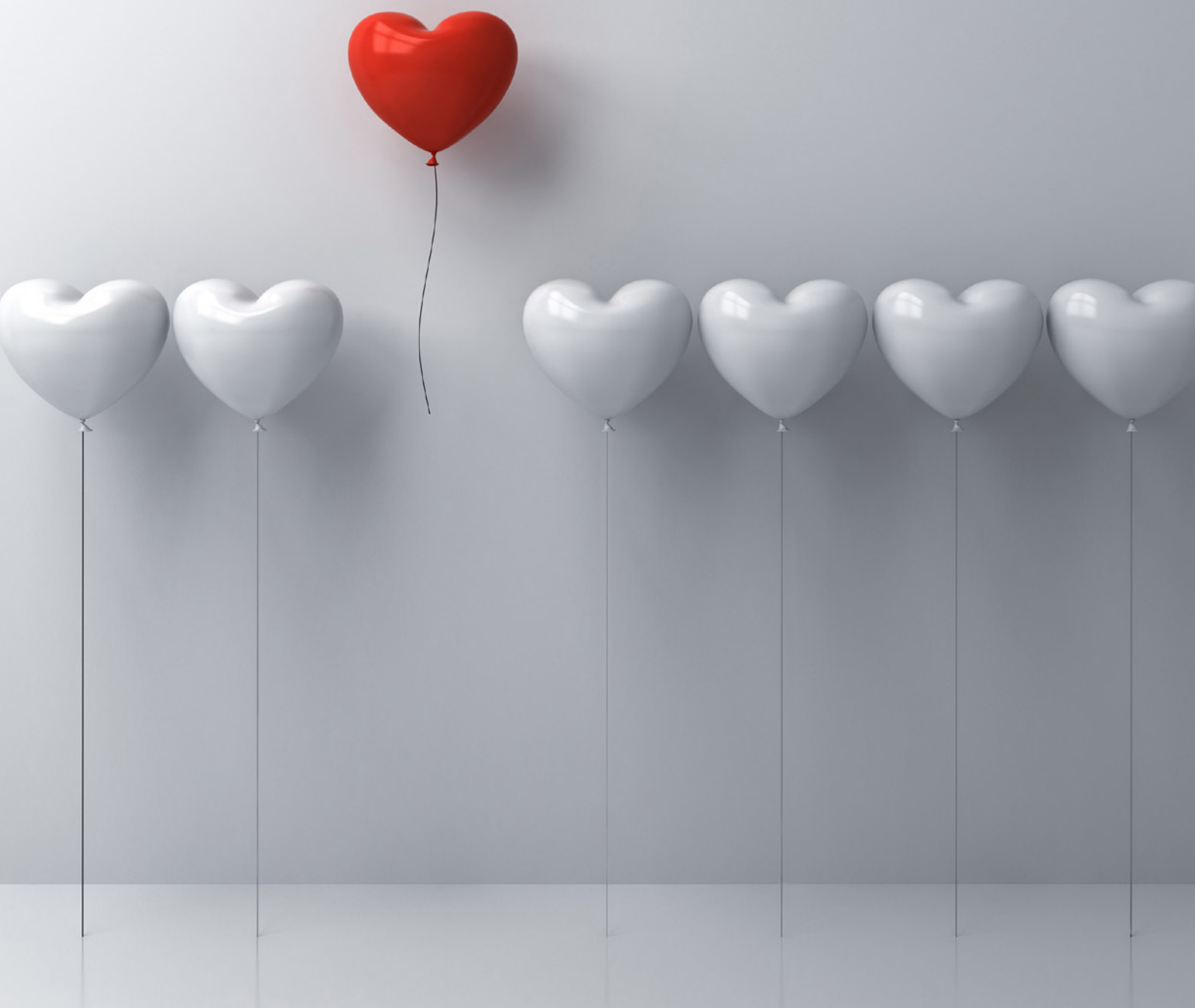


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# WELCOME TO THE FEBRUARY RECORD



**WE CONTINUE TO WITNESS, AND TO BE AFFECTED BY, THE PAINFUL GRIEF AND CONTINUAL FEAR CAUSED BY THE COVID PANDEMIC.** The virus continues to spread, bringing devastation to the families affected by it. At the same time, we pray the vaccine rollout will begin to bring the pandemic under control.

In the following pages you will find a letter from Rev Donnie G MacDonald, Moderator of the General Assembly, written on behalf of the Free Church's COVID committee. The letter explains the Free Church's position on physically meeting together during the ongoing lockdown. Government guidelines, and indeed legislation, on gathering for church services have created a dilemma for Christians around the world. Throughout the pandemic, *The Record* has reported on lobbying against church closures, legal challenges as well as some people deciding to contravene the rules to meet for worship. The Moderator explains why the Free Church has chosen to accept the restrictions in place in Scotland.

The Free Church News section this month reminds us that the work of God's Kingdom continues. In particular, the Mission Board's response to the current drought in South Africa emphasises our ongoing participation in the worldwide Christian community, even as we remain physically close to home.

As well as being available online, *The Record* continues to be printed and posted to subscribers. If you haven't been receiving your copy, please get in touch and we will sort this out for you. ●

If you have any news articles please send them to [dayspring.macleod@icloud.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@icloud.com).

Yours in Christ

John

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

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The pursuit of prosperity in a servant economy

# Invisible Hands

BY THE EDITOR



## The political parties, newspapers, trade unions and chambers of commerce will all have views to share about the direction the economy should take. But what about the church?

**S**OMETIMES IT IS THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL. At other times, it is a source of common grace. At all times, the economy is idolised by policy wonks and politicians for the power it has to affect living standards and sway elections. Partly as a cause and partly as a consequence of this reverence, economists have come to replace lawyers as the great sages of public policy. Their influence is easily seen. In politics and current affairs, the economy is never far from the headlines. Politicians have a habit of quoting bald economic generalities as evidence of progress: the stock market is up, so is GDP, and the deficit is down. To compound this phenomenon, it's an election year, meaning pledges and policies to reform the economy's workings will come tumbling from the mouths of office-seekers in the coming months. The political parties, newspapers, trade unions and chambers of commerce will all have views to share about the direction the economy should take. But what about the church?

### CHRISTIAN ABSENCE

Economics is one of the more ambitious academic disciplines in that it attempts to understand, explain and predict human behaviour. It is also one of the most influential, readily applying itself to government policy by seeking to answer questions like: how do we prosper? There is much that is true among the work economists have produced. But, while it is an enormously useful tool, contemporary economics cannot explain everything. It has significant blind spots which often leaves modern economic theory at odds with biblically-focussed thinking.

The economy is an aggregation of all the day-to-day decisions people make about how they use the resources they have — like money, time, or energy. As such, Christians cannot avoid taking part in the economy. But we usually avoid thinking about how we take part in it.

A lack of assistance doesn't help in this. We would naturally read John Lennox to gain a Christian perspective on science, we can choose from a range of thoughtful contributions from C.S. Lewis to Flannery O'Connor on literature, and even for the arts we could read Francis Schaeffer. It is not so easy to find biblical Christianity being applied to economics.

Politically charged, and necessitating the study of wealth, economics is dangerous territory for a Christian to enter unguarded and ill-equipped. At present, it is also — to a very large extent — foreign territory. One of the few theologians who has tackled the dismal science, Greg Forster, observes, 'the economic thought of the modern world has become detached from Christian thought and is deeply shaped by various secular and pagan ways of understanding the world.' The omnipresence of economic ideas in government and throughout society shapes the way we think about some really important things. These ideas can influence the jobs we do, our generosity with the resources we have and certainly how we cast our votes. We should be aware of the foundations these ideas are built upon.

### HOMO ECONOMICUS

Humanity has always made decisions about the way resources are used, and the economy is present in the history in Christian thought. Material prosperity has a long, if complicated, relationship to theology. Thomas Aquinas applied his scholastic analysis to trade and concluded that goods



## **Mainstream economic thought is self-centred... there is no Christian contribution among the key milestones of economics.**

should be sold at no more than a 'just price' — one which was enough to cover the cost of production, including the sustenance of the worker and his family. Aquinas thought raising prices in response to demand was immoral. Duns Scotus concluded that merchants were necessary and useful. In *Utopia*, Thomas More wrote that common ownership of land should be part of the ideal society. For his part, Francis Bacon's observation was that, 'Of great riches there is no real use, except it be in the distribution; the rest is but conceit...Seek not proud riches, but such as thou mayest get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly.'

But Christian perspectives were set aside when Adam Smith ushered in the era of modern economics with *The Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776. Smith observed the presence of self-interest within the economy, which is consistent with the doctrine of sin. However, he went on to argue that, restrained only by a competitive free market, rational self-interest results in economic prosperity. He thought that self-interest incentivised people to work and to produce useful goods; and then to sell them at affordable prices to earn a living. He wrote, 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.' Smith's own views on the morality of this proposition are ambiguous, but the idea that rational self-interest is beneficial, if not virtuous, and central to increasing prosperity remains deeply influential.

After the Industrial Revolution brought unprecedented wealth to the West, Smith's successors like Hayek and Pareto built on the assumption that people within an economy act rationally to maximise their own satisfaction, applying mathematical models to their assumptions to create economic 'laws' like supply and demand.

Karl Marx's approach saw a significant departure from economics' previously positive view of capitalism. He argued that a capitalist economy inevitably exploits working people, forcing them to sell their labour but paying them less than that labour is worth, and ultimately treating them as if they are disposable commodities. He expected this exploitation to foment dissatisfaction, leading workers to unite, attain political power and then go on to establish a classless society in which everyone can access the raw materials, machinery and other means to produce the goods and services that fulfil their needs and desires.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the economic policies of governments were upended by the work of John Maynard Keynes. He challenged the traditional view that free markets would, of their own accord, eventually provide full employment. He famously remarked, 'this long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead. Economists set themselves too easy, too useless a task if in tempestuous seasons they can only tell us that when the storm is long past the ocean is flat again.' He recommended government borrowing and spending to stimulate demand in the economy. His ideas were employed to mitigate the effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and the Financial Crisis in 2007-2008.

Keynes was criticised by Milton Friedman, who returned to the idea that people's rational self-interest brings better results than government

**There has been a collective failure among Christians to apply the truth we find in Scripture to economics, a field which has huge consequences for the lives of our neighbours and the stewardship of creation.**

intervention. He thought leaving people to choose how to conduct their own affairs would allow greater efficiency and creativity in the economy.

In the 21st century, a greater degree of doubt characterises the work of economists. *Homo economicus*, the assumption that people act rationally when they make economic decisions, has survived since Adam Smith, but its limitations have been the focus of recent economic ideas. Joseph Stiglitz noted that rational economic decisions cannot be made without full and accurate information about the commodity being traded. In practice, not many people in an economy possess perfect information about what they are buying or even selling. Meanwhile, Richard Thaler observed that human emotions and lack of self-control mean rational decisions are often not made in reality. The assumptions of classical economics are increasingly seen as an unreliable foundation for an economy fit for the present day.

**COMMON GRACE**

Although the relatively brief history of economics contains views as diametrically opposed as those of Marx, the basis of communism, and Friedman, the basis of Thatcherism, there is a common theme. Mainstream economic thought is self-centred.

Also, economics is unusual in Western intellectual history. There is no James Clerk Maxwell or Michael Faraday; no John Bunyan or Jane Austen. In other words, there is no Christian contribution among the key milestones of economics.

The common grace of intelligence and curiosity mean there are valuable insights to be found, but traditional economic models don't satisfy. They cannot, because they have not benefitted from biblical wisdom being directly applied. Nor have they benefitted from the Christian's God-given perspective that reveals who we are before our Creator (Psalm 8) and what prosperity truly is in his sight (Psalm 106:4-5). As a result, economic models have no regard for the creation mandate, and have resulted in over-use of the world's resources in pursuit of prosperity. They have no understanding that humanity is made in the image of God, and therefore that people have worth far beyond what they can make or consume.

God is ever-gracious, though, and his common grace abounds to a magnificent degree. A fresh insight has emerged over the last few years which brings economics closer to a recognition that both image-bearers and creation need to be cared for. Kate Raworth's 2017 book *Doughnut Economics* argues that the priority should be creating the conditions for a sustainable economy. She wants to see a balance between the need to ensure everyone has what they need to live a good life and keeping economic activity within the bounds of what the planet can cope with. Raworth rejects the pursuit of economic growth for its own sake. During 2020, Amsterdam became the first of several cities to commit to finding this balance.

Perhaps *Doughnut Economics* will help foster the kind of economy the 21st Century needs. If so, then to God be the glory because such a blessing would come in spite of a collective failure among Christians to apply the truth we find in Scripture to economics, a field which has huge consequences for the lives of our neighbours and the stewardship of creation.



**This is the biblical insight that Christians can contribute to economics: we need a servant economy. Self-interest is not a virtue; wealth is not an adequate goal. Instead, we are to prefer one another**

**TIME TO SERVE**

But it's not too late. The growing recognition of Raworth's idea presents an opportunity to develop a positive insight even further. Christians have always been committed to the truth that each person is more valuable than wealth. We know, too, that we depend on grace, and grace is not the pursuit of self-interest. It is, in fact, the opposite. Instead of leaving fallen humanity to face the wages of our sin, God upholds both sides of his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:17-21). And he has given us an example of how we can apply this ethic to the economy.

Efficient division of labour, as introduced to the world by Adam Smith, would require that Jesus concentrate on using his unique expertise and skills to teach and heal. It would necessarily be for someone else to wash the disciples' feet. And yet, our King says:

*'You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'* (John 13:13-17).

Forster writes that, 'We can see the economy as a social web that God has created for people to serve each other with their work.' This is the biblical insight that Christians can contribute to economics: we need a servant economy. Self-interest is not a virtue; wealth is not an adequate goal. Instead, we are to prefer one another (Romans 12:10). This attitude is essential if we truly want to meet people's needs without ruining the environment. Acquisition and accumulation are not the end-goals of service. The goal is to steward that which we have to ensure others benefit from it.

In a market economy, sometimes this needs to be hard-headed. The gifts given to some in the body of Christ will mean they can serve by building a business which employs people and produces goods or services that bless others, while avoiding the gathering of wealth for its own sake.

Sometimes, though, this means using skills which could be deployed for personal gain, and for earning more money, in other tasks, less well remunerated, but with greater opportunities for service. *'When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?'* (Ecclesiastes 5:11)

Economic decisions taken to serve others are an act of worship, and a reflection of God's intervention in the human economy. Our motivation for taking such decisions is gratitude. Economists expect rational people who hold valuable commodities to exchange them for a price. But almighty God has given us eternal life as a free gift.

For all his foresight, Keynes only saw part of the picture. It is true that 'in the long run, we are all dead', but *'after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him'* (Hebrews 9:27-28). History's most consequential debt was paid on Calvary. In gratitude, we marshal the resources we have been given to worship the Lamb who was slain, and to serve one another. This is how the righteous prosper. ●



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# WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

## US EVANGELICALS RESPOND TO INSURRECTION AND IMPEACHMENT



Prominent American evangelist Franklin Graham took to social media to criticise the second impeachment of Donald Trump following the attack on the US Capitol.

'Shame, shame on the ten Republicans who joined with @SpeakerPelosi & the House Democrats in impeaching President Trump yesterday,' Graham tweeted. 'After all that he has done for our country, you would turn your back & betray him so quickly? What was done yesterday only further divides our nation.' He later added, on Facebook, 'It makes you wonder what the thirty pieces of silver were that Speaker Pelosi promised for this betrayal.'

Meanwhile, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement criticising the outgoing President. They wrote, 'The mob at the Capitol was provoked by leaders, including President Trump, who have employed lies and conspiracy theories for political gain. Evangelicals are people who are committed to truth and should reject untruths.'



## RELIGIOUS SHIFT IN ARGENTINA



Following the report on proposed legislation in last month's *Record*, Argentina became the first country in Latin America to legalise abortion. After rejecting the change two years ago, the Senate approved a bill allowing pregnancies to be terminated up to 14 weeks.

This reflects the declining influence of the Catholic Church. As recently as the mid-2000s, three-quarters of Argentina's population identified as Catholic. Not only has that figure declined to below two-thirds in 2019, but less than 10% of Argentinian Catholics attend church regularly.

Even so, as Argentina becomes less religious (19% of people don't identify with any faith), it is also becoming more evangelical. 15% of the population now belong to an evangelical church, the vast majority of which are Pentecostal.

## SCOTTISH MINISTERS CALL FOR REOPENING OF CHURCHES



In an open letter to the First Minister, more than 200 Scottish Christian leaders, along with 300 from the rest of the UK, have called for churches to be reopened by the Scottish Government. Lead signatories to the letter include Rev. Paul Rees of Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh, Rev. Dr William Philip of the Tron Church in Glasgow and Rev. John Mackinnon of Calderwood Baptist Church in East Kilbride.

The letter states: 'We strongly disagree with the decision to prevent the gathering of the Church at this time, which we believe is profoundly unhelpful and may be unlawful.'

'We know of no evidence of any tangible contribution to community transmission through churches in Scotland. To the contrary, since churches re-opened in July we have demonstrated that places of worship and public worship can be made safe from Covid transmission.'

'However, above all we are dismayed because there seems to be a failure in the Scottish Government to understand that Christian worship is an essential public service, and especially vital to our nation in a time of crisis.'

Noting that places of worship are open in the rest of the UK, the authors continue, 'We urge you not to be the government which denies our nation the collective prayer of the churches of our land in days when it is most greatly needed.'

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said in response, 'We know how tough this decision will be for many people. However we must take action across society to stop the virus spreading further, so we can protect public health and save lives. This virus can spread anywhere that there is close human contact – without exception.'

## OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST 2021

Persecution increased during 2020, according to *Open Doors*, with Christians being denied COVID-related aid in several countries, authoritarian regimes increasing surveillance and Islamic militants exploiting the pandemic to attack believers. Around 340 million Christians experience high levels of persecution, and 2020 saw a 60% increase over the previous year in the number of people killed for their faith. More than nine out of ten of the 4,761 deaths took place in Africa.

David Landrum, head of advocacy for Open Doors UK and Ireland, said, 'The increasing persecution of Christians across the world should disturb us all. Freedom of religion is what underpins many other human rights and civil liberties. Oppressive governments know this, and they are exploiting the pandemic crisis to turn the screw on Christians.'

*Open Doors'* World Watch list continues to rank North Korea as the worst country for persecution of Christians, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya and Pakistan. ●

### 'AFRICA'S BILLY GRAHAM' DIES OF COVID-19



Stephen Lungu, evangelist and retired leader of African Enterprise, died on January 18<sup>th</sup> after being admitted to hospital in Malawi with COVID-19. He was 78.

Lungu grew up in Zimbabwe and was the leader of a street gang before being converted through hearing the gospel preached at an evangelistic event. After becoming an evangelist himself, he led African Enterprise, an organisation focussed on urban outreach. The organisation now reaches around 1 million people each year proclaiming the gospel and through community support projects.

Lungu himself preached to crowds around the world. At one gathering in Ethiopia in 1991, shortly after the fall of a regime which persecuted Christians, 10,000 people came forward to accept Christ following Lungu's sermon.

Michael Cassidy, honorary chairman of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization, who founded African Enterprise in 1961, said, 'There will be thousands and thousands of people in heaven because of Stephen Lungu. I have known many preachers over the years in African Enterprise, and beyond it, but I don't think I have ever known a more passionate and endlessly energetic preacher of the gospel than Stephen.'

'A giant has fallen among us,' Francis Mkandawire, general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of Malawi, told *Christianity Today*. 'The Christian history of Malawi will never be told without mentioning the name of Baba Stephen Lungu, as he was fondly called. Stephen was more than a preacher to many of us in Malawi; he was a father.' ●

### COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE IRAQI CHRISTIANS' PROPERTY CLAIMS



Muqtada al Sadr, an Islamic cleric whose Saairun coalition is the largest bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, has ordered the establishment of a committee to investigate claims of illegal expropriations from Christian property owners, reports the Catholic news agency, *Fides*. Al-Sadr is a Shia cleric and militia leader opposed to both Saddam Hussein's regime and the Western coalition which ended it. He has positioned himself as an Iraqi nationalist. Many Iraqi Christians lost property when they were forced to leave their homes by Islamic State forces. Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako of the Chaldean Church welcomed the initiative, which may repair some of the injustices suffered by Iraqi Christians in recent years. ●



### UN CRITICISES IRAN'S SYSTEMATIC PERSECUTION



A group of six senior United Nations human rights experts – including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman – have written to the Iranian government to express their 'serious concern' over reports of 'continued systematic persecution' of Christians.

According to *Article18*, Iran has responded by asserting that 'nobody is prosecuted on religious grounds', but that legal action has been taken against members of 'enemy groups' and 'private churches' (taken to be a reference to house churches), which the government accuses of belonging to a 'Zionist Christian cult' with 'anti-security purposes'.

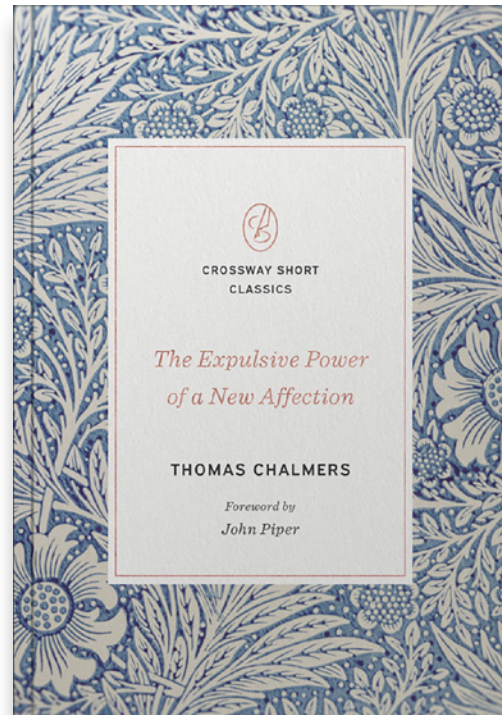
The Iranian government's position is disputed by evidence gathered by *Article18* which includes cases of Christians being imprisoned, and in one instance even executed, for apostasy. ●

## NEW EDITION OF CHALMERS' FAMOUS WORK

**C**ROSSWAY HAVE RECENTLY PUBLISHED A NEW EDITION OF THOMAS CHALMERS' FAMOUS SERMON *THE EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION*. A leader of the Disruption and the first Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, Dr Chalmers was a notable public figure in his day. Indeed, in his foreword to the Crossway edition, John Piper notes William Wilberforce's comment that 'all the world [is] wild about Dr Chalmers' and William Gladstone's remark that he was 'a man greatly lifted out of the region of mere flesh and blood.' He contributed to the sciences, apologetics, economics and sought to address poverty, in addition to preaching and church leadership.

This new book presents Chalmers' best-known work, a sermon on 1 John 2:15, in which he shows that the human heart is freed from its love for the world only when an even greater love for God replaces it.

The book is part of Crossway's 'Short Classics' series which presents important works from church history in short, affordable editions. ●



## DROUGHT IN SOUTH AFRICA – OUR RESPONSE

BY **BOB AKROYD (CHAIR OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
MISSION BOARD)**

**T**HE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HAS A DISASTER RELIEF FUND TO ENABLE IT TO RESPOND TO NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CRISES. We work with mission partners and Christian organisations like Tearfund who are dedicated to relieving suffering and distress in the name of Jesus Christ.

Recently, the Reformed Churches in South Africa alerted us to an ongoing crisis in the Northern Cape Province in South Africa. The worst drought in more than 100 years has been further exacerbated by the COVID pandemic; the resulting needs are obvious and pressing.

The remit of this initiative by our mission partners in South Africa is simple and succinct: 'The assistance is offered to people in need. The only criterion is need.'

To bring some support to the Northern Cape, the Free Church has authorised £2,000 from its Disaster Relief Fund to be transferred to the diaconal arm of Reformed Churches in South Africa. We have sent these funds as a tangible expression of our practical and prayerful concern for the people of this region in their time of need.

The Lord Jesus commends the practical care

and concern shown by his people in the parable of the sheep and the goats, *'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:34-36).'*

The Disaster Relief Fund is regularly topped up by the generous donations of congregations, individuals and mission support organisations like WfM. If you would like to support this fund, which is used solely for the care of those in extreme need, please send your donations to Free Church Disaster & Relief Fund.

Please pray for the people of the Northern Cape and for those seeking to offer help in the name of Jesus. ●

# FREE CHURCH RESPONDS TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S ABORTION CONSULTATION

**T**HE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HAS SUBMITTED A RESPONSE TO A CONSULTATION FROM THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT WITH RESPECT TO FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR EARLY MEDICAL ABORTION AT HOME.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic last March, the Scottish Government allowed certain women to take both pills required for an early medical abortion (mifepristone and misoprostol) in their own homes after a telephone or video consultation with a doctor or nurse, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic for an in-person appointment. The Government consultation aims to canvass opinion as to whether this process should continue.

The Free Church is deeply concerned about the practice of abortions at home. As Christians we believe all human beings have inherent worth and value, having been made in the image of God. We also believe it is right for the church to speak up on issues such as abortion provision and to strive for a more just society. Proverbs 31:8-9 tells us to 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.'

As a church, we are concerned about the rights of the unborn child and believe more needs to be done to protect the child in the womb. We do not therefore share the State's view as to when abortion is permissible; indeed, we believe that there are few circumstances in which it is justified,

although we recognise that is beyond the scope of this consultation.

However, as well as being concerned about the rights of the child we are also deeply concerned about the health and wellbeing of any woman who finds herself considering abortion or having to self-administer abortion in her home. We want processes that show compassion to women in these circumstances and which protect them from the huge medical risks inherent in these proposals.

Our response to the consultation outlines the many reasons why abortions at home are inherently less safe and open to abuse. The likelihood of undue pressure and abuse being applied to women is increased. There are more risks of complications and significant ongoing psychological risks. We also see the potential for abuse where abortion pills could be prescribed to one individual who then gives them to another.

It is not possible to mitigate these many risks and accordingly, home abortion is not appropriate. It is noteworthy that when the Abortion Act 1967 was introduced in the UK it was to protect women from the risks associated with abortions away from a healthcare setting. The move towards home abortions is therefore a backwards step introducing increased risks to women who deserve the best possible care, which requires face-to-face contact. ●

## RED SCARE

### THE MONTHLY RECORD, FEBRUARY 1911 UNDESIRABLE ALIENS

**U** **NDESIRABLE ALIENS' IS A COMMON NEWSPAPER HEADING JUST NOW.** Murder and outrage on a large scale have resulted from the too easy hospitality accorded to these criminal strangers in London. During the early hours of Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, a jeweller's shop in Houndsditch was invaded by a band of desperadoes, chiefly Russian, and armed with revolvers. In the attempt to capture them, three policemen lost their lives, and one robber was killed.

A frightful sequel to the affair was the suicide on Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, of two accomplices in a house in Stepney, London. These demoniac characters kept the police and military at bay for several hours with firearms, and at last, to prevent capture, they suffered themselves to perish in the burning house. The symptoms of the affair point to extensive anarchist operations in the heart of London. It may be said that every country gets the aliens it deserves.

The contrast between now and two hundred years ago in the respect point a moral. At that time London's alien population was of quite a different stamp. Huguenot refugees, fleeing from the cruelty of Louis XIV of France, found asylum in Britain, and enriched the country of the adoption by virtuous examples and useful arts. It paid the lieges well to harbour these fugitives; but the migratory band that now seeks our shores are, for the most part, an undesirable race, a menace to morals, and a danger to life.

There is an Aliens Act, but a correspondent writes that it is a feeble, ineffective measure. 'For reasons I need not now go into, a great many aliens who misconduct themselves in England are not expelled. In one case, an alien, convicted of a particularly vile offence, was expelled, but a fortnight after he was found in London dressed as a woman.' ●

### THE MONTHLY RECORD, FEBRUARY 1921 SOCIALIST SUNDAY SCHOOLS

**A** **T A RECENT MEETING OF THE GLASGOW PRESBYTERY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, AN INTERESTING REPORT WAS SUBMITTED ON SOCIALIST SUNDAY SCHOOLS, AND ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SOCIALIST TEACHING.** The report referred to the widespread nature and thorough organisation of the Socialist movement, especially among the young, in Scotland, and particularly in Glasgow, where it was stated there were now 19 Socialist Sunday Schools and seven or eight Proletarian Sunday Schools. 25 years ago there were only two Socialist Sunday Schools in Scotland, and it was now alleged that there were 150.

The Committee was not aware of any formal creed or confession framed by those in authority in these schools. With regard to the character of the hymns taught the children in these schools, the Committee found that the name of God and of Jesus was expunged from every hymn, and that the children had no direct Christian teaching. Hatred of the rich, pity for all who labour with their hands, and a levelling down of all distinctions was the nature of the teaching found by the Committee in the general hymns of the Socialist Sunday School.

The palpable fallacy contained in one of the Socialist maxims, which took the place of the Ten Commandments, that all good and beautiful things were produced



only by labour, reappeared constantly in the hymns, and was used to fire the passions of one class against another. The men who compiled the hymn book had evidently no idea, no persuasion of the ultimate meaning of life. The teaching of the Proletarian Sunday Schools was of the same kind, one more extreme and bold, and virulent in its denunciation of all religion, of all spirituality, and everything for which the Church of Christ has always stood and still stands. This is a development of modern times regarding which it is highly necessary that a note of clear warning should be sounded, and with reference to which the Church of Christ must be on its guard. ●

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## THE MONTHLY RECORD, FEBRUARY 1946 RUSSIA AND BRITAIN

**O**UR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE SOVIET UNION THREATEN TO WORSEN, AND IT MAY BE THAT THEY MUST GET WORSE BEFORE THEY CAN GET BETTER. The oft-vaunted 'friendship' and 'understanding' between the two Allies scarcely impressed anyone who could see beneath the surface, and even that superficial harmony has now been openly broken by the appeal of Russia to the United Nations on behalf of Greece and Indonesia, charging Britain with interference in the internal affairs of these nations likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

How far these charges can be substantiated, even on paper, we are not in a position to say, but the fact that they were brought forward at the juncture reveals the dangerous extent to which Britain and Russia are drifting apart, as it also points to the new spirit of aggressive imperialism that inspires the policies of the Kremlin. It, incidentally, raises the question also whether the Soviet Union, with its suspicion and intrigue and double-dealing, can ever give its sincere support or co-operation in the working of the United Nations Organisation.

During the latter years of the war there was a foolish tendency in this country to gloss over, airily and good-naturedly, the wide divergence between this nation and the Soviet Union in political, cultural, and, above all, spiritual outlook and much loose talk about Russia being a great Christian democracy. Till we realise that Russia is neither Christian nor democratic we shall fail to understand its policies and be unprepared to meet its intrigues. To this extent it may be a good thing that its attitude to Britain, and to the western nations in general, should come under discussion in the open forum of the Security Council, and that its charges should eventually come before the judgement of the United Nations. It will at least clear the air, and it may lead to better understanding all round. ●

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## THE MONTHLY RECORD, FEBRUARY 1961 THE CHURCH AND THE BOMB

**T**HE RECENTLY-PUBLISHED LETTER ON THE ABOVE SUBJECT WHICH APPEARED OVER THE NAMES OF SEVERAL PROMINENT MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, and the discussion to which it gave rise in the correspondence columns of our daily newspapers, has served at least to bring to light the confusion which exists in the Church with regard to the retention of the nuclear deterrent. The line 'better be Red than dead', advocated by one of the ministers referred to, is a strange one for any minister of the Gospel to take, and it is completely at variance with the heroic past of the Church in this land of glorious martyrdoms.

But the complete illogicality of the unilateralists is what causes the greatest surprise. To suggest that abandoning nuclear weapons, irrespective of what other countries did, would induce Russia to follow our example is surely to live in a world of fantasy. Nothing would suit Mr Khrushchev better than that the nations of the world should throw away their defences and trust themselves to the tender mercies of a man whose pose as an apostle of peace is ill-matched with his record as a ruthless aggressor.

Nuclear warfare is unspeakably horrible even to imagine, but the blunt facts are that Russia has armed herself with nuclear weapons which she will not hesitate to use to make the nations bow to her will unless those nations are strong enough to meet her threat, or servile enough to yield to her demands.

Every effort should be made to press for general disarmament under agreed supervision, but an abandonment of nuclear weapons by Great Britain at this moment in world history would be a shameful betrayal of Western civilisation to the forces of evil. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ,' to quote Bishop Manning of the Protestant Episcopal Church, USA, 'stands not for peace at any price, but for righteousness at any cost.' ●

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# WHY WE CHOOSE TO ADHERE TO GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS

BY **REV. DONNIE G. MACDONALD, MODERATOR OF  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH,  
ON BEHALF OF THE COVID-19 COMMITTEE**

**T**HE BIBLE IS CLEAR, THE PEOPLE OF GOD SHOULD NOT NEGLECT GATHERING TOGETHER FOR WORSHIP (HEBREWS 10:25). It may therefore seem strange that we in the Free Church of Scotland acquiesce to the Government's requirement that we do not gather for in-person worship, and perhaps it is stranger still that a Church Committee encourages us to do so. But we are in strange times.

COVID-19 is a new virus that has wreaked havoc across the globe. Like all viruses it spreads from person to person. The more contact people have with each other the easier and the further it spreads. COVID-19 is not the common cold, nor a winter flu. It has filled our hospitals, overwhelmed ICUs and taken tens of thousands of lives. New strains of the virus in particular are easily transmitted. And like all viruses it does not discriminate; it is transmitted as easily in church settings as it is in homes, workplaces, gyms, shops, pubs and restaurants. It simply spreads wherever people gather.

The COVID-19 Committee therefore recognise that, in these exceptional circumstances, acquiescing to the Government requirement not to gather for in-person services of worship is not a denial of the scriptural injunction of Hebrews 10:25, but rather a fulfilling of the Sixth Commandment, and the equally clear Biblical instruction to love one another, to love our neighbour as ourselves and to put the interests of others before our own. We are also thankful to God that we live in an age where we have the technology that allows us to have services of worship online and to meet for prayer and fellowship. This in no way underplays the importance of meeting together in person, but as a temporary measure we are thankful for it.

In normal circumstances a civil authority requiring the people of God not to gather would be viewed as an infringement on our right to worship, a challenge to the independence of the Church and the Headship of Christ, which we should, and would, vehemently resist. But not in this instance. This is a public health crisis that the Government is seeking to resolve, and the Church has a responsibility to support the Government in its efforts. In the preamble to the Route Map we were reminded that:

'The Free Church of Scotland recognises the teaching of The Bible that



we are subject to the governing authorities. We recognise the duty and authority of the civil government to protect the wellbeing of the nation (Romans 13:1-7). We shall therefore comply with the law, advice and timings given by government.'

At the same time, the Committee has recognised occasions when it was felt necessary to challenge decisions and make representations to the First Minister and Government officials. When certain restrictions are deemed to be unnecessary (the inability to conduct weddings during the first lockdown), or inequitable (numbers allowed to meet in church as supposed to restaurants or entertainment venues during the easing of restrictions), meetings have taken place and letters have been written. And it may be at the end of this pandemic, after a time of reflection, we will seek to remind Government of the spiritual independence of the Church. If so, it will be done strongly and clearly.

There is a time for everything under the sun and the Committee believe this is a time to:

### **BE STRONG**

It takes strength and courage for an old person to live under the restrictions which prevent family and friends visiting as they would want. It takes strength and courage for ourselves, and for our congregations, to live under the restrictions that prevent us being able to gather together as we would want. But we find our strength and courage in the Lord. We must be strong in our togetherness, our care for one another and our witness during this time of pandemic.

### **BE SELFLESS**

When politicians, celebrities and sports people flout the rules, they are accused of having a sense of entitlement, 'one rule for them and another for us'. Their behaviour is resented by the wider public who have to comply with the rules. Our right to gather for in-person worship in normal circumstances should not create in us a spirit of entitlement in these exceptional circumstances. Christ entered into our world, giving up his rights; he selflessly shared in the experience of our humanity, and all that goes with it, for the good of others. We in the Church of Christ enter into this pandemic along with our communities, sharing in the experience with all its difficulties, and we also selflessly sacrifice things that are dear to us for the good of others.

### **BE SENSITIVE**

These restrictions are hard for us, they are hard for the people in our congregations and they are hard for the people in our communities. We need to be particularly sensitive to the needs of our people and our communities during this time. It is challenging to minister in these circumstances. As we struggle, and as our people struggle, we need to do all we can to support and strengthen them, and each other. Our words in particular matter, whether that be in our preaching, pastoral communications or our presence on social media platforms. Just as we think carefully about what we preach from our pulpits, let us think carefully about what we post online. Let us be sensitive to how difficult it is for the people in our congregations and in our communities and use our words wisely and well to help and encourage one another.

These are strange and difficult times, but we believe and trust in a sovereign and loving God who is in absolute control of absolutely everything. We seek to serve him and honour him in these trying circumstances, giving thanks for his provision, grasping the opportunities, and trusting in his purposes. ●

**This letter has been sent to all Free Church of Scotland congregations**

**DAYSPRING MACLEOD** picks an argument

# Planting Seeds in Hard Ground

## **H**AVE YOU WON ANY GOOD ARGUMENTS LATELY?

Personally, I've been taking a debate masterclass in an online peer-reviewed think-tank, and...okay, Facebook. I've been arguing with people on Facebook. Kindly and pleasantly calling out misinformation, providing evidence, toning down hyperbole, answering people's points of deviance from orthodoxy. Friends. Friends of friends. Strangers on a message board of a preacher I've never heard of. Whatever.

The truth is, though, that you can't argue a person either into your political position or into the Kingdom of God. So I am setting a new strategy in place: win the person, not the argument. I want to remind Christians online that, even if our earthly nation is in a tenuous place (as mine is), we belong to a better country; and to show non-believers that there is precious hope. I want to woo them with interest and gentleness. I want the strength to admit when I'm wrong. I have come to realise I don't have to defend to the death an opposite position simply because I don't agree with theirs. Oh, don't get me wrong, there are times when a sinful attitude or assertion must be confronted. But with compassion and interest, not judgment and dehumanisation. And it is interesting to see in the Bible that Jesus saved head-on collisions for the self-righteous 'religious' people who refused to see the truth. Non-believers and 'sinners' he approached with grace and the offer of hope.

Of course, disagreement doesn't just happen online. From the child who speaks hurtful words to the unreasonable colleague to the guy who cuts us up in traffic, we face situations of conflict. And almost inevitably we are focused not on saving a relationship or helping another person, but saving our dignity, our interests, our peace of mind, our opinion. Winning the argument, losing the day. Fretting on it when the occasion has long past. Sometimes living with the consequences, the regret, of our own gracelessness; sometimes avoiding the hard discussion altogether and living with a hidden but gaping wound.

I have resolved to ask more questions. I don't often get actual answers that change my mind, though that would be fine. What I get much of the time is silence – but it's a good quality of silence. Not an angry silence, because I've been rude; not a blank silence, because I've chickened out. I believe it's a thinking silence. A silence that doesn't have an immediate answer, but – I hope – tickles something in the person's mind. I ask questions like "Why do you think that? What did you see that convinced you? What is it that worries you most about this?" I have had people do this to me, and sometimes it's taken days before I've decided what I actually thought. Sometimes I've never actually reached a conclusion, but found it interesting to have my assumptions challenged. What I'm saying, though, is that rather than forcing your own opinion on someone else, you get them to fully understand their own. The truth will out. (Oh, and when they give you an answer, don't just slam it down and prove where it's wrong. Use it to understand how their mind works, how they're feeling.)

My second suggestion is, very simply, to approach the person as you would like to be approached. With a true, sincere attempt at understanding and empathy. With the remembrance that, no matter how stubborn, deceived or hurtful they may seem, they are still made in the image of the Creator, and you yourself (I myself) have been that soul in a moment of darkness.

To go back to my real-life example, sometimes you're the one who gets flustered and cuts in traffic. There is a glorious equality to human nature in that regard – it is very freeing to admit that, sometimes, you are the idiot. You don't have to be right all the time. Mature people appreciate humility and apology. Even more mature people show humility and apology. It takes Christlike people to reach out even to those who scorn humility and apology.

I want to share with you the two most helpful answers I have seen people give in Facebook discussions, both Christians. One was a complete stranger who told a friend of mine, 'I think having hope in the Lord makes us realize we are not doomed. ...I hear your words. Your feelings are valid.' I love the way that she valued him, and in doing so, showed him that the Christ she represented also values him.

The second answer that really struck me was from my missionary friend Ryan, who wrote to a Christian stranger who was in denial about Biden's election: 'I would sincerely love to re-explain the good news to you on January 21. Your faith need not be shaken by political change.'

Will either of these lives be changed by a Facebook reply? Who knows – but they are seeds, seeds of gospel truth. Opportunities to slag someone off became opportunities to show love. These people are evangelists. I'm doing my best to join them. Online, in your living room, at church, wherever the chance arises, let's redeem every encounter to show people the Christ who loved them and gave himself for them. ●

# CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW PART 02 OF 04

BY REV GORDON MATHESON



In May we will elect representatives to the Scottish Parliament. Regardless of who forms the next government, with almost a quarter of MSPs stepping down there will be big changes at Holyrood. How will we vote? Before we let political preferences decide, we should pause and think about our worldview.

A worldview is a collection of attitudes, values, stories and expectations about the world around us, which inform our every thought and action. As disciples of Jesus, we want our worldview to be constantly reshaped by the Bible. In this four-part series we examine the big Biblical narrative — Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation — to help us work out priorities for how we think about the big issues facing us in the next four years.

There is a place for firmly stated views. But our goal in interacting with people around us should be to mimic Jesus' patterns. Learning to ask the right questions, to challenge the worldview and assumptions of others, is important. In this series we will look at some key ideas, but we will also look for strategies to engage with candidates around these issues.



## PART 02: THE FALL

Photo ©Надя Ветрова - stock.adobe.com

## *The reason we transgress at all is because of the underlying heart-problem. Thus, new hearts, not new laws, are the key to God's remedy.*

### **F GENESIS 1 AND 2 PROVIDE THE FOUNDATION FOR A BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMANITY, GENESIS 3 EXPLAINS THE ROT THAT HAS EVIDENTLY SET IN.**

Humankind did not retain the good state in which we were created, and the world we live in is no longer in apparent harmony with us. All experience is, to some degree, affected by the Fall.

There are two strands to understanding the Fall narrative. Firstly, there is moral failure: Adam as a representative of all humankind — and arguably the best of us — failed to comply with the one command he had been given. This resulted in the corruption of his nature — a corruption, and guilt, that has been passed on to all humanity. Secondly, there is the Curse: God passed sentence on Adam, and by extension, to the whole realm over which Adam had been placed as God's representative, enacting the assured death penalty for sin. Sinning, as God's image bearer, had dire consequences.

Sin is a problematic idea in our culture. It is challenging when we try to explain the need for Jesus as our atonement — people don't get it! Because of this difficulty, it is attractive to replace the word: we talk about brokenness, flaws, weakness, etc. These synonyms sometimes come close to the biblical language: of *missing the mark* (Greek: *hamartia*); of *unrighteousness*, literally *not straight* (Greek: *adikia*); of *transgression*, or *turning from the right path* (Greek: *paraptoma*); or *lawlessness* (Greek: *anomia*). But while they are close, we need to be careful not to file away the hard edges of the biblical idea.

If we are to have a Christian worldview that makes sense of the world we see, and offers guidance for how we might address the problems of our age, we will have to rehabilitate the doctrine of *sin*. We need to be deliberate about our theology: both the disease, and its symptoms.

The Bible treats sin, firstly, as a heart-problem. Within all of us, there is a desire to displace God's benevolent rule for our own. Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan's lie: that God didn't mean for their good in denying them the forbidden fruit. Their original sin was to supplant God's priorities with their own. That root problem still lies in each human heart.

Secondly, the Bible outlines a range of thoughts, words and actions which God defines as sinful. These are defined in, for example, the Moral Law. These teachings are valuable to help us work through ethical questions, but they foremost state what God considers wrong. The Bible implies that human responsibility leaves us guilty for these actual transgressions, but the reason we do them at all is

because of the underlying heart-problem. Thus, new hearts, not new laws, are the key to God's remedy.

What might any of this foundation-level theology mean for our approach to elections?

### **BIBLICAL REALISM**

Politicians of all stripes offer us a narrative to explain what is wrong in society, where we want to get to, and how their particular brand is uniquely qualified to deliver change. To mass-market their political offer, the simpler this message can be, the easier it is to communicate and get 'buy-in'. The problem is that simple explanations are inadequate. They are not real.

As I write this, we are in the closing days of the Trump presidency in the United States. The narrative Trump offered was relatively simple: America is diminished; it must be made great again; the Trump brand is the solution. All of this is left fairly undefined — and easy to read into with our own priorities. American Evangelicals, for example, note diminished Christian values in society, and inject the Trump brand with the hope of restoration, even revival. Meanwhile, anti-federalists, libertarians, and internet conspiracy theorists all contribute to the melting pot of Trumpism. Thus, when Trump mobilised his supporters to protest, the rioters storming the Capitol waved 'Jesus Saves' banners alongside QAnon slogans (a wild internet conspiracy theory) and the Confederate flag. For a lot of Christians, any sense of biblical realism was lost, if not abandoned.

Scottish politics isn't as extreme, but our political narratives rarely offer a complete, or real, picture. Scotland's problems are not because we lack independence. But nor are they because we neglect the working class; over-regulate business; or have insufficient carbon reduction targets. A danger for Christians is when we take one of these narratives as our main approach, then back-fill Christian values into it.

The doctrine of sin offers us a realistic view of the world. It explains everything we see. Human flourishing is, depressingly, hindered at every turn by the effects of the Fall. The utopian promise of the Enlightenment has proved empty — progress is not inherently good: things get worse.

We should note that we know why *good* initiatives fail. The Fall offers a rationale for why every aspect of our nature — our dignity and worth; maleness/femaleness; liberty; and most particularly our dominion — is subject to abuse. For example, humans are commodified; work is undervalued; sexual violence tolerated; liberties defended without recognition of matching responsibilities; and the exercise of wise

## ***Those who pursue Social Justice see the same world we see – a world mired in human sin, and unable to reform itself without radical renewal.***

governance of the world and its resources can be abused to maximise short-term gain.

As Christians we know there is a narrative that encompasses the whole world we see. Thus, we can acknowledge how narrow political narratives fall short. We should not be afraid to ask hard questions of our own 'side', without blindly following its core philosophy.

### **JUSTICE**

As we noted before, the political sphere is influenced by developments in the academic sphere. This is very clearly seen in the emergence of Social Justice movements – for example, Black Lives Matter. In this area, our elected leaders are often playing catch-up to cultural movements going on beneath our feet – like the radical who says, "I must know where are my people going, that I might lead them!"

Social Justice movements grow out of attempts to explain the same world we all see. The corruption we know and attribute to sin and our fallen nature has to be explained somehow. A humanist answer was offered by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist who was imprisoned by the Fascists, and died in 1937. He took Marx's ideas about the capitalist elite – the rich preserve their advantage by oppressing the poor – and applied them to culture: the powerful in any culture preserve their supremacy (what he called *hegemony*) and thus always oppress the less powerful. To right this inherent imbalance, the powerless must seize and reorientate hegemonic structures. This idea – coined Critical Theory in Germany – took root in post-war academic circles, and has become hugely influential in grassroots community movements.

In the 1960s, Christianity shaped the reaction to American racism, giving birth to the Civil Rights Movement. Since then, a widely-held Christian worldview has eroded. Christianity has also become tied to conservative politics. When grassroots activism on racism started to coalesce after the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, it wasn't inclined to Christian answers, as Martin Luther King Jr had been a generation earlier. Instead, Humanist Critical Theory and the ideas of Antonio Gramsci shaped the entire movement. The same ideas shape queer theory, gender politics, the Green movement, etc. – it is hugely influential.

Christian responses to social justice movements have been drawn into a culture war. Critiques of Critical Theory-inspired aspects often produce accusations of "Cultural Marxism". True, like Marxism, Critical Theory provides an inadequate analysis of the human condition in its fallen state, and offers a hopeless

solution – essentially replacing the supremacy of one set of sinners with another.

But we should concede two things: Firstly, those who pursue Social Justice see the same world we see – a world mired in human sin, and unable to reform itself without radical renewal. We might disagree over the root of the corruption – it is not just the powerful who do evil things! We might disagree over the remedy – new power structures cannot change hearts, only the Holy Spirit can! But what we cannot disagree with is the reality of a world where evil exists: in individuals, and in the very structures of our society.

Secondly, those who pursue Social Justice are God's image-bearers, and crave *justice*. The human conscience, seared though it can be, is meant to alert us to wrongdoing – in ourselves and in others.

We need to be careful to let our worldview be shaped by the biblical doctrine of sin – not just a rejection of the humanist answers on offer. We should be clear, when interacting with politicians, that we share deep concerns for the abuses and evils in our society. Instead of deflecting attention from the problems of racism, we should humbly listen to, and weep with, the experience of people of colour. Where we can, we should seek to pursue justice.

### **COMMON AND EXTRAORDINARY GRACE**

As we leave Genesis 3, and the Fall, one last detail should not escape us: God supplies grace to the humble. God restrains sin, so the world is rarely as hellish as it could be. Although we are, culturally, quite dismissive of the motives of people in politics, the overwhelming majority are proof of the doctrine of Common Grace. God appoints civil authorities to serve the common good for the sake of his glory in the elect.

Human flourishing depends on liberty, but the Fall implies that human liberty has itself been enslaved, and is unwittingly quite content to be that way. This should alert us to a danger in how we go about promoting biblical ideals of liberty. There is a strong Christian tendency to benevolent legalism – as if more good laws are what society needs to flourish. Compulsion is the enemy of liberty – whether in the name of Christ, or in the name of human individualism. The humility required to pursue true liberty involves an ongoing dependence ourselves on the One who sets us free. Thus, our ultimate craving should be for God, who supplies grace to the humble. ●

**The Rev. Gordon Matheson is the minister of Sleat & Strath Free Church on the Isle of Skye.**

# PLATES FROM THE PEWS



**T**HIS MONTH WE'RE STARTING A NEW COLUMN FEATURING SOME FAVOURITE DISHES FROM FREE CHURCH FACES! We're starting off with Catriona MacLeod, from Leith Free Church. Full disclosure — this is Dayspring MacLeod writing the first recipe page, and I came up with the entire concept just as an excuse for introducing you all to this recipe, our absolute family favourite from my mother-in-law! Please enjoy learning a little about a wonderful lady, and then enjoy her delicious dinner! If you would like to have a recipe featured, or nominate someone you know, please email myself or Fiona Macaskill for WfM (emails in front cover of *The Record*).

## Tell us a little about yourself, your family and your church.

My parents were married in Leith (Elder Memorial) Free Church in 1938, and I was baptised there by the then-minister, Mr Shaw. The congregation in the 40s through the 60s had a lot of Lewis people, many of them cousins of my parents – so the other kids in Sunday School were also my pals, and my companions travelling up to Lewis every summer!

Kenny and I were married there in 1965, and then lived for ten years in Knock, Lewis. My son Neil was baptised in Leith on a visit to my parents, and after Kenny and I returned to Edinburgh, we professed faith and came into membership. There weren't so many children there by that time, and Neil was often the only boy with a Sunday School comprised of four little girls! My husband and son both became elders there in due course, and Kenny's funeral took place in Leith in 2003.

## What are some favourite Bible verses or hymns, and what have you learned from them?

My favourite Psalm is 23, because it was constantly in my mind after my husband died. I also love Psalm 40, 'I waited for the Lord my God, and patiently did bear.' That psalm has guided me for many years as the Lord has taught me to be patient and trusting. I've had to learn patience to wait for what the Lord wants, and wait for his guidance; and then trusting that he will bring it about, although not always in the way you expect! This was important when I was running an assisted living home, and had many people dying and being admitted to hospice. I often sat with people who were experiencing pain and illness. I couldn't do much except be with them, and I had to ask the Lord to help me through helping them.

## What are some ways you have served the Lord?

I was very involved with the social side of the Church, when I was more able, though bad knees and hard hearing have limited me in recent years. Something I did well in the past was heling with catering and events. I ran the Assembly café for several years, and loved the feeling of the team working together in

the kitchen, and seeing all the ministers from all over Scotland trooping in for their soup and home baking! I used to take a week of annual leave to do all the planning, shopping, cooking and serving – and it was great. Going to the Moderator's Reception was one of the events of the year in those days! I did lots of hospitality at Leith too, including serving free meals for all comers when Colin Macleod was here.

## Tell us about your special dish.

After we were married, Kenny and I went on a trip to Tangier. One night in the dining room we smelled something gorgeous coming from the kitchen, and asked the waiter what it was. He said it was 'cinnamon lamb' – we never tried it, but back at home, I decided to have a go myself. Well, it was such a success that it soon became a firm favourite for Sunday lunches. These days we usually have it for holidays and special occasions. ●





# ظلمة لحم جوزة

## RECIPE

This recipe is very simple, but there are a few little tips that will make it come out just right. You need a joint of lamb with a layer of fat on the outside so that it will crisp up – that really makes the flavour come alive. We always use Scottish lamb, as we find it sweeter; Morrisons' lamb has had the best results of the mainland shops, but if you can get a good cut straight from a Lewis butcher, better yet! You can, of course, change the volume of ingredients here for the size of your joint, but maintain the proportions.

**½ teaspoon salt**  
**1 teaspoon brown sugar**  
**1 teaspoon cinnamon**  
**1 teaspoon black pepper**

Mix the dry rub together and massage it into the outside of the lamb, making sure to get in any crevices. Leave to marinate in the fridge overnight. Roast according to instructions, but don't cover, as you want it to crisp up. Serve with new potatoes, red cabbage, braised carrots. Makes an excellent gravy, and leftovers are delicious in curry. ●



**J**ESUS APPEARED OVER 40 DAYS AND SPOKE ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD (ACTS 1). Every one of the Gospel stories about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances is precious to believers. But here we will stand back from the detail and reflect on the journey of maturing faith during these vitally important 40 days.

It took some time for the followers of Jesus to come to terms with the fact of the resurrection. Most recorded appearances, including the one when Peter took a few disciples with him fishing, tell of confusion and struggle to accept the momentous miracle.

After the ascension 120 followers of Jesus were together in Jerusalem 'constantly in prayer' and Peter takes the lead in organising their strategy, arranging to replace Judas Iscariot. What caused the change from disoriented disciples retreating into their past life as fishermen, to leaders in an emerging church?

Gradually Jesus moved his followers through a learning, maturing process. He demonstrated several times that he had a physical body, for example by eating fish. On one occasion, he appeared to more than 500 people and there is good reason to think that they were all believers. Luke, in Acts 1, says that Jesus 'spoke about the kingdom of God'.

The first person to whom Jesus appeared was Mary Magdalene. In this, and on other occasions, Jesus showed himself to be still the caring person his followers had known. He confronted Thomas with his doubts, resulting in the important declaration 'My Lord and my God!', a huge leap for an observant Jew. He confronted Peter, who was probably consumed with grief, unable to shake off the guilt of his denial prior to the crucifixion, and restored both his faith and his confidence. Jesus met with his brother James – was it this meeting which moved James from 'did not believe in him' (John 7:5) to being one of the 120 waiting for Pentecost?

On the day of the resurrection Jesus 'explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself', but it is inconceivable that he spoke in these terms only to the two walking to Emmaus on that momentous day and later in the upper room; John tells us (twice) that 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs...which are not recorded'.

Jesus endowed the disciples with the Holy Spirit during his first appearance in the upper room in Jerusalem. He gave the disciples the Great Commission while in Galilee, and it is a sobering fact that on that occasion 'some doubted'. The last the disciples saw of Jesus was back in Jerusalem, near Bethany, at his Ascension, with its promise of a glorious, dramatic Return.

The Apostles' Creed includes the words: 'On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven...' This brief mention contrasts with the greater detail listed about Jesus' death. We too easily roll these two sentences about two momentous events into one 'raised and ascended'. We must not lose sight of the critical work that the Saviour undertook in these last 40 days on earth and the steep learning curve that Jesus' followers had to climb. In these few days, Jesus was preparing his followers for the outpouring of the Spirit, working toward enabling his church to be 'witnesses' to his resurrection, his teaching and his Lordship: each of these was built on the foundation of his sacrificial death. ●

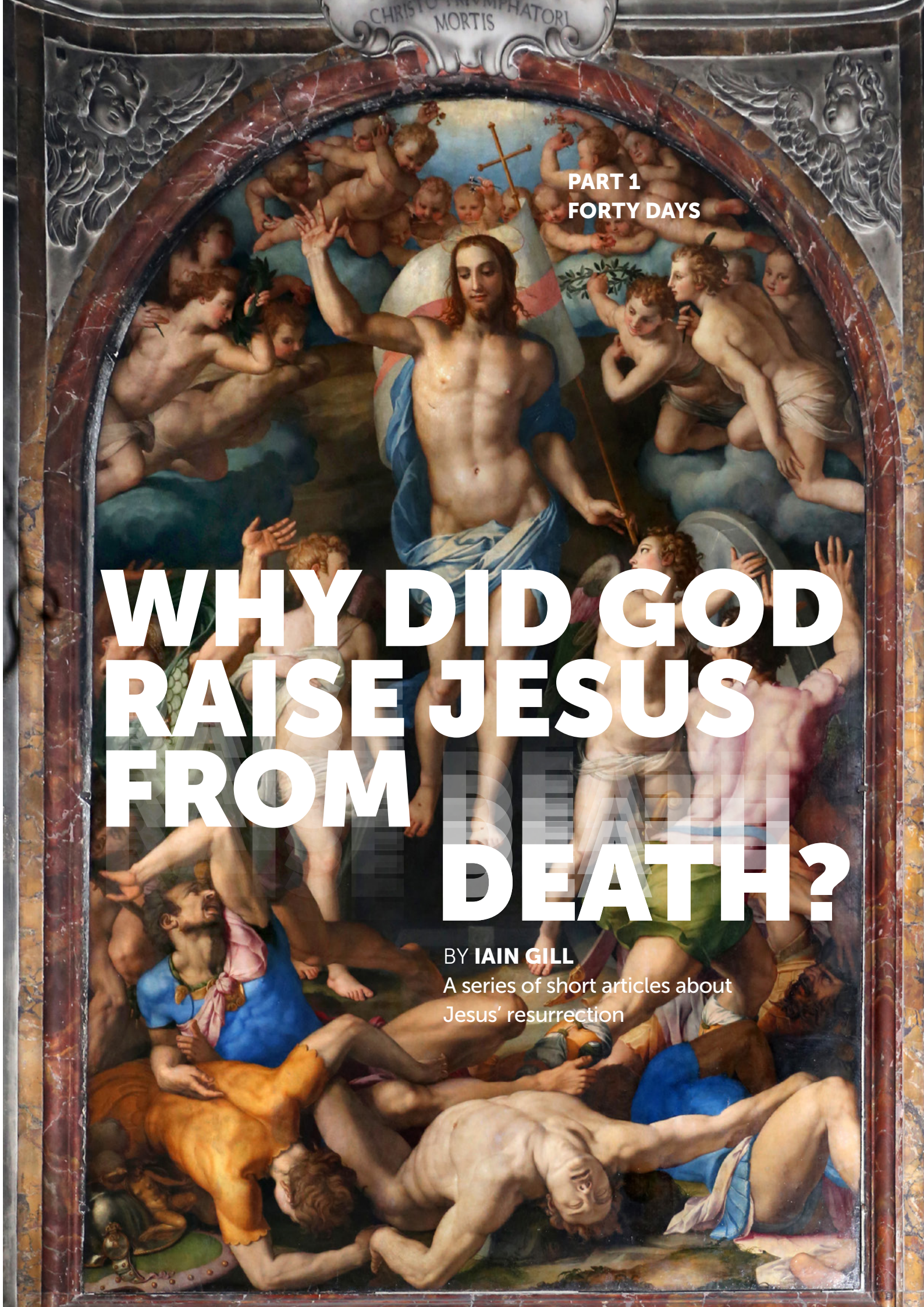
CHRISTO TRIUMPHATORI  
MORTIS

PART 1  
FORTY DAYS

# WHY DID GOD RAISE JESUS FROM DEATH?

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about  
Jesus' resurrection



# At the end of my tether

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

**'CURSE GOD AND DIE' IS NOT EXACTLY ONE OF THE MOST SPIRITUAL PHRASES IN THE BIBLE, IS IT?**

But can you blame me for coming out with it? My husband and I had suffered tragedy after tragedy and I couldn't understand how he could still stand by his faith in a loving God – it all seemed so naïve and unreal. If there's a God in heaven, I thought, he must be like a horrid little boy tormenting an insect before casually squashing it into the ground.

Once Job and I had a very pleasant life. We had a full quiver of ten children, we owned huge herds and in fact we were probably high up in the ancient world's rich list. But we always knew that people can't live on material things alone and we were determined not to allow prosperity to lead to spiritual poverty. We believed that the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom and we sought to glorify and enjoy him. I remember my husband often getting up early in the morning to pray for the family. But tragedy struck – a catalogue of disasters that threatened to overwhelm us.

First, we lost

our flocks to raiders so that we were left impoverished. But much worse followed when a messenger came rushing in one day to tell us that our entire family had been wiped out. They had been enjoying a meal together in our oldest son's house when a tornado caused the house to collapse, resulting in the death of them all.

We were heartbroken. Tragedies happen all the time, but when it comes to your own door, it's different. We wept and mourned for our family; isn't it all the wrong way round when children are taken before their parents?

And then, to crown it all, my husband's health gave way. I had to watch the man I love writhing in pain from sores all over his body; I remember him sitting with a bit of pottery scratching at the wretched sores, which only made them worse. He had scabs and boils that became infected so that he had fever. He lost weight; he was in constant pain; he even looked so awful that people turned away from him in revulsion. I couldn't argue when he said he wished the day of his birth had never dawned.

So can you blame me for turning away from faith in God? I don't know that I ever felt as if he doesn't exist, but I certainly felt we had been abandoned. It didn't seem fair. We had tried to honour him,

***Whether people believe in God or not, suffering is still real. But the 'problem' of suffering doesn't really arise if you don't believe.***

and my husband kept doing so. 'The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD' – that's what he said. I could go along with the first part, but 'Blessed be his name' stuck in my throat. As far as I was concerned, we'd had enough and it was time to give up.

Then his friends started to come and they just rubbed salt into our wounds. They kept insisting day after day that Job must have done some very wicked things to deserve such suffering and that if he would just repent, God would remove his suffering. Well, neither Job nor I would claim to be perfect, but that simple equation just didn't seem right.

Perhaps it's true that devotion to God and obedience to him lead to joy and blessedness sooner or later, but sometimes it's later rather than sooner – and often that 'later' seems a long time coming. It's written large in history for individuals, societies and nations that if we rebel against the ways of God there will be consequences (we can be sure our sin will find us out), but it doesn't follow that all suffering is the direct result of some particular sin. But my poor husband's 'comforters' kept hammering away at that theory of theirs day after day.

I came to the point of saying that he had suffered enough and how could he go on believing that God was still in charge? I thought we would be justified in cursing God and yielding to despair and meaninglessness. That's what I meant with my 'Curse God and die'.

But did he take my advice? Not a bit of it. He said, 'Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?' And now I hear him talking about an ever greater sense of the big-ness and glory of God. Instead of losing faith, he seems to have come to stronger faith in a bigger God. If people ask him how to reconcile all the suffering in the world with belief in a God of love, he admits that there are questions and mysteries that remain in his mind, but he holds to the faith – and

encourages me to do the same – that one day God will explain the reason why, and that for now, it makes more sense to believe in God even with these unanswered questions than it does to reject the way of faith.

He believed that God would finally vindicate him, that a day would come when God would take action to demonstrate his love for the world, a day when a Redeemer would come.

I have had to learn from Job's faith. One of his famous sayings is, 'Even if he should slay me, I will still hope in him.' He would suggest that when we were prosperous and healthy, we believed in God, but maybe that faith didn't go deep enough. Through his trials he came to a more clear-sighted view of God and I've been led to see that we don't need to know all the answers before we can trust in him.

Whether people believe in God or not, suffering is still real. But the 'problem' of suffering doesn't really arise if you don't believe. It's when we trust in a God of love and goodness that we face these difficult questions. And I'm coming through too to a more real and personal faith. Now, instead of encouraging anyone to curse God and die, I would encourage people to trust God and live. Our Redeemer lives and he will stand on the earth; through his rejection and suffering he will act for the salvation of the world. He knows. He understands. He sympathises. And that makes all the difference.

Even in the darkness light shines and the darkness will never be able to overcome God's light. I came to the end of my tether, but there is a love that will not let me go. ●

**Rev. David J. Randall spent forty years in pastoral ministry in Macduff before retiring in 2010. He has served in a number of locumships, written several books and is a member of the Free Church congregation in Broughty Ferry.**



# PAGES FROM ADAM'S DIARY

## The Story of Mohammed the Laser (Part 1)

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.

## *When we are where God wants us, that is the happiest place to be.*

**A** S I HAVE SERVED OUR SAVIOUR, NOW AND AGAIN MY PATH HAS CROSSED SOMEONE WHOM I THOUGHT WAS BEYOND REDEMPTION. Mohammad, nicknamed 'Laser', known to his adversaries and bosom buddies as 'Mamad Laser', was one such person. When I met him, he impressed me as the embodiment of an unnerving, intimidating thug who belonged to the age of Al Capone. He did, however, come to faith and, in subsequent years, our Saviour wrought an unbelievable transformation in the life of this man. Mohammad the thug was changed by the Spirit of God to grace-filled Mohammad the evangelist. In my encounters with him and those like him, our heavenly Father taught me that in the depth and the vastness of the sovereign grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, no one is beyond redemption. Efficacious grace reaches the most defiled if their names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

I met Mohammad in Athens, Greece. In those days, prior to his salvation, his Curriculum Vitae could have been summarized as follows: gangster, hooligan, thug with a widespread reputation for violence and an array of criminal mischief such as drug dealings, promoting gambling, mercenary, bouncer, counterfeiter of official documents, inciter of riots and much more. He was called Laser because of his prowess with a small Turkish knife which he carried in his coat pocket. When he got into fights, which he did regularly for sport or evening relaxation, before his opponents knew it, he had scarred their faces several times. He was a criminal of a first-class order. I was told that even the police were wary of him and avoided him, especially because of his diplomatic connections. The best description for this man in those days may have been captured in the lyrics of a 1970s song by Jim Croce about a character named Leroy Brown, a mobster on the south side of Chicago. In the song in his honour, Leroy is described as standing six feet four; a gambler who liked to wear fancy clothes and wave his diamond rings in front of everybody's nose. He also had a custom Continental and an Eldorado, too, and he carried a 32-caliber gun in his pocket for fun and a knife in his shoe. 'He is bad, bad, badder than old King Kong and meaner than a junkyard dog.' That description was a perfect profile of Mohammad the Laser too. Before I tell you about his conversion, I first need to tell you the circumstances which led me to him.

I was serving our Lord among Afghan refugees in Athens. In the mornings, I used a store front to run a medical clinic where, with the help of a dear, elderly Greek pharmacist, I practiced my rusty medicine; and at noon, we fed as many refugees as we could, and then for those who stayed afterward, I taught the Bible late into the evening, introducing them to our Saviour and answering their questions. I had a wonderful helper whom I had led to the Lord and disciplined. In this article, I shall call him Ali—that is not his real name. He was a deeply devoted man of God. During those years, Ali lived in Athens as a refugee and served our Lord among the refugees. Our heavenly Father drew thousands of these refugees to himself in that season.

One afternoon, after the clinic, we had a large gathering of those who stayed behind after lunch. As we both prepared to teach, Ali said to me that he felt a strong leading by the Lord in his heart that we must address the issue of sin and its relation to the atoning work of our Saviour. We took turns to speak. We spoke to the refugees present of how deadly and destructive sin had been to the human race from the day it entered the hearts of men when they chose to disregard the command of the holy God. That disobedience to the instructions of God broke the fellowship man had enjoyed with his Creator. The severance of that fellowship immediately removed peace from the hearts of men and replaced it with fear. Soon violence and death joined fear. Sin always moves with its band of companions: fear, confusion, violence, sorrow and death. Therefore, so much of the Word of God focuses on showing us the devastating consequences of sin and on ceaseless warnings to the people of God to flee from it and mortify the deeds of the flesh. Sin always removes our peace and brings turmoil; it removes our protection and exposes us to all of its harmful and toxic effects. Sin inevitably leads to death. *'The soul that sins shall surely die'* (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:20).

We explained that after the fall of man into the abyss of sin, it seemed his fate was sealed. But God, in his immeasurable goodness and mercy, sent a Saviour. A Great ►►

Physician who knows how to cure this dreadful infection which permeates the very fabric of our being. This God-man who lived among us came to cleanse and remove the stench of sin's pollution from the lives of all those who receive and believe him and are washed in his cleansing blood. We reiterated that it was our sins which put our Saviour upon the cross. We told them that Christ came to free us from the slavery, bondage, addiction and servitude of sin. He came to set us free to live in righteousness and purity in fellowship with God again. We really do not know what life is until we meet Christ and have been freed from the power of sin. Ali implored them, 'Flee into the arms of the Lord Jesus who invited us: *"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30)'.

A young woman, with an older man sitting next to her, was in the front row. As Ali and I were speaking, I noticed she was visibly shaken and began to cry. After the meeting, she asked if she could speak to Ali and me privately. We learned that she was young, only 25 years old. She had been beguiled by this older man to come to Europe. She had abandoned her husband and daughter and run off with this man, who was much older and who had promised her a dazzling, exhilarating life in Europe. In the meeting, she had come under great terror and conviction for her recklessness and unfaithfulness. She asked to be baptized and confessed her faith in Christ. She also asked us to help her to find a way out of her entrapment and be returned to her husband in Central Asia. However, she was intensely frightened because of the man she was with and also by her husband's reaction once she returned to him. We prayed with her and we asked God to show us the way forward. I phoned her husband in Central Asia. His initial response was what I had anticipated. He said that, although he loved her, in view of her infidelity, he did not want to see her again. For the next several days, through fervent prayer and many hours on the phone pleading and reasoning with him, eventually he came around. I told him that I was a Christian. I also noted that his wife had become a Christian too. He said that he did not believe in God and his wife's embracing a different religion was inconsequential to him. I responded that, in fact, it was the Lord Jesus who had been the reason for such a transformation in his wife. Eventually he agreed to take her back. After overcoming this obstacle, we still had two more in front of us: first, the man who had beguiled and brought her to Greece; and, second, she had no passport. Once the man with whom she had run away discovered what was happening, he threatened Ali and me if we were to come between them. Ali told the unhappy deceiver/boyfriend that we were one step away from turning him over to Interpol for the crime of kidnapping. At first, he laughed it off, but on second thought, he must have believed it because he disappeared. But we still faced one more obstacle: she did not have a passport. Her passport was with this man, and he had now disappeared. To go through the normal process to get her a replacement passport was not only complicated but also would have taken several weeks, if not months, and we needed to return her quickly. To make a very long story short, with the help of Mohammad the Laser in obtaining a passport, we sent the young woman back to her husband and young daughter. I cannot even begin to chronicle the miracle God performed in the life of this family! Not long after her return home, her husband came to faith in Christ. Today there is a house church meeting in their home, and through their courage, devotion, labour and witness for our Lord, others have been brought to faith.

It is God's expertise to use even the most dreadful of circumstances, such as the beguilement of this dear young woman, to bring about good. Our heavenly Father will turn the most regrettable mistakes of his children to their benefit if they acknowledge their sin and flee from it. The same God is on his throne. He still works to our benefit and toward the advancement of his everlasting Kingdom our most grievous errors in judgment and our outright rebellion, if we learn from our mistakes and turn from our sins. His arms are always open to those who seek refuge in him.

In the next article I will tell you about Mohammad's conversion. The God who brings good out of evil is able to convert the heart of the most defiled, such as Mohammad the Laser, to an amazing example of the outworking of the sovereign grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ – that grace is efficacious and irresistible! ●



# FEB/MAR 2021 PRAYER DIARY

*The Record* would like to extend its thanks and love to Mairi Macdonald, who stepped down after several years faithfully writing the Prayer Diary. For now, requests may be sent to Dayspring ([dayspring.macleod@icloud.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@icloud.com)). This month, among other things, we will be focusing on 'Pandemic Prayer' — hoping that this is the last time we will be praying our way through a lockdown!

## Sun 7<sup>th</sup>–Tues 9<sup>th</sup>

As lockdown and home-schooling continue, pray for our teachers. They are juggling hub schools, admin and Zoom calls for whole classes of students (not an easy task!) and home-schooling their own kids too. Pray for all their many pressures, as well as for parents stepping in to teach at home – ask the Lord bring comfort and calm to all who are struggling, and to help students to learn and to cope well.

## Weds 10<sup>th</sup>–Fri 12<sup>th</sup>

Chinese New Year begins on Friday. Pray for China as its relations with the West have been severely strained this year. Pray especially for the Christians in underground churches who are facing persecution — may their faith grow through this hardship. Remember also the Uighurs and ask the Lord to shorten their suffering and draw them to himself.

## Sat 13<sup>th</sup>–Mon 15<sup>th</sup>

This weekend, with Valentine's Day on Sunday, pray for those single folk you know who dread this day. Ask the Lord to walk closely beside them as their 'portion'; and that for the this season — as long as it may last — they will find in him every fulfilment of their longings. Let us also appreciate them as they are without seeking someone to 'complete' them.

## Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup>–Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>

Pray for the United States and new president Joe Biden. Ask the Lord to expose untruths and corruption, strengthen the Church in its witness, and grant wisdom, integrity and repentance to our leaders. May he bring healing to a bitterly divided land.

## Fri 19<sup>th</sup>–Mon 22<sup>nd</sup>

Continue to pray over the COVID-19 pandemic, that God will comfort grieving families and friends over our terrible losses in the past year, and will help us to serve others patiently and graciously in a time of suffering. Thank him for the vaccines and many treatments that have already been developed. Ask protection against further mutant strains.

## Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup>–Thurs 25<sup>th</sup>

Remember the vulnerable who are struggling to cope with the devastating changes: those suffering from poor mental health, or from anxiety, who cannot control their consuming fears; those suffering abuse at the hands of family members or carers, who have nowhere to go; the asylum seekers who cannot be placed in homes; the elderly who have no family to help them. May God have mercy on these people and bring them hope.

## Fri 26<sup>th</sup>–Sun 28<sup>th</sup>

Pray for the poor also, who are inevitably suffering more than anyone else: who may not be able to work, have the equipment to home-school their children during lockdowns, get sufficient food or heat their homes in the winter months. Ask the Lord how you can help to be his hands and express his care of them through practical love.

## Mon 1<sup>st</sup>–Tues 2<sup>nd</sup>

Finally — pray once again for our wonderful carers and medical workers, who face a dangerous job in exhausting circumstances. Give thanks for them and ask the Great Physician to walk with them, giving strength, comfort and wisdom to do their work.

## Weds 3<sup>rd</sup>–Thurs 4<sup>th</sup>

Pray for the terrible drought in South Africa, and for the resultant poverty and hunger there. With such desperation in the land, ask God to send both food and hope to the people. The need both bread and the Bread of Life! Intercede for these suffering moms, dads, children, orphans...and consider giving to the appeal through our Disaster & Relief Fund.

## Fri 5<sup>th</sup>–Sun 7<sup>th</sup>

Pray for the Scottish Government: for the uncertain leadership as questions are raised about Nicola Sturgeon's actions, and also for the proposed legislation to permanently allow home abortions. Above all, pray that the Lord would not remove his guiding hand from our nation, and that the Christians in our Parliament would wisely and courageously govern according to his will.

# BOOK REVIEWS



Each month, we've started to choose a 'BOOK OF THE MONTH', one which we think you should read and encourage your friends to get hold of too! Our choice for February is moving, engaging and timely – check it out below. We also think you'll enjoy our other selections. All are available from Free Church Books (<https://thefree.church/shop>, unless otherwise stated).

## THE WAY OF LIFE

CHARLES HODGE (1841, REPUBLISHED 2020)

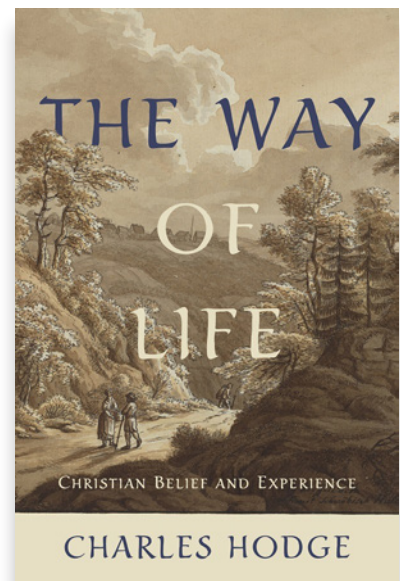
This engaging and thought-provoking book is written with the conviction that a Christian is to grow in holiness, which is to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Since holiness and truth are inseparable, for a Christian to grow, they need to have three things: first, confidence that the Bible (the truth) is the Word of God; second, a knowledge of what the Bible teaches; and third, experience of the truth lived out in daily life.

Most helpfully, Charles Hodge outlines the case for the Scriptures being the Word of God that the reader's confidence in them might grow. From this solid foundation, he builds up *The Way of Life* by outlining truths that are essential to salvation. He discusses sin, justification, faith, repentance, professing faith and holy living. Hodge shows not only what we are to know concerning these truths in order to be a Christian to begin with, but also what continuing effect these truths should have on our hearts and lives. This helps the Christian to be salt and light in this world of darkness.

*The Way of Life* would be very helpful to Christians of any stage in their walk with the Lord. It may be of particular benefit to younger Christians, perhaps at college or university, seeking to engage other students with the truth of the Gospel. ●

(Available to purchase from Banner of Truth.)

Allan Shearer, Dunblane Free Church



## THE HEART OF GOD

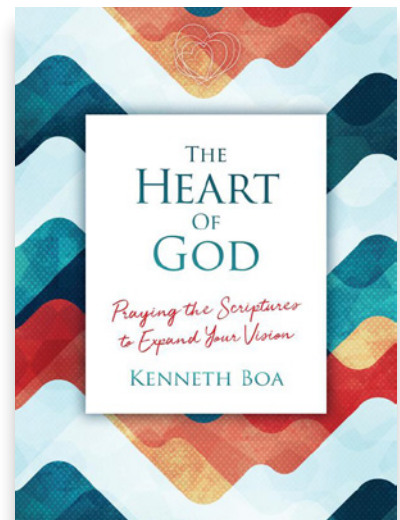
KENNETH BOA (2019)

The simple layout of these daily devotions invites the reader into the presence of God. The format is large and well-spaced with short paragraphs giving space to think and reflect.

Perhaps the most valuable, and the most critical, concept of the whole book is that every page is crammed full of verses from the Bible. Each reflection is geared towards scripture, quoted in full, asking the reader to pause at each station and reflect on what God is saying through his Word. There surely can be nothing more worthwhile than to read scripture each day and apply it to the daily needs of the reader and those with whom he comes in contact. To praise God; to examine yourself in the light of his Word; to commit yourself to him and then to intercede both for yourself and others with thanksgiving are gifts from heaven. This is a treasure trove of living words that can transform your daily walk with God. ●

(Available to purchase from Free Church Books.)

Ruth Aird, Bruntsfield Evangelical Church, Edinburgh



## BOOK OF THE MONTH

### HELPING THE SUFFERING

JAMES & JENNIE MULDOON (2020)

From the very first page, it is evident that *Helping the Suffering* was born out of real hardship as well as genuine love and care for the Christian community.

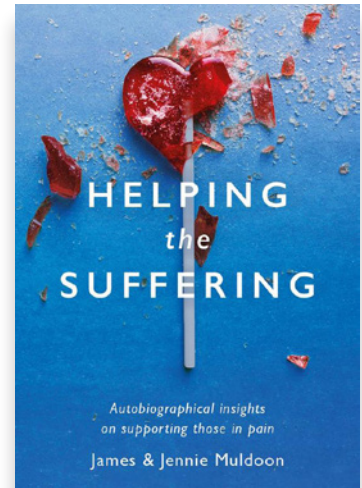
James and Jennie Muldoon speak honestly and openly about their struggles through infertility, learning to care for their daughter with spina bifida, and coping with multiple deaths within their close family circle, all within a very short space of time. It is difficult to read at moments as, just like in the book of Job, the reader thinks: how can anything more happen to them? Things do continue to happen, but the way in which the authors frame these events in light of the gospel is convicting.

This book was not written to be a highbrow academic read, it was written to meet the reader exactly where they are at; to comfort them; to let them know that average people everywhere struggle in major ways; and to testify that all glory and honour needs to be given to our God.

The second half of the book focusses on what the authors have learned in their experiences and how everyday Christians can become major encouragers in the lives of their fellow believers who are struggling. The most convicting part of this book is that it does not introduce anything revolutionary, but its purpose is to bolster the confidence of those Christians that seek to be encouraging but do not know how. We often think that our efforts are not enough and so we shy away from saying anything at all, when in actuality, the simplest, kindest words can lift a struggling believer out of moments of complete crisis.

This book has certainly encouraged me to be more mindful of my words and actions to those around me and to not be afraid to speak up even when I think it is just a small gesture, as to someone else it could be the difference in making it through the day and completely falling apart. ●

(Available to purchase from Free Church Books.)



Sarah Perkins, London City Presbyterian Church

### THE PRISONERS, THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE MIDNIGHT SONG

BOB HARTMAN & CATALINA ECHEVERRI (2020)

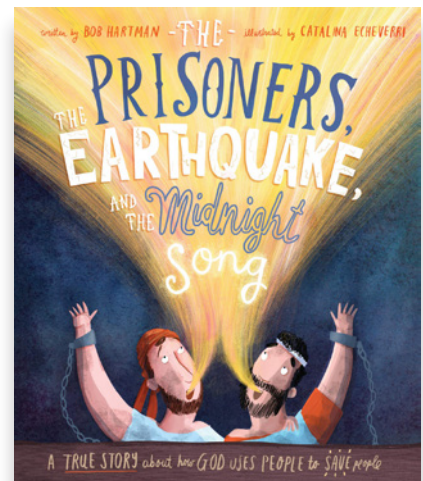
The title of this book alone is enough to captivate almost any child. It sounds like a swashbuckling adventure story, not an account of a couple of Christian guys from two thousand years ago! In reality, this story is, remarkably, both.

Too often, I think, adults read the miraculous Bible stories of the early church and fail to be as blown away by them as they should. There is no danger here that kids will make the same mistake. They will love the captivating storytelling and fun illustrations, as each page draws you on to the next. They will be amazed by the earthquake, the jailbreak, the snoring and the singing. By the end, they will truly appreciate what Jesus' first followers went through because of their faith in him, and also the incredible redeeming power that faith has to offer.

What I appreciated most of all, however, had to be the super-simple three-step exposition of the gospel, which is repeated throughout the book as Paul and Silas share their message. After a couple of times through, my three-year-old was saying it for himself – which has to be a good sign! And the ending's gentle encouragement for the reader to talk to their friends about Jesus is wonderful too.

As an aside, it is also delightful to see Bob Hartman's words encouraging a new generation. I still have and love his earlier book *Angels, Angels All Around* from when I was a child myself, and it's great to see his passion for sharing the gospel with young minds hasn't waned in the years in between! ●

(Available to purchase from The Good Book Company.)



Miriam Montgomery, Free Church Books

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>

## LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S: A LOVE STORY

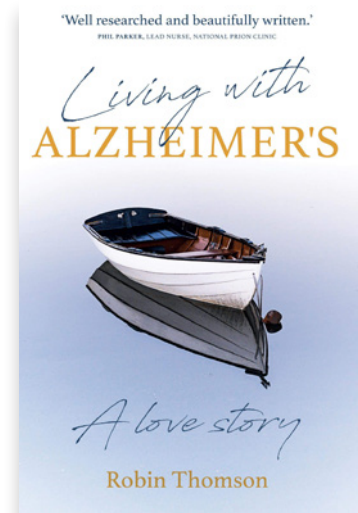
ROBIN THOMSON (2020)

Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are all too common and we should be as well-informed about them as possible. This paperback relates the experience of the author caring for his wife of nearly fifty years when she developed Alzheimer's disease in 2012. It is written with great sensitivity and searing honesty and I found it spiritually uplifting as well as challenging and informative.

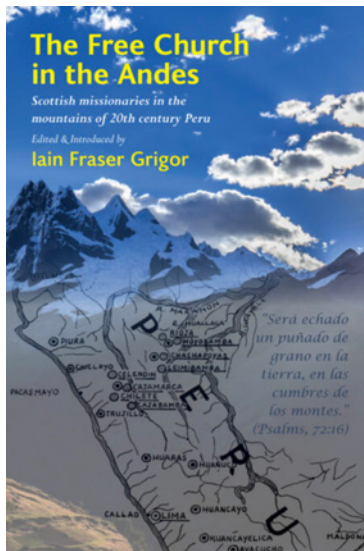
We knew Robin and Shokho Thomson in India, where they were missionaries for 20 years, and we kept up contact when we returned to Britain in 1988. Robin taught in Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, and their children went to Hebron School, Ootacamund, where our children also studied. Of interest to Free Church people is that Robin's mother, Anna, was a daughter of Rev. Alexander Stewart of St Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh. Anna joined her sister Edith as a Free Church missionary in Lakhnadon and Chhapara in 1938 (See Dr Anne Urquhart's *Near India's Heart*). While at language school both met their future husbands. Anna married Cyril Thomson, an Anglican missionary in Madras, so Robin's early years were spent there.

The book's subtitle is amply justified by the delicately related development of their love following meeting on a ship in 1966, Robin going from England to teach in a Bible school in Madras (now Chennai) and Shokho returning from training in America to teach in a Bible School in her native Japan. But behind it all is their shared love for their Saviour and trust in the Sovereign God who sustained them all their lives.

Robin's account of Shokho's illness and his experience of caring for her makes fascinating reading. He did a lot of soul-searching and research and thus is able to make very helpful practical suggestions from the insights he gained – for instance the importance of patience and love, the need for support for the carer, the need to simplify the system for accessing professional advice. No two situations are the exactly the same, and a person-centred approach is paramount. There is an excellent list of resources, including books and websites, at the end of the book. Highly recommended. ● (Available to purchase from Amazon)



Rev. Dr Donald Macdonald



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*David Ross, author of Highland Herald*

'Fhuair mise mo thogail anns an Eaglais Shaor agus tha cuimhn' agam air mòran dhe na h-ainmean - ainmean dhaoine agus aithean [grave on the first a] – a tha a' nochdadh anns an leabhar. Ach ged nach biodh ceangal agad ris an eaglais sin neo ri eaglais sam bith eile se leabhar a tha seo is fhiach a leughadh.'

*Roddy John MacLeod, Lord Minginish*

# POETRY PAGE

## OF THE INCOMPARABLE TREASURE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES THE GENEVA BIBLE

Here is the Spring where waters flow,  
to quench our heat of sin:  
Here is the Tree where truth doth grow,  
to lead our lives therein:  
Here is the Judge that stints the strife,  
when men's devices fail:  
Here is the Bread that feeds the life,  
that death cannot assail.  
The tidings of Salvation dear,  
comes to our ears from hence:  
The fortress of our Faith is here,  
and shield of our defence.  
Then be not like the hog, that hath  
a pearl at his desire,  
And takes more pleasure of the trough  
and wallowing in the mire.  
Read not this book, in any case,  
but with a single eye:  
Read not, but first desire God's grace,  
to understand thereby.  
Pray still in faith, with this respect,  
to fructify therein,  
That knowledge may bring this effect,  
to mortify thy sin.  
Then happy thou, in all thy life,  
whatso to thee befalls:  
Yea, double happy shalt thou be,  
when God by death thee calls.

This poem was printed in the introduction to the *Geneva Bible*. A milestone in the history of Bible translation, the first full edition of the Geneva Bible appeared in 1560. The Geneva Bible was the first translation to use chapters and numbered verses. It included annotations commenting on the text written by Reformers such as John Knox and John Calvin, which, along with its small size and relatively low cost, helped to make it the most popular version of its time. The Geneva translation is quoted in the works of Shakespeare, Bunyan and Milton. ●

# MISSION MATTERS

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

## **T**HE HOLY WAR MADE BY KING SHADDAI UPON DIABOLUS, TO REGAIN THE METROPOLIS OF THE WORLD; OR, THE LOSING AND TAKING AGAIN OF THE TOWN OF MANSOUL

is a 1682 novel by John Bunyan. It sees a person like a guarded town with five gates. Entering that town is no easy task and there can often be a battle.

Most people are biddable and easy to talk to but when it comes to sharing the gospel the defences go up. This is perfectly natural, because when we are confronted by the truth claims of Jesus our lives are challenged. By nature we are turned in within ourselves and see ourselves as the captain of our own lives. When the ego is challenged it can provoke a vicious reaction.

Imagine then that your neighbour or workmate is not a believer and you have had the opportunity over many years to talk to them about faith. May I suggest an image that could be in your mind as you speak?

See them as a heavily guarded city, surrounded by many tripwires which could trigger off a barrage of bullets, activate loud sirens and switch on powerful floodlights. Any one of these trip wires could be activated and will stop your progress.

The least successful personal witnesses are undoubtedly those who are forward about their faith and unafraid to 'speak a word in season'. The problem is that they rarely get the season right and trigger off these tripwires. This is counter-intuitive. People who are outwardly zealous in holding personal conversation are usually poor at it and leave a trail of wreckage in their wake.

Let's take the example that your neighbour, who drinks much more than they should, has just been appointed a humanist celebrant, but ironically has discovered Buddhist meditation. They know that you are a person of faith and excitedly give you a gift of *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: The Buddha's Way of Mindfulness* by Nyanaponika Thera. You could begin by presenting the unique claim of Christ to truth, shoot down other philosophies and warn your friend about the real spiritual dangers of

unhelpful meditation. In today's culture you would also rush to Facebook to publish your thoughts and give a blow-by-blow account of the battle.

Trust me, the effect of your encounter will be to set one of these tripwires going with the resultant noise; or, what could be worse, silent and passive aggression. You will not get into the town. You will be shouting at closed gates.

The situation will be turned around if you see what is really happening here. Perhaps we have judged her drinking, but are unaware that the alcohol helps dull the pain of a series of miscarriages over the last 20 years. Her interest in religion has been sparked by an inward (at least she thinks it's inward) homing device which is drawing her towards the transcendent. Her desire to act as a celebrant is motivated by a desire to serve the wider community. Her offer of the gift of a book is not a statement of rebellion against Jesus as the way and the truth, but is an act of kindness towards you.

There were times that Jesus was not frightened to set off every tripwire he could. If you notice, though, he always did this with the religious extremists of his day. In Matthew 23 he went to the walls of the city of the Pharisees and called them out as 'hypocrites', 'blind guides', 'blind fools', 'whitewashed tombs'. In contrast, notice how he treated the honest seeker – look at John 4 and Matthew 9:20-22. Be gentle with people and speak the truth in love and understanding. Remember also: God is able to open the door...you are not God. ●

*The least successful personal witnesses are undoubtedly those who are forward about their faith and unafraid to 'speak a word in season'. The problem is that they rarely get the season right.*

# Aimsir teanntachd

## (A time of distress)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

**N**UAIR a tha an saoghal againne fhathast troimh-chèile, tha na ràithean a' tighinn mar a bha iad a-riamh. Bha samhradh air leth math againn an-uiridh agus deagh fhoghair, agus aig an àm-sa, air feasgar reothaidh, chitheadh duine sam bith a bha a' coimhead ri obair a' Chruthachaidh seallaidhean miorbhaileach agus an t-adhar le rionnagan soillseach.

Bha e na thogail-inntinn a bhith a' beachdachadh air mar a tha luchd-àiteachaidh na talmhainn, 'mar fhionnain-fheòir' na shùilean-san, agus E 'a' sineadh a-mach na nèamhan mar sgàil thana, agus mar bhùth anns an gabhar còmhnaidh.'

Nach e ar Dia-ne a tha àrd agus mòr anns a h-uile dòigh, agus sinne a-bhos anns an t-saoghal glè thrìc a' di-chuimhneachadh seo?

Tha na nèamhan aig nach eil comas-labhairt mar a th' aig an duine, 'a' cur an cèill glòir Dhè'nna bhith a' cur an cèill ann an dòigh sam bith, A chumhachd, A ghràdh agus A thuigse air gach trioblaid a dh'fhaodadh a thighinn oirnn' a-bhos air an talamh.

Is e ar n-ùrnaigh gu seall E oirnn' le truas aig an àm-sa, ged nach eil sinn airidh air an sin. Tha Esan comasach air cobhair a dhèanamh oirnn' mar nach dèan neach eile, oir cha ghabh tuigs' a' Chruthaidheir a rannsachadh ann.

Tha iomadh adhbhar againn airson taingealachd anns a' cheàrnaidh bheag-sa den t-saoghal, airson gach dìon a chaidh a chur oirnn' gu ruige seo, agus dh' iarradh sinn a' Ghloir a thoirt Dhà-san.

Is e gun cùm sinn oirnn' a' cuimhneachadh air càch a chèile, agus gu dearbh air gach rioghachd, ag ùrnaigh gun cùm Esan A shaoghal Fhèin a'cuimhneachadh air A Ghràdh, mar a rinn iad o chionn mìos no dhà nuair a bha iad a' comharrachadh teachd an t-Slànaigheir a Bhetlehem. B' e seo am Mac Siorraidh a'tighinn mar dhuine gus slighe a dhèanamh dhuinn air-ais gur Dia.

Tha sùil a' Chruthaidheir air an duine oir tha sinn air leth priseil Aige.

Nach ann an sin a tha an t-adhbhar-taingealachd?

Tuigidh an Cruthaidhear ar n-àmghar agus ar sàrachadh, agus tha an-còmhnaidh freagairt Aige-san, oir tha tuigs' Aige air inntinn gach aon a th'air uachdar na talmhainn. Tha eòlas Aige cuideachd air gach car is cleas a tha ann an cridhe an duine, agus na àm Fhèin seallaidh E gur E a bhios a' freagairt ùrnaigh.

Tha sinn mothachail air àmhghar iomadach duine aig an àm-sa; tha mòran a' caoidh, cuid air buillean goirt fhulang, 's feadhainn eile ann am bochdainn de gach seòrsa. Tha e mar dhleastanas oirnn' a bhith cuimhneach orra seo, oir chan eil fios againn cuin a dh' fhaodadh ar suidheachadh fhìn atharrachadh.

Tha bràithrean agus peathraichean againn aig nach eil Facal Dhè, 's iad ann an rioghachdan fada bhuainn, agus e cho furasta dhuinn an di-chuimhneachadh. Nuair a tha sinn beò air ar cuartachadh le pailteas, tha e cho duilich a bhith a'cur an aon mheas air nithean.

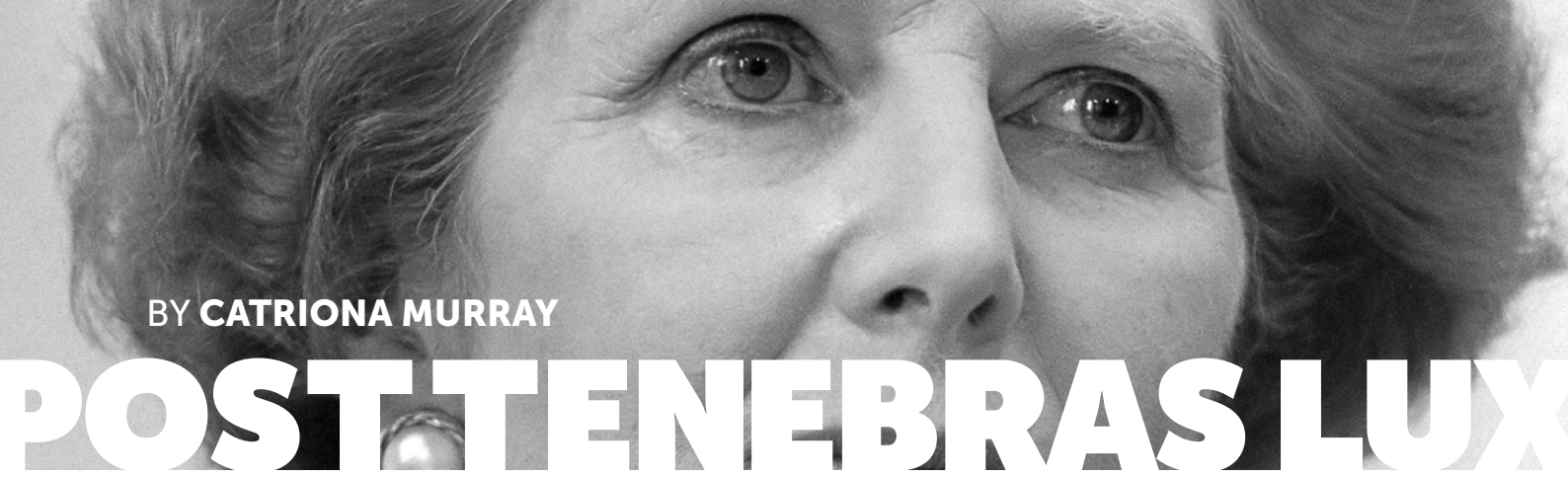
Tha e tòrr nas fhasa a dhol chun a' Chruthaidheir aig àm èiginneach na tha e a dhol thuige nuair a tha cùisean a' dol leinn.

Is e gu ruigeadh ar n-ùrnaighean an saoghal mun iad a' ghrian. Gheibheadh sinne beannachd 's bhiodh ar cridhe air a chur am farsaingeachd.

Aig an àm-sa

Tha bacaidhean is ceanglaichean  
gar sgaradh bho na daoine  
cha gheuraich iarann iarann  
is mòran a' fàs glè òn'rach.

Tha an saoghal làn de thrioblaidean  
ach de chuideachadh bho chàirdean  
's dh' iarradh sinn uile taing a thoirt  
airson gach coibhneas 'n iomadh àite. ●



BY CATRIONA MURRAY

# POST-TENEBRAS LUX

**T**HE NETFLIX SERIES *THE CROWN* HAS BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS WITH VIEWERS. Initially I enjoyed it as a straightforward costume drama, but the recently-aired fourth series portrayed events I lived through, albeit as a child. My memories of the Charles and Diana wedding, for example, are mixed up with preparations for my first ever trip on a ferry: I was five, and making the epic journey to Uist the very next day.

It has also reminded me of a time when Margaret Thatcher seemed to dominate our lives. She was the only Prime Minister I could remember until her removal when I was fifteen. I remember feeling strangely bereft as we watched the BBC footage of her journey to the Palace. We were not a Conservative-supporting household; yet, you get used to things being a certain way, and to particular people just being there.

Netflix brought the 'Iron Lady' vividly to life, and one particular scene made a great impression on me. In a tense conversation with the Queen, Mrs Thatcher quotes the Chartist poet Charles Mackay's '*No Enemies*':

You have no enemies, you say?  
Alas! my friend, the boast is poor;  
He who has mingled in the fray  
Of duty, that the brave endure,  
Must have made foes! If you have none,  
Small is the work that you have done.  
You've hit no traitor on the hip,  
You've dashed no cup from perjured lip,  
You've never turned the wrong to right,  
You've been a coward in the fight.

Christians are seen by the unbelieving world as ineffectual people who must always shrink from conflict. It has to do with a superficial grasp of what our cause is about, believing that we stand under wishy-washy slogans. They equate our 'God is love' to their own tea-towel mantra, 'in a world where you can be anything, be kind'.

The reality is quite different. To be a Christian is to have your life turned upside down and to discover enemies lurking everywhere. Our God IS love, and true love — as defined by him and no other — has a keen edge. Living that life of Christian love will

bring us into the orbit of our foes.

Or, I should say, 'our foe', for we have but one.

Satan does not lead his army from the front: he is too full of guile to reveal himself in that way. He is purposely elusive, so that even his very generals would be shocked to find themselves fighting on his side. Instead, they are made to think that they are striking blows against the likes of you and I for the high ideals of freedom and, yes, even love.

Isn't it obscene? Doesn't it offend your very soul that he lures your fellow men and women to hell with an imitation of God's defining traits? God IS love, and there is no freedom apart from Christ. Yet, his poor dupes pursue those things by blocking the only route to them.

That is our enemy. He is your enemy, and mine, not because he can ever pluck us from God's safe grasp — but because he would keep others from joining our side. Satan is a destroyer, a liar and a murderer, and when you are safe from all his wiles, as you are in the arms of Christ, it is your duty to be HIS enemy.

Our God asks that we worship him because he is worthy; Satan relies on his followers never even knowing his name, for that's the only way they will do his work. Mrs Thatcher was speaking of a political fight, as was Charles Mackay. In such circles, as the poem suggests, it is craven to seek a life in which no enemies are made.

In the context of modern Christianity too, we sometimes allow ourselves to be influenced by the world's expectations of us, that we will uphold peace at any price. That, however, is not possible if we are to really contend for our faith. It is not always right to be silent. And silence may not necessarily equate to peace. We have got to challenge ourselves and one another to know the difference between peacekeeping and surrender.

God has won the battle already and he does not send us unequipped into the fray. We are girded with the light of truth from which Satan shrinks; we have had our call to arms: '*The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light*' (Romans 13:12). ●

Rob Bogaerts / Aneto, Nationaal Archief