are not machines. We cannot put in one thing and expect them all to turn out the same and in the same time frame. Your child will have the advantage of working at his/her own pace and receiving adequate attention.

You can foster a love of learning. There is flexibility in home education to adapt material to the interests of your child to ensure that they learn important subjects (and even 'facts'), but in a way that engages them and keeps them interested and wanting more. We also do a lot of learning through

reading stories which are by engaging nature. In healthy homes, there is freedom from

negative peer-

Homeschooling can have many advantages. You can educate from an explicitly Christian perspective, exploring a broad range of subjects with love and respect for knowledge and learning as God-ordained.

of education.

with your children.

Christian parent will consider their options, take responsibility to intentionally choose what feel they is the best educational path for their child, and view

pressure and influences. Obviously children can experience negativity at home, too. But if your home is healthy, your children are less likely to be bullied or peer-pressured into negative behaviour. (Note: we think socialisation is important and our children spend time every week, nearly every day, with others, including other children.)

You have the opportunity to explore a wide variety of subjects for which a traditional school model does not always have time or funding.

Lessons can be short and to the point, creating more time for free play, wonder and imagination. (Our children can usually get through their day's work in half of a regular school day.)

Homeschooling develops strong family relationships. We learn to work through our differences and love unconditionally. This takes their own role in educating and discipling their child as primary.

time and space, and we feel it is an important part

Similarly, your time together as a family enables

the child to learn what a healthy family life looks

like and how to participate in the household

chores and activities. There are subtle lessons in

relationships, economics, and other important life

skills on display. You will never regret the time spent

We want to add: homeschooling is not for everyone.

It does not make sense in every scenario. It is not

easy. It is nearly impossible without one parent

spending significant time at home. But we hope every

To learn more about homeschooling, we recommend starting with Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, For the Children's Sake. We also run a podcast called Forming Home in which we discuss broader issues to do with making your home a place for the family to thrive (for more, see forminghome.com).

Dr Josh Mann has a PhD in New Testament from the University of Edinburgh and currently works for a biblical language-learning software company in addition to running a couple of small charities. Melanie Mann has a BA in Music Education and spent six years as a schoolteacher before working in the home full-time, where she homeschools and continues to offer music lessons to others.

STATE SCHOOLS ARE OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE BY DR ANN MACDONALD

T IS OF GREATER IMPORTANCE THAT A TEACHER BE A GOOD MAN THAN A SKILLED TEACHER.' Thus was the suggestion made to Hugh Miller, 19th-century geologist and Free Church leader, and thus his reply: 'Would you choose your tailor on such a principle?'

If we are to do all things as unto the Lord, then we will aim high for our children's education.

Teaching has been a graduate-only profession in Scotland since the 1980s, and teachers have expertise in pedagogy, psychology and child development that parents cannot match. They are skilled in recognising learning difficulties and in creating socially-just learning environments in which barriers to learning are overcome. Secondary schools offer experts in every

discipline. Homeschooling cannot compete with this, and in Christian schooling, as an inevitable consequence of scale, there will be less expertise. Online resources might be used, but if the pandemic has taught educators anything, it is that online learning has significant limitations. Teaching is relational, and relies on eye contact, social cues and nuanced asides, none of which are possible onscreen.

Current arguments against state schooling tend to centre on the moral environment. Much Christian discourse constructs schools as cesspits of evil, intent on the indoctrination and corruption of pupils. If trans activists were to enjoy free rein, this might, in time, prove true, but this is a far cry from my experience of working with teachers. Rather, I observe a tendency towards social conservatism: a profession slow to adopt current 'gender identity' agendas, to which, in any case, secular feminist groups are mounting successful resistance. But Christian parents are wise to keep watch, and, if need be, to exercise their right to withdraw their child from sex education just as they are entitled to do for religious education.

While there is merit in vigilance over the moral trajectory of state schooling, there are causes for rejoicing too. Schools are kinder and gentler places than they were 40 years ago. The tawse is gone, and with it the teacher brutality of former generations. For this we must surely give credit

to the God of all mercy, who bestows common grace on teachers, Christian and non-Christian

I learned that day that the realm of secular learning was not booby-trapped to topple me from my faith-perch: God himself is the alpha and omega of all learning.

alike. The teacher who sang 'Ann MacDonald is a pest' (you can guess the tune) to my forlorn and tearful eight-year-old self would be relieved of her job today. This is moral progress.

Christian parents and teachers are called upon to be salt and light in a broken world. But how is that to be if we withdraw from our community schools? Both Christian and home schooling are for the relatively privileged - for parents who can afford fees, or for one parent to remain unwaged. Depressing though it is for educators, research suggests that the most reliable predictor of a child's educational success is the home environment, so the children of loving Christian parents will thrive, wherever they are schooled. But for underprivileged children the state school system is not merely a source of education, it is a lifeline. For some, it is the primary source of food and warmth, a place of safety and belonging. For others, who hear only words of anger and rejection at home, it is where they receive the affirmation that the teacher knows they need.

State schooling is essential for a just society, and Christians ought to be full participants.

But, more than all of this, the state school system in Scotland is our Christian heritage. Was it not John Knox himself whose vision for a school in every parish laid the foundation for an education system ever since vaunted as world-class? Education was a religious ideal: it enabled ordinary people to read their Bibles. From this ideal emerged a meritocratic system which offered equality of opportunity to all (or, at least, to all boys). Whilst parish school provision was to be delivered by churches, the Reformation view was that it was the responsibility of governments to ensure provision for the education of their children, not only for religious instruction, but for the common good. Consequently, after the 1872 Education Act, the churches voluntarily transferred their schools to the state system.

So, far from being a threat to our faith tradition, the national system of secular education is the conceptual birth-child of our Founding Fathers. The road from Ragged Schools to state schooling is paved with the names of our church worthies: Chalmers, Guthrie, Cunningham, Candlish, Begg and Miller. Are we not then the custodians of their vision?

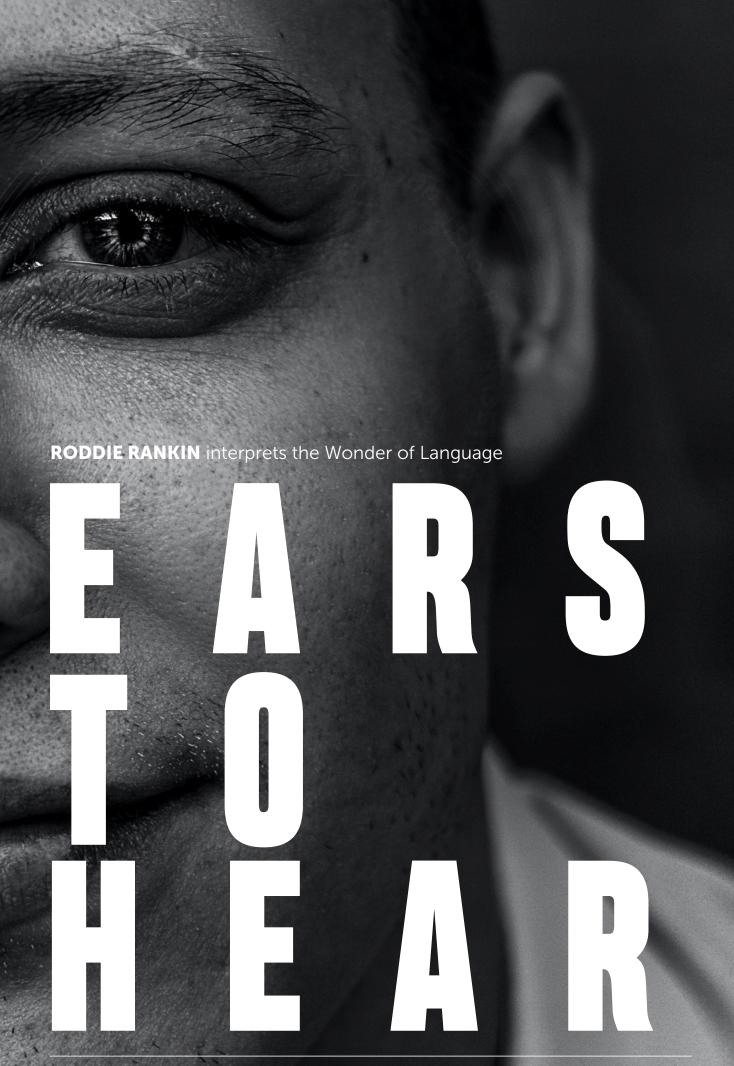
My own father, recently translated to Glory, valued learning above almost all things, save faith itself. As children, we received the six-day creation

narrative as unproblematic; God made, and God saw that it was good. Thus, returning from school new weight of

one day carrying the troubling new weight of Darwin's theory of evolution, I sought confirmation of my prior understanding. It wasn't forthcoming. Dad, a research scientist himself, held Darwin in the highest esteem, and was entirely at peace with the dual concepts of a creator-God and an old earth. I learned that day that the realm of secular learning was not booby-trapped to topple me from my faith-perch: God himself is the alpha and omega of all learning.

Christian parents, commit your children to the Lord in the morning, and send them school-wards knowing that he sees them and he keeps them from harm or accident, physical and spiritual. For, where covenant children are, are not the angels there also?

Dr Ann MacDonald is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, where she teaches in the Institute for Education, Teaching and Leadership at Moray House.



HESE ARE WORDS. I AM A SENTENCE. THIS IS LANGUAGE.

Words and sentences and language do not for the most part draw attention to themselves, but to the meanings they convey. Words make sentences; sentences make languages. In this way we all learned the languages we speak. Our mother-tongue, so easily acquired in early life, becomes invisible in adulthood. An ever-present tool, it is forgotten once the concepts, scenes and stories it constructs have gripped our minds.

Yet wonder lies about her! Here we call our mothertongue, and all her cousins, out from the shadows of meanings. Let's marvel at our languages, for their story, too, is worth the telling. From its earliest chapters sublime vistas open out, as you and I make first acquaintance with the Word...

To start with, the Word was. No tongue had spoken: There were no tongues to speak. Just the Word, marvellous In Power. Silent, poised. Not Words to confuse: A singular Word, everywhere When there was no where to be, But God-where, and there The Word was. Eternally Communing. Then He spoke; Broke the silence and was heard By nothing, which, having heard Ceased to be. A something New – the first course Of reality, laid on words Of endless potency, Began its surge to light. Then stars Flared their 'Amens,' and all Beneath their gaze began to stir. This Word-song; this sentence Of decree, hailed Spring-time In creation, till final syllable, And the exclamation marks Of you and me!

You and I. Us. Writer and reader. Dumb animals? We are not! With our Word-given personhood, selfawareness, agency and imagination we are capable of deep relationships. For these we need to communicate. Communication needs language. You and I have language: our thesaurus or treasury of words to arrange as suits our style and purpose. Take time with me now to explore the wonder of this oft-forgotten gift.

LANGUAGE POWER

You're a waste of space. You'll come to nothing. I have a dream. I love you. Let there be light. Your sins are forgiven. Potent words. Languages are powerful tools to get a job done.

Some are specialised.

A population that has remained isolated for many hundreds of years tends to develop a ferociously impenetrable grammar. Succeeding generations add to its complexity as they describe the same activities with increasing detail. Their children naturally soak up this detail in childhood and so the language eventually becomes as unapproachable as a table of logarithms. The Siberian language Ket is an example, which no outsider has been able to learn fluently! Yet, as a tool for life on the tundra it is finely honed.

Some are multi-tools.

The conquest of speakers of one language by speakers of another produces a different outcome. It necessitates adult learning, and adults can't assimilate detail as infant learners do. They tend to simplify language and crossfertilise vocabulary. Repeated cycles of this process, along with movement of speakers and new experiences, broadens the lexicon, as tributaries feed a mighty river. English is a prominent example. It functions successfully across the globe and in every field of knowledge: a tool with dazzling versatility, rigour and finesse. From crosswords to comedy, rap to rhapsody, poetry to oratory, it grips by its power. Without it most of us would be marooned on a lonely island of silent impotence. (A pause to thank God for your English tongue would be fitting here. More blesséd still the polyglots!)

All convey power.

With language we gain control. It enables us to cooperate and command in order to adapt the environment for our benefit. It precedes the creation of imagined and real worlds: where people write 'once upon a time', or God says 'let there be'.

LANGUAGE PROLIFERATION

We who speak English inevitably regard it as a 'real' language. How many real languages are there? Let's add French, German, Gaelic, Mandarin... how many? The astonishing answer is about 7,000! In these unique tongues the human race conducts the serious business of life: work and play, worship and prayer.

Where did this wealth of linguistic diversity originate? In answering this we must remember that all languages have changed through time. Sorry, but there was no Gaelic at Babel, let alone Eden! World languages are divided into families. The languages of each family go back to an original population speaking a language now lost. As their descendants spread and separated from one another, each group's language developed in unique ways. Over thousands of years entirely new languages emerged. The similarities in vocabulary of those languages today betrays their single ancestor. An example is the Indo-European family which hosts such surprising cousins as Urdu, Russian, Icelandic, Gaelic and English!

Our Bible gives an account of the beginnings of now long-lost languages: Adam, already a fluent communicator, adds to his vocabulary the names of animals (Genesis 2:19, 20); a group of people of common tongue at Babel lose their ability to cooperate in faithless ventures when God scatters them geographically and linguistically (Genesis 11:1-9).

In today's brave new online world, truth, if we even have the inclination to seek it, is hard to discern. Often we deal in gossip, propaganda and myth unwittingly.

Are all present-day languages descended from the tongues which sprang from Babel? Christians give different answers to this: 'Yes,' if they believe all mankind was present at Babel; 'No' otherwise. Other debated points like whether the Flood was local, or there were races of people before Adam, also have a bearing, but take us beyond our purpose. Scientific research on the genesis of language tends to get lost in speculative mists when it attempts to go back beyond the origin of writing around 5,500 years ago.

Let's refocus! The meadow of human speech is running wild with thousands of blossoming language species which confound our senses. But not those of our God only wise! When 'all lands to God in joyful sounds, aloft their voices raise', he fluently interprets the words and thoughts of the worshippers, whatever their tongue. Think on the marvel of God's omniglot listening ear, as the sun sweeps across the globe on the Lord's Day: millions address his glorious throne in hundreds of languages, in the confidence that 'to you all people will come near; you hear us when we pray' (Psalm 65:2).

Of course, communication predates humanity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit have ever shared their minds one with another. Our language skills are an aspect of bearing the image of the Triune God. That does not mean the Three Persons employ the stilted apparatus of human speech which our limited brainpower constrains us to settle for. Their thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

The limits of human intellect and honesty create problems with our use of language. We lie. Our words may convey falsehood as well as truth. The alliance between the devil – the father of lies (John 8:44) – and the deceitful human heart has ever sown confusion and sorrow. In today's brave new online world, truth, if we even have the inclination to seek it, is hard to discern. Often we deal in gossip, propaganda and myth unwittingly. Christians, who are commanded to test the spirits, and to test everything and hold to what is good, must insist on educating themselves, society and children about how to discern truth. May God mercifully give us that love which rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6).

We lack. If I speak but one language I cannot communicate with the speakers of the 7,000 other languages, if we do not share a common tongue. Also, while languages are the vessels of culture, history and tradition for a people, they are easily lost (Nehemiah 13:24), and troublesome to learn. It is very easy to see therefore how misunderstandings arise between people, which can quickly escalate to conflict. Until the day we all have the same speech, the arduous task of acquiring extra languages will remain. Surely Christians, who would be peacemakers, may affirm the study of linguistics as a calling from God to promote reconciliation and harmony between peoples.

Another problem is that if the gospel is to be preached to all nations, the Bible must be available to them in their own language. This is a pressing challenge, with the eternal destiny of whole people-groups depending on the church mobilising for world mission and Bible translation. It is not to the credit of the worldwide church that scripture is not available to speakers of 4,000 of the world's languages. 1 in 5 people do not have the full Bible in their first language (**wycliffe.org.uk/stats**). Could God be calling you to help address that crying need?

Behind these challenges is the fact that all languages lack full descriptive power. Christians realise this in relation to God. Coming to know him stretches our vocabulary as we attempt to express our experience and insights. We also anticipate the day when we shall see him face to face and shall need a new voice to express the divine colours between colours that we have never seen before. And then still we shall know our words to fail. Only God can give exhaustively accurate descriptions. In all of his dealings

In all of his dealings with us he accommodates himself to our tiny words and weak minds. In the Bible, and on the lips of Jesus, God contracts his thoughts to our small scale.

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LANGUAGE PROSPECTS

Since most human languages are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, many are vulnerable. Every two weeks another language goes silent when its last speaker dies. A few world-tongues increasingly predominate. The biodiversity in the flora of language is constantly diminishing. Is the linguistic patchwork-quilt of summer meadows becoming one endless field of oilseed rape? Time will tell.

What is clear is that the emergence of global languages and translation software empowers the human race to greater cooperation and urbanisation. Man is returning to Babel: the city without God, which conveniently provides everything its residents require. 60% of humanity lives in cities, which are man-created places where people need never encounter God's providence or presence in his created world. The motivations present at the original Babel-project remain: self-made security and greatness. God halted man's Babel-building program. How long will it be before he once again intervenes? We know Judgement Day is coming. We may ask what fate languages will then share?

On the Day of Pentecost world mission was relaunched. The goal was that those in far-off generations and places (Acts 2:39) would tell the wonders of God (v11). The gift of languages experienced on that occasion gave a foretaste of the ultimate outcome of the church's mission. The lips of the first disciples praised God in the national languages of pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for the Feast. It is doubtful whether the disciples knew what they were saying (1 Corinthians 14:14), because for that moment a miracle happened. God the Holy Spirit spoke a multitude of languages in praise of God the Father, and empowered human minds to move human mouths to voice the words. His purpose was to demonstrate the worldwide reach of the gospel of God the Son.

The subsequent spread of the Christian Church across the world, sometimes in obedience to her missionary calling, sometimes though persecution, has ensured the fulfilment of the sign given at Pentecost. The gospel is reaching the speakers of more and more languages and many are giving their lips to tell God's wonders. In this way the company of those in the great multitude that cannot be numbered is being gathered from every nation, tribe, people and language (Revelation 7:9).

They spoke myriad languages. What will they speak once Judgement Day is past and Babel-without-God is judged? Will our present languages be left to those who never cease to use them in mockery (Acts 2:13)? Our Bibles do not answer these questions directly. However, the future people of God, who constitute the Bride of Christ, are symbolised in Revelation as a city (21:2). Where human nature is no longer corrupt, monolingual cities cease to be a threat to God-focused living. It is only a symbol, but might it suggest that one language for the new creation would be both safe and convenient?

It is surely true that all peoples will understand one another when their resurrected bodies speak and hear. As God constitutes our physical natures from the dust, he will certainly have the opportunity to form the wiring of our brains so that they all share a common tongue. Perhaps, just as our bodies will have new properties and powers, the language we inherit will have a grammar and vocabulary adequate to express our new, sinless face-to-face fellowship with God. With all barriers to communication lifted, what unimaginable purposes and glory will we achieve as one in Christ the Word in the fellowship of the Triune God?

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

DR. MURDOCH MURCHISON (1933-2019) BY **REV. ALEX J MACDONALD**

URDOCH (MURDO) MURCHISON WAS BORN IN THE AULTBEA SCHOOLHOUSE, WESTER ROSS, IN 1933. His father, John, became a schoolteacher after active service in WWI. His mother, Mary, was a nurse from Vancouver.

Aultbea was a hub of military activity during World War II. Murdo's father would lead the schoolchildren in singing psalms and also sea-shanties in the air raid shelter. Hymn- and psalm-singing as a family was a regular Sunday night pattern.

In 1944, the Murchison family moved to Alness, Easter Ross. Murdo attended Invergordon Academy. He loved sailing with his father on the Cromarty Firth and enjoyed the Boys' Brigade, football, badminton and running. Murdo's sister Mairi recalls a 'happy and interesting childhood, with picnics, camping, walking, boating, yachting, gardening and keeping Sunday as a special day. Our father and mother treated us all equally, but our paternal maiden aunts favoured boys, so this was rather nice for Murdoch!'

Those three aunts were amazing ladies who lived close by in Strathpeffer, where Murdo often spent the summers. Auntie Ina had taught in the 'Wild West' and kept a Winchester rifle and a box of rattlesnake tails. Decades later, daily phone calls and weekly visits to 'the aunts' were a staple of family life in Inverness. They thought the world of Murchadh Mòr (Big Murdo), who looked after them as a son when they grew old. This practical, day-to-day love of family was a hallmark of Murdo's life.

As a teenager, Murdo set his sights on medicine. He and his sister Lilian were the third of five family generations to follow this path. In 1950 he went to Edinburgh University.

Back in Alness, his four teenage sisters had each, independently, decided to become Christians. They shared their stories with Murdo by letter. This intervention was a turning point. At 19 years old, Murdo decided to follow Jesus. Everything he became or achieved in his long life can be traced back to this decision.

The second key decision was to propose to Maurine Tallach, a history student. The two were engaged in North Berwick in 1958, and married in Westminster Chapel, London, in 1959. Married life began in St Theresa's Maternity Hospital, Wimbledon. Growing up, Murdo was surrounded by remarkable women in Alness and Strathpeffer. It's no surprise that in Maurine he found another.

In 1960, Murdo became Dad to his firstborn, John. The young family went to live in Lima, Peru, but soon returned to London, where Murdo's career turned to public health. Two daughters, Alison and Elisabeth, were born in 1962 and 1963. The growing family headed north to Inverness in 1964. Two more sons, Murdo (1965) and Andrew (1968), swelled the ranks. 17 Island Bank Road became the family home where all the children were raised.

Murdo was Medical Officer of Health for Highland Region. His 'moonlight' career was as a police doctor. This involved midnight calls, squad cars and cell visits, and sometimes danger. He received a Royal Humane Society Award for Bravery in 1979, risking his life in wild weather to save a man from death. He made light of it. Doing the right thing, rather than the easiest, was just what you did.

Growing up in Inverness, the family were blessed by their father's consistency, his commitment, his unwavering faith, and his example. His deep love for his family was seldom spoken, but never ever in doubt. They attended Greyfriars Free Church in Inverness where Murdo was an elder.

As children became adults and moved away, Murdo decided to it was time for a fresh challenge. He moved to Aberdeen in 1985 to become the Medical Officer for Grampian Health Board. A new home, a new job, and a new church community in Bon Accord Free Church, where Murdo became a valued elder – Murdo and Maurine threw themselves into it all.

On Murdo's retirement they returned to the family home in Strathpeffer, where he had so many childhood memories. They made it their own home, offering hospitality to a constant flow of guests and family.

That family had expanded. Over 20 years, starting in 1989, 20 grandchildren arrived in various places – Inverness, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, London, Brussels, Geneva, even the Bahamas. Birthdays were never forgotten, and family visits were frequent, taking the grandparents as far afield as New York, Hong Kong and Mozambique. When grandchildren visited Strathpeffer, a daily highlight was the walk to the shop with Grandad and Hector the dog. Newspaper for Grandad, sweets for everyone else.

2008 was a year of sorrow and grief. Maurine passed away. They had been married for 49 years and she was the love of his life. He rarely passed the graveyard at Fodderty without visiting her resting place.

Murdo now entered a different, slower, season of life. When Maurine was alive, she kept everyone informed about the whole family. It was quite a network to track, but Murdo rose to the challenge.

Physically, Murdo now faced various ailments which collectively took their toll. Eventually he moved from Strathpeffer to Edinburgh. Of course, it's easy to paint these latter years in muted hues, but there were lots of celebrations along the way. He made it to Oxford for grandson Andrew and Lucy's wedding. The birth of a great-grandchild, Alexander, was a real joy.

In recent months, Murdo knew his departure was imminent. He saw no reason to hasten or delay his final day. Rather, he placed great trust in 'the Lord's good timing'. Murdo did not fear death as an undefeated enemy. Meantime, he was dignified, uncomplaining, and very accepting of the limitations his body imposed on this last stage in his journey. There was no unfinished business in his book.

Through a long life, Murdo enjoyed happy but temporary homes in Aultbea, Alness, London, Lima, Inverness, Aberdeen and Strathpeffer. He went to his eternal home on 2 December 2019.

One of Murdo's closest and longest friends sent this message to the family the day after: 'You all sorrow, but not without hope. Far from it! Your Dad was a faithful servant of the Lord, a man of unflinching integrity and a lifelong, loyal friend. I shall miss him greatly.'

Our sympathy goes out to Dr Murchison's family in their loss: to John, Alison, Elisabeth, Murdo and Andrew and all their families, and to his sisters Alina, Lilian, Margaret and Mairi and their families.



ALEXANDER CRICHTON (1925-2019) BY REV. JAMES MACIVER

ITH THE PASSING OF ALEXANDER (ALASDAIR) CRICHTON, ON 14^{TH} december 2019, the congregation of stornoway free church was deprived of a godly man and a conscientious elder.

Alasdair was born on 6th August 1925 to Torquil and Catherine Crichton at No. 21 Swordale, Point, brother to Iain, Mary Ann and Nora. Alasdair attended Knock School, and having been called up to the Forces in 1944, he was posted to the Scots Guards. He was on guard duty at the Potsdam Conference in August 1945 attended by President Truman, Winston Churchill, Josef Stalin, and Clement Attlee.

After Army service, he trained in London as a furniture maker. He then decided to train as a technical teacher at Moray House, Edinburgh, and took up the post as a teacher of Technical Subjects at The Nicolson Institute in 1954, retiring from this work in 1990. During his time in London, he met Mairi MacLeod in 1947, and they married in 1954. They set up home in Stornoway that same year, and had three children over the next few years (Charles, Torquil, and Janet).

He became a communicant member of Stornoway Free Church during the Rev. Kenneth MacRae's ministry, and subsequently worshipped during the ministries of Murdo MacRitchie, Murdo Alec MacLeod, Kenneth Stewart, Iver Martin, Kenneth I Macleod and James Maciver. Alasdair was ordained as an elder in the congregation in 1982.

Retirement from teaching also meant opportunity for increased input to congregational duties. He was involved with Sunday School work for many years, and with the management of the Free-Will Offering scheme. Alasdair was most conscientious in his role as an elder, giving thorough attention to visiting homes in his district and beyond. He also set a great example in his faithful church attendance, even when his health had deteriorated significantly. His passing leaves the congregation of Stornoway bereft of a man of God whose service for the Lord was appreciated by many.

We extend our sincere condolences to his widow Mairi, sons Charles and Torquil, daughter Janet, his grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, and his sister Nora, together with all other members of their families, and commend them to the comfort of God.



'Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27).

T IS AN EXCITING JOURNEY, EXPLORING THE WAY THAT THE CONCEPT OF RESURRECTION SLOWLY DEVELOPED IN THE LIFE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. An alternative approach is to look back through the lens of Christian teaching and to try to answer the question, 'To what extent would Jesus have pointed to resurrection in the Old Testament as he walked to Emmaus?' How we would love to hear the Word expounded by Jesus. But we nearly have that in the New Testament.

Paul, preaching in Athens (Acts 17), started with creation (Genesis 1 & 2) and ended with Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection was arguably the pinnacle of God's creative activity. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul writes: '... raised imperishable ... raised in glory ... raised in power ...' (verse 43).

The introduction of sin and its ultimate consequence of death (Genesis 3) was answered by God in Jesus' death and resurrection. 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive' (1 Cor. 15:22).

The theme of escape from Egypt (Exodus) resonates through the Old Testament and is linked to resurrection by some commentators. Was the exodus in mind when Paul was writing Romans 6 and 8 (the former life of slavery)?

The Land is another recurring theme which finds its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus (of whom the land was a type). There is fulfilment too in the resurrection of all believers when the earth is restored and God dwells with his people (Revelation 21).

Daniel 12 is the clearest Old Testament reference: 'Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.' Isaiah 25 and 26 are also clear: '... he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.' And, '... your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.'

Words in Job (as in Handel's Messiah), in Ezekiel (the valley of dry bones), in Joel (quoted in Peter's sermon in Acts 2), in Jonah (referred to by Jesus), Isaiah 53:11-12 — the list of references worth examining is considerable. An old Scottish writer points to Aaron's rod that budded and he sees in that a type of Jesus' resurrection (Numbers 17, Hebrews 9:4).

The feasts of Israel are types of Christ. Leviticus 23 lists 'the appointed feasts of the Lord'. Coming between the Passover and Pentecost, verses 9 to 14 describe the Firstfruits, which is a feast of special resurrection interest. 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath' [my emphasis]. In other words, on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, the first day of the week, the priest should accept the first fruits of a future harvest and wave it before the Lord. 'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him' (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' (Luke 24:32).' ●

PART 8 RESURRECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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

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PAGES FROM ADAM'S DIARY, PART 1: Christ Visits a Mountain Village

A brother, known to some of us as Dr Adam, has served the Lord among his suffering church for many years. Dr Adam has also ministered in various parts of the world among refugees. We have asked his permission to print some of the stories of his life and service for the encouragement of readers of *The Record*. For well understood reasons, the names of people and places have usually been changed or omitted.

N THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN WALKING WITH OUR SAVIOUR AND SERVING HIM ACROSS THE FIELDS OF THIS EARTH, I HAVE HEARD, SEEN, AND HAD INCREDIBLE ENCOUNTERS—

stories of God's goodness and faithfulness, and the power of the Holy Spirit's magnificent work in the salvation and transformation of human beings delivered from darkness into light, snatched from death into life; stories of the marvellous work of our Lord Jesus Christ in the lives of his own, to lead, to intervene, to protect, to give strength and courage, to provide and to bring light, salvation and hope into the darkness and hopelessness of human hearts.

The story I am about to tell you is one example among many, a graphic illustration of God's supernatural intervention on behalf of his own—in this instance, one who did not know our Saviour, but she was known by God and belonged to him before the foundation of the world. However, in order to tell you this story, I need to begin with a prior incident which happened twelve years earlier at a remote mountainous village in the region of the Turkish/Iraq borders.

Years ago, I was introduced to a couple who were from that village. They were working as janitors in a residential high-rise building in a large city. This couple had a nine-year-old son who had come to faith in Christ when he was seven. In the building where they worked as janitors, there lived a Christian couple who did not have any children. They befriended this boy. They would take him to their home and feed and entertain him. After a while, they introduced him to our Lord and he came to faith. As a result of his conversion, his mother came to the knowledge of Christ (and what a bulwark of faith she has become!). Then his father came to know the Lord.

Not long after the child's conversion, he developed an aggressive form of leukemia. I had discipled the couple who befriended the child. They asked me if I would be willing to visit this family. They felt it would encourage them. A few days later, I was taken to a small, single room in the corner of the parking lot in the basement of the building. They were desperately poor. We became friends—a friendship which has continued since then. Near the end of this child's earthly life, I was on a ministry visit in that part of the world. In fact, the day I arrived, they were the first family I went to see. The child was gravely ill. I prayed for them and told them that I had just landed earlier that morning in the country and would come back the following day. That evening I was called to go to the hospital. The little boy had been taken to the Urgent Care Unit. Early the next morning, he died.

The grief-stricken couple were taking his body back to their village about ten hours away. They asked me to go with them. I agreed but there was not enough room in the small van. I found two friends, one of whom had a car and reluctantly agreed to drive me to the village. Through a blizzard the next morning, we finally reached this isolated settlement. A crowd had gathered. Upon our arrival, a procession began toward the small, derelict ruin which was their cemetery a few hundred yards away. They buried the child.

Afterward we headed toward the home of the grandfather, who was also the elder and the white-haired chief of this community. In the primitively poor sitting room were crammed together fifty or more people. The silence in the room was broken when the elderly tribal chief turned to me and, in his deep resonating voice, said; 'I am told you are the man who converted my son and grandson to Christianity.' The unexpectedness and brusqueness of his statement jolted me. I felt he was going to vent his sadness in anger on me, and I would be trampled to death by a mob. I replied, 'No, sir! I did not. God converted them.' He was staring at me, all the while rolling his massive mustache around the tip of his finger. After a long pause, he asked, 'Would you explain to me the teaching of the prophet Jesus?' One of the men, who had hesitantly come with me and had reiterated that this undertaking to an out-of-the-way region was too dangerous, and hence was not the will of God, was sitting next to me. He elbowed me and whispered, 'Here, they cut your throat so fast you won't know you have lost your head! Be careful what you say!'

I began with our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, went to the Gospel of John as I explained who our Saviour is, why he came into our world and what he has accomplished in our place and on our behalf. I explained that the Messiah came to our world for our salvation to wash away and cleanse the fatal infection that has contaminated the hearts and minds of men beyond description. This heavenly person came to set us free from the bondage and addiction to sin, rescue us from a certain death, give us life, peace and hope, and ultimately, take us to be with him forever. His supreme commandment is love - love for God, and out of the overflow of that love, love for our fellow men (Matthew 22:36-40), even for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). In that word, 'love', there is encapsulated and fulfilled all the commandments of God through the ages (Matthew 5:17; Romans 13:8-10).

When I stopped, the elderly chief was reflecting on what he had heard. He was no longer staring at me, but at the ceiling, with tears streaming from his eyes.

'Here, they cut your throat so fast you himself and asked, 'How do I become won't know you have lost your head! Be careful what you say!'

After a long silence, he collected a follower of this person? How do I become a Christian?' He turned to the others and said, 'I have not heard anything like this! Have you heard this

before? I have never heard anything so beautiful and profound.' Then he turned to me again and said, 'How do I become a follower of the Messiah?' I replied, 'Sir, if you believe in your heart all that I have said and make an open confession before this gathering, then you have entered into a covenant with Christ to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him.' He stood up from the head of the room, came to where I was sitting, sat next to me and put one hand on my shoulder and held my forearm with his other hand, and said, 'I believe!' I asked him to bow his head and pray with me. As I began, 'Our Father in heaven...,' suddenly the entire room bowed their heads and began to repeat after me. I paused and said, 'No. You cannot pray this unless you believe in your hearts. This means you will abandon your religious traditions and become a disciple of Christ.' An elderly man and some of the others said, 'We believe.' Unsure what to say and what to make of all of this, I resumed my prayer and they continued to repeat after me. That morning, from what I could see, nearly everyone in that room made a profession of faith in our Lord. The funeral of a believing child had turned into a joyous occasion as we spent the day speaking about the Lord.

The following morning, a large crowd had gathered in that same room. But these were not the folk I had seen the previous day! They were the second layer of the extended family and friends coming to express their condolences. This time, the father of the child spoke and said, 'When my 17-year-old brother died in an accident, I grieved for three months. No one was able to comfort me. Yesterday I buried my son, my own flesh. But I am not grieving because God has given me hope of life and resurrection and a peace that passes human understanding." Pointing to me, he continued, 'Here our guest, the doctor, can tell you how you can have this hope and this peace.' We had a repeat of the events of the day before. Once again, after I finished talking, everyone in the room prayed. By now I was persuaded that something unusual was taking place. This happened for three days. Twelve years have passed since then. That elderly chief remarried at age 93, and three years ago, he was struck by a car and went to be with the Lord. God has given his son and daughter-in-law, who lost their only child, other children. I usually see them when I visit that part of the world.

Now, with this in the background, I want to tell you the next story. Most of the folk who came to faith in the living room of that elderly chieftain are still in that far-off mountain village. I went to see them last year. In one of our meetings, there was a young woman. I was told she was from a Kurdish town in northwestern Iraq near the Syrian border. The villages and towns in that area were ransacked and brutalized by ISIS as they moved like gangrene to inaugurate their repugnant Caliphate-the pan-Islamist fundamentalist aspiration to unite the entire worldwide Islamic community under one flag, one political religious ruler, and under sharia law.

Not long after the arrival of ISIS men into that village, one day five men broke into the home of this young woman and her family. They murdered her father and brother. Then they turned their attention on her. They cornered her in a room. Surrounded and trapped, she huddled on the floor burying her face between her knees, preparing to be raped and killed, when suddenly the entire room was infused with blinding, intense light. She told us that she became aware of a person in the midst of the light, a very strong holy presence. When she lifted her head up to see who it was, the ISIS men looked terrified, falling backward over each other as they fled. By that afternoon, there were no ISIS terrorists in the village.

Once her family was buried, she collected a few of her personal belongings and came out to go to the home of a relative in a nearby village. An American army jeep pulled up next to her on the dirt road. The driver was a Europeanlooking military officer, a thin, tall man with white hair. He spoke flawless Kurdish and offered to take her to her destination. The officer did not say much except to give her some water and food. She recalled that she fell asleep. A few minutes later when she woke up, she was in a mountainous region she did not recognize. Soon they arrived in a village, which was also completely unfamiliar to her. The officer dropped her off in front of a house and said to her, 'The people in this house are my friends. They will help you.' And then, just as he had appeared out of nowhere, he drove away and disappeared. She knocked on the door and a lady opened it. She greeted the woman, also Kurdish, and told her

that an American soldier had driven her to their home and had told her that they were his friends. She was invited in and, upon further inquiry, she discovered she was in a Kurdish community hundreds of miles from

As I began, 'Our Father in heaven...,' suddenly the entire room bowed their heads and began to repeat after me.

her home. The family did not know any European soldiers. How could she have travelled the distance of several hundred miles in a few minutes? She had left her town shortly before noon, and now it was only a few minutes past noon. And there was no foreign military presence anywhere within hundreds of miles of that area. The family dismissed this account and attributed it to the trauma she had suffered. But they were still uncertain how she had travelled hundreds of miles and crossed international borders. Nevertheless, they took her in, were kind to her and cared for her. Before long, the young lady discovered she was in a Christian home. After a while, the family realised that what she had seen and experienced was none other than the hand of God bringing her to their doorstep. They introduced the young woman to Christ and discipled her.

In that dilapidated, poor house meets a thriving church. Most of these were the men and women who came to faith in the living room of that chief elder on the day of the funeral of his grandchild. A young man in that fellowship expressed interest in her, and she was married and now lives there. She and her husband came to our meetings while I was there. We pondered who came into the room when she faced the ISIS gangsters, who might have been that solider, how was she transported hundreds of miles in a few minutes. We also marvelled how God plans out events in the lives of all believers. Every Christian, regardless of the simplicity or the dramatic manner in which he or she is brought to Christ, is a book written by the hand of God. Paul tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Twelve years earlier, when that family came to faith during the funeral of that child, who could have imagined this course of events? There are still many questions in my mind, the answer to which we will not know until we are with our Saviour. For now, we have the comfort and the assurance that, 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour...Fear not, for I am with you' (Isaiah 43:2-3, 5) •.



SUMMERSALE

Our Summer Sale is on RIGHT NOW! Until the end of August, we have 13 amazing books available for you to buy at bargain prices. Using our discount code **SUMMER20READS**, each of them have at least 25% off RRP, and many have even more than that! Shop the collection at **thefree.church/shop**, or read on for more details.

BEST-SELLING PRAYER BUNDLE (2014/2019) SALE PRICE: £7.97 (RRP £15.97)

This bundle offers three great books for the price of one; *Fresh Pathways in Prayer* (Julian Hardyman), *Heart of God* (Kenneth Boa), & *Enjoy Your Prayer Life* (Michael Reeves). Incredible value for your heart and your bank account, this is a pack to buy for yourself or to give away. Miriam Montgomery (Free Church Books) says of *Fresh Pathways in Prayer*: 'This book is like a cosy wee chat with the best kind of friend; the one who will support and encourage you, but also insistently challenge you to be a better person. Or, in this case, a better pray-er.'



NIV SCRIPTURE JOURNAL NT PACK (2020) SALE PRICE: £34.81 (RRP £94.81) THAT'S 63% OFF RRP!!!

All of the books of the New Testament in 19 easy-to-use Scripture journals. High-quality but portable, these journals match the NIV text with lined note pages. Perfect for personal or small group study, sermon notes or the increasingly popular Bible journalling. Our incredible sale price makes it common sense to buy the whole set – which may just encourage you to reread that Bible book you haven't been near in a while!



SKETCHES OF FAITH JOHN D. WOODBRIDGE (2020) SALE PRICE: £11.24 (RRP £14.99)

This is an excellent book in every way. It feels and looks like a high-class book, something that could easily sit on the shelves and look impressive as we have seen in so many Zoom calls of late. However, it's when you open it that things really come alive. The book is composed of 33 very short introductions to people who have helped shape Christian history. The people are as diverse as the Apostle Paul to William Booth to John Sung; this book helped fill in some blanks in my church history but didn't overwhelm with information. Each study can be read in about five minutes and at the end of each there are helpful suggestions for further readings if a particular character has gripped you. I used this book in my daily guiet time and it fitted in well for that purpose, though it would be equally well used as a reference book or perhaps a basis for some adult Bible class studies on church history.

If I had one criticism of this book it would be that it falls into the same trap that so many of these books do. The first study is on the Apostle Paul and the next is on John Wycliff, giving the impression that nothing happened in the church for 1400 years; the churches loses much when we cut out the early church fathers from our study of church history. All in all this is an excellent little book, which won't break the bank and which you will come back to time and again.

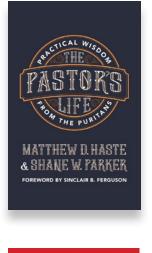
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THE PASTOR'S LIFE MATTHEW D. HASTE & SHANE W. PARKER (2019)

SALE PRICE: £5.99 (RRP £7.99). Ciarán R. Kelleher (Broughty Ferry Presbyterian Church) says: 'It is a short book, with concise and zippy chapters. Their appreciation for the Puritans is obvious and while there is some critical engagement, their aim is to resuscitate the image of those alleged fun sponges of yore.'

FOR ALL WHO GRIEVE COLIN SMITH (2020) SALE PRICE: £7.49 (RRP £9.99)

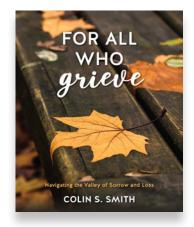
Andy Murray (Livingston Free Church) says: 'I found this book a huge comfort in my own loss. It helped articulate so many of my own feelings that were hard to express. Most of all it led me to the best of all counsellors: Jesus Christ.'





CONFRONTING CHRISTIANITY REBECCA MCLAUGHLIN (2019) SALE PRICE: £9.99 (RRP £18.99)

An exploration of twelve of the hardest questions for Christianity to answer, this book is exceptionally researched, deeply personal and biblically powerful. Challenging, blunt and persuasive, it has taken the bestselling lists by storm. One not to be missed – especially with 47% off RRP!

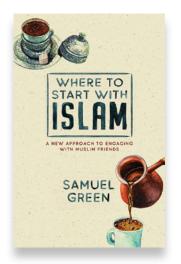


These books are only a small proportion of the ones we review.

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

WHERE TO START WITH ISLAM SAMUEL GREEN (2019) SALE PRICE: £5.99 (RRP £11.99)

Our increasingly multicultural society brings its own evangelistic challenges, and this book seeks to help you share Jesus sensitively with any new or longstanding Muslim friends.



THE HOLE IN OUR HOLINESS KEVIN DEYOUNG (2012) SALE PRICE: £4.99 (RRP £10.99)

A popular book at Free Church Youth Camps for campers and leaders alike. If you haven't read it, get it now.

THE FRUITFUL HOME ANN BENTON (2019) SALE PRICE: £3.74 (RRP £4.99)

Jody Guy (St Andrews Free Church) says: 'There is no hint of guilt-tripping weary parents, but instead lots of down-to-earth encouragement to keep looking to God's Word for wisdom in creating a home.'



THE MOON IS ALWAYS ROUND JONATHAN GIBSON (2019) SALE PRICE: £9.99 (RRP £15.99)

A heartbreaking but healing book that explains suffering to children. One of the most striking kids' books of the last year.

THANK GOD FOR BEDTIME GEOFF ROBSON (2019) SALE PRICE: £5.99 (RRP £8.99)

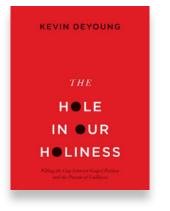
There has been a lot of lockdown talk about burnout, rest and sustainability. This timely book adds a valuable contribution in the form of a 'theology of sleep' •.



DIG INTO MATTHEW CHRIS RANSON (2020) SALE PRICE: £3.74 (RRP £4.99)

If you loved Chris Ranson's *Acts: A Visual Guide*, you will be enthralled by this. Brand new, this book is great for small groups and youth fellowships alike – even online.

CHRIS RANSON



BOOK REVIEWS





Free Church BOOKS

As well as our summer sale picks, we're still reviewing many of the best books released recently. The following are three we are delighted to recommend! All are available at https://thefree.church/shop, unless otherwise stated.

BELIEVE: WHAT SHOULD I KNOW? MIKE MCKINLEY (2019)

This is one of ten books from the 9Marks series which is designed to help readers think through some of life's big questions. It is specifically aimed at those from an unchurched background or with little or no Bible knowledge. It is essentially a miniature, highly condensed systematic theology spread over nine short chapters exploring questions like 'Who is God?', 'Who is God the Son?', 'Creation and Fall', 'Atonement and Election' and others. Each chapter is broken up into small, bite-size sections which take the reader on a journey through each doctrine, drilling down into the truth by way of illustration from real-life examples, questions to be answered along the way, key verses or passages which highlight a teaching point to be read three times, Bible verses to be memorised, and a succinct 'What's the point of this chapter?' summary at the end. This is a highly interactive, reflective and thoroughly practical book which will serve to ground and grow followers of Jesus.

This book is available to purchase from Free Church Books.

Colin Macleod, Gairloch, Kinlochewe & Torridon Free Church

FOLLOW ME: BIBLE STORIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN LIESBETH VAN BINSBERGEN (2019)

This book looks like not only a classic for anyone's library but also a work of art. One hundred and sixteen stories, no less, have been selected from the Bible and carefully translated into the language of children. Although no age category is stated, both illustrations and text would fit the 5-8 age bracket who will ask the challenging questions. For instance, the first sentence in the book says that 'there was only God who has always been there', which just begs a six-year-old to explore. Each story is large font and two pages long, finishing with three discussion questions, so it can easily be used as a daily family Bible reading. The illustrations are bright, colourful, and uncomplicated but full of detail, so in the Garden of Eden ten birds and animals jostle for a place on the page.

The text clearly holds to the truth of the Word of God, yet at the same time uses simple descriptive language which is captivating for both adults and children. This

LEARNING TO LOVE THE PSALMS W. ROBERT GODFREY (2017)

W. Robert Godfrey has written what is perhaps the most helpful book about the Psalms in print. This work is full of wise insight about what the Psalms teach us of our human condition before God, and how Christ is the answer to every deficiency in us. There is no more accessible source that describes some of the most important steps for every Christian to know better how to reflect upon the Psalter. Godfrey has clearly reflected long and hard on the themes of these one hundred and fifty songs that God inspired to help us understand ourselves, understand how to worship, and understand our God and what he has done for us. The opening chapters digest high-level biblical scholarship into helpful, ordinary language. The rest of the book provides encouraging, soul-lifting observations about important samples from each of the Psalter's five books. This little volume certainly lives up to its name; you will learn to love the Psaltms – or love them more – by reading it ●.

This book is available to purchase from Mound Books.

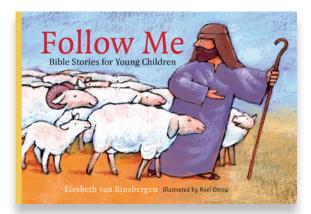
Harrison Perkins, London City Presbyterian Church & ETS



will be a joy for any grandparent, parent, auntie, or uncle to read to the little children in their family and be excited by the resulting discussions.

This book is available to purchase from CLC.

Ruth Aird, ETS





W. ROBERT GODFREY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

Thank you to Catriona Murray for the beautiful article on the back page of *The Record*, June 20, and for clearly linking environmental degradation with human sin.

I've found Chris Wright's speaking and writing on care for Creation as part of the mission of the Church hugely helpful for a Christian understanding of the environmental issues of today, including biodiversity loss and the climate crisis. In the Lausanne Movement's Cape Town Commitment (2011), when Chris Wright was chair of the Statement Working Group, it states:

'The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.'

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in April 2020, said that despite the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, the world mustn't forget the 'deeper environmental emergency'. 'Eco-anxiety' has become a real diagnosis, particularly among younger people, when they realise the extent of the impact of climate change on their futures. How can we relate to this and respond with the gospel?

Firstly, Christians should not be climate deniers; nor can we sit on the fence. Surely only Christians can look at the climate crisis square in the face, without despair, because God promises to take care of us, *'to the very end of the age'* (Matt 28:20) He will be with us always, no matter how bad it gets. When people are fearful about the almost impossible task of keeping global warming within two degrees, we as Christians know that we don't have to fix the problem all by ourselves. The Lord graciously involves us in his missional plans to redeem all of creation, but we only have to do our small part, and we can rest in the certainty that he is sovereign and will continue to work out his good purposes. And we look forward to the new heaven and the new earth with eager anticipation.

What then is our part? Above all we can pray. Then can I suggest we should lead by example in our own lives and our corporate church life. To consider our individual responses, I recommend *L is for Lifestyle* by Ruth Valerio, recently updated. As a church, perhaps we can begin with grieving and lamenting the losses already incurred. Tearfund is now campaigning on climate justice because they see their decades of work on ending poverty being undone by changes to the climate. Then we can encourage and support our leaders, both spiritual and secular, to make the necessary cuts to CO2 emissions.

Sincerely

Heather Munro (Hope Community Church Helensburgh, branch of Glasgow City Free Church)

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

POETRY PAGE

STEAL AWAY BY **WALLIS WILLIS**

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus! Steal away, steal away home; I ain't got long to stay here.

My Lord, he calls me; He calls me by the thunder. The trumpet sounds it in my soul; I ain't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus! Steal away, steal away home; I ain't got long to stay here.

Green trees are bending; Poor sinners stand trembling. The trumpet sounds it in my soul; I ain't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus! Steal away, steal away home; I ain't got long to stay here.

'Steal Away' is an African American Spiritual understood to have been composed by Wallis Willis around 1862 while he was enslaved in what is now Oklahoma, USA. A local minister, Rev. Alexander Reid, overheard Willis singing Steal Away and Swing Low, Sweet Chariot. Reid transcribed the words and melodies and sent them to the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. The Jubilee Singers popularised both songs during their tours of the United States and Europe. Along with Spirituals like Wade in the Water and Go Down, Moses, some commentators believe Steal Away's message was given a double meaning as an incitement to escape slavery.

MISSION MATTERS A monthly take on some of the mission

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

HO IS CHURCH FOR?

'All our guy is interested in is evangelism.' The on-street counselling session continued as this loyal Free Church member lamented at the preaching in their local church. Were they justified in their complaint?

Like most issues, I suspect that it has to be unpacked in more detail. If evangelism is indeed the sole tune being played, then there is a problem. Overt evangelistic preaching on every occasion is neither normal nor healthy. This leads to a connected question: who is the Church for? The New Testament certainly reveals that early church services existed almost exclusively for people who were already committed Christians. Have a look at the description of a typical service in Acts 2:41-47. Even the classic passage teaching clarity of communication in church assumes that the 'unbeliever or an inquirer' is, at least initially, an 'outsider' (1 Corinthians 14:22-25).

The main worship service, then, is not primarily designed as an event for non-believers. It is a time to worship God and to be taught from the Bible. The focus of the church service is believers, not believers. Controversial?

In the New Testament we have numerous examples of gospel proclamation in other contexts apart from church. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 seemed to be preached to a spontaneous crowd who were attracted by the phenomena of Pentecost (Acts 2:6); it was not the regular house meeting of the early church. In Acts 16 we have evangelistic 'preaching' on a river bank and in a prison. It is incontrovertible to say that the majority of evangelistic opportunities were taken outside the church and not inside.

What's the point? Is there to be a sharp division of emphases, teaching in church and evangelism outside? By no means!

Our observation is that churches which engage with the Bible in a clear and relevant way also

experience conversion growth. There is an energy which comes from the Bible which is infectious. As people hear about the character of God, the power of the cross and the life of Jesus, they are confronted with the elements of the gospel. With great respect, the gospel is so much more than 'turn or burn'. Excuse the crass language, but so much 'evangelistic preaching' seems to be reduced to this concept. In the menu of our local churches the full range is on offer, from milk to strong meat. As believers developed through teaching, prayer, the sacraments and fellowship, so 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'. The healthy church which grew mature believers also experienced a baby boom. There was no either/or situation.

IRELAN

Limerick

ENGLISH

In practical terms, here are two things to begin with: Make use of apologetic sidebars. These are explanations of and engagement with difficult issues which we suspect may raise objections from unbelievers. We may find no problem with the fact that God tells Joshua and his army to kill the men, women and children in Ai (Joshua 8: 24-26), but the complexities of the situation require sensitive exposition.

Work at intelligibility at all levels. Clarity is not the same as superficiality. Indeed, our Confession gives broad hints at how services have to be conducted: they have to have 'the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence'. The Spirit opens hearts. He does not translate and is not impressed with deliberately obscure language.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to take this little article and use it as the basis for a discussion in your small group. The question is simple: who is the Church for?

Sta

Derdee

Thèid Mise romhad (I will go before you)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

HIG FREASTALAN ÙRA AM BEATHA AN DUINE, NUAIR A STADAS E, AGUS AN NÌ A DH'ATHARRAICH NA BHEATHA LÀITHEIL AIR A BHEATHA A CHUR BUN OS CIONN.

Chan eil sinne mar dhaoine a'faicinn na th'air thoiseach oirnn', ach, ged nach eil sinne a'faicinn seo, tha an Cruthaidhear a tha a'riaghladh, a'faicinn gach ceum a th'air thoiseach air gach duine san t-saoghal. Smuain iongantach!

Tha Esan an-còmhnaidh air thoiseach oirnn', 's ged nach eil sinn a'tuigsinn A dhòighean 's A shlighe, tuigidh sinn beagan nuair a choimheadas sinn air-ais.

Aig an àm-sa, cuiridh e iongnadh air an duine mar a tha an Cruthaidhear air an saoghal Aige Fhèin ullachadh gus coinneachadh ris an èiginn a tha seo.

Tha sinn beò an-diugh ann an linn le Teicneòlas, agus mòran a' cleachdadh seo nam beatha làitheil. Mar sin, chan eil e ro dhoirbh dhaibh na sgilean sin a chur gu feum na adhbhar air an talamh.

Le Teicneòlas, èistidh sinn ri searmon, ùine ghoirid an-dèidh dhan seo a bhith air a shearmonachadh, no cluinnidh sinn an searmon nuair a tha e air a shearmonachadh.

Tha roghainn againn air loidhne de nithean prìseil, 's tha e na chùis-iongnaidh mar a tha an Cruthaidhear cho fada air thoiseach air an duine.

Chunnaic E iomchaidh gum biodh Teicneòlas ann am mòran dhachaighean, agus chan eil cho fada bho dh'atharraich saoghal mhòran, 's iad ag ionnsachadh sgilean Teicneòlais an cois an dreuchd làitheil.

Chan eil na h-inntinnean as fheàrr ach astar glè fhada air dheireadh air a' Chruthaidhear. Tha gach nì na làimh-san, gach anail air thalamh, gach beathach, gach rionnag anns an adhar agus gach adhartas talmhaidh.

Mar a thuirt am bàrd, Dùghall Bochanan,

"Cò a chuairticheas do bhith a Dhè? an doimhne shluig gach reusan suas; nan oidhirpibh tha aingle 's daoin' mar shligean maoraich glacadh chuain."

Cò a thuigeas eadhon iomall A mhòrachd?

Cha tèid Fhacal-san thairis a-chaoidh. Don Chrìosdaidh is e fior adhbhar-thaingealachd agus adhbhar-misneachaidh a tha an sin. Bidh an Cruthaidhear anns gach suidheachadh, a'faicinn na crìch bhon toiseach. Ma tha an t-àm-sa èiginneach do mhòran, nach cuir sinn an cuimhne ar càirdean, cumhachd sìorraidh ar n-Athar, A ghràdh sìorraidh, agus ma ghleidheas E an gealbhan, nach mò gu mòr a ghleidheas E an duine a rinn E na ìomhaigh Fhèin.

Cuiridh sinn ar n-earbs'agus ar dòchas ann, agus gu cinnteach, is e A gealladh, nach millear idir neach dhiubh siud, a chuireas an dòchas ann.

Tha sinne shìos an seo air thalamh an-diugh 's an-dè, seo a'chainnt a th'againn. A-màireach, dè na tha nar rùn -ne a dhèanamh le beatha a fhuair sinn gu saor bhuat.

Tha Thusa àrd- Tighearna nam Flaitheas 's do shùil air gach nì, air a'ghrèin' 's air a'ghealach. Cuiridh Tu nithean air dòigh 's sin gu sàmhach 's bidh cobhair aig daoine nuair a thig orra plàighean.

Nach math gur e gràdh as ainm dhut gu cinnteach bidh Tusa ri gleidheadh 's a' beathachadh d' oighreachd. Bidh d' Ainm-sa buan, is e sin gealladh na Fìrinn is do chomasan sìorraidh- cha tèid aig duine innseadh.

Nuair a thàinig an èiginn-sa, fhuair sinn aimsir glè fhàbharach bhon Chruthaidhear. Bha na làithean blàth, agus e furast'do dhaoine, ma bha iad air an tuath, coiseachd gu sreang-aodaich, no a bhith ag obair anns a'ghàrradh.

Dh' fhaodadh na làithean sin a bhith glè eadardhealaicht', 's tha sinn taingeil gun tug blàths na grèine togail-inntinn do mhòran, nuair a bhiodh e dualtach do dhaoine a bhith a' fàs tùrsach.

Nach fhaic sinn A làmh an-còmhnaidh faisg oirnn' le cobhair? •



2020

Y CATRIONA MURRAY

20STENEBRAS UX

AO TZU, FOUNDER OF TAOISM, FAMOUSLY SAID, 'GIVE A MAN A FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A DAY; TEACH A MAN TO FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A LIFETIME.' Well, all I can say is Mr Lao probably hadn't met many Lewismen. My own experience would have the proverb run a little more like this: 'Give a Lewisman a fish and he'll ask why you didn't cook it too; teach a Lewisman how to fish and you will fall at the first hurdle, because they already know everything.'

Perhaps I'm being a little harsh, and I am most definitely generalising for effect. Nonetheless, I have met a fair number of men (and women on the odd occasion) who seem to believe they have nothing to learn from anyone else.

I am a fan of experiential learning - that is, picking things up by doing them, preferably alongside a more experienced mentor. Outside the confines of formal education, there are limitless possibilities for this. We are never too old to pick up a new skill or glean additional knowledge. It's been my good fortune to serve on various boards and committees alongside people who have taught me much about the way to work effectively as part of a team. Some have taught me negatively, by being an example NOT to follow, but most have generously shared their wisdom and experience in ways that have enriched my own.

It used to be the way with island communities, the older teaching the younger. Wee boys and girls followed their parents to the peats or to the sheep shearing and, eventually, learned the techniques for themselves. Gaelic survived the same way. Linguists will tell us now that it is a failure of what they call 'intergenerational transmission' that leaves the language in the state it's in. That isn't hard to believe. We have, sadly, begun to neglect the importance of home and of community in the raising of children as they ought to go. Instead, we leave it to schools and, therefore, governments — to instil values, skills and knowledge that used to be supplied by those who loved the children best.

Instead of wringing our hands in despair, or wearing ourselves out petitioning a deaf government, the church is well-placed for action. We are, at our best, a community. In theory, church should be somewhere that young people can grow in safety, surrounded by those who want only the best for them.

I worry, sometimes, that our well-meaning best isn't enough. Provision is certainly made for children and teenagers. They have groups by the score, where they come apart from the rest of us fuddy-duddies to enjoy one another's company and learn about the Gospel message. What, though, about intergenerational transmission? Or lifelong learning? And what about community? Are we, in fact, missing an opportunity by always separating the children from the adults, and giving a subliminal message that they have nothing to learn from us, nor we from them?

My own congregation is richly endowed with mature Christians. They ought, I think, to be considered a source of experience and wisdom. Many of them have lived through times of revival, as well as thinner spiritual harvests. All of them have an insight into life as a Christian in all its seasons: the first flush of love, the discouragements, the personal failures, God's gracious refreshing...all of which might profit youngsters in their walk.

One of my firmest convictions is that our own providences are not just for ourselves. We are to share them so that others may profit by an experience which might well never be theirs. It was my privilege, and that of older people, to enjoy a schooling that was a true extension of home. Teachers - and, indeed, wider society - shared the values of family life, reinforcing the sort of moral learning that started with our parents. Thus, we passed from the tutelage of our mothers and fathers, to primary and then secondary school, without ever being conflicted by what we heard.

Not long ago, in teaching my Sunday School class the commandments, we stuttered to a halt on the subject of idolatry. 'People do believe in other gods,' a girl of ten told me, 'and we have to let them.' There is a battle between church and state — and state is winning.

How can we teach our children that right is unchanging, and that wrong will always be wrong, when louder voices and stronger forces say otherwise? I say the answer lies in experiential learning within the church, of discipleship which doesn't always separate young people from the body of believers, but encourages them to watch and learn from their elders.