



 THE
RECORD

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WELCOME TO THE OCTOBER RECORD



AS THE NIGHTS DRAW IN, IT'S THE PERFECT TIME TO START A NEW BOOK. This month's *Record* has plenty of recommendations, including two newly-published titles closely related to the Free Church. Thank you to the Rev Dr Malcolm Maclean for reviewing Prof Donald Macleod's latest book which tells the story of Scottish theology in the wake of the Reformation. Thanks, also, to Duncan MacPherson for his article on Fraser Grigor's history of the Free Church's mission work in Peru. And don't miss ETS News this month, as the Rev Thomas Davis gives us an insight into the must-read books from the Seminary's shelves.

Many of us are returning to our church buildings to worship together, following six long months of lockdown. The pandemic has shown us all how vital Christian fellowship is, and the blessings God has given us by bringing us together. Being deprived of meeting has seemed a strange providence. But God's purposes are wise and good. We continue to pray that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10) ●

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

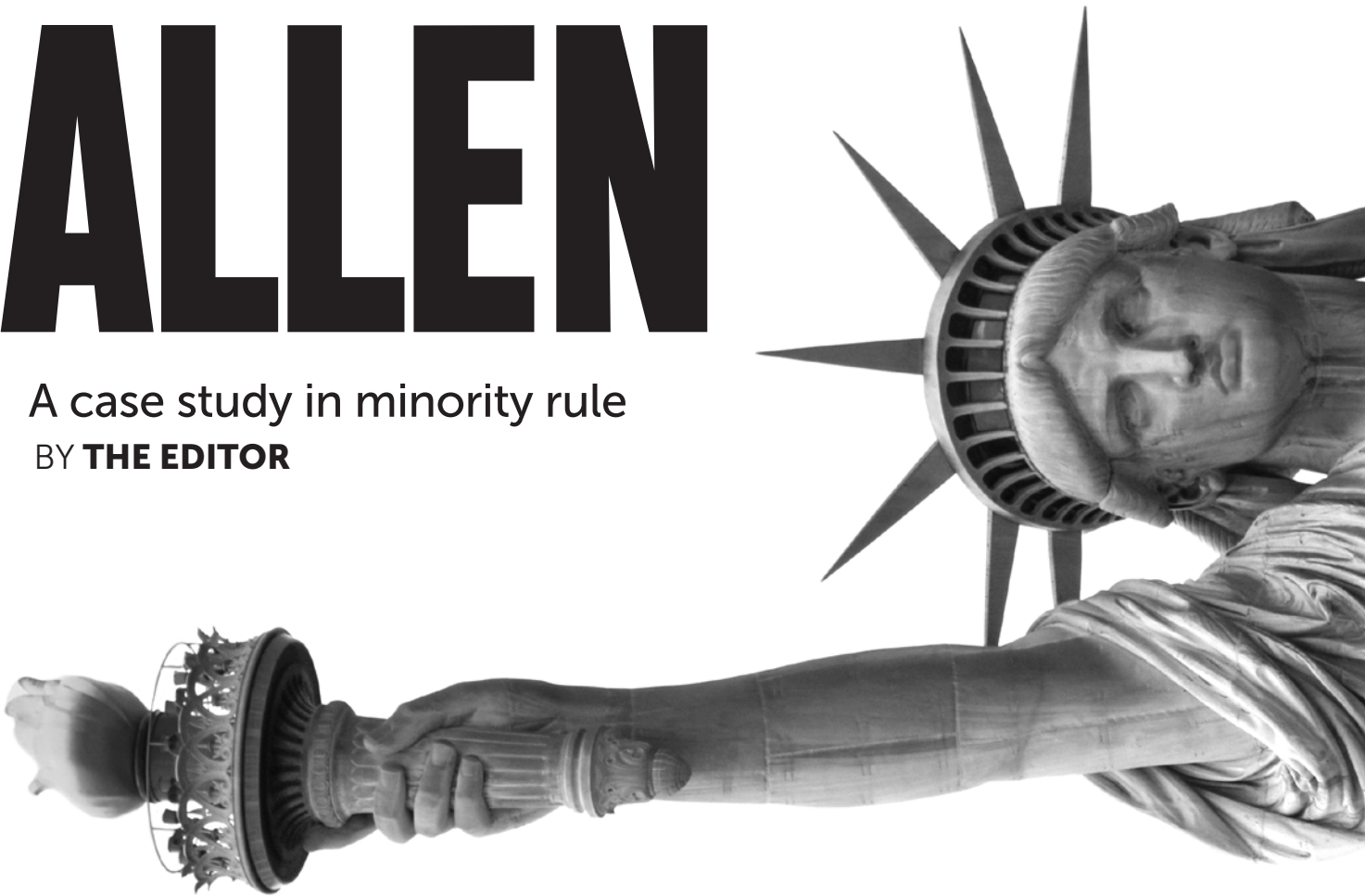
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HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN

A case study in minority rule
BY **THE EDITOR**

Photo by Juan Mayobre on Unsplash



The common refrain over here about the son of Mary Anne Trump (née MacLeod) is 'he must take after his father'. Rather than celebrate the fulfilment of America's promise, we'd rather ignore our association.

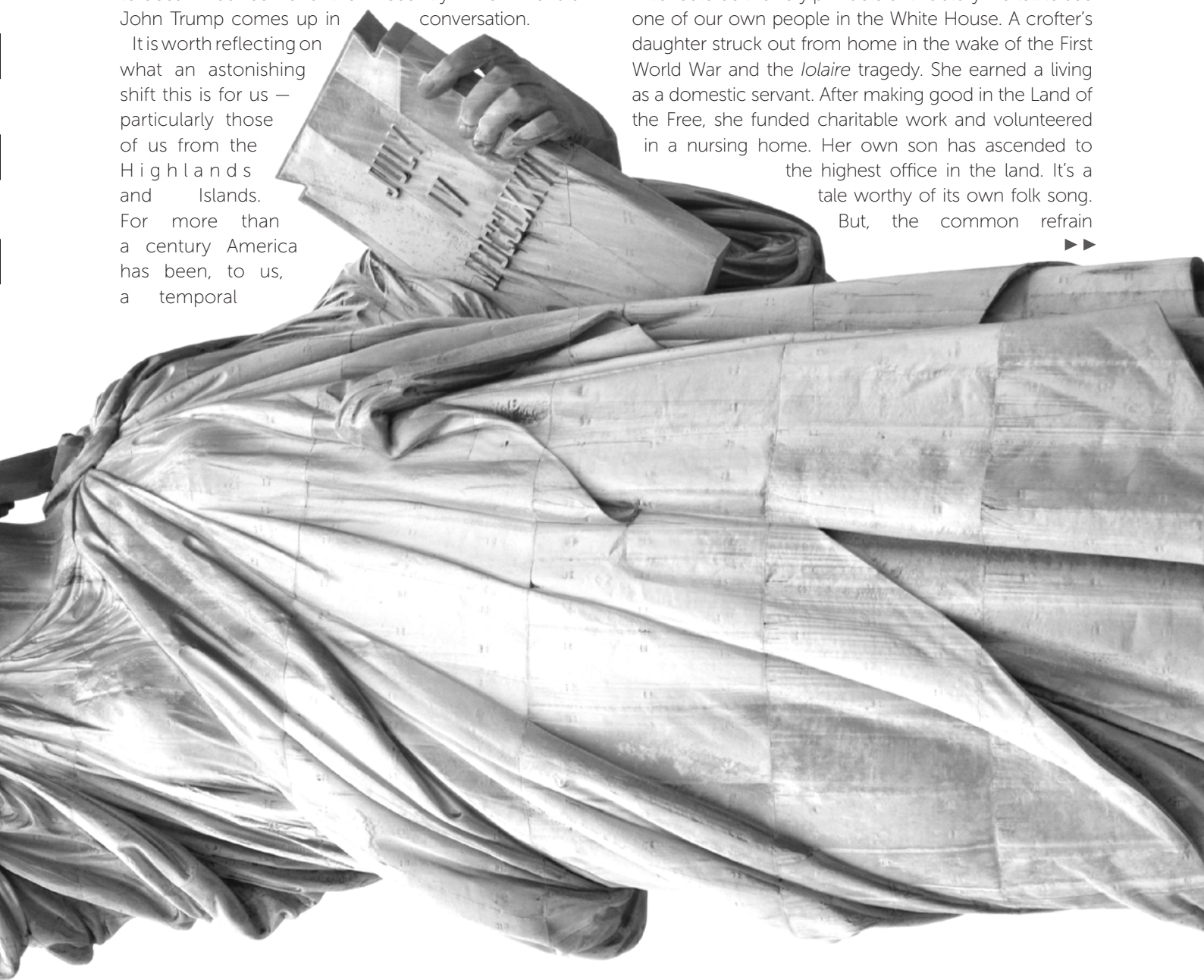
A DANCE CALLED AMERICA

The *Pew Research Centre* recently published polling data which suggests that only 41% of the UK public have a favourable view of the United States. This is a record low for us since these surveys began, and down from 83% in 2000. *Pew's* researchers conclude that the perception we have of the man in charge is to blame. The polling isn't broken down by region, but the overall number seems to chime with the eye-rolling which tends to occur in our corner of the country when Donald John Trump comes up in conversation.

It is worth reflecting on what an astonishing shift this is for us — particularly those of us from the Highlands and Islands. For more than a century America has been, to us, a temporal

promised land. We have thought of it as the place where our impoverished forebears, considered expendable by landlords and Field Marshals, found respect as well as wealth. Our folk songs lionise those among us who 'made this Clan great' because they 'rose with your people through the New World, like a rocket to the moon'. They praise the land with 'No kings and no landlords to treat us like beggars and thieves. There's no one but God here to fear or to look down on me'.

It should be the very pinnacle of this story we tell to see one of our own people in the White House. A crofter's daughter struck out from home in the wake of the First World War and the *Iolaire* tragedy. She earned a living as a domestic servant. After making good in the Land of the Free, she funded charitable work and volunteered in a nursing home. Her own son has ascended to the highest office in the land. It's a tale worthy of its own folk song. But, the common refrain



We are not loving our neighbours unless we are trying to bring them the benefits of Biblical morality. We are not bringing the benefits of Biblical morality to society unless we are involved in politics.

over here about the son of Mary Anne Trump (née MacLeod) is 'he must take after his father'. Rather than celebrate the fulfilment of America's promise, we'd rather ignore our association. And it's not just because he became a landlord. In observing the actions of Donald Trump, we are seeing what it takes for a minority to wield power in a democracy. It isn't endearing. But it holds lessons for the church.

TRIUMPH OF THE MINORITY

America was founded on a contradiction: an economy built on slavery and a political philosophy based on human rights. The latter is the root of generations of American leaders deploying high-minded and ambitious rhetoric which has set expectations for American democracy. Abraham Lincoln called his country 'the last best hope of earth'. Ronald Reagan echoed John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards in referring to it as 'a city on a hill'. Madeleine Albright called it 'the indispensable nation'. Comparing the US to the despotic monarchies of early modern Europe, the dictators of the 20th century and the Soviet Union, Americans have – with some justification – considered their Great Experiment an example of principled and effective government.

It is in this light that the current administration is often considered 'norm-breaking'. It is claimed that the principles, culture and unwritten rules of American democracy have been set aside since 2016. But Trump's approach is only the loudest, most obvious example of a cross-party trend that has been developing for 40 years.

In his First Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson reaffirmed the republican principle that 'the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail'. It doesn't always work out that way in practice. The current President garnered almost 3 million fewer votes than his opponent in the 2016 election. The Senate, which draws two members from each State, is six or seven percentage points more Republican than the electorate. This means the Republican Party can win a Senate majority without gaining a majority of votes cast, while Democrats require a landslide.

In the less frequently reported upon, and even more bare-knuckled, arenas of state and local-level politics, attempts at engineering minority rule have been made by both of America's behemoth political

parties. Control of local government has been used to favourably re-draw constituency boundaries and to make voting more difficult for people likely to support opposing candidates. The result is public policy which contravenes Thomas Jefferson's majoritarian principle. Disillusionment has followed. Only 17% of the public trust their government to do what is right all or most of the time. Another consequence is anger towards those who have benefitted from the inversion of democracy.

SEPARATION OF POWERS

Prominent among the privileged minorities are the 'evangelicals'. They have their own segment in polling samples, and are frequently cited as a key part of Donald Trump's voter base. Around 1 in 4 American adults belong to an evangelical denomination; only around 7% of adults subscribe to evangelical doctrines such as salvation by grace alone, Biblical inerrancy and God's sovereignty, according to *Barna Group*.

How can the evangelical Christian minority command influence in a country with no established religion? 'The constitution doesn't say anything about the separation of church and politics,' writes Aaron Sorkin in *The West Wing*. The church in the US largely retreated from politics in the mid-20th century. But by the 1970s, things changed. *The Record* of April 1978 noted the rapid rise of the evangelical movement in America, which is 'strong in social prestige and enjoys the support of some of the most prominent politicians, sportsmen and businessmen in the United States'. The following year the televangelist Jerry Falwell established the Moral Majority pressure group to influence public policy. The 'religious right' has been a prominent force in electoral politics ever since. The movement has coalesced around socially conservative policy goals and counts the confirmation of pro-life Supreme Court judges and the relocation of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem among its successes. These are significant achievements for such a small group. But has it been worth it?

SEPARATION OF CHRISTIANS

Falwell's Moral Majority yoked itself to the Republican Party early on. For many evangelicals since, being Christian has meant voting

People are more likely to think like others of their own race than like others of their own religion. This is the result of yoking political evangelicalism to one particular political party.

Republican. This was surprising in 1981 when the movement backed the divorced Ronald Reagan over the Sunday School teacher Jimmy Carter. It has been the source of fevered press commentary during the Trump administration, attracting accusations of hypocrisy and bringing to light a series of scandals related to contemporary leaders like Jerry Falwell Jr.

Even so, it has been an effective tactic. Republican politicians, and none more so than Trump, consistently court the evangelical vote. Still, despite evangelicals' apparent out-sized influence, the landmark decision legalising abortion, *Roe v. Wade*, remains the law of the land. 61% of the population want abortion to remain legal in all or most cases. At the same time, the past decade has seen the number of Americans who describe themselves as Christian shrink from 77% to 65%.

Exercising minority influence is very risky. This is most clearly evident in the fragmentation which has come about among evangelicals themselves. Surveys conducted by the *Pew Research Centre* over the summer show a significant racial divide in voting intention. In a poll of registered voters, 82% of 'white evangelicals' stated their intention to vote for Donald Trump, while 88% of 'black Protestants' plan to vote for Joe Biden. In other words, people are more likely to vote like others of their own race than like others of their own religion.

The issue runs deeper than the choice of Presidential candidate. *Barna Group* research into perceptions of race relations in the US shows that only one third of white Christians think America has a race problem, a slightly lower proportion than the white population overall. But 81% of black Christians think there is a problem, slightly higher than the black population overall.

Similarly, only one in 10 white Christians feel 'very motivated' to address racial injustice in society; whereas half of black Christians are 'very motivated'. In other words, people are more likely to think like others of their own race than like others of their own religion.

This is the result of yoking political evangelicalism to one particular political party.

While it has permitted magnified influence, it has caused division in the body of Christ. It has sidelined crucial issues like inequality in the criminal justice system. Not because Scripture is silent on these issues (see James 2:8-9; Leviticus 19:15), but because they don't fit within a political party's platform. As a direct result of the pursuit of evangelical political influence, party affiliation in the US has become a matter of identity rather than of reason. This means matters other than Christian ethics are being prioritised when it comes to politics.

Additionally, there is no room for nuance. Consider the case of abortion. In terms of rhetoric, the Republicans are the pro-life party, the Democrats are pro-choice. Yet, statistics show that abortion rates have declined much more rapidly under Democratic administrations than Republican ones. Nominating pro-life judges has not addressed the reality of abortion to the same extent that job creation, poverty alleviation, and access to contraception and education has.

Do we want decisions to be made by people who say the right thing, by people who do what looks like the right thing, or by people whose actions lead to the right outcomes? A Christian may conclude that standing by the correct principle is the key. Equally, a Christian may also decide that practical action is most important.

But instead of respect for both of these positions, the goal of maintaining party political influence has led Christians to call into question the very salvation of brothers and sisters in Christ who have chosen an alternate public policy position.

The case of contemporary US government demonstrates that, in a democracy, minority rule gets ugly. Holding on to power requires cunning, rule bending, reliance on technicalities, guile, sleight of hand and — at worst — corruption and lies. To rule as a minority is to balance on a knife's edge. The current US administration looks set to lock in an advantage in the Supreme Court. Despite the President's poor reputation among the electorate, the Republicans' structural advantages may even allow them to ►►

America is becoming less white, less Christian and less conservative every year. The achievements of today's ruling minority may be obliterated before long.

hold on to control in the Senate for the time being. But changes in demographics will surely catch up with them eventually. America is becoming less white, less Christian and less conservative every year. The achievements of today's ruling minority may be obliterated before long.

LAND OF THE FREE CHURCH

In Scotland, the Free Church has been a small minority in society since 1900. Reformed Christians have been so since the liberalisation of the established Church's theology. Christians in their totality are now in this same boat.

As in America, the church's retreat from politics in the middle of the 20th century hastened laws we don't want. Unlike in the US, the church here hasn't taken hold of institutional power. As laws on life and family which run contrary to Scripture have been passed, regret has been expressed about that. But where do we go from here? Should we follow American evangelicals in seeking to exercise power beyond our numbers?

The Trump administration is the logical conclusion of that approach. To seek to frustrate the will of the majority is a precarious position. It requires tactics we should not be prepared to use. Even when gains are made this way, they are unlikely to last.

And yet, *'Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people'* (Proverbs 14:34). We are not loving our neighbours unless we are trying to bring them the benefits of Biblical morality. We are not bringing the benefits of Biblical morality to society unless we are involved in politics.

The early church is a better model for us than political evangelicalism in the US, though an American politician can help to explain why. Former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, is supposed to have remarked that 'all politics is local'. This is how the church in Acts did their politics. They did not seek, nor did they expect, to wield the power of government. Yet the way they lived, the social policy they practised, changed their society. The Roman Emperor Julian earned the nickname 'the Apostate' for his rejection

of Christianity. Yet, he wrote of the Christian community, 'why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism [his term for Christianity]? I believe that we ought really and truly to practise every one of these virtues.

'In every city establish frequent hostels in order that strangers may profit by our benevolence; I do not mean for our own people only, but for others also who are in need of money.

'For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us. Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort'.

If the Free Church, minority as we are, were to spend our time attempting to lobby the Scottish Government in line with Biblical morality, we would be readily ignored. It is more profitable, for us and for our neighbours, when we seek the common good in our own communities. To preach the Gospel and to apply it to the problems in our neighbourhoods: homelessness, addiction, unemployment, loneliness, despair. When this leads to opportunities to talk with politicians, at local and national level, we should take them. Not only is persuasion possible, but the right to free speech confers a duty to engage in constructive debate with the good of others as our motivation.

Our approach to political power rests on our understanding of where power really resides. A President who asserts that his political opponent will 'hurt God' and 'hurt the Bible', as the current incumbent has, is not one who adheres to the Reformed doctrine of God's Sovereignty. We know that God's will cannot be thwarted, or even resisted. His purposes cannot be frustrated. When it comes to engaging in politics, we recall Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he sent them out to preach and to heal, *'Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves'* (Matthew 10:16). ●

OCT/NOV 2020 PRAYER DIARY

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

Wed 7th Pray for the Commission of Assembly as they meet today for urgent business only.

Thurs 8th Pray for Revs Malcolm Macleod, Nigel Anderson and Stephen Allison as they deal with the business of the Church after the commission.

Fri 9th U's national youth conference for S4-S6 pupils is happening online this weekend. Pray for the young folk who want to grow in their relationship with God as they look at issues facing them.

Sat 10th As we come to another weekend, pray for an end to restrictions so our churches can be filled and we can sing praises to our Heavenly Father aloud together.

Sun 11th Pray for the scattered community of Lybster, Bruan, Latheron and Berriedale and for Rev. Howard Stone as the interim moderator for the congregation.

Mon 12th Pray for all those in government as they consider how best to begin the recovery process after the financial fallout caused by COVID-19.

Tues 13th As some teachers and pupils are enjoying time off school after a term of getting used to new school rules, pray that they will be refreshed and look forward to the next term with less concerns.

Wed 14th Pray for the many people who have fled their home country to find safety and freedom. Pray that they will be treated with compassion and mercy.

Thurs 15th Pray for Gillian Moyo, the youth worker in Kilwinning, and for the Glasgow Presbytery as they consider how to develop the work in that community.

Fri 16th As many of our buildings do not have facility to livestream services, pray that each congregation will be able to find a solution to enable growth and fellowship.

Sat 17th Continue to pray for the governments in Westminster and Edinburgh as they plan the best ways to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant economic downturn.

Sun 18th Today remember the vacant congregation of Rogart in your prayers and Rev. Duncan Macleod as he serves as their interim moderator.

Mon 19th Pray for the students and staff of ETS as they are on their mid-semester break this week.

Tues 20th Give thanks for all the work that Sunday School teachers and youth workers have done throughout lockdown to keep in touch with our young folk.

Wed 21st Pray with 20schemes as they strive to plant gospel churches in Scotland's poorest communities. Give thanks for the lives that have been changed through their work.

Thurs 22nd Give thanks with the Kilmallie and Ardnamurchan congregation as they and their new minister, Rev. Dr Euan Dodds, settle into working together in their community.

Fri 23rd Give thanks for the faithful work that Rev. Peter Turnbull has given the Burghead congregation in the past, and pray that he and the congregation will continue to work together to spread the gospel in their community.

Sat 24th Pray for all those who speak out against abortion and euthanasia and pray that our society would recognise the sanctity of God-given life.

Sun 25th The Northern Presbytery covers a scattered community. Pray for the Wick and Keiss congregation on the east coast and Rev. Howard Stone, their interim moderator, as they serve there.

Mon 26th Pray with the Bible Society for funds to come available to purchase a new van for Bible distribution in Siberia.

Tues 27th As we are so blessed with so many resources to help our Bible study, pray for the many around the world who do not have the whole Bible in their own language. Give thanks for all those involved in Bible translation.

Wed 28th Give thanks for CARE, the Christian Institute, and our own church leaders for taking

a lead in the response to the proposed hate legislation by the Scottish government.

Thurs 29th The Trustees are scheduled to meet today. Pray for guidance in all their deliberations.

Fri 30th SU run Spotlight for S1-2 every fourth Friday. Pray for the young folk who join to have fun and to look at the Bible together and find out more about Jesus.

Sat 31st When many of our schools will have celebrated Halloween this week, pray that we will be able to show Christian kindness to any children who come to our doors.

Sun 1st Remember the Duirinish congregation and Rev. David Miller as he is on a phased return to work. Pray that he and Rev. Donnie G will be able to serve the congregation through this interim period.

Mon 2nd Give thanks for the Christian Institute as they work to promote Christian principles in the government, education and medical spheres.

Tues 3rd Pray for the Christians around the world who have been self-isolating for years because their faith is seen as dangerous. Give thanks for organisations who serve the persecuted church.

Wed 4th As communication through media has been such a blessing to us through lockdown, pray for the ongoing work of FEBA as they bring God's Word to places where people cannot go.

Thurs 5th Give thanks for our rescue services and pray especially for our firefighters, who will be on alert today as communities and families have bonfires.

Fri 6th Pray for all those who have been bereaved throughout this year and who have struggled to come to terms with their loss.

Prayer requests to: ian.macdonald57@btinternet.com.

Please take time to send requests for your congregation or ministry to be included in forthcoming Records. These prayer notes are prepared 5 weeks in advance of publication.

WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

TRUMP HAS 'DISTORTED' THE GOSPEL (AMERICAS)



Faithful America, which describes itself as the largest online community of Christians working for social justice, is campaigning to persuade believers to vote against Donald Trump. Rev Nathan Empsall, Faithful America's campaigns director, told *Newsweek* that Trump has 'distorted' the Gospel to serve a 'hateful, right-wing agenda.' 'His incompetent, deadly response to COVID-19 and its impact on jobs and the poor is something every Christian needs to take into account, as is his anger toward protesters who simply want racial justice.' Empsall noted that Trump questioned the faith of those who criticised his approach. 'This is not religious freedom, or even Christian freedom: It is a form of toxic Christian nationalism,' Empsall said. ●

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE (AMERICAS)



Timothy Keller, founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, tweeted, 'The Bible binds my conscience to care for the poor, but it does not tell me the best practical way to do it. Any particular strategy (high taxes and government services vs low taxes and private charity) may be good and wise and may even be somewhat inferred from other things the Bible teaches, but they are not directly commanded and therefore we cannot insist that all Christians, as a matter of conscience, follow one or the other...The Bible tells me that abortion is a sin and great evil, but it doesn't tell me the best way to decrease or end abortion in this country, nor which policies are most effective...This means when it comes to taking political positions, voting, determining alliances and political involvement, the Christian has liberty of conscience. Christians cannot say to other Christians 'no Christian can vote for...' or 'every Christian must vote for' unless you can find a Biblical command to that effect... The demonization and dehumanization of the other side must stop. When professing Christians do it, it is triply wrong.' ●

'TRUE BELIEVERS' VOTE TRUMP (AMERICAS)



John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles and author of the MacArthur Study Bible, told an interviewer that 'Christians could not vote Democratic'. MacArthur recounted a telephone conversation he had with Donald Trump, during which he told the US President, 'any real true believer is going to be on your side in this election.'

He went on to say, 'I'm not at all surprised that you have an assault on the conscience by the Democratic Party, where homosexuality, immorality at any kind of level, transgenderism is fine, acceptable behaviour and we ought to make laws to normalize it. I'm not at all surprised that the family is destroyed through divorce and abortion, which is the destruction of the very reason for marriage. I'm not surprised that they're screaming to defund the police, because that's the next restraint to go. And I was just waiting for when they were going to hit the church. So if that's the Democratic platform, then it is an all-out, massive, comprehensive assault on God.' ●



PRAYER AND ACTION JUSTICE INITIATIVE (AMERICAS)



A coalition of American Christian groups including the National Association of Evangelicals and the American Bible Society is calling for reform of the American criminal justice system based on biblical principles. The Prayer and Action Justice Initiative is demanding a legal system which recognises that all people are made in the image of God. Referring to data that shows black males are six times more likely to spend time in prison than white males; that black Americans are more likely to be arrested for a drug-related crime despite drug use and trafficking rates being roughly equal across racial groups; and that black people receive harsher than average sentences following conviction, the group cites James 2:9, 'if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.' The coalition states, 'We seek policies designed to level the playing field so that outcomes are driven more by justice than wealth or race.' ●

BRITAIN'S FIRST CHRISTIAN GRAFFITI (EUROPE)



A 5th century chalice covered in Christian etchings has been discovered at the Vindolanda Roman fort, near Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland. The excavation also uncovered the foundations of a church dating to the 5th or 6th century.

Dr Andrew Birley, director of Vindolanda excavations, told *The Observer* that finding a vessel 'smothered both inside and out with Christian iconography is quite incredible...Nothing in north-western Europe comes close from the period.' The fourteen fragments of the lead chalice which have been found by the archaeologists are covered in crosses, angels and Chi-Rho (a symbol representing the name of Christ) as well as fish, a whale and ships. Birley said: 'The discovery [of the chalice] helps us appreciate how the site and its community survived beyond the fall of Rome and yet remained connected to a spiritual successor in the form of Christianity.' ●

ANTI-MISSIONARY EFFORT CONTINUES (EUROPE)



In the first six months of 2020, more than 40 people were punished for contravening Russia's anti-missionary law, according to *Forum 18*, a Norwegian religious liberty news service. Several people have been fined for handing out Christian tracts. A South Korean national, Seo Jim Wook, was fined and deported after holding a small evangelistic gathering in a private home. While the status of the Russian Orthodox Church has been protected by President Vladimir Putin, evangelical Christians have been targeted by the government, along with Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and Roman Catholics. Russia's legislature is currently considering a new law which would limit religious liberty to Russian citizens, ban non-residents from practising their faith and prevent Russian religious leaders from studying abroad. ●

SURVEY CONFIRMS CHRISTIANITY'S GROWTH (ASIA)



Dutch research institute GAMAAN (Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran) has conducted an online survey of almost 40,000 Iranians living in Iran. Contrary to the Iranian Government's census, which claims 99.5% of the population are Muslim, the new research shows a diversity of beliefs in the country. Missionaries have reported significant growth of the church in Iran, and the survey confirms this. 1.5% of respondents identified as Christians, which extrapolates to between 750,000 and 1 million adults in the country as a whole. Younger people reported higher levels of conversion to Christianity than older respondents. ●

CHRISTIANITY GROWING IN THAILAND (ASIA)



The Free in Jesus Christ Church Association (FJCCA), a movement focussed on village-level evangelism, baptized 1,435 new believers in a single day on 6th September. National church leaders told *Christianity Today* that this is the biggest group of converts being baptised they had ever seen in the majority Buddhist country. Such a large group baptism was possible because Thailand is one of the few countries to have effectively contained COVID-19. Bob Craft, who supports FJCCA, said, 'It is truly a mystery to the world as to why Thailand has been spared during the COVID pandemic. We believe it is the merciful hand of God to allow the gospel to spread at this crucial time.' Beginning in 2016, FJCCA has helped to establish around 700 house churches in Thailand. ●

CHRISTIANS STILL UNDER ATTACK IN NIGERIA (AFRICA)



Attacks on Christians in Nigeria continue. Stephen Enada, President of the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON), recently told the international media that Nigerian Christians are facing an 'existential crisis'. ICON has published a report, 'Genocide in Nigeria', which details the widespread violence committed against the Christian community by terrorist group Boko Haram and Fulani militants who have mixed Islamist ideology with a desire to steal land. New reports of Christians being killed emerge on a weekly basis. Sati Bulus was shot by Fulani herdsmen on 17th September in Bokkos County, Plateau State. This was three days after local Fulani leaders held a meeting to raise funds for the purchase of weapons. In addition to those who have been killed, more than 3 million people have been displaced and reports suggest women and children are being trafficked to Europe. In light of the Nigerian government's failure to act, ICON is calling for international pressure to be applied. ●

MP SUED FOR BIBLE REMARK (ASIA)



Malaysian Member of Parliament Nik Muhammad Zawawi Salleh is being sued for comments he made about the Bible. During a debate in Parliament related to tougher drink-driving laws, Nik Zawawi claimed that all religions prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but that the Bible had later been 'manipulated'. His comments provoked public anger, but he has refused to apologise, according to the *Malay Mail*. Two members of Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku (Homeland Solidarity Party) have filed a lawsuit alleging that Nik Zawawi's comments amount to unlawful interference with their constitutional right to freedom of religion. Marcel Jude Joseph and Margaret Binsing are seeking an injunction to prevent Nik Zawawi making 'defamatory, malicious, injurious, blasphemous remarks about the Christian faith and religion'. ●

FREE CHURCH ANNOUNCES NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND IS DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THE APPOINTMENT OF ANDREW GIFFEN AS ITS NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER. Mr Giffen will take up his new post at the beginning of November.

Andrew has a background in both finance and church leadership. Having trained as an accountant, he then studied theology in Vancouver before working in an executive minister role in a large church in Newcastle, then as associate minister of a church in Glasgow.

Board of Trustees Chairman Donald Forsyth said, 'I'm delighted to welcome Andrew to the role of CEO of the Free Church of Scotland. Andrew joins us at an exciting time as we work towards our vision – a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.'

'I'm immensely grateful to Scott Matheson, our out-going

CEO. During his five years in the role, Scott has made a very significant contribution to the efficient running of the central office and the life of the wider church. I will miss his counsel and wish him every success in his new role.

'Please pray for Mr Giffen as he prepares to take up his new role and give thanks for the service of his predecessor Mr Matheson.' ●



GENERAL ASSEMBLY – 2020 UPDATE

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND MET TO DISCUSS LIMITED BUSINESS. The Assembly decided, due to lockdown restrictions, to reconstitute the meeting in October in the hope that these measures would be relaxed, allowing some commissioners to attend in person.

It has now become apparent that this will not be possible.

To allow time for urgent matters to be discussed and for some board reports to be given, an online meeting has been arranged for the 6th of October at 9am. ●



READING THEOLOGY – WHERE DO I START?

ANYONE WHO HAS VISITED ETS WILL HAVE NOTICED THAT THE BUILDING IS FULL OF BOOKS. Indeed, there isn't actually a library at ETS, because every room is a library! Apart from the toilets, in every room you enter at the Seminary you will find books, and lots of them. And that, of course, is because reading books is a huge part of what is involved in studying theology. But for many people, that can feel quite intimidating.

When confronted by a vast amount of books, it can be so easy to find yourself swallowing hard and thinking, *Where do I start?* So, with that question in mind, this month we're looking at some of the key books that students will use, and we will offer some tips so that you can have a go at reading them too.

After the Bible, there is one book at ETS that is more important than any other: *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. The reason it's the most important is because it is the summary of what we believe as a Seminary and as a Church. No one is allowed to be a full-time lecturer at ETS unless they can subscribe to the Confession. It is an outstanding summary of Reformed Theology. But not only is it the (second) most important book, it is also one of the shortest! So if you have never read the Westminster Confession before, it only takes half an hour or so to read and it gives you a brilliant description of many of the key truths of Reformed Theology.

But not every book is as short as the Confession. Most are much longer, but they're still very good. In terms of theology, perhaps the next most famous book is the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. This book, written almost 500 years ago, is still hugely influential. It can sound quite intimidating. It's also very long, which is perhaps not surprising because it is actually four books in one. But the really surprising thing about the *Institutes* is that it is nowhere near as hard to read as you might think. It is divided up into lots of little sections which are all clearly marked. Some of these discuss topics that were very much related to Calvin's own day (and you can skip these if you like), but many of them offer a very clear and often very beautiful description of all the key truths of Christianity. It is not the kind of book that you need to read from cover to cover (very few theology books are), so you can dip in and out of different sections. So it's definitely not a book to be afraid of; it is well worth giving it a go.

Alongside Calvin, there are many other outstanding authors to look out for. Thomas Boston, Charles Hodge and Herman Bavinck are amongst the giants of history. J. I. Packer, Sinclair Ferguson and Donald Macleod are the giants of our own day.

One type of book you'll find a lot of at ETS is commentaries. These are written about different books of the Bible and they go through each chapter and verse discussing what each section means. There are literally hundreds of them at ETS, and they are immensely useful. But they are not just useful for students and preachers, they are an excellent resource for any believer. Some are more technical, so they will spend a lot of time talking about the original languages, but others are much more accessible. These can be a great resource for personal reading or for group discussions. And there's loads to choose from. Often people are tempted to buy a 'set' of commentaries. This can be useful, but rather than choose a set, the best thing to do is to look out for the best authors. In the Old Testament, anything written by authors like John L Mackay, Alex Motyer or Dale Ralph Davis will be very helpful. In the New Testament, names to look out for include John Stott, William Hendriksen and Don Carson. And there's many, many more.

One last book that gets a lot of attention at ETS is one that is perhaps not so well known. It's called *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*. It's a very significant book for two reasons at least. One, because it contains an amazing amount of information about the church in Scotland. It's a superb introduction to the people and events of Scottish Church History. And two, because it is very hard to get. The *Dictionary* is now out of print and you can only find it by scouring the second-hand market (and it is eye-wateringly expensive!). There are one or two copies at ETS, but you are not allowed to take them home. In fact, it's quite a scoop if you can get your hands on your own copy. If you are a high school student, the height of being cool and impressing your friends is having the latest iPhone in your pocket. But if you are an ETS student, the height of being cool and impressing your friends is having a copy of the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* on your bookshelf!

There are many, many more books at ETS, covering topics that stretch from ethics to evolution, from global mission to ancient archaeology. Each has an important role. And that includes books that we don't necessarily agree with. A key part of understanding what we believe is to ensure that we can engage accurately and effectively with people who think differently. So if you are a regular reader of theology, keep going, and why not try a new topic or author? And if you have never read a book on theology, go for it! It's definitely not as scary as you think. ●

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

BY NATALIA PELTTARI



EARLIER IN 2020, JUST A COUPLE OF WEEKS BEFORE THE LOCKDOWN STARTED, EDINBURGH CITY MISSION EXPANDED ITS WORK

among the most vulnerable in our city to encompass refugees and asylum seekers through a ministry that we are calling Salaam (Arabic for 'Hello' and 'Peace'). In the Bible, the equivalent Hebrew word, Shalom, means far more than the absence of war: it paints a picture of harmony, completion and wholeness; the state of the world as the loving Creator intended it. Our prayer for our New Scot friends who have been forced to leave their homes is that they may find safety, peace, and the wholeness that only comes from knowing that we are loved by our Heavenly Father.

In expanding our ministry, Edinburgh City Mission is continuing the important work started by Edinburgh Churches for Sanctuary, which operated for about five years in our city and which received significant funding and support from the Free Church.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

In 1951, following the horrors of the two world wars and the displacement of millions, an international convention spelled out the definition of a refugee: any person who is forced to leave their country of origin or residence due to persecution, war or violence. The nations agreed that refugees should be protected without discrimination and that international co-operation is required to fulfill these aims. The convention has been ratified by 147 nations, including the UK.

In the UK, the term 'refugee' is used to describe a person who has had their claim for asylum approved by the Home Office, whereas an 'asylum seeker' is someone who has made a claim for asylum but has not yet been approved. In Scotland, the great majority of asylum seekers live in the only Scottish dispersal city: Glasgow. Still, because of our participation in the Syrian Resettlement Scheme, there are refugees in all 32 local authorities.

The Syrian conflict has resulted in the largest humanitarian crisis in our time. Millions have left the country and even more are internally displaced within Syria. The UK government responded to the crisis in 2015 and committed to welcome 20,000 people through the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. Edinburgh promised to welcome 500 Syrians, and had been on track to reach that goal this year, before the pandemic hit our country.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT REFUGEES?

Over and over again, the Bible commands us to show hospitality to all, in particular towards the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant. God recognised the special vulnerabilities of these groups and called his people to protect them. He told them to *'treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God'* (Leviticus 19:34).

He required them to *'Do justice and righteousness...*

do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow' (Jeremiah 22:3). *'Is not this the fast that I choose...to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house...?'* (Isaiah 58:6-7).

I could go on citing Scripture. The very essence of the Gospel is that God descended (migrated, if you will) to us, and dwelt among us. Through Jesus' sacrifice we, who were once strangers, now belong to God and to each other. Even our precious Saviour was once a refugee, escaping death and persecution in a foreign land.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

If the Old Testament was clear on this issue, Jesus challenges us even more. When asked by an expert on the Law how eternal life is inherited (Luke 10), Jesus does not ask for an empty proclamation of faith. Loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself are the way to life, healing, salvation and flourishing. And if there is any doubt in our minds, Jesus goes on to clarify who our neighbour is in the Parable of the Good Samaritan: everyone is our neighbour — particularly those in need. Even Samaritans? Yes! Even our political enemies? Yes! Even those seeking asylum? Especially them!

The Church is called to bring Shalom to all the world. Jesus is making each of us our brother's keeper. We are responsible for each other's well-being. When one of us finds salvation, wholeness and liberation in Christ, we all benefit. As never before in our lifetime, the global pandemic has made it crystal clear that every single one of us is interconnected.

Our calling and duty as the Church of our living Lord remains the same, and it perhaps is even stronger and more needed now in our political and social climate. There is so much to be afraid of right now: Will we be unwell? Will we lose our jobs? Will the economy collapse? Will there be enough for everyone? What will our future be like? God is calling us to look compassionately on our fears but to choose courage and love. The Apostle John reminds us that, *'There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear'* (1 John 4:18). We can cast our cares on our good, good Father, for he is taking care of us. Our trust in his love and grace frees us from our fear and allows us to care for one another.

It is no secret that refugees and migrants have been dehumanised and made scapegoats. Even in the past couple of weeks, we have seen an alarming increase of these hateful, fear-full sentiments. The Church is called, however, to keep our hearts and our tables open, ready to extend hospitality. Like the Samaritan in the story (the unlikely hero!), we must let the love of God overcome our fears and reservations and help those who are most in need.

'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' (Hebrews 13:2) ●

Natalia Pelttari is an outreach worker with Edinburgh City Mission (edinburghcitymission.org.uk)

MY NAME IS OBADIAH, BUT I HAD BETTER CLEAR UP WHICH ONE. There are about a dozen Obadiah's in the Old Testament. I suppose the most famous is the one who lived much later and who has a Bible book named after him. He lived in the sixth century BC, when God's people had been exiled. I lived a couple of centuries before that, when God's people were under a different kind of pressure.

It was the time of Elijah the prophet and I was employed as the chief steward of the king of Israel. His name was Ahab and he was one of the worst of all the kings. He reigned for twenty-two years and the Bible's verdict is that he did more evil in God's sight than all of his predecessors put together.

Israel was supposed to be a community in which people worshipped and served the Lord alone. But Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, brought the idolatrous worship of Baal into the nation.

I had been brought up from my earliest days to worship and serve the Lord. But I had to come to a point of making my own decision and my own commitment. The faith in which I had been nurtured became my own personal faith. And I was determined to remain faithful to the living God. That wasn't easy in Ahab's royal court. I was often under pressure to just go with the flow of the idolatry around me.

One of the trickiest situations I faced was the time when Queen Jezebel was trying to wipe out the Lord's prophets. I realised that something had to be done. It was as if I had come to the kingdom for such a time as that. I managed, amid much secrecy, to arrange for two groups of fifty prophets to be hidden and kept out of harm's way. Amazingly, I got away with it. But then one day I received new instructions from the king.

There was a terrible drought affecting the country. I learned later that Elijah had prophesied this would happen — a direct challenge to Baal, who was supposed to control the rain and the land's fertility. But the drought persisted and Ahab was desperate for water. So he divided the land between the two of us and we went out to search for any springs of water for drinking or green grass to feed the horses.

It was as I went about this task that I encountered Elijah. I was in awe of him really. He asked me to arrange an audience with the king. That did not exactly fill me with excitement. In fact, I wondered if I was being punished for my sins. I expected that the very mention of Elijah's name would provoke Ahab to anger and he would probably take it out on me.

But Elijah assured me that everything would be okay, so I arranged for the two of them to meet. When they did, Ahab accused Elijah of bringing trouble on the

land, I suppose because he'd predicted the famine and revealed Baal's impotence.

Of course, the irony was that it was really Ahab who was the troubler of the land. He was mixing up the religion of Israel with paganism, despite all the commandments that people should worship the Lord with all their heart and soul.

Elijah challenged Ahab to prove Baal's power. The king gathered all of Baal's prophets together at Mount Carmel. They were to prepare an altar and an offering to Baal, while Elijah would build an altar to the Lord. They would all pray for fire to come and devour the offerings.

And what a carry-on we witnessed. The false prophets worked themselves up into a frenzy, but, no matter how loudly they shouted or how frantically they danced about, nothing happened.

Then Elijah prayed that God would reveal his power and glorify his own name by sending fire from heaven. And that's just what happened.

People were astounded. I remember them breaking into a chant, 'The Lord, he is God' — over and over again they said it. Baalism had been publicly exposed as useless and the Lord shown as truly the One who reigns on high.

It was the high point of my life really. I had lived dangerously. It wasn't easy to remain true to the Lord in those days. Many people felt you just had to play along with Baalism. I heard some who suggested that they would like to follow the Lord but the times were changing and maybe it was time to move on, as if the tide was going out on the old religion. But I always knew that God's calling was for faithfulness, whether it's easy to stand up for him or not.

People have asked me whether I was nervous or afraid. Well, of course I was. I mean, if Jezebel had found out what I was up to, I would probably have become another statistic in her catalogue of murders.

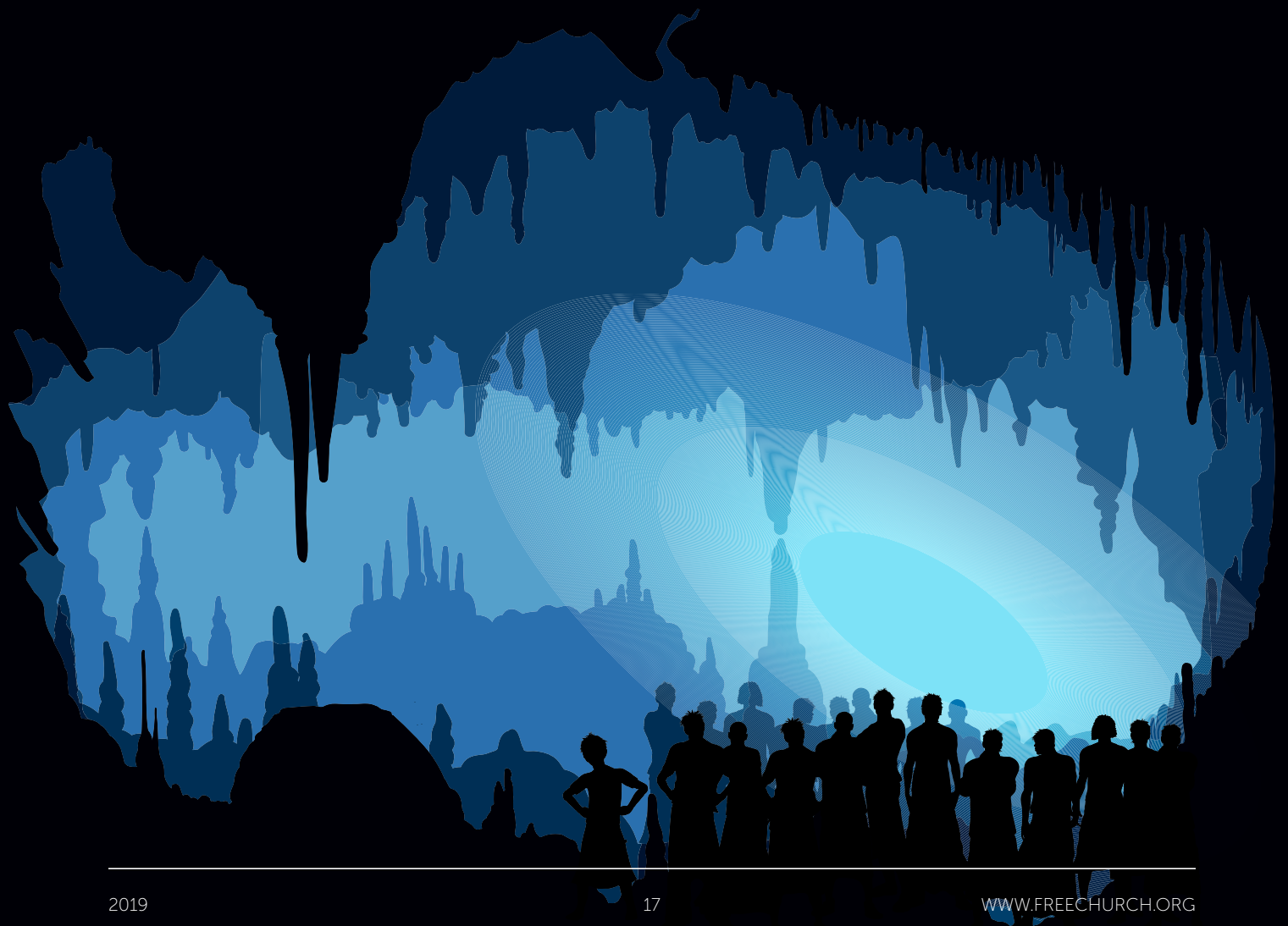
But I believed that when God requires faithfulness he will give the strength needed. His grace is sufficient for our needs and I found it so. Even if I had been found out, I would still have felt it right to be true to the Lord, to be 'faithful even unto death', trusting that God has a crown of life for those who do so.

I'm one of the less well-known people in the Bible, but we're all important to the living God, and I hope my faithfulness may inspire others to be faithful to him — when it's easy, and especially when it's not. ●

Rev. David J. Randall spent forty years in pastoral ministry before retiring and has served as Chair of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity. He is the author of several books, including *Christianity: Is It True?*

Obadiah, the faithful believer

REV. DAVID J. RANDALL begins **This is my story**, a devotional series which draws attention to the great truths of Scripture through the experiences of some of the Bible's lesser-known characters.



Lessons from the leaves

DAYSPRING MACLEOD on the beauty of change

HAPPY HALLOWEEN! are words you don't often hear in the Free Church. Nor am I really wishing you an enjoyable time ruminating on stories of the dead or the occult. But I do wish you stunning foliage, cosy scarves and pumpkin spice lattes (I can do that now that Stornoway has a Starbucks).

Everyone has a favourite time of year, and for me, the months from 1 September right up through Christmas are the absolute top. I love the nights drawing in (ever try to put three small children to bed while their rooms are flooded with sunlight?), the seasonal treats in the supermarket (one day this week, I found Halloween, Christmas and Easter in the same shop!) and the crisp air. Leaving aside that we are also entering both flu season and American election season, it's good just to enjoy a new time of year, one of beauty and festive anticipation and comfort food and, if I may make a recommendation, the song '*Autumn Leaves*' as sung by Eric Clapton.

David Meredith writes this month that there are some people who love change simply for the sake of it. I am not, generally speaking, one of those people. I tend toward apprehension. Part of that is a strong sense of nostalgia — perhaps because I've been an expatriate from a relatively young age, I want to cling to stability and home comforts. Part of that is because I have an underlying dread of things changing for the worse, or a fear of the pain or inconvenience of upheaval. Part of that is a natural human aversion to challenge and risk. And frankly, the largest part of that is a sinful lack of focus on and trust in the Lord.

So it does me good to look for a moment at the beauty of change. The glory of autumn is its transience. The falling leaves are beautiful — but when they fall, they're dead. Their greatest beauty is their act of letting go. We often reflect on Christ's promise to make all things new. What he actually says is 'Behold, I am making all things new.' We are, of course, waiting for the culmination of that newness on the day when he unveils the new heavens and the new earth, his eternal kingdom. But for now, autumn is an annual reminder that before we can celebrate the newness that is already underway, we must first observe the 'passing away' of the old.

There are many ways in which we participate in this passing away, and each of them has its own beauty. The first, and perhaps most regular — I hope — is repentance. We should, of course, be bringing our sins to the Lord each day for forgiveness and strength, but sometimes we go through a particularly intense period of repentance: of looking with open eyes at our own hearts and bringing long-standing habits and attitudes to the Lord, giving him our dirty rags and gratefully seeing them washed in his blood. These seasons of repentance are deeply painful and

We must let go of our brown, withered, dried leaves before we can start budding again.

humbling, but they leave us with a new understanding of Christ's words 'my burden is light,' for we see that he really is carrying the greatest burden of all — our sins — and we get the lightness of his righteousness instead. We must let go of our brown, withered, dried leaves before we can start budding again, abiding in the Vine.

Another 'passing away' is major changes in our circumstances. Getting a degree, getting married, having a child, retiring — each of these is a blessing that we gain, but also freedom that we give up. The carefree life of university, the single life in which you make your plans to suit only yourself, the quietude of childlessness, the identity of career. Even when receiving joy from the Lord's hands, there are few of us who don't occasionally look back on the good old days in Egypt — our old life. Again, though, these changes can be met gracefully, with contentment and thanksgiving and casting of our cares upon the Lord.

There is the 'passing away' of personal trials. Ill health, broken relationships, bereavement, a church split, financial problems, political unrest, persecution. These are the times of 'discipline' which, as Paul reminds us, is not joyful at the time, 'but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness' (Hebrews 12:11). These seasons of discipline — not of punishment, but of conforming us to Christ's character through suffering — are probably what I dread most in life. I know that God is good, that his purposes are always right, and that he will use these times to mould me into a godlier woman. And yet, I fear these things. So how do I learn to praise God through them?

I think that cultivating that ability — to praise God through trials, and thus increase our faith — is itself the fruit that he wants to bear in us. And it's not something that passively happens in our hearts; it's something that we have to work at. It's choosing not to dwell on all the excruciating detail of the situation but to turn our minds instead to Christ. It's turning off that repetitive, anxious voice in our head by singing or quoting scripture aloud. It's writing down God's promises and looking at them every time we feel out of control in our own lives — because, thank God, we are out of control!

Finally, there is the 'passing away' of physical death. The psalmist tells us that 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,' (Psalm 116:15) and we know this, because we have seen some of these precious, gentle departures. We spend so much of our lives horrified by the idea of death, and yet we have so many examples of godly men and women who have gone before us in the peace of an easy conscience and a thorough trust in the Lord's ability to raise us up again. May we live and die like them.

In October, the world would point us to superstition and magic and horror and ghouls. To the black undercurrent of death — the hopelessness and hideousness and the monsters lurking in the darkness of the human heart. These things are real, and there is ugliness far worse than the rubber masks in the seasonal aisle (even the 'demonic bunny' ones, which are a new and needlessly upsetting invention). There *is* change that is for the worse, change which is final and irrevocable and horrifying.

But we are not called to this change, nor should we fear it. In each of our seasons of change, we can evince a grace, humility and trust that breathe out beauty. Our calling is that of a perfect painted leaf, letting go again and again of its old tree, paving the way for fresh budding and the bearing of new fruit. ●

Autumn is an annual reminder that before we can celebrate the newness that is already underway, we must first observe the 'passing away' of the old.

60 YEARS OF FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS

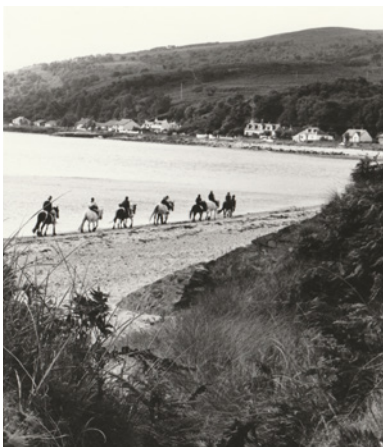
THE AIM OF FREE CHURCH YOUTH CAMPS IS TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS. Over the last 60 years, young people have had the opportunity to experience living together in Christian community, to hear the Bible being explained, to discuss how its teaching is to be applied and to hear testimony from Christians further along in their walk with the Lord. Despite all the other changes which have taken place, these are still the goals of camps today.

Roddy Macleod was 13 when he attended his first camp. He had seen the profound impact camps had on his older brother, and wanted to find out for himself why people kept going back. Reflecting on his own involvement, Roddy writes about the blessing camps have been for many young people in the Free Church.



EARLY DAYS

In the first few years of camps, a couple of small camps were held in school classrooms. Evan Macdonald's story on the FCYC website tells of his experience of the very first youth camp which took place in 1960 in his home village of Evanton, north of Inverness.



Accommodation was modest in those days — a sleeping bag on a canvas camp bed was the height of luxury! Many found themselves sleeping on the floor or, with later developments in comfort, on a strip of foam on the floor.

The somewhat basic sleeping arrangements did provide plenty of opportunities for pranks, with campers often falling victim to the letting-down of their air beds or discovering missing steel frames

in their canvas camp beds! After a change in council policy meant that camps could no longer be held in council schools, bespoke Christian centres and boarding schools were used, along with a few 'canvas camps' which provided plenty of fresh air for the intrepid campers. On these occasions it was often the local swimming pool which provided the opportunity for the campers to shower. The campers, on the whole, were unconcerned with the accommodation arrangements, instead concerning themselves with participating in the many tasks and activities on offer during the week of camp.

There were duties to be undertaken each day such as washing dishes and tidying dorms ahead of the daily dorm inspections. Campers were split into teams, working together on the various tasks in order to earn points for the team. These responsibilities taught us the importance of such life skills and encouraged us to work well together as a team and to live together in community.

It wasn't all hard work, though! A lot of the week revolved around food — as well as the top-class meals cooked each day there were midnight feasts, the tuck shop (selling treats at knock-down prices) and barbecues. As diets have changed over the years, the camp cooks have done a great job at changing menus to suit — most

young people nowadays probably wouldn't enjoy the spam and beans which were popular during the first camps! During the week there would often be a treasure hunt, where groups of campers would work together to find as many items from a list as possible. The resourcefulness of the campers never ceased to amaze — at one camp, one of the items on the list was 'a beauty queen'. One group discovered where the town gala queen lived, and persuaded her to come back with them to the camp along with the other treasures they had collected!

FURTHER AFIELD

The early camps programmes featured separate camps for boys and girls, but with demands changing, the choice available expanded to include mixed



camps in many different places throughout the UK. Initially the activities at camp included a hill walk or hike with a picnic lunch, a trip to a beach if there was one nearby, and team games or 'wide-games', where the smaller boys were liable to be thrown around by the bigger ones in the competitiveness of the game! Over the years specialist camps developed for those with a particular interest in things like football, golf, hill-climbing, watersports, pony-trekking and even studying! The popularity of the camps was clear, with places being filled within days of the publication of the camps brochure. I remember at one of the football camps, along with the usual coaching, competitions, match reports and a visit to a football stadium, the excitement of having the



coach of the Scotland National Team visiting. After he provided a coaching drill, there was a question and answer session with the campers, one of whom did not beat about the bush but came straight out with: 'Mr Brown, how much do you get paid?'

Following this, a number of international camps were added to the programme, with camps taking place in Northern Ireland, France, Switzerland and even the USA.

These camps were enjoyed by many, and Andy Robertson tells of his memories of the international camps as part of the series of camps stories on the FCYC website. Having international camps, of course, added to the logistical challenges faced each year in terms of travel arrangements. The leaders, always up for an adventure, flew out from Edinburgh to the USA camp, hired buses, and got on with driving on the other side of the road without so much as batting an eyelid! Back in the UK, I remember one year waiting in Glasgow with a number of campers and their parents to join a coach coming from Inverness and travelling to Oswestry. After waiting what seemed an interminable amount of time, with no mobile phones in those days to be used to update each other, we eventually discovered that the coach had been held up in T in the Park festival traffic! In subsequent years, the dates of the festival were always taken into consideration when planning camps transport.



CLOUD OF WITNESSES

One thing that has never changed through the years is the influence of the Christian leaders and cooks, who demonstrate a sure walk with God and can testify to his work in their lives. The priority given to sharing and learning about God and his Word has had a lasting impact on many campers, as well as leaders and cooks. Along with the specific times set aside for Bible studies, talks and discussion, the importance of living as a follower of God is intertwined throughout all the activities of camp, providing a week-long experience of what it means to live in Christian community. Many have been deeply affected by Jesus' claims and through seeing what it means to follow him, and for many campers, their week at camp has been the start of their Christian walk. On a personal level, something that deeply affected me was seeing young people

being invited to share what they thought. I knew plenty of stories and information from attending church and Sunday School as a youngster, but until attending camp we hadn't been given the opportunity to share and discuss the application to our lives. This is one of the enormous benefits of camp for our young people.

We are confident that God will continue to bless the work of



camps for decades to come. Let us continue to pray for our young people as they attend camps, and for the Camps Supervisor and the Camps Administrator as they plan and prepare. Pray for safe travel to and from camp, and for safety throughout the camp, and pray for spiritual interest amongst the campers, and that many more will to put their trust in Jesus. We can be sure that God will keep his promises, and will bless the camps to successive generations.

God has richly blessed the work of the Free Church Youth Camps (FCYC) over the past 60 years, and there are many stories of God's faithfulness which could be shared. The selection of stories which were told during the summer on the FCYC website (www.freechurchoyouthcamps.org/stories) give a small insight into the ways in which God has used FCYC for his glory in the lives of many. ●



KENNETH MACIVER (1934-2020)

BY **REV. IVOR MARTIN**

THE PASSING OF KENNETH MACIVER ON 21ST MAY 2020 SENT A WAVE OF GRIEF OVER THE BON ACCORD FREE CHURCH CONGREGATION IN ABERDEEN. Over many years his witness and wisdom as an elder had become legendary and his loss is incalculable.

Kenneth was born on the 12th December 1934, in Shawbost, Isle of Lewis, a son of Rev. Murdo and Dolina Maciver. After high school he studied Mechanical Engineering at Robert Gordon's Technical College, where he obtained a Higher National Diploma in 1957.

His career as a Radar Engineer began with national service, before being employed by Ferranti. He then became a company representative for the RAF. A second teaching career began at Aberdeen College of Education in 1968. Thereafter, he taught technical studies in the Aberdeen area until 1979 when, upon being appointed to the Nicolson Institute, the family lived in Stornoway for a period of six years. Returning to Aberdeen in 1985, Kenneth was appointed to Robert Gordon's College, where he was Head of Technical Studies until his retirement in 1994.

Kenneth met Margaret Mackenzie in Edinburgh and they married in 1964. From that moment, they went everywhere and did everything together, out of loyal and constant devotion. As a father to Lena, Angus and Anne, he took a proactive interest in all of their activities in their youth and beyond, investing everything, heart and soul, in the wellbeing of his children.

But above all else, Kenneth was an unashamed disciple of Jesus Christ. Having come to faith as a young student, he professed his love for Jesus in 1957 within the church to which he would devote most of his adult life.

For Kenneth, being a Christian meant a hunger for the Bible which could only be satisfied in listening to and studying the Word. For him, church was the place where his interest could be developed and where new precious doctrines could be discovered, not just to add to an ever increasing knowledge, but to be put into practice in consistent Christian living.

His gifts were recognised by the church when he was appointed an elder in 1969. But for Kenneth, 'elder' was not a title. It was a weighty responsibility which he discharged with wholehearted steadfastness. A sense of discipline, strength of character and quiet resolve, all shaped by an informed and resolute faith in the Lord Jesus, made him a role model for younger Christians, particularly the many students who relished the hospitality that there always was at Kenny and Margaret's home in Airyhall.

He was a dedicated shepherd who diligently visited those over whom he had oversight. He kept watch over the needs of the congregation, regularly visiting, often having people to Braeside Avenue for Sunday lunch and, even in recent COVID times, looking out for a number of the older generation who were not able regularly to access online services.

Kenneth's contributions to Session meetings were always measured and wise. Over many years he faithfully supported the different ministries at Bon Accord, and, while holding on to the important foundations of the faith, he

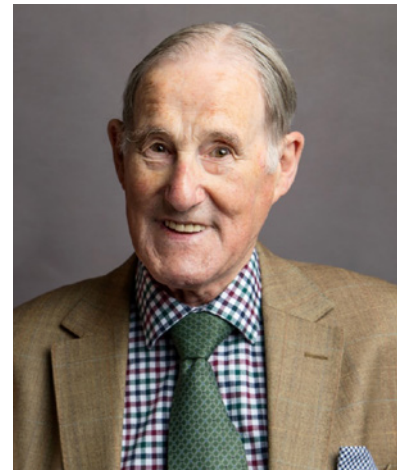
was nonetheless willing to approve of change when it was helpful to the cause of the gospel.

His prayers were marked by reverence and intensity, frequently quoting the scriptures which he had stored in his memory. He was not only a keen precentor, Sunday School Superintendent, confidant, and prayer warrior, he was also active in community involvement.

The legacy that Kenneth leaves is that he loved Jesus. May the Lord bless the memory that we have of him and his lasting witness to all who knew him. May he raise others who will follow Christ with that same resolve.

Along with his surviving siblings, Catherine and Mina, we extend our deepest sympathy to Margaret, to Lena, Angus and Anne, together with their spouses, and to Hannah, Dan, Mary, Calum, Nathan and Esther, grandchildren whom he loved and daily prayed for. ●

'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord' Revelation 14:13



JOHN MACLEOD (1928-2020)

BY **REV. IAIN THOMSON**

T WAS WITH GREAT SADNESS THAT THE CONGREGATION OF EAST KILBRIDE LEARNED OF THE PASSING OF THEIR BELOVED ELDER JOHN MACLEOD ON 30TH JUNE 2020, AGED 92 YEARS, SURROUNDED BY HIS FAMILY.

John was born in Point in the Isle of Lewis to Alexander and Catherine Macleod, into a family of six boys and a girl. John's father ministered in the congregations of Ness, Govan and latterly in Back, and it was there that John met Catriona, who was to become his wife. They married in 1953, after John completed his National Service in the Air

Force, and settled in Glasgow.

As a son of the manse, John's upbringing was soaked in Bible teaching and preaching, and he never really strayed too far from the example he had received in his formative years. It was, however, at a Billy Graham Crusade in 1955 that John felt the call of the Gospel in a personal way. This commenced a close and lifelong relationship with his Lord and Saviour.

Catriona and John were blessed with three sons and a daughter. Alistair was born in 1955, Roderick in 1958 and Ian in 1959. Their delight was complete when Joan arrived in 1963.

In 1962, the family moved to the new town of East Kilbride, where John held several administrative posts in pharmaceutical companies Gallenkamp, Griffin and George and Fisons. John had a strong work ethic and he worked diligently to provide for all the family needs. On moving to East Kilbride, he and the family quickly became part of the local Free Church congregation, where he was recruited as a Sunday School teacher on arrival. He was ordained to the office of elder on 19th January 1969 and became Session Clerk on 21st April 1982. He served in all of these capacities with diligence and faithfulness.

His undivided support and wisdom were appreciated by all the ministers who served in East Kilbride, including Revs. David Paterson, Alastair Gollan, John Pateman, James MacIver, and the present incumbent, Iain Thomson.

John was a man of prayer and loved the ever-open opportunity to enjoy fellowship with God privately and publicly. He could often be heard by his family praying in his bedroom. He was always at public prayer meetings and participation in these meetings was a constant delight to him. He often led singing at church services and was musical despite neither being able to read music nor possessing a tuning fork! The tunes were firmly in his head! At many of the Gaelic services held in the Glasgow area, and on his frequent holidays in Lewis to catch up with his family and friends, he would invariably be asked to lead the Gaelic singing in church.

Family life was not without its challenges and the death of their son, Ian, in 2013 was a sore trial for John, Catriona, and the family. He was strong in grief and adversity, accepted this hardest of providences, moved on, and built on his experience to bring comfort to others. He was a great advocate of 'continuing to run the race set before him...'

John was a great supporter of the Free Church at large, keenly interested in its national development and happy to attend the General Assembly if invited. He did not often make a formal speech, but when he did, he could be counted on to lighten the mood if needed with a pithy remark or two. John always believed in brevity and was encouraging of speeches that were known for their getting to the point! On one occasion he went to the lectern and preceded his remarks with: 'As Henry VIII said to one of his wives, I will not keep you long!'

John was widowed in February 2019, with the passing of his beloved Catriona following a long period of illness. John dearly missed Catriona as they were inseparable!

As his family reflected on his long life but sudden passing, they have been greatly encouraged by messages of support and love from family and friends, such as the reminder of God's faithfulness in Psalms 23 and 46 and the following words:

'I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet, when Christ calls me home, I shall go with gladness.'

Nevertheless, the earthly parting is deeply sore. There will no longer be the daily phone calls from their father to check on family and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He loved to see their photographs and, most especially, to see them all in person. The isolation and restriction of the past months caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had not been easy for John. But he used his time fruitfully, not only on his personal meditation on the Word, prayer and reading of good books, but by keeping in constant touch with the East Kilbride congregation and wider family and friends by telephone.

John has been described by some as not only as representing the very best of his age, but the last representative of it. He was brought up in an era marked by deep seriousness and by a daily awareness of the presence of God and of the importance of walking closely with him. It was also an age in which believers followed the Psalmist in meditating on God's word day and night, while at the same time giving rich expression to the communion of saints, not only in the sense of extending hospitality (at which John and Catriona excelled), but also in sharing their spiritual experiences and delving into the truth together. Always 'proper,' he nevertheless exuded a cheerfulness which cut through formality and put nervous preachers at ease.

We commend Alistair, Roderick, and Joan along with their respective families to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. When we are united to Christ together, one day, we will meet John again in the very profoundest and most meaningful sense. ●



'God ... commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.'

Acts 17:31

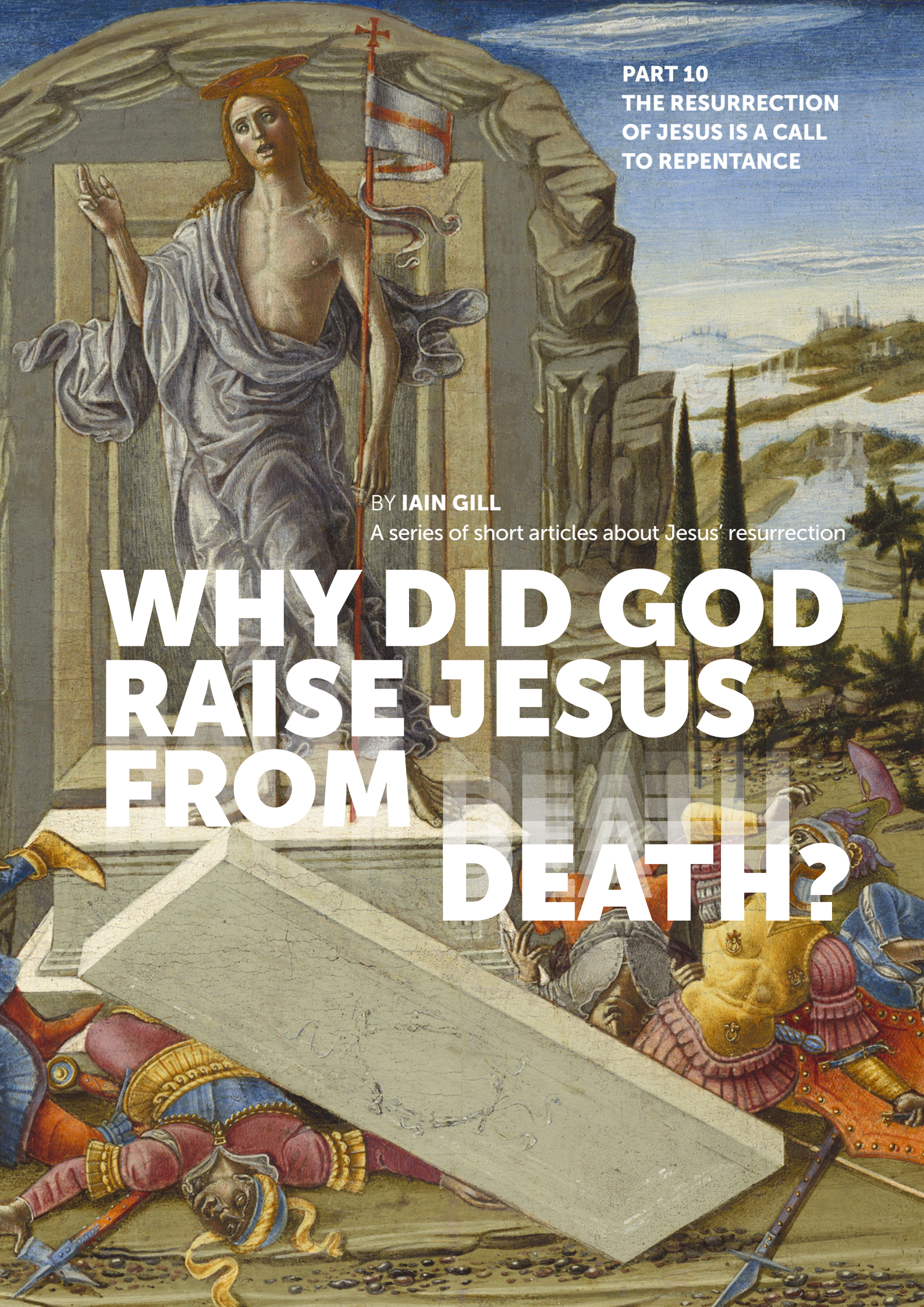
BOTH MATTHEW AND LUKE REPORT THAT JESUS WAS ASKED FOR A MIRACULOUS SIGN. Jesus' response was to say: *'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'* (Matthew 12:39-40).

God in his mercy has given us a clear sign that he will hold everyone to account. The sign of the prophet Jonah is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul addressing people in Athens (in Acts 17) narrows that down to the resurrection. The death happened and was not questioned — though its significance would not have been understood by his hearers — but the resurrection was a dramatic and miraculous event. No wonder people struggled to believe. Dead men do not rise from death. Which of course is the point! If dead men did rise, Jesus' resurrection would not be special. But he, exceptionally, did rise, showing himself on many occasions, on one of those to more than 500 people. The resurrection, says Paul, proves that God will one day judge the world. God calls all people to repent. The resurrection is a call to repentance.

The missionary James O Fraser (who served in the early twentieth century in southwest China, among the Lisu people) once tried to identify the essential elements of the Gospel that should be explained to the unconverted. He especially explored the book of Acts to see how the New Testament church answered his query. He found only four elements that were repeated often and might be regarded as essential: the crucifixion, the resurrection (which he pointed out was always included), repentance and the consequent promise of remission (or forgiveness) from sin.

It is interesting to see how Gospel truths link with each other. Judgement, sin and repentance are obvious contenders. They sound negative, but the Gospel, with resurrection a core fact, flips them for believers and we see the positive. On judgement: *'There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus'* (Romans 8:1). On sin: *'... set free from sin and ... slaves to God, ... the result is eternal life'* (Romans 6:22). On repentance: *'repent ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins'*. This was Peter's response when those who had heard his Pentecost sermon were moved to ask *'What shall we do?'* (Acts 2:37-38).

Repentance is a grace, a gift from God which leads to forgiveness. Jesus' resurrection, in the sermons of both Peter and Paul, points to the need for repentance. God's Spirit calls people everywhere to repent, to turn away from sin, to acknowledge Christ as their Lord. That leads to life — eternal life in the risen Jesus. ●



**PART 10
THE RESURRECTION
OF JESUS IS A CALL
TO REPENTANCE**

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about Jesus' resurrection

WHY DID GOD RAISE JESUS FROM DEATH?

ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT PART 2

BY **DONALD MACKAY**

IN A PREVIOUS ARTICLE I TRIED TO SKETCH OUT SOME OF THE HUMAN BACKGROUND TO THE EXODUS — THE WORM’S EYE VIEW, AS IT WERE, OF THAT MOMENTOUS EVENT. I would like now to fill in certain aspects of the story. I begin with the perversity of the Israelites, which is so much emphasised in the sacred text. My purpose is not to condone or condemn, but to seek to understand.

When the sons of Jacob arrived in Egypt they were not a choice group. They had united in hatred of Joseph, and although they had repented, they caused Joseph to weep over their continuing crass misunderstanding of his motives. Several of them had an iniquitous history, which their father did not gloss over in his prophetic deathbed song. So although in Egypt over the next 400 years the twelve tribes multiplied and grew, we cannot be sure that they grew in the knowledge of God.

In Egypt they were in the midst of a totally alien culture and religion — one of many gods, mostly nature gods but some of a more sinister character. Granted, the Israelites might have been to some extent insulated by geography and certain taboos, but the presence of a ‘mixed multitude’ in their midst was not a good sign. Then, their conscription into a massive labour force was bound to break down cultural barriers and erode their cultural identity, especially the institutions of circumcision and the Sabbath. So these practices seem to have fallen into disuse by the time of the exodus.

In a sense, Moses had to start from scratch with the Israelites when they stood on the farther bank of the Red (or Reed) Sea. They had to be reminded of their status as a covenant people, the nature of their God, and their obligations to him in terms of conduct and worship. Above all, they had to grasp that Yahweh had not chosen them for any qualities he had seen in them, but for his own glory. Israel was an instrument in his hands, which he would shape and polish for his own purposes, whether with or against their will.

Yahweh had not chosen them for any qualities he had seen in them, but for his own glory.

These were lessons which the Israelites scarcely understood at first, and even after forty years of hard graft they had taken in very little. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy testify to the struggles which Moses had with what Isaiah, much later on, described as 'a disobedient and obstinate people' (Isaiah 65:2). Their reversion to idolatry were chronic. A constant feature was moaning – about the lack of certain kinds of food, or Moses' leadership, or the punishment meted out to rebels, or the strength of the native tribes they were destined to encounter. Many times Yahweh expressed exasperation with his people, and in the end sentenced a whole generation to lay their bones in the desert. Against this background it is amazing to find individuals, such as Joshua, Caleb, the daughters of Zelophehad – and the tribe of Levi – whose faith in the faithfulness of God sustained them in hope throughout this searing episode.

By what means did God seek to recall the nation back to true allegiance to himself? There were the daily providences – guidance on the route to follow, the supply of manna, protection against plundering desert tribesmen. There was teaching, whether through solid blocks of doctrine such as that delivered on Sinai, or through incidents along the way like the provision of drinking water at Marah, or by judgments such as that visited on Miriam and the followers of Korah. But most spectacularly there were the miracles.

We need to be clear about the meaning of miracle in Scripture. It is a term rarely used, the description of wonder and sign being preferred. Our understanding of miracle usually hinges on some kind of suspension of the 'laws' of nature, whether of physics, chemistry or biology. Such laws were not generally known to the ancients. They tended to think rather of some happening which, by its visible effects, by its fitness to the situation, or by its timing, made an appropriate impact on those who witnessed it.

Such signs and wonders are relatively rare in Scripture and tend to be concentrated on particular periods. The life of Christ was one of those, and most of his signs were also miracles in the modern sense. The exodus and the subsequent journeyings were full of signs and wonders, but few have the 'miraculous' overtone. Indeed, in most cases the account of the happening includes something like a naturalistic explanation. The plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Sea, the provision of manna (characterised poetically as angels' food but also given a more down-to-earth description), the descent of the quails, the judgment on Dathan and Abiram, and the crossing of the Jordan, come into this category.

Every one of the wilderness signs was obviously impressive and some had a notable impact in terms of Moses' reputation and authority. But none effected a lasting change on the nation at the time. Later, they were recalled by the psalmist, in Psalms 105 and 106 – but only to emphasise that they were overridden by the unbelief of Israel. There had to be something more: the gift of a new heart and a new spirit, promised by the prophets and donated at Pentecost. ●

Donald Mackay is a member of Perth Free Church

PAGES FROM ADAM'S DIARY, PART 3:

The Wedding Gift

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.



I was caught in a dreadful quandary. I tried to find a way out of attending the wedding – it did not work.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, IN ONE OF MY MINISTRY VISITS TO CENTRAL ASIA, I WAS CONFRONTED BY AN UNUSUAL DILEMMA. I received an invitation to a wedding as a guest of honour.

To be a guest of honour in that culture means you are expected to give a 'gift of honour', a substantial gift. In the minds of many people in the world, westerners are loaded with money. I was coming from the west and so I was perceived as being 'loaded' as well. I had money with me, but every penny of it was carefully saved for the needs of the suffering Christians, for various church-related projects, and also for the orphans and destitute families I had been assisting. I was expected to give a big gift when I could not afford to give even a small gift! In an honour-based culture like this, one of the worst things a person can do is to cause someone to lose face. To be invited as an esteemed guest and to not give a significant gift would bring disgrace to the bride's family, as they had extended the invitation to me. I was caught in a dreadful quandary. I tried to find a way out of attending the wedding – it did not work. As the date of the ceremony drew closer, my stress and anxiety exponentially worsened.

Then one morning, a couple of days before the wedding, the Lord put a thought into my mind. It was probably what he had planned all along but I did not know. It was perfect! I took several hundred pounds and converted them into the national currency – I ended up with a stack of bills ten centimeters high! I put it into a beautiful gift box. Then I wrote a letter for the bride and the groom in which I said how flattered I was to be their special guest and how I yearned to bring a blessing from God into their marriage at the commencement of their lives together. I explained that in the enclosed box was a gift, but this gift was not for them. Rather, the blessing of what I wanted them to do with these funds was my actual gift for them. I clarified that I wished for them to go with me as I distributed, on their behalf, the money in the box among destitute families and two orphanages. The blessing which was to come into their lives as a result of this action was my true gift for them. I noted that it has been said that, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'.

I concluded the letter by saying that when I was about their age, I met a wise person who was now my very best and closest friend. Early on in my friendship with this person He taught me, *'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'* I folded the letter, placed it in an envelope and taped it to the gift box. I thanked the Lord for delivering me from an impasse and breathed a sigh of relief.

On the wedding day, a few hundred guests had gathered. Halfway through the festivities, after the wedding cake was cut, the father of the groom came forward and stood before the guests to receive the gifts on behalf of the bride and groom. The guests came forward one by one and presented their gifts, which were then described to all who were present. After the elders of the family had presented their gifts, eventually it was my turn. Quietly I went forward, handed over the gift and quickly returned to my seat. The father of the groom opened the gift box with the stack of bills, announced it and showed it amid many cheers. I was pleased that the hosts and their guests seemed impressed and honoured. But then he noticed, 'Oh, there is a letter with this gift!' He turned to me and asked, 'May I read it?' and before I could say no, he opened the letter and proceeded to read it. I had written the letter for the private reading of the young couple in their own home, not for the hearing of hundreds of people. As I mumbled that the letter was private, the father of the groom began reading it aloud.

A few sentences into the letter, he broke down and sobbed as he read it to the end. When he finished, he paused to collect himself, lifted up his head, looked at the guests – some of whom were also in tears – pointed to the letter and remarked, 'I have lived for 67 years. All my treasures are laid up here on earth. I have nothing in heaven. ►►

How often in this journey to the city of God we fret over matters for which our Father in heaven has already made provision!

He was in tears again, but composed himself, turned to me and said, 'Today, you have given a beautiful gift to my children, but you have given the greatest gift to me — and I hope, to my guests. I feel as though this has been my own wedding night. My life will never be the same!' The wedding moved on. I thought that was the end of it, but it was not.

The following day, I received an urgent message that he needed to see me. Late in the evening, he came to where I was staying, once again profusely thanked me and reiterated how deeply he had been touched. Then he asked, 'In your letter you said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth"...that was profound! Did you say that?' I said, 'No, I did not.' He asked, 'Who said it?' I said, 'Jesus Christ said that.' He asked, 'Is that "the best, intimate friend" to whom you referred in your letter?' I said, 'Yes.' He was tearful again. He then asked, 'Where did he say that?' 'In the Enjil (the New Testament),' I replied. 'Where can I find a copy?' was the next question. I went into my room and brought a copy to him. He took it, embraced me and disappeared. A week later, once again I received a message that he needed to see me. When I met him, he exclaimed, 'I have never read such things. Everyone must read this book! I have three brothers who are as chained to this world as I have been. They need to read this book too. Where can I find three more copies?' I gave him three more copies. In a few days, he came back. This time he asked for ten more copies to give to some of his friends and workers in his factory. By the time I left Central Asia, he had asked for and received at least seventy or eighty copies of the New Testament. On the evening I was due to leave, he came to the airport at 2:00 a.m. once again in tears, saying his life would never be the same.

On several occasions he, rather than the bride or the groom, came with me to distribute the money among some of the orphanages. As time went on, whenever he came to ask for Bibles, in order not to appear too demanding, he would say, 'Do you remember you had asked X amount to go to this orphanage house or to this or that family? I went back and I gave three times more from my own resources.'

While I had agonized on the horns of a dilemma, the Lord in his wisdom and magnificent creativity had already planned the whole event and worked out the details to accomplish his purposes, not only to multiply the material assistance to those in need, but also to bring an immeasurably greater gift to many — the gift of salvation. With one act, all objectives were achieved and more. The parents of the bride and the groom were honoured by a considerable gift. The orphans and needy families received all the aid the Lord had intended for them and many times more. An invaluable lesson was taught to a young couple at the outset of their lives together in a materialistic world. The guests had an experience they would not forget. The Lord touched the hearts of many of them. The father of the groom came to know the Lord. The seeds of the Gospel were scattered supernaturally in ways I could have never anticipated nor imagined. Judging from my past experiences, I am convinced God has continued to bring about waves of spiritual harvest from one person to another which may persist until the coming of our Lord.

During these years of serving our Saviour in his fields, this story, among many others I could tell you, has been one of the enduring, happy memories in my mind. Looking back, I am certain the idea that finally delivered me from my dilemma was put into my head by the Lord. In his incredible sense of humour and infinite creativity, our Lord always has a plan but often he does not disclose it to us. We are expected to trust him and walk by faith in obedience to him. How often in this journey to the city of God (Hebrews 11:10) we fret over matters for which our Father in heaven has already made provision! How often he already has the answer and the solution for circumstances which we find so trying, so discouraging and seemingly impossible — solutions to be revealed in his timing, for our benefit, and for the advancement of his kingdom and to the glory of his holy name! ●

BOOK REVIEWS



Our books...

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

SERVICE: HOW DO I GIVE BACK?

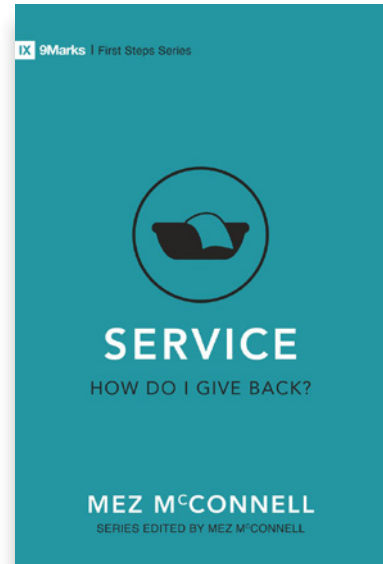
MEZ MCCONNELL (2020)

It's very easy for church to simply be something we attend, rather than something we are committed to and involved in. This short book is a great read for those wanting to consider the 'how' and 'why' of service within the church – whether for themselves or to help encourage others. The book covers a lot of ground in a short space such as the motivation to serve, the reasons we often fail to serve, and spiritual gifts. It would be a great book to read with other people to help discuss, digest, and consider individual practical applications.

I particularly appreciated how, by keeping the gospel front and centre, service is presented as a joyful opportunity to build the church and glorify God, rather than a drudge or something to build our own egos. If you're keen to see your local church flourish and grow, this would be a great book to read (perhaps with a couple of friends) to see how in God's strength you could help be the answer to that prayer. ●

This book is available to purchase from Free Church Books.

Ali Sewell, Haddington Community Church



BUMPS, BABIES AND THE GOSPEL

SARAH DARGUE (2020)

Expectant parents are bombarded with so much information these days. Social media posts, friends and family and even random people we meet in shop queues all like to give us advice on what we need to buy, what books we need to read and what strategies we should implement as we delve into the adventure of parenting.

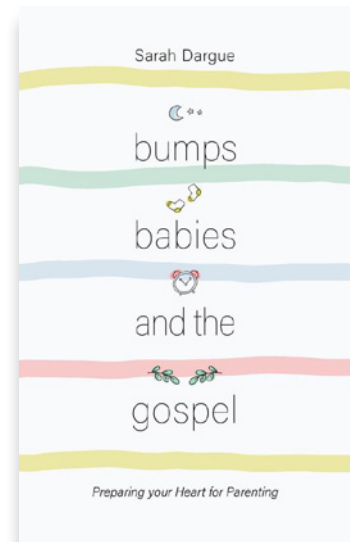
However, in this short and extremely readable book, Sarah Dargue uses Colossians to prepare the hearts of new parents. Throughout the book the author urges the readers not to look to the child-rearing philosophies which the world has to offer, but rather look to Christ. We will never match the world's idea of the perfect parent. On the contrary, so often sin which we previously kept under wraps is exposed in that early, sleepless season of parenting. However, the author encouragingly comments: 'but as you see your sin, Paul encourages you to keep setting your gaze firmly on Christ and his cross, basking in the beauty of what's been achieved there and receiving this heart relief for yourself.'

There are many useful and practical suggestions throughout, including pointers on how to read the Bible and pray in those early days with a newborn, disciplines which are vital to maintain but can so easily fall by the wayside as routine goes out the window! I felt that the chapter on community was particularly important. It spoke about how essential it is that new mums continue to go to church despite cranky children, only hearing snippets of sermons and feeling exhausted, as by attending, 'you're communicating something extraordinarily powerful to your child about what you most need'.

Discussion questions at the end of each chapter make this a useful book to go through as a couple before the arrival of a baby, but even parents who are beyond the newborn stage could benefit from reading this title as it encourages us to look beyond the everyday ins and outs of parenting and instead set our gaze on Christ, who alone can provide all that we need for parenting. ●

This book is available to purchase from Free Church Books.

Suzanne Kane, First Portadown Presbyterian Church



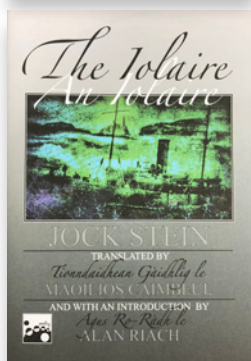
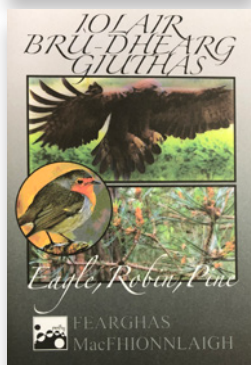
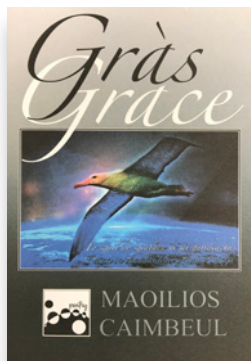
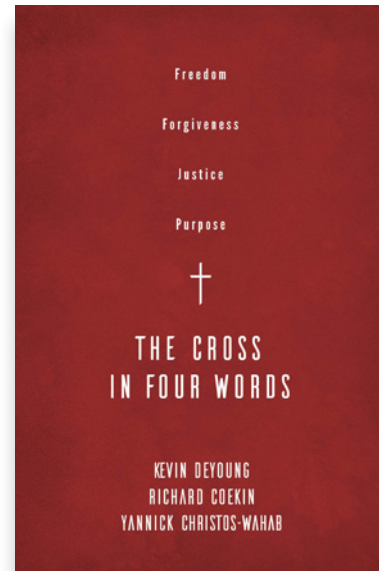
THE CROSS IN FOUR WORDS

KEVIN DEYOUNG, RICHARD COEKIN AND YANNICK CHRISTOS-WAHAB (2020)

The crux of history, theology, and eternity is centred upon the cross. Many, many volumes have been written which have mined the depths of the cross in the experience of the Lord Jesus. What this very short but helpful book does is take the Pauline phrase, 'Christ crucified' (1 Corinthians 1:23) and by using four words focus on the central biblical themes which Christ's death on the cross fulfils. There are four chapters dealing with the respective themes of Freedom, Forgiveness, Justice and Purpose. Each chapter shows how the Old Testament sets the background in order for the cross to come into the foreground, with lots of helpful illustrations also. The final chapter is a challenge for us to respond by taking up our cross and follow Jesus. There's a lot packed into a book which is a helpful and easy read. ●

This book is available from The Good Book Company.

Colin Macleod, Gairloch, Kinlochewe & Torridon Free Church



A TRIO OF GAELIC POETRY:

'AN IOLAIRE; GRÀS; IOLAIR, BRÙ-DHEARG, GIUTHAS'

JOCK STEIN, MYLES CAMPBELL, FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH (2019)

'An Iolaire', 'Gràs' and 'Iolair, Brù-dhearg, Giuthas' are three separate collections of Gaelic poetry, written by different poets. 'An Iolaire' contains work translated into Gaelic, whereas the other two collections have been written in Gaelic. These three short books are published in the same format and style, each with an English translation on the opposite page throughout the book.

The subject of 'An Iolaire' is the Iolaire disaster of New Year's Day, 1919 – a tragedy familiar to most Gaelic speakers. As Donald Murray writes in the blurb, this sequence of poems, by Jock Stein, is 'rooted in the knowledge and rhythms of the psalms'. He ponders eternal questions around God's providence in allowing heartbreaking tragedy. Myles Campbell provides thoughtful and artistic translations.

'Gràs', by Myles Campbell himself, is a stream of poetry focused on Creation and the consequences of the Fall. Each uplifting poem gives thanks for various aspects of creation but is followed almost by a reply, telling of some aspect of our fallen earth. This chimes with the believer's experience of life – we praise God for his mercies but our heart breaks to see his creation groan. I found this collection the most enjoyable as it reminded me again of the beauty of creation and that we live in hope despite its decay.

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh's 'Iolair, Brù-dhearg, Giuthas' is dedicated to the author's mother. The poems explore issues of joy and grief and are full of colourful images from nature. I found much of the symbolism difficult to understand but would recommend to anyone who is an avid reader of poetry. Times of grief are hard to navigate and I am sure the final section – full of rejoicing at the believer's eternal rest – would warm the heart of anyone who has lost a brother or sister in Christ. ●

These books are available to purchase from Sanctus Media.

Christine Coghill, Knockbain Free Church

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

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

THE FREE CHURCH IN THE ANDES

IAIN FRASER GRIGOR (2020)

This book gives a fascinating insight into aspects of Free Church missionary endeavour in the Peruvian Andes in the 20th century. It is a story of arduous journeys to incredibly remote places at high altitudes, medical missions and church planting against hostility from Roman Catholic clergy, and some remarkable characters who deserve not to be forgotten by history, and especially not by the Free Church.

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the editor giving an overview of the missionary effort in the Free Church from its founding in 1843 to the establishment of mission work in the Andes in the 1920s, and on to the present day with the prospect of celebrating the centenary of that work in 2021. As one who was not brought up in the Free Church I found this to be an excellent opening to the subject. It not only introduced key characters and places, but also highlighted issues that faced the Free Church of how to establish church structures and allow the Peruvian church to become truly independent. Names such as Annie Soper, J. Calvin MacKay and Dr Harold Lindsay, and places such as Cajamarca, Celendin and Moyobamba may be well known to older church members. However, they are new to me, and probably also to the younger generation coming through in the Church.

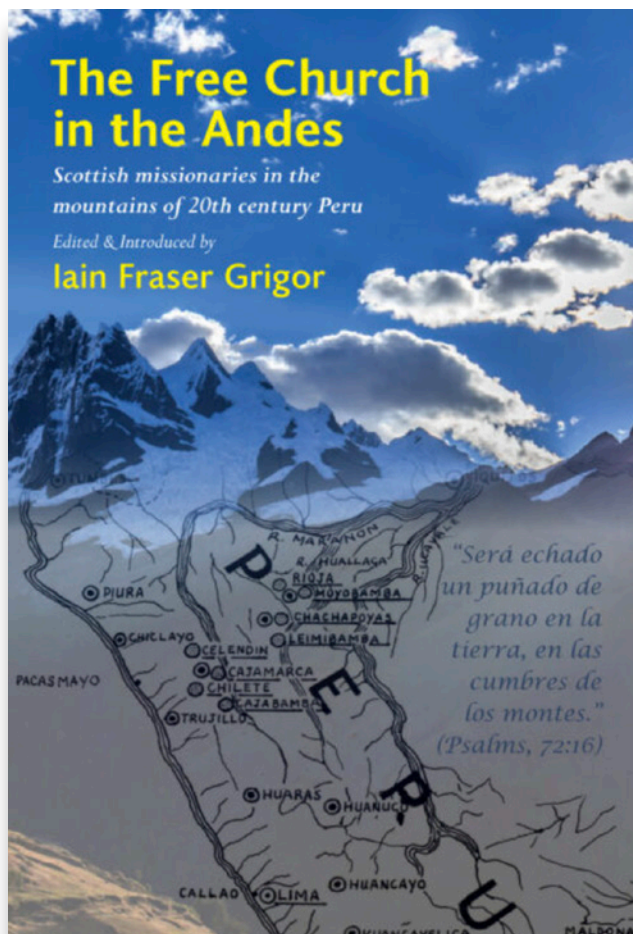
Due to a lack of sources for a traditional history, each of the subsequent chapters is an extract from a missionary journal, a visitors' report, or personal reminiscences from more recent missionaries of the '70s and '80s. All of the writers are engaging and succeed in painting vivid pictures of the cultural setting and the

challenges of missionary living in the Andes. I will highlight two contributions as illustrative of the whole: first, the account of Dr Kenneth MacKay's trip from Glasgow to Moyobamba in 1926 via train, steamship, coastal steamer, train, horse, mule and on foot. It was an epic journey and demonstrated the commitment required to take the gospel to a new field in those days. Secondly, Ronnie Christie's account of his time in the 1970s, where he shows the progress of the work including conventions, camps and a bookshop in Cajamarca. Travel could still be extremely difficult, culminating in a 35-mile walk to find a helicopter to rescue two people seriously injured following a major earthquake.

The book left me with many unanswered questions and wanting to know more. Who were the first converts and the first congregation? Why were Peruvian pastors not allowed to administer the sacraments in the late '60s and early '70s? (Could they really be considered pastors in those circumstances?) Iain Fraser Grigor suggests in his afterword that a lot of the gaps in knowledge could be filled in with further research, perhaps for a doctoral thesis. I, for one, would support such research being carried out at the ETS Mission Centre. The work in Peru was a major achievement for a small denomination and we would do well to remember, teach and celebrate it.

The book opens by stating that by the time of the death of Thomas Chalmers in 1847 the Free Church was operating possibly the largest missionary endeavour in the world. It did this while also organising 700 churches and 650 schools at home in a four-year period. Today we think that seeking to plant 30 churches by the end of the decade is ambitious, while the denomination's international mission work is a fraction of what it was, even in the 1980s. Perhaps it is time that we meditated upon our past in order to get a larger vision for the future. This book is a useful starting point and well worth a read. ●

**Duncan MacPherson, Session Clerk,
North Harris Free Church**



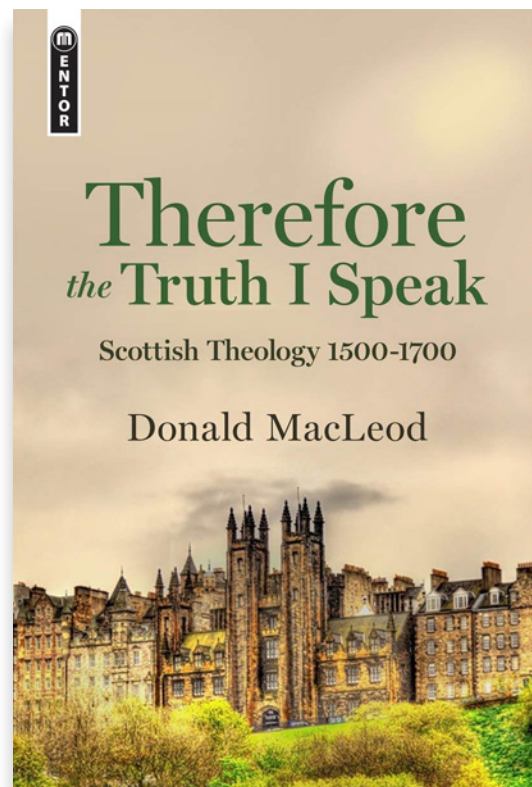
Therefore the Truth I Speak

REV. MALCOLM MACLEAN reflects on the significance of Professor Donald Macleod's latest book

STUDENTS WITH ME AT THE FREE CHURCH COLLEGE WHO HEARD DONALD MACLEOD'S LECTURES ON VARIOUS SCOTTISH THEOLOGIANS ALL AGREED THAT IT WOULD BE GREAT IF THEY COULD BE PUBLISHED AT SOME STAGE. Yet we were concerned about the likelihood of such taking place, because the lectures seemed to be delivered without much, if any, notes. Yet with the recent publication of *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, it can be seen that our wish has been fulfilled and our concern shown to be unfounded. The book is his mature treatment of some prominent Scottish theologians and the various contributions that they made in and for the church.

The period covered is roughly from the Reformation to the close of the Covenanting times (1500–1700). Anyone with knowledge of that period will know that the Reformed church in Scotland repeatedly found itself in very difficult circumstances, facing both strong and persistent political and ecclesiastical opposition. Initially it might seem surprising that such a wealth of theological insights came to the fore in such a period. Yet history reveals that often theological convictions have been tested and refined in times of great difficulty.

It would have been impossible to include in one volume every Scottish theologian from that period, so a selection had to be made about who would be included. The author begins by briefly commenting on Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart, both martyred for their faith early in the Scottish Reformation struggle. He then considers the contribution of John Knox, without whom we may not have had the Reformation and all that has flowed from it. Andrew Melville and his influence on education is explained, as well as the purpose of the Second Book of Discipline for church life. The life of Robert Bruce, a man with unusual spiritual experiences and a desire to explain the Lord's



Supper, who knew gospel success in the Highlands as well as the Lowlands, follows. Then we move into the Covenanting period and see the contributions of Alexander Henderson, who led the church through difficult times; Samuel Rutherford, who wrote lovingly on one King and advised all other kings that their power was limited; David Dickson, who expounded federal theology and experienced revivals in his ministry; and Robert Leighton, who became an Episcopal bishop and archbishop and wrote a magnificent commentary

on 1 Peter. The chapters on those men also include numerous references to many others who made their contributions to the development and spread of Scottish theology.

Throughout the book, the author turns to some topics that came to the fore frequently in those times. They include how the Lord's Supper should be understood, how believers should discover and retain assurance, whether federal theology is a biblical framework, how Christians and others should respond to civil rulers, and how Christians should regard the church. Those matters still show themselves and a great deal of understanding can be obtained by considering what those theologians of the past wrote about them. On topics like these, it is folly indeed to ignore the wisdom of our forebears.

One striking feature of the theologians discussed in this book is that they were good preachers. 'Good' here is not a suggestion that they were orators, although some of them no doubt were. Rather, they knew how to take the themes of the Bible, which they had analysed and absorbed, and then present them in messages that many found attractive and soul-satisfying. It could not be said of them often that they made doctrine dull. While they could speak effectively to the intellectuals, they could also speak to the common person, and they were not afraid in their applications to let monarchs and nobles as well as ordinary people know that they should, and could, serve God. In one way, that may be the challenging aspect of this book: to know how to preach faithfully and relevantly to the times.

Donald Macleod not only possesses great theological insight, he also knows how to communicate his knowledge in a manner that make his explanations attractive reading. Many a person has looked at a book from the past and quickly found its sentence structures and manner of punctuation difficult to cope with. In this volume, the hard work of reading such material has already been done by the author and he presents his discoveries in a way that is engaging to read. He manages to do this without ignoring the difficulties connected to the theological ideas presented by the men he considers. The author does not forget that theology is not just for the mind, nor only for the heart. It has to be worked out in the daily living of old and young, male and female, rich and poor.

Most of all, it shows us that we have a big God, and even although Scotland is a small country, it was his pleasure to use Scottish theologians to produce works that enabled not only people from Scotland but also people from many other countries to grasp something of his greatness. This volume enables us to appreciate some of the treasures that those men from the past discovered and which they delighted to share with others.

This book is highly recommended. ●

Rev. Malcolm Maclean is minister at Greyfriars Free Church, Inverness, and an editor at Christian Focus.

QUOTATIONS:

Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, and death to communion with his Father. He affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial.

Howard Thurman

Sometimes you need to feel the pain and sting of defeat to activate the real passion and purpose that God predestined inside of you.

Chadwick Boseman

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Re: *Letters*, September 2020

Dear Sir,

In reply to Andrew Fraser's letter in the September issue of *The Record*, I would like to assure him that I agree with his clear defence of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Where I disagree is with his insistence that these texts necessarily imply a literal six-day creation.

B B Warfield's insistence on the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible did not pose any problems for his recognition of the scientific discoveries with regard to the age of the universe. In his *Lectures on Anthropology* at Princeton in 1988 he said, 'The upshot of the whole matter is that there is no necessary antagonism of Christianity to evolution, provided that we do not hold to too extreme a form of evolution', quoted in *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*, David N Livingstone (1987). In making reference to 'too extreme a form of evolution' he wished to allow 'constant oversight of God in the whole process, and his occasional supernatural interference for the production of new beginnings'. These new beginnings would include the divine image in man and the creation of Eve. In this it is clear Warfield accepted that both the inanimate and the animate worlds were brought into existence by the Creator, ex nihilo, using processes of his choosing, under his control, over long ages.

Leading Reformed theologians came up with varied answers to the questions posed by scientific discoveries in the nineteenth century that demonstrated the great antiquity of our planet. The gap theory was favoured by Chalmers and Spurgeon; the day-age theory by William Cunningham, Charles Hodge and Francis Schaeffer; the literary framework approach by Meredith Kline, Henri Blocher and J I Packer. All these and many more accepted the great antiquity of the world and looked at its implication for Biblical studies. They were well capable of distinguishing between demonstrable scientific evidence and any 'philosophy of science which has as its raison d'être eliminating God from the picture'. That distinction is vital for a healthy approach to God's truth. Time and again I find opponents of the idea that life has evolved in an ancient universe simply assuming that this idea is atheistic and so must be rejected. There are, indeed, atheists who try to use the theory of Evolution to discredit the Bible, but fortunately there are also Christians within the scientific world who clearly demonstrate the ideological fallacies at the root of such a belief. It is their atheism that needs to be called into question, not the idea of evolution that they misuse in support of their unreasonable atheistic convictions.

The Scriptures Andrew Fraser brings to our attention are compatible with a Young Earth Creation viewpoint, but they are also compatible with six day ages or six days seen as a literary framework used to teach that YAHWEH alone brought into existence and maintains in existence the whole created order, including the physical, the spiritual and man made in his image. He alone is eternal and worthy to be worshiped. This framework also supports the unfolding revelation of His redemptive activity, culminating in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we come to unpack the teaching of Genesis 1 we need to be mindful of the people who first received this revelation. The Bible was written to peoples who lived in varied cultures, hugely different from our own, but were also written for our benefit. The 6+1 literary structure was a known literary device in the ancient world and was well adapted to the transmission of truth in an age where few had access to written documents. The idea of the land being called upon to produce vegetation and to produce living creatures as well as the idea of Adam having time to name all the animals before it became apparent that there was no suitable helper for him, put a strain on the credibility of the six 24-hour days interpretation. The tension between such a belief and the clear evidence of science adds considerably to that strain.

Tying the integrity of the Bible to the perceived inerrancy of any one of several possible interpretations is a dangerous exercise, especially where young and impressionable minds are concerned. For them to grow into confident Christians in a hostile world they must be able to tell the difference between the clear teaching of Scripture that is 'useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...' and the accretions of exegetical traditions that go beyond the main teaching of the Bible and home in on its perceived implied teachings.

Further reading: biologos.org; faraday.cam.ac.uk; cis.org.uk

Sincerely

Alan J F Fraser

POETRY PAGE

DAVID'S LAMENT FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN 2 SAMUEL 1:19-27 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,
publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

You mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor fields of offerings!
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain,
from the fat of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan turned not back,
and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles;
they were stronger than lions.

You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.
How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain on your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was extraordinary,
surpassing the love of women.

How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished.

Scripture's most famous poet used the creative gifts God blessed him with to express his grief at the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. That he mourned so deeply for his best friend is understandable and expected. That he cried over a man who sought to kill him is more surprising. He is concerned that Saul's death will persuade the Philistines that Dagon has won a victory over Israel's God. But his lament reveals the love and respect he maintained for 'the Lord's anointed' (1 Samuel 24:10).

MISSION MATTERS

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

HYMNS ARE LIKE MARMITE: THEY DIVIDE OPINION IN A STRAIGHT BINARY MANNER. I think we can say that about words of human composition. Such a hymn must be *Abide with Me*. It's not so much the hymn as the tune, *Eventide*. Personally, I think it's one of the worst tunes ever to be produced, up there with *Londonderry Air*. One leading musicologist, Paul Westermeyer, described it as 'distractingly dull'.

Leaving the tune aside, the words are profound. Check out, 'change and decay in all around I see'. How do we do mission in a world of change? We accept the change and stay the same!

Change is everywhere. Since COVID we have witnessed the end of cash, the demise of the office and even the extinction of the light switch. A specific focus reveals that our ministry context has changed. If we take the two extremes of our geographical reach: the Western Isles are facing a severe population decline which poses the largest existing economic and social threat to the islands, and central London is disappearing as a venue as the congestion charge kicks in and people take to their trenches in the suburbs.

Recognition and acceptance of this sort of change is essential. Those of us who find change difficult are tempted to put our own heads in the sand. When we speak of 'acceptance', that's not the same as 'agreement'. Change which has resulted in new approaches like the cancel culture cannot be welcomed. The same media system which displays faux outrage at abuse is responsible for the highly exploitative Cuties. We accept it in the sense that we recognise that the world has changed. We speak the prophetic voice into the world as it is, not the world as we wish it could be. Often we watch the miracle unfold as the gospel does its work and lives are changed, the chains break off, the prison doors fly open and we hear the sound of singing at midnight. Jesus spoke into society as it was with its prostitutes and pimps, collapsing towers and racial tensions.

The people who live in our areas are changing.

Remember that 17% of the Scottish population were not born here. If the average Free Church is to be healthy it must be composed of a cross-section of society. MacLeods, Nicholsons, Finlaysons, MacDonalds and Campbells are good but we need more Singhs, Hides, Huangs, Satōs and Ghataks. Our goal is surely to be parish churches, not ethnic clubs. That's one of the reasons we encourage churches to be careful with language. Recently one of our churches still gave a warm welcome to 'strangers'; thankfully, there were no aliens present. Try to listen to one of our services through the ears of a person from another culture; you will realise that we could be speaking Greek as far as they are concerned. Another culture need not be from Dar es Salaam, it could just be Duns.

The thing about change is that there is a bit of a knack in managing it. Some of us simply love change, sometimes just for the sake of change itself. The key in all of this is knowing what elements in our church life must always be subject to change and what must never change. Remember the next line of the hymn: 'O Thou who changest not, abide with me'. Ordinary means of gospel transformation are to be employed in extraordinary times. Paul and Silas found themselves in a changing situation in Acts 16. They were beaten up, placed in a windowless cell and fastened in stocks. They sang hymns, showed great kindness and spoke of Jesus as saviour.

Our churches are changing: online services, pews out, carpets on the floor, fleck wallpaper removed, dressed-down as the new norm. Among it all, we still speak into the prisons of our culture, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.' ●

Slighe air-ais (A way back)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

BHON CHIAD LÀ A DH' FHÀG ADHAMH AGUS EUBHA GÀRRADH EDEIN, B'È SLIGHE AIR-AIS AN NÌ A BHA IADSAN AGUS A H-UILE DUINE BEÒ A THÀINIG ÀS AN DÈIDH A LORG.

Bha iad coltach ris na caoraich a chi sinn, 's iad a' fiachainn ri geat' air chor-eigin a lorg, ach am faigh iad a-mach gu saorsa.

'S dòcha gur e nì coltach ri doras a bhitheas ann, agus le bhith a' dol troimhe, tha farsaingeachd romhpa, agus an saoghal mòr gam fàilteachadh.

Chan eil rian nach e là gu math eadar-dhealaicht' a bh' ann do dh' Adhamh agus do dh'Eubha, 's iad air an druideadh a-mach à suidheachadh glòrmhor. An dùil dè na facail a bhiodh aca ri ràdh ri chèile? Am biodh iad coltach ris an seo?

'Nach e a bha beannaicht' blàth an gàrradh sinn cho toilicht', 's cha robh bàs ann.
Nach e an t-àite-sa tha sàraicht'
le fallus mo ghnùis bidh mi a' caitheamh mo làithean.

Dh'èist sinn ris a' ghuth bha cealgach thug e a thaobh sinn, 's rinn sinn dearmad air na dh'àithn Athair na Tròcair
'Na blaisibh dhith, is e seo m'òrdugh.'

Thug sinn sgrios ro mhòr air saoghal 's ged a ghuileadh sinn son ùine chan atharraich sinn mar tha cùisean dor Dia-ne feumaidh sinn bhith umhail.'

Ach ged a chaidh an cur a-mach às a' ghàrradh, bha rùn mòr aig Athair tròcaireach don t-saoghal a rinn E Fhèin.

Nuair a chi sinn an rùn sin a' tighinn gu buil le teachd

losa don t-saoghal, 's nuair a chluinneas sinn cuid de na nithean a thuir losa, bidh iad a' toirt oirnn' a bhith a' smaoinichadh air an obair a bha E a' dèanamh.

'Is Mise doras nan caorach,' thuir E, agus E a' mineachadh seo don luchd-èisteachd.

Cluinnidh sinn cuideachd, 'Is Mise an t-slighe', agus an t-slighe-sa a' treòrachadh an duine à daorsa gu saorsa ghlòrmhor.

Nach iongantach na snàithleìn a lorgas sinn anns an Fhìrinn, agus sinn a' faicinn air a' cheann thall, gur e aon snàithlean a th' ann, ach abair toinnte!

Aig an àm-sa san t-saoghal, tha iomadh doras dùinte, eadhon glaiste, agus an saoghal a' feitheamh ri saorsa air chor-eigin a-mach às an t-suidheachadh-sa.

Tha sinn gu lèir na Làmhnan-san, agus sinn dall air a thoil don linn, neo eadhon dhuinn fhìn.

Tha daoine a' lorg dòighean ùra gu bhith a' ceannach agus eadhon a' searmonachadh, agus tha sinn taingeil gu bheil, oir tha seo a'ciallachadh gu faigh sinn air cumail oirnn'.

Tha a h-uile duine ag iontrairn aodann caraid agus a bhith a' conaltradh còmhla. Ged a tha fòn uabhasach priseil, chan eil e an aon rud ri bhith a' còmhraidh ri chèile aghaidh ri aghaidh.

Mas sinn clann Dhè, nach e seo ar dèidh cuideachd, a bhith a' faicinn an Uain a phàigh cho daor air Crann-Ceusaidh, gus am biodh slighe air-ais gu Eden a tha a' toirt barrachd air a'chiad ghàrradh?

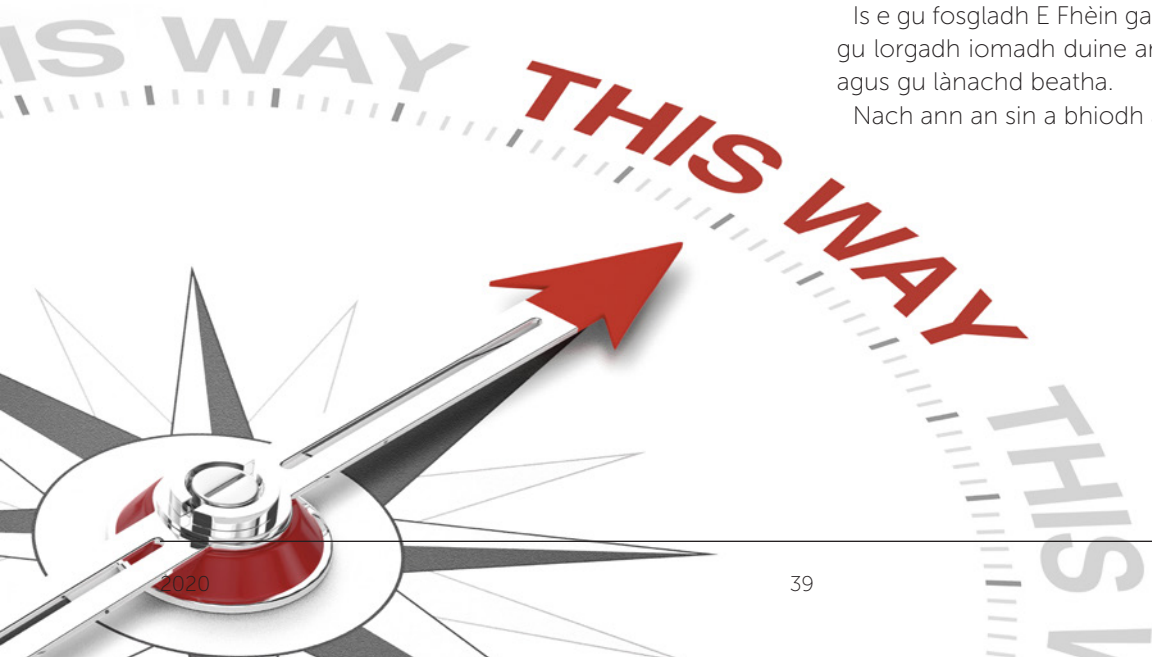
Nì iad an slighe air-ais an seo, às gach treubh agus cinneadh, agus cha bhi aon sgaradh ann.

Nuair a gheibh sinn sealladh air meud tròcair Dhè, bidh sinn ag iarraidh a bhith nas coltaiche rir n-Athair nèamhaidh.

Tha obair mhòr ri dhèanamh Dha a-bhos san t-saoghal a tha a'fàs gu math coma mu chùisean air leth priseil.

Is e gu fosgladh E Fhèin gach doras agus geata, agus gu lorgadh iomadh duine an t-slighe air-ais gu saorsa agus gu lànachd beatha.

Nach ann an sin a bhiodh am fuasgladh? ●





BY CATRIONA MURRAY

POST TENEBRAS LUX

NORMALLY HAVE PLANS FOR HALLOWEEN. For the past few Octobers I have been invited to speak about the supernatural world to local historical society audiences across Lewis. Last year, on the 31st, I was in Lochs, giving a talk on the second sight to an appreciative and well-informed group of folklore buffs.

People are fascinated by the primitive beliefs of our forefathers. They are interested to hear how the Gaels of old lived in proximity to the Otherworld of witches, ghosts and fairies while often simultaneously professing a faith in God and the true spiritual realm. The supernatural world had a geography, an ethnography and a function all its own. Concepts which were either too difficult to understand, or too painful to come to terms with in the real world, were explained by reference to supernatural phenomena. Thus, infant disability was related to fairy changelings, and sudden illness or death might be attributed to witchcraft or the evil eye.

There was a very present awareness of encroaching darkness, and of forces beyond themselves which intended harm to those they loved best. This personification of evil is not as infantile as we modern types care to believe. Indeed, any properly informed Christian knows that harm is not arbitrary and that, in our bleakest of circumstances, Satan is waiting to claim our souls for himself. So, we must allow that there was some merit in linking painful providence to a sentient agency outside of our control.

Because I was born in the twentieth century rather than the sixteenth, I accepted that my widowhood was not brought about through ill-wishing, but by disease. Yet, after he died, my husband's Macmillan nurse spoke about cancer to me like it was a person – an old enemy that she had grappled with for many years.

Personifying the adversary makes sense, I think, precisely because of Satan. He isn't the cartoon fellow with the horns and the trident; he is the malicious, malevolent force that inhabits darkness and death. I don't know if he particularly enjoys inflicting pain, fear and grief for their own sake – it wouldn't surprise me a bit if he does – but I do know that he is very interested in what those sensations can drive us to.

That is why our providences are of less consequence than the reactions they provoke. Our time in this world is of brief duration, and much more so when measured against the unfathomable eternity. Nonetheless, periods of pain and sorrow can make it seem like a protracted horror. One night can seem endless when we are mourning a loved one. I remember vividly my own reflections upon how long I might have to live without my husband, and was depressed at the thought of a 'normal' lifespan. It seemed too much to bear.

And, of course, it was, taken all at once like that. God doesn't ask us to take our sorrows like medicine, though. The enemy wants us to be overwhelmed and encourages thoughts of helplessness and despair. He

wants to use providence against us, to drive a wedge between us and God, so that eventually we turn on our very Creator for what he has taken from us.

This is the true force of darkness. It isn't about ghosts and ghouls and things that go 'bump' in the night; it is about further warping our damaged relationship with God so we eventually become his accusers. Satan works on our fears and our griefs, and our sense of being hard done by. He encourages us to dwell on the slow drag of time in this world, so that we consider nothing in the light of eternity.

When we do, however, get that light to see by, God shows us something very different. Once we are able to stop Satan's propaganda, pouring despair into our hollowed-out hearts, we can focus on the still, small voice.

What does God say to us in our fear and in our grief? Does he silence us, and tell us it is of no consequence? Will he dismiss it as a light, momentary affliction? Will he indulge our self-pity? Or defend himself against our bitter recriminations, when we remonstrate with him and ask, 'why?'

He weeps with us. And he comes alongside us. If the night seems long, he will remind us of the joy that awaits the morning.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

Satan wants me to dwell on God's removal of what I loved best. Very well, Satan. But what have I loved more than my own sin? He has taken that too.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. ●