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RECORD

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WELCOME TO THE APRIL RECORD



CHRIST IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED!

'We have in his death the complete fulfilment of salvation, for through it we are reconciled to God, his righteous judgment is satisfied, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid in full. Nevertheless, we are said to "have been born anew to a living hope" not through his death but "through his resurrection" (1 Peter 1:3). For as he, in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone.' — John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Christian hope necessarily turns our eyes towards the source of our hope, and there we find peace and consolation. Pointing to Jesus is the purpose of the HOPE MAIL Initiative, about which you can read this month. The Initiative is the work of four friends who are sharing portions of Scripture with people around the country. Nothing could be simpler, but nothing is more powerful. 'Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?' (Jeremiah 23:29).

This month's edition also sees the conclusion of two article series. I'd like to thank the Rev. Gordon Matheson for his articles on developing a Christian worldview, which lay sure foundations from which we can apply biblical truths to politics and public policy. The series is very much appreciated as the campaign for the Scottish Parliamentary election begins in earnest.

I also want to particularly thank Iain Gill, who concludes his series on the resurrection this month. Iain's aim was to help us answer a question which is often taken for granted, and so is rarely explored – why did God raise Jesus from death? Iain's short articles were easily read, but have been deeply researched, and consequently deepen our understanding of the first Easter. ●

If you have any news articles please send them to dayspring.macleod@icloud.com.

Yours in Christ

John

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

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BY THE EDITOR

Through a Glass, Darkly

Information asymmetry
in the post-lockdown church



LIFE AFTER LOCKDOWN IS A JOYOUS PROSPECT. But the pandemic leaves an array of challenges in its wake. The enforced atomisation of our Christian communities and the remote worship of the COVID era has created a particular pastoral issue for our ministers and elders. We have each run the race at a different pace.

ASYMMETRY

The impact of 'asymmetric information' on markets was first studied by George Akerlof in the 1970s. He noticed that buyers of used cars didn't know enough to figure out if they were looking at a good or a bad vehicle. The lack of information meant they wouldn't risk paying a high price in case the car was faulty. But sellers who knew they had a quality car on their hands refused to sell at a lower price. The end result is that no high-grade cars were traded at all. Akerlof's insight was that unequal access to knowledge can cause problems for everyone.

A year of homeschooling has left behind a different kind of asymmetric information problem for the education system. While some young people have managed to keep learning, others need to catch up. We can observe that online lessons have worked for some pupils. But they are ideal for very few, and detrimental to the learning of others. A similar problem is facing the church. ▶▶

As churches begin to reopen after a year and more of remote services, people will return having had hugely different levels of spiritual, theological nourishment. Many will have been able to virtually attend two services and a midweek meeting at their church. Some will have attended less frequently than usual, the result of a variety of circumstances. Some with limited or no access to technology will have been dependent on others delivering recordings of services to them. Others have used online access and 'church from home' to hear a vastly increased number of sermons.

Of course, there has always been a range of knowledge within each community of believers. Everyone is at a different stage of their walk with God (1 Corinthians 3). Even under normal circumstances, people's unique interests

For those who take the opportunity to devour the information that is now available to them, there are risks as well as benefits.

and abilities — bestowed by our Creator and nurtured by the Spirit — bring different approaches to personal devotion and Bible study. There is liberty here — and no requirement to attain enlightenment. We trust, too, that God, who sent manna from heaven and who made water spring from a

rock, provides for our spiritual needs. But that reality is no cause for complacency. It must not be allowed to mask the fact that there is a growing theological information asymmetry in the church today.

INFORMATION AGE

This knowledge inequality is brought into sharp focus by remote worship. But it has existed long before COVID. Pre-pandemic, we were used to a regular diet of worship, preaching and fellowship. When the minister stood up to preach, he knew what the congregation had heard a week previously. Yet, he could not know what they had consumed in the intervening days.

Since Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1440s, there has been a mass of theological information available to Christians in the West. Yet, even now, books remain relatively expensive and require spare time to read. It has been the rise of the internet which has driven theological information asymmetry.

In 1993, shortly after the invention of the World Wide Web, 1% of information flowing through telecommunications networks used the new technology. By 2007, 97% of telecommunicated information was sent over the internet. Beyond its replacement of previous communication methods, the internet has exponentially expanded the amount of information that is available to those who can access it. 2007 was also the year the first iPhone went on sale, allowing us to carry the world's information repository in our pockets.

The use this technology has been put to in the service of the Kingdom is cause for joy and thanksgiving. Enormous blessings have resulted from the vast resources to which many of us now have access. Myriad translations of Scripture are freely available, as are a range of classic commentaries which would be very expensive to buy in print. Websites and blogs are devoted to expounding theological issues and applying biblical truth to our culture. Sermon archives and podcasts allow preaching and teaching to be accessed anytime, anywhere. That is in addition to the fact that all of us would have had long periods with no access to preaching and fellowship at all in the last year, were it not for the internet. All of this is wonderful for those who can make use of it. But there remain many who can't, or don't. It is difficult to lead and preach to a body of believers in which such inequality exists.

On the other hand, for those who take the opportunity to devour the information that is now available to them, there are risks as well as benefits. The explosion of resources available online requires wise discernment. There is much good to be found, but there is also much that is false.

When there are so many voices we can tune in to, the authority of our own church leaders is weakened. This runs in parallel with a similar pattern across our culture. Michael Gove summed it up during the EU referendum campaign

when he told the press, 'I think the people of this country have had enough of experts.' There is democratisation in this, consistent with the Reformation principle which put Scripture in everyone's hands. But, while the Reformers fought for everyone's right to interpret Scripture, as R.C. Sproul put it, they allowed no one the right to misinterpret it.

Today's ministers must be able to guide people through the mass of information, and give them the ability to separate the good from the bad. When it comes to theological instruction, the minister's may now be one voice among many. But his role remains vital in grounding people in truth and teaching us how to discern false teaching.

ADDRESSING THE ASYMMETRY

We cannot merely carry on as before, as if the problem will rectify itself. The pandemic has exacerbated the inequality, but it exists independently of COVID. And the gap will continue to widen. The continued growth of theological information asymmetry, then, presents two pastoral issues for ministers and elders. Those being left behind by lack of access need to be provided for; and those happily consuming information need to be protected from false teaching.

In seeking to address this, an associated dynamic in contemporary culture needs to be acknowledged: there is fierce competition for people's attention. Whether the aim is to advertise a product, to convince someone to stream another episode or to benefit from their labour as an employer, people are constantly assaulted with demands for their attention.

Theology occupies only a small corner of the internet's knowledge emporium. Church requests a relatively small amount of time from a person's week. By contrast, the modern world is unashamed in its demands for attention. Much has been written about 'information overload', which forces people to prioritise gathering information for work or study. It also induces a tiredness which can often make TV more palatable than reading theology.

Yet, to address the problem of knowledge inequality and the risks of consuming false teaching, church leaders need to — gently, lovingly — garner our attention and use it to shore up the foundations of our biblical knowledge. They must always present the gospel to us. But they must also teach us how to handle Scripture ourselves and how to test the information we consume against the truth of God's Word.

We need to ensure our young people are well grounded, too. The

volume of knowledge they are expected to possess is only increasing. On top of that, our culture continues to tumble down relativism's rabbit-hole and can't figure out which way is up. They need, as we need, a solid rock on which to stand.

But, how? The answer isn't revolutionary, just a return to our roots. Paul writes, '*Let the one who is taught* [katechoumenos, one who is catechised] *the word share all good things with the one who teaches*' (Galatians 6:6).

Tim Keller writes, 'Modern discipleship programs are usually superficial when it comes to doctrine. Even systematic Bible studies can be weak in drawing doctrinal conclusions. In contrast, catechisms take students step by step through the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer — a perfect balance of biblical theology and doctrine, practical ethics, and spiritual experience... Our people desperately need richer, more comprehensive instruction. Returning to catechesis — now — is one important way to give it.'

Theological information asymmetry is a consequence of the Fall. For now, we all see '*through a glass, darkly*' and only know in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). But inequitable access to information — to preaching, teaching and other means of learning — means that some glasses are darker than others. It is a pastoral issue which demands attention, but one to which our forebears have taught us the answer. ●

Those being left behind by lack of access need to be provided for; and those happily consuming information need to be protected from false teaching.

WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

CANADIAN PASTOR JAILED FOR COVID BREACHES



James Coates, pastor of GraceLife Church in Edmonton, Alberta – an independent, evangelical congregation – has been charged with a violation of the Public Health Act and violation of his bail conditions. He was initially arrested after holding in-person services which did not observe social distancing rules. He then continued to hold services in contravention of his bail conditions. Coates turned himself in to police in mid-February and is being held at a local Remand Centre.

John Carpay of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom, representing Coates and GraceLife Church, said in a statement that the bail conditions which Coates had agreed to 'required him to violate his conscience and effectively stop pastoring his church as a condition to be released. This is a miscarriage of justice.' Coates' attorney, James Kitchen, added, 'the government's forcing him into a position where he has to choose between disobeying God and obeying government, or obeying God and disobeying government'.

GraceLife Church published a statement on its website calling into question the legitimacy of COVID restrictions. They wrote, 'it is apparent that the negative effects of the government lockdown measures on society far surpass the effects of COVID-19. The science being used to justify lockdown measures is both suspect and selective... We are gravely concerned that COVID-19 is being used to fundamentally alter society and strip us all of our civil liberties...we believe love for our neighbour demands that we exercise our civil liberties.'

The pastor's legal team is hopeful that he will again be released on bail. His trial is scheduled for early May. ●

'ILLEGAL SERVICES' IN MOTHERWELL



BBC News reports that Hope United Church in Motherwell, an independent, evangelical congregation, broadcast services online which appeared to show a gathering in contravention of COVID restrictions.

Motherwell MSP Clare Adamson (SNP) told BBC Scotland that she had reported the incident to the police. 'While the Hope Church are entitled to their own beliefs, they are not entitled to break the law,' she said. 'Any activity like this could be to the detriment of the whole community if COVID is reseeded. We are looking forward to a more normal time but this behaviour that could seed the virus in the community again is to be condemned.'

A Police Scotland spokeswoman told the BBC: 'We were aware of reports relating to potential gatherings at a church in the Motherwell area. Inquiries into the reports are ongoing and officers are engaging with representatives of the church.'

Hope Church had not commented to the BBC by the time their article was published. ●

DEAD SEA SCROLL FRAGMENTS DISCOVERED



The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) has announced that ongoing explorations in the Judean desert, funded by the government to prevent ancient artefacts being taken and sold by looters, have uncovered around two dozen scroll fragments from the books of Zechariah and Nahum. They are the first such texts discovered in the Dead Sea area in more than 60 years. The fragments are a Greek translation, with only the name of God in Hebrew. They have been carbon-dated to the second century A.D. and form a missing part of the Greek Minor Prophets scroll, parts of which were first found in the early 1950s.

The scroll was been hidden in a cave during the Bar Kokhba Revolt against Rome (132-136 A.D.), the last of the three major Jewish-Roman wars. The cave is 260 feet below a cliff top, and according to the IAA is 'flanked by gorges and can only be reached by rappelling precariously down the sheer cliff.'

IAA director Israel Hasson, who led the operation, said, 'The desert team showed exceptional courage, dedication and devotion to purpose, rappelling down to caves located between heaven and earth, digging and sifting through them, enduring thick and suffocating dust, and returning with gifts of immeasurable worth for mankind.' ●



ALGERIAN MAN IMPRISONED FOR FACEBOOK CARTOON



Morning Star News reports that a Christian who reposted a cartoon of Muhammad on Facebook three years ago has been jailed in Algeria. Hamid, a farmer in El-Aiyaida, shared the cartoon in 2018. He was arrested in January and sentenced to five years in prison.

Rachid Seighir, pastor of Oratoire Church in Oran said, 'It is a tragedy for us and for his family. When a member of the Body of Christ is sick, the whole body feels the pain. Brother Hamid was naive in accepting this cartoon on his Facebook account. That this story goes back three years and only now it's resurfacing – it's hard to digest.' Hamid is married with four young children.

Algeria ranked 24th on *Open Doors'* 2021 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

Hamid's lawyer is hopeful that his sentence will be reduced following an appeal. ●

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DEBATE IN SRI LANKA



Sri Lanka's minister of public security, Sarath Weerasekara, is seeking Cabinet approval to ban the wearing of burqas in the majority-Buddhist nation. 'The burqa has a direct impact on national security,' he said, 'It is a sign of religious extremism.' Burqas were temporarily banned in Sri Lanka following deadly attacks on Easter Sunday 2019. Two local groups who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State carried out suicide bombings at three churches and three hotels, killing 269 people.

In response to the latest proposal, Godfrey Yogarajah, who serves both as general secretary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka and as the World Evangelical Alliance's ambassador for religious freedom, told *Christianity Today*, 'We believe it is a woman's right to decide what she wears. Also, if she has grown up wearing the burqa for religious reasons, then for the state to try and regulate is a violation of religious freedom.' He also noted that the Easter Sunday bombers were all men 'dressed in normal attire'. ●

AFRICAN PRESIDENTS' DEATHS PROVOKE COVID DEBATE



Christians across the Great Lakes region are debating the role of medicine and infection control following the deaths of President John Magufuli of Tanzania and President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi. Both had drawn criticism for their approach to the pandemic.

President Nkurunziza died of COVID-19 in 2020. President Magufuli's death was announced in March this year. The official cause was heart complications, but opposition leaders and local media had speculated for several weeks prior to his death that he had contracted COVID. Magufuli had long claimed that coronavirus had been defeated by prayer in Tanzania, refusing to institute public health measures and announcing that the country had no plans to take delivery of COVID-19 vaccines. His position changed in late-February, when he asked Tanzanians to take precautions such as wearing face masks. He also provoked a theological debate across the region by telling mourners at the funeral of his chief secretary, 'Maybe we have wronged God somewhere. Let us all repent.'

According to *Christianity Today*, the views of many Christian leaders in Burundi were summed up by Joseph Ndayizeye, pastor of Rugombo Pentecostal Church in the capital, Bujumbura, when he told a prayer meeting, 'It is not normal for the virus to invade the country and even kill the president. God punished us with the coronavirus pandemic because of our sins. Let us repent our sins and ask God for forgiveness and our prayers will be heard.'

However, pastor John Bigirimana of Bujumbura's Buterere Pentecostal Church argues, 'there's nowhere in the scriptures where God commands Christians not to seek medical assistance. This is a pandemic all over the world... Let's not be cheated, unless we all want to die.' ●

ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS PROLIFERATE IN INDIA



Police in Madhya Pradesh, central India, have registered 23 cases of 'forced conversion' in the first 23 days following the implementation of a new 'Freedom of Religion Ordinance', according to *The Times of India*. An equal number of Christians and Muslims have been arrested under the law, which is intended to prevent people converting from Hinduism. Similar laws have already been enacted in the states of Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. An anti-conversion law was approved by the Uttar Pradesh state Cabinet at the end of 2020, which *International Christian Concern* warns will 'incite more religiously motivated violence'. ICC notes that Christians make up 2.3% of India's population according to the country's 2011 census, the same proportion recorded in the 1951 census. Even so, attacks against Christians and laws to restrict worship have increased – particularly since Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014. ●



FINANCE UPDATE

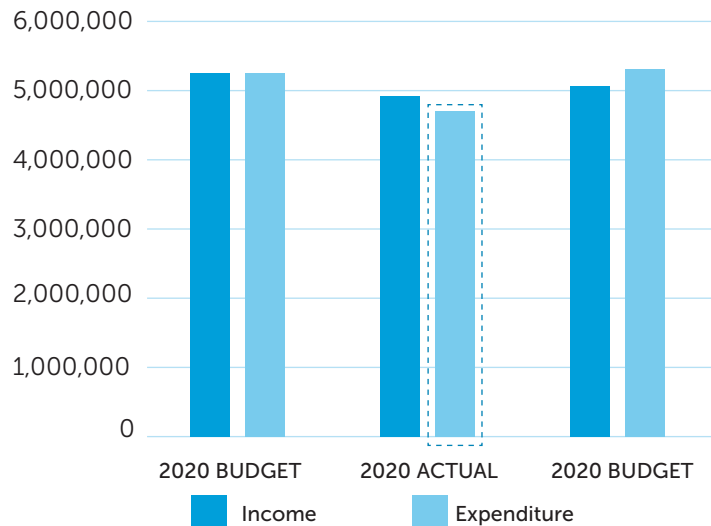
THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES WOULD LIKE TO THANK CONGREGATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS FOR THEIR EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN REMITTANCE LEVELS AND MISSION DONATIONS DURING 2020.

It has been a difficult and challenging time for all of us. The remittances received for 2020 were lower than the budget but a little higher than in 2019. Expenditure for the year was considerably under budget, which meant that the year ended with a small surplus.

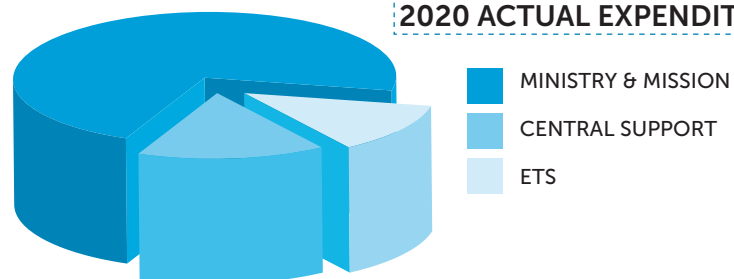
We give thanks to God for the generous congregational giving which helped the Free Church of Scotland to start the New Year in a good financial position with the ability to continue its mission and ministry.

The budget and forecast for 2021 does, however, anticipate a shortfall of around £250,000, and we bring this prayerfully before the Lord and his people. ●

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE



2020 ACTUAL EXPENDITURE



MINISTER'S MARATHON

BY **REV. ANDREW MACLEOD**

WHEN OUR COUNTRY WAS LOCKED DOWN IN MARCH 2020, WE WERE ENTITLED TO EXERCISE OUTDOORS ONCE A DAY, SO I PUT MY TRAINERS ON AND STARTED RUNNING. As a youngster, I could run all day (as long as there was a football to chase), but just running for no reason seemed so boring. Lockdown changed my perspective. When leaving the house becomes a luxury, you begin to appreciate aspects of life you didn't before.

So, I started putting one foot in front of the other. I completed the BBC's 'Couch to 5k' (which I highly recommend to get you started). I then entered a virtual 5k race representing my football team, and I began to wonder just how far I could go. A fellow running minister, from Roskeen FC, gave me this piece of advice which has stood me in good stead – 'Just get the

miles in the legs'. I had never run past 5km, but I was soon reaching 10km, then 15km, and so I targeted, and completed, a half-marathon before the end of 2020.

There have been so many benefits I didn't expect with running. Going running allowed me to take that little bit of time out from the books. It took me away from the study for an hour, and my mind was given a chance to rest and recharge. In a year that has been challenging for everyone, running has been an outlet for me, and I know for many of my colleagues (as we compete and encourage each other on Strava). It allowed me to explore the beautiful corner of the world in which we live and serve the Lord. I would often take Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones with me on the longer runs, listening to some of his lectures.



But 2021 brings a new challenge and I have no idea if I can actually manage it – to double my previous accomplishment and run 26 miles, the full marathon. I kept my running up all winter, but the training officially began in February, the same week we got our year's worth of snow here in the Seaboard Villages.

I hope to run this marathon on the 1st May, leaving from the Manse and heading all the way down to Blythswood in Evanton. This is the route because the money raised will go towards the work of Blythswood, which I have been associated with through Christian mission trips to Moldova for 10 years, and also to a specific charity of which I am a board member, the *Moldova Support Group*.

Blythswood needs little introduction to the readership of this magazine. The work that they do

locally and internationally is phenomenal. From the charity stores, food banks, and shoe box appeals, Blythswood are a bright light for Gospel ministry on our doorstep and across the world.

The Moldova Support Group (MSG) operate in the town of Nisporeni, working alongside Holy Trinity Church. Moldova may be unfamiliar to the reader, but it is no exaggeration for me to say that going to this country – five times so far – has changed my life. I have never felt so out of my comfort zone as I have there. I have made lifelong friendships with people there. And I preached from a pulpit for the very first time there. The Lord has put this little country firmly into my heart, and through MSG our desire, in partnership with the local church, is to support the community and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

I would be delighted if you could support these organisations as I train to run this Marathon. You can donate online at virginmoneygiving.com/AndrewMacleod11. Otherwise, you can contact me directly by email – mowgli16b@hotmail.com.

The very first sermon I preached on Scottish soil was from Hebrews 12, where we read, 'Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.'

The key to running a marathon is not about being able to sprint down the A9, or get a PB around the villages. Instead, the key to a marathon is putting one foot in front of the other – for 26 miles. The key is perseverance. The same is true as we press on through life's journey. Though this year has been hard, we persevere by throwing off sin and fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Keep running! ●

Rev. Andrew Macleod is Assistant Minister at Tain and Fearn Free Church.

VIRTUALLY ENSPIRED 2021

BY AILEEN MACLEOD

O N SATURDAY, 6TH MARCH 2021, VIRTUALLY ENSPIRED MET BY THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY! The day started off with uplifting praise and prayer. It was a spiritually enriching day as we listened to a variety of inspiring speakers.

First Debbie Urquhart spoke to us on 'Being Steadfast in a Changing World', from Philippians 4:12-13, seeking contentment whatever our circumstances. We were reminded of God's steadfast



love and care in an ever-changing world and how important it is to lean on God amidst the pressures and difficulties of life: he holds us in the palm of his hand.

We were encouraged when we listened to the experiences of two ministers' wives, CJ Macdonald and Kirsteen Stott, who both spoke movingly and honestly about their experiences of 'Moving On in Ministry'. There was much that we could all identify with.

We then moved into breakout rooms and were able to connect with friends old and new to discuss, pray and encourage one another in our individual circumstances.

Finally, Mark Fleming spoke to us in a very engaging way about

'Mental Health in the Manse', offering practical help and advice and reminding us of our value and identity in Christ.

Thank you to everyone who went to such an effort to organise such a special morning, to the speakers and to the entire Enspire Team, to those who worked in the background and those who ensured the technology worked. Thank you also for the thoughtful gift we all received beforehand. ●



UPDATE FROM WOMEN FOR MISSION

BY **FIONA MACASKILL**

AS THE DAYS STRETCH TOWARDS THE SUMMER, OUR THOUGHTS TURN HOPEFULLY TOWARDS SOME POSSIBLE RETURN TO MORE NORMAL LIVES.

It does seem, though, that we are unlikely to see enough easing of restrictions to enable us to raise funds for this year's project in the ways we normally would — so keep those thinking caps on. We have been really amazed and encouraged by the many innovative ways we have seen the money come in over the last year and we are really keen to hear more about your adventures in virtual fundraising. Please feel free to mention them on our Facebook page, or if you would like a special mention on the website then please get in touch. If you haven't already started raising funds for this year's project it's not too late. There are lots of great things you can do, such as Zoom cookalongs, virtual auctions, sponsored virtual hill climbs...

Last month we mentioned that we were on the hunt for a new treasurer for the WfM committee. We have found someone and are thankful for God's provision so quickly. Our outgoing treasurer, Cairine Davidson, will be greatly missed from the group but she does have a good excuse for

leaving us. After five years of being our Treasurer she has decided to step down, and we wish her every blessing in her new responsibilities as a mother following the birth of her little boy Finn. We are very grateful to Cairine for all her hard work in keeping our accounts in order and we hope to announce at our AGM in May who our new treasurer will be.

We were sad to hear earlier in March about the death of a much-loved supporter of our work, Elizabeth Graham, Edinburgh. She served, alongside her husband Billy, for many years in South Africa, where they were instrumental in founding the Dimbaza Bible School — which later became what we now know as Dumisani Theological Seminary. We pass on our condolences to her husband Billy and their daughters.

Please remember we have our AGM virtually on the 22nd May this year. We will be launching our new project at this and hopefully have further details on our conference in September. For further details please keep an eye on the website or contact us by email. Funds for this year's project should be in by June at the latest. ●



NORMAN WILLIAM MACLEOD (1941-2021)

BY **REV. FARQUHAR RENWICK**

NORMAN MACLEOD WAS BORN ON A CROFT AT CULKEIN, SUTHERLAND IN 1941. The youngest of a family of six blessed to the home of Norman and Peggy Macleod, both Gaelic speakers, he was well grounded in biblical truth from his earliest years. Times were hard and he had to join in with all the others on the constant round of crofting life.

After attending the local school at Stoer he moved on to Dornoch Academy. This meant adjusting to hostel life, but he adapted to it well. He spent six happy years in Dornoch packing in as much football and golf as he could manage alongside his studies. Holidays were spent making hay, cutting peats, shearing sheep or feeding animals, depending on the time of year.

After leaving school Norman headed to Aberdeen to study for a degree in Civil Engineering. He attended the Dee Street church where he was a fellow student of the late Prof. Douglas MacMillan. Deep and lasting impressions were made.

After graduating he worked for a time for the Roads Department in Argyll before moving to Hamilton County Council in 1966. This was the same year he married Catherine, whom he had met during his student years in Aberdeen. They were to be blessed with three children: John, Shona and Alison.

Later Norman worked for the Strathclyde Region in Glasgow, followed by a move to Lochgilphead in Argyll as Chief Engineer. It was there he joined Lochgilphead Free Church during the ministry of Prof. John MacIntosh. He would go on to serve as an elder and contribute much to church life.

In 2001 Norman retired to North Kessock on the Black Isle. He joined Knockbain Free Church and served for many years as an elder and Session Clerk as well as giving considerable service to Assynt and Stoer Free Church as an Assessor Elder. He served for many years on the Foreign/International Mission Board, making regular trips up and down the road to Edinburgh.

In his latter years he was often to be found on the golf course as he maintained an impressive level of

fitness. He also took great pleasure in interacting with his children and grandchildren in Norway and America as well as those living in Scotland.

Norman's demise at the end came suddenly and unexpectedly but he bore the illness to which he would succumb with courage and dignity. There was an air of tranquil acceptance right up to the end. He knew the One in whom he had trusted and it was indeed a case of grace for the hour. He was ever grateful that he spent his final lap on this earth in his own home, nursed untiringly by his beloved wife Catherine and the Community Health Teams.

He is mourned by Catherine; his son John and his partner, Janne; his daughter Shona and her husband, Simon; his daughter Alison; and his grandchildren, Kaia, Ailsa, Beth, Fin, Errin and Rory, as well as the local and wider church and community. ●

Dear in God's sight is his saints' death
Psalm 116:15



QUOTATIONS:

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

Herman Bavinck

CARL TRUEMAN DELIVERS ANNUAL LECTURE IN CHURCH HISTORY

ON THURSDAY 4TH MARCH, ETS WAS DELIGHTED TO WELCOME DR CARL TRUEMAN AS THE SPEAKER AT THE ANNUAL LECTURE IN CHURCH HISTORY. Dr Trueman is professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Grove City College, Pennsylvania, and the title of his lecture was 'The Other Genevan: Rousseau and the Rise of the Modern Mind'. Jean Jacques Rousseau lived from 1712 until 1778. He was born in Geneva, and the reason he is 'the Other Genevan' is to draw a contrast with John Calvin, who, although not born in Geneva, is very much associated with the Swiss city. Who was Rousseau? Well, he was a bit of genius really; a philosopher, civil servant, composer, novelist, and political theorist. A lot of what Rousseau taught was influential in the French Revolution, which took place about 15 years after he died.

But the great point that Dr Trueman made in his lecture was that Rousseau didn't just influence things 200 years ago. His writings have also had a big influence on our world today.

Dr Trueman explained that one of the key things Rousseau taught was that the true location of personal identity is on the inside. In other words, if you want to know who you really are, you need to look inward and you need to be yourself. But not only that, Rousseau also taught that that inward self is fundamentally good and the reason that people do bad things is not because people are bad on the inside. It is because the pressures and influences of society around us lead us astray, preventing us from being our true selves. According to Rousseau, the problems that exist in the world are not the fault of individuals. The problems come from the social pressures around us that stop us from being ourselves.

Rousseau also applied this inward focus to ethics. If the inward self is where we find real truth and meaning, he thought, then it is by looking within ourselves that we also discover what is right and wrong. For Rousseau, the foundation of ethics moves away from an external standard, towards an inward personal sentiment. In other words, something is right or wrong if it feels right or wrong. And if everyone is being true to themselves, they will also treat others as they would like to be treated,

thus allowing others to be true to themselves as well. And because everyone is basically good, then the more people are their authentic selves, the better things will be.

Dr Trueman pointed out that this is exactly how people think today. Over 200 years after Rousseau, we live in a world where individual identity is very much an inward concept – so much so that our inward identity might not be the same as our external bodies. Moreover, any constraints that society imposes that prevent people from being themselves are bad and should be changed. What we see today is the fruit of ideas that emerged centuries ago in thinkers like Rousseau. What does this all mean for Christians? Well, it teaches (at least) three important lessons.

One: history is very important and very cool. Dr Trueman's lecture was a brilliant reminder that the past has a huge influence on the present. To understand our world today, we definitely need to learn about what people like Rousseau taught in the past (which is why history is important), and it is actually quite amazing to see how things fit together (which is why history is very cool!).

Two: if there is ever a battle between the Bible and philosophy, the Bible always wins. Rousseau reminds us that philosophies that move us away from the Bible never actually work. Rousseau wanted to stop external pressures forcing people to think in a certain way. But, ironically, that's exactly what he created. Rousseau's teaching about bad external pressures in society has actually produced a society that is putting huge pressure on us to think in a certain way.

And three: what humanity really needs never changes. Rousseau reminds us that people are desperately looking for an inward peace. Rousseau was a genius, but underneath he was really a troubled mind looking for answers. The world he has shaped today is full of exactly the same kind of people. The reason people are looking inwardly to find themselves is not because they feel wonderful, it is because they feel lost. And, of course, that's exactly the kind of people that Jesus has come to seek and to save. ●

APR/MAY 2021 PRAYER DIARY

Please send requests to Dayspring MacLeod (dayspring.macleod@icloud.com). This month we will be focusing largely on Scotland.

Wed 7th–Fri 9th

The Free Church said farewell to one of its most treasured examples and greatest prayer warriors in April as Elizabeth Graham went to be with the Lord. Please keep her husband Billy and daughters Ruth and Anne in your prayers, along with the grandchildren and a great multitude of friends and loved ones.

Sat 10th–Mon 12th

Pray for all those who have been affected by abuse by church leaders. There have been several such cases in the press lately, bringing shame on the Church and deep pain to those whose faith has been shaken by it. Pray for your own minister and elders, that God would keep arrogance and temptation far from them, and that their hearts would be tender and accountable to him. We must always be bringing our leaders before the Lord, as Satan loves to attack those in authority. May God protect them.

Tues 13th–Thurs 15th

Pray specifically for our carers, who are often left with very few resources or support to help some of our most vulnerable people. Ask the Lord to tenderly shepherd those who sacrifice so much, and that they would receive greater government help as the pandemic has shown how much quiet work they do. They should not have to 'run on empty'. Can you support a carer you know with prayer and simple needs?

Fri 16th–Sun 18th

Tuesday sees most Scottish children going back to school after the Easter holiday. Pray for those who are feeling anxious after so much disruption in the past 13 months. May the Lord strengthen our wonderful Christian teachers, too, so they may encourage and support children as best they can, while finding rest for their own souls too.

Mon 19th–Wed 21st

On these days surrounding the Queen's birthday, pray that God would continue to uphold her in the courage and conviction of her faith, which is such a testimony to the whole nation. Pray for her comfort surrounding family upsets, that there might be reconciliation and forgiveness, and that the Lord would also open the eyes of those in her family who do not recognise him as their King.

Thurs 22nd–Sat 24th

Women from St Columba's and associated folks have started Sparkle Sisters, a brilliant initiative providing good quality clothes, pampering, refreshments and friendship to women who are homeless or struggling financially. Pray they'll be able to renew contacts and serve those in need as restrictions loosen. What a wonderful way to 'wash the feet' (and paint the toenails!) of those who can be so marginalised!

Sun 25th–Tues 27th

Scotland will hopefully start a major transition out of lockdown this week. Give thanks for opportunities that are being restored, and ask God's protection on the nation as we continue to fight this illness. Pray for endurance as we must still wait for so many things to resume, especially those that are separated from family.

Wed 28th–Fri 30th

Give thanks for the WfM finding a new treasurer and for all the wonderful work they do in supporting mission at home and abroad. Pray for the committee to be motivated and passionate about their work, and that those they benefit would get a real sense of Jesus' love, warmth and abundance through their fundraising and prayer.

Sat 1st–Mon 3rd

Give thanks for the life of Knockbain elder Norman MacLeod, and remember his wife Catherine, along with their children and grandchildren. Pray that his testimony of grace and courage in death would be a witness to many of the peace that only Christ gives.

Tues 4th–Thurs 6th

This is of course the week of the Scottish elections. Leading up to Election Day on the 6th, pray for voters to choose wisely and with clarity and good reasoning. Ask the Lord that his will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven, and that he would be preparing both the hearts of the voters and of the candidates to do his will.

Fri 7th–Sun 9th

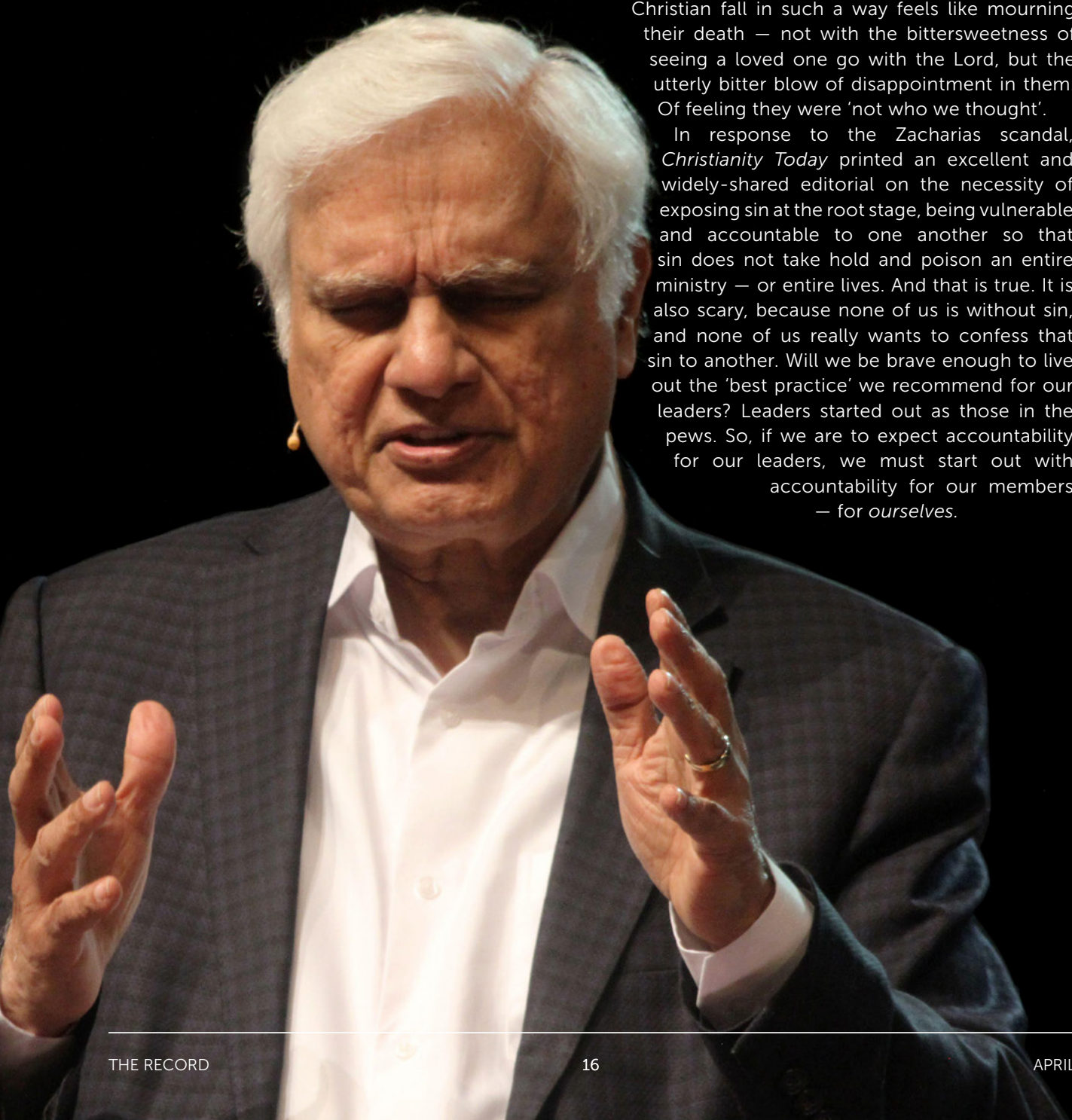
In the aftermath of the vote, pray for the unity of Scotland – we are a nation with divisions over independence, identity politics, and much else. Pray especially that Christians would keep 'first things first', and would be the light and character of Christ even in discussions with those on the opposite side of the issues. Gordon Matheson's article this month is so helpful for keeping a godly perspective!

LEGACY AFTER SIN

When a leader seems to fall away from God, what is left of their work? **DAYSPRING MACLEOD** ponders the example of Ravi Zacharias

ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN IN THE CHURCH FOR VERY LONG HAS EXPERIENCED THE HEARTBREAK OF SEEING A BELOVED CHRISTIAN LEADER — WHETHER FAMOUS OR FRIEND — FALL AWAY FROM THE FAITH, OR FROM THE MINISTRY, OR SULLY THEIR WITNESS. The latest and most public example of this is the exposure of Ravi Zacharias' pattern of sexual abuse. Seeing a prolific Christian fall in such a way feels like mourning their death — not with the bittersweetness of seeing a loved one go with the Lord, but the utterly bitter blow of disappointment in them. Of feeling they were 'not who we thought'.

In response to the Zacharias scandal, *Christianity Today* printed an excellent and widely-shared editorial on the necessity of exposing sin at the root stage, being vulnerable and accountable to one another so that sin does not take hold and poison an entire ministry — or entire lives. And that is true. It is also scary, because none of us is without sin, and none of us really wants to confess that sin to another. Will we be brave enough to live out the 'best practice' we recommend for our leaders? Leaders started out as those in the pews. So, if we are to expect accountability for our leaders, we must start out with accountability for our members — for ourselves.



I've often wondered what to make of the legacy of those who have publicly and spectacularly sinned, or have left the faith, or have done damage to the cause of Christ. If we see how inconsistent they were, is it then wrong to benefit from the things they said and did when they were still walking with the Lord? Is there anything we can still learn and enjoy from their works — or is it all sullied?

I wrestled with that question for a couple of years before I remembered the example of Solomon. This was a man who had not only the greatest intellectual wisdom in the world, but who also plainly loved and rejoiced in the Lord. It's impossible not to be moved by his speech at the dedication of the Temple. He understood that his wisdom was not inherent in himself, but that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. In Ecclesiastes he expounded how life is meaningless apart from the Lord who gives it meaning. In his Canticle he explored as no one else has done the incredible intimacy of a loving God with his people.

And yet, like so many Christian leaders, sex and power led to Solomon's downfall, with devastating consequences — the fracturing of his kingdom and its turning away from the Lord. What leaders do matters. The moral character of a leader matters. His heart turned away after women, and no doubt the worldly power that his many royal alliances represented. He compromised with his actions, and then with his heart. He did not submit himself to the rule that God gave *all* his people — from the common to the king — to marry within the faith in order to keep their worship pure. When leaders decide they are above God's law, due to their status or their success, or that they can 'handle' a little bit of sin without letting it rule them — the battle is lost. They corrupt the very thing they rejoiced in: God's work in them.

And yet — and yet — Solomon's writings are included in our holy Scripture. The wisdom in them is eternal, is God-breathed. God did his perfect work out of an imperfect vessel. Does he not always do that, in every case except that of Jesus himself? Each one of us has sins as egregious as Solomon's, as Ravi Zacharias', hidden within our hearts. Does that mean that nothing we have ever done for God's kingdom has any worth or beauty? No, it means that God has sanctified even the poor offerings we have made toward his great Gospel. There would be no hope otherwise.

If we learned and benefited only from the work of perfect Christians, we would have to 'redact' every word in our Bibles that isn't written in red! 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 says this:

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

These are sobering words. Looking back on what I have produced in my life, I see a lot of hay, wood and stubble. I think, and hope — though only God can judge — that there is also some treasure. Oh Lord, burn up all the worthless things NOW, so that I can produce gold for you in my time on earth! How I long to be single-minded for Christ, not distracted by ambition or earthly pleasures or an impatient and self-obsessed heart. How far I am from it still — but filled with joy to know that he has not yet finished his work in me.

One of the wonderful things about the Bible is how it exposes the sin of 'heroes' of our faith. Is it wrong to be encouraged that they often failed, even as we often fail? In Solomon's case, we have not only benefited from his wisdom and initial love

of the Lord, we have also been given a warning in his falling away. The Bible is not full of platitudes about how coming to God fixes our hearts immediately,

and woe to him that puts a foot wrong afterward. It is chock-full of the ups and downs and struggles and griefs and forgiveness that we have all experienced. One of the verses that gives me great comfort is Psalm 37:24, 'though [a good man] stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with this hand'. This verse is hope for me, and for you, and for those you love, and for those Christians whom we have seen publicly stumble. Through redemption, and repentance, we don't have to 'stay down'. Christ himself holds our hand and raises us back up.

We cannot judge the heart or the ultimate end of Ravi Zacharias, or any other Christian who has 'erred grievously'. Thank God, that work belongs only to him! But we should learn both from the righteous and grace-filled work that Zacharias did in his life — and the example of his hidden sin. We should learn to be accountable for the state of our hearts before God. We should learn to pray for our leaders, even (especially) the ones we see as totally godly and above reproach, that they not be overcome by temptation. And we should pray for the courage and humility to get up again when — not if — we stumble. ●

REPORT FROM INDIA

BY **REV. DR DONALD M MACDONALD**

Compiled from reports by Rev. Samit Mishra of Presbyterian Free Church (PFC) and Mr Neeti Raj Nand of Lakhnadon Christian Hospital (LCH)

ANTI-CONVERSION ORDINANCE

Prayer is urgently requested because the Madhya Pradesh State Government has just replaced the 1968 Freedom of Religion Act with the Freedom of Religion Ordinance 2021, which is even more strict in controlling conversion. The Ordinance prohibits conversion of religion through: (i) coercion, force, misrepresentation, undue influence, and allurement, or (ii) fraud, or (iii) marriage. A marriage involving religious conversion will be declared null and void: (i) if it was done with an intent to convert a person, and (ii) if the conversion took place through any of the above prohibited means. The Ordinance also prohibits a person from abetting and conspiring to such conversions. A conversion by any of these means will be deemed null and void. However, an individual reconverting to his/her parental religion will not be deemed as conversion.

This is already being used by extremist Hindu groups to accuse pastors, evangelists and others of unlawful conversion. Almost 30 people have been charged so far, some of them in Seoni District. Most of those arrested are Christians, but some are Muslims charged with so-called "Love-Jihad", illegally converting girls by marriage. Penalties of imprisonment from 3-10 years and huge fines are prescribed.

Anyone intending to convert and the officiating religious official must give 60 days' notice to the District Magistrate. One of the worst features is that the burden of proof of the lawfulness of the conversion is assigned to the accused person. Please pray for those already charged and for those who will defend them in court, that they would be fairly dealt with. Also pray for possible appeals to higher courts.

COVID PANDEMIC

The PFC is extremely grateful for the financial help sent by the Free Church during the pandemic. This is still being used to help support church and mission school workers during a time of reduced income as well as to distribute food aid to 1200 needy people in the communities where they have churches or church plants. They have also distributed masks, sanitisers, and other equipment to people at various stages of the pandemic.

The spread of the virus locally seems to have

slowed down considerably and places of worship have been open since October. In church services, they still observe COVID guidelines. They have not started house meetings yet, but meet for prayer in the church building. Weekly online prayer and Bible study is going on, and this is especially useful for teaching the young people. The youth of the Church organised an online symposium on baptism on Reformation Day, 31st October, and this was attended by more than 70 leaders from across India.

NEW HINDI CATECHISM

After two years of work, Rev. Samit Mishra has produced a modern Hindi translation of the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms with Scripture references. They are due to be published in February 2021 in a book which also contains a Sunday School syllabus based on the Shorter Catechism. This will be very useful to teach Christian doctrine to both younger and older readers.



Rev Samit Mishra

MISSION SCHOOLS

These have been closed for most of the pandemic, making it difficult to collect fees. Standard 10 and 12 pupils are attending for preparation for their State Board examinations in April/May. Chhapara Mission School has been designated as a COVID vaccination centre by the Government. Lakhnadon Mission School is suffering financially from competition from other private schools, as well as because of the lockdown. It is planned to introduce an English medium stream this year and this will attract more pupils. The money sent by the Free Church last year has been partly used to support school staff in the absence of fee income and they are extremely grateful for this.



Church planters at a conference in Chhapara

CHURCH PLANTING

The church building at Kahani (15 miles from Lakhnadon) is almost complete. The parsonage has been completed and is used for meetings meantime. Please pray for Rev. Fakir Chand as he ministers there. The PFC is grateful for the financial help received from the Free Church for this building. This is now the fifth congregation of PFC to have a church and parsonage. The other church plants associated with the Free Church are Bhimgarh near Chhapara in Seoni District, two in Dindori District, one in Chhindwara District and four in Maharashtra State.



Some of the Kahani congregation



Kahani Church and manse

DIPLOMA IN THEOLOGY

The PFC is now almost completing the delivery of the third Diploma course run in conjunction with Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS), Dehra Dun, using the Hindi language. Nineteen were enrolled and fourteen will be awarded the Diploma. In the previous courses 36 were enrolled

and 26 were awarded. Many of the students are independent church planters and they appreciate the solid biblical, Reformed teaching. Many are poorly supported financially, but the PFC is not in a position to offer more support until it can sustain and strengthen the work it has already started. PTS is considering upgrading the Diploma to a BTh course from 2022 and this would make it even more attractive.



PFC Presbytery (Rev Samit Mishra 4th from left)

LAKHNADON CHRISTIAN HOSPITAL

As previously reported, the hospital has been virtually closed for two years as no doctor was available. Many staff were transferred to other Emmanuel Hospital Association units. The administrator, Mr Neeti Raj Nand, and his wife, nurse Shanti, continue to look after the property and she provides palliative care in the community up to 30 km from the hospital. Because of lack of income the hospital is in financial deficit. LCH has had some support from other Emmanuel Hospital Association units, but they are also under severe pressure due to the COVID pandemic. There is also danger of encroachment on the property.

Emmanuel Hospital Association now has identified a doctor couple, including a surgeon, to serve in LCH from June/July 2021. They will also have to assemble the necessary nursing and paramedical staff, and the buildings need renovation. DVN Netherlands, of the Reformed Churches, who have helped PFC, the schools and the hospital in the recent past, are keen to support the work once the new team is in place. It would be wonderful if friends in the Free Church, who supported the medical work throughout the twentieth century, could help out at this critical time. Donations can be sent through the Free Church Offices – please contact Mairi MacPherson at mission@freechurch.org for details.

It is encouraging to hear of the growth of the church despite the many problems it faces. It is also good to hear of a young Christian medical couple willing to serve in rural India. The dedicated service of Christian educational and medical work over the last century is a powerful witness to the reality of the gospel and can disarm the efforts of extremists to stir up anti-Christian feelings.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW PART 03 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 04: CONSUMMATION

Photo ©Надя Ветрова – stock.adobe.com

If the church in Scotland needs a reorientation it is this: we are the fearful Israelites in the story of David and Goliath.

TAKING OUR STORY BEYOND THE EVENTS OF THE CROSS AND JESUS' RESURRECTION, THE EXPERIENCE OF REDEEMED HUMANITY FALLS INTO TWO STATES.

Initially there is a period of 'in between' – Christ has risen, yet to return. Ultimately there is our eternal destiny: the hope and expectation of the resurrection, the merger of the other world (and the immediate presence of God) with our reality in the new Heavens and the New Earth.

It is tempting to entertain a philosophy like classical Greek Stoicism – to view the material world as evil and temporary. In light of the Christian hope, we can be tempted to long for release to a blissful ever after. However, the 'in between' state of redeemed humanity cannot be treated as a mere oversight on God's part, as if the only bit that matters is getting saved, and then just making it through to the end. God has ordained that his people remain here for a season as disciples, evangelists, and citizens of his Father's Kingdom; as pilgrims on the earth.

The experience of the Church in the world, awaiting Christ's return, is both daunting and liberating. It is an intimidating prospect because the world, having hated our Lord, will hate his disciples. But the church remains to be salt and light in the world – and it does so with an assurance about the final outcome. And that is liberating. The outcome is not in doubt.

The process of how that outcome will be arrived at is not so clear. Will Christ come and usher in a millennial kingdom before the real end comes? Will there be a particularly great tribulation? Will the church on earth see a period of great evangelistic success, transforming the world before Christ's return? These sorts of questions depend on the way we interpret the Book of Revelation.

Personally, I feel the fixation with working out the exact pattern God will use to unveil his eternal purpose is futile – his ways are not our ways. The fulfilment of prophecy is startling. The first coming was not what the majority of Jews expected. So, too, the Second Coming will astonish us. It is enough for me to know this: Jesus wins.

It's important to grasp that aspect of our worldview. Trying to work out ahead of time what God is doing will shape our politics. Back in the '90s, one particular interpretation made out that Tony Blair would soon be revealed as the Antichrist, uniting Europe and heralding the End Times – therefore, it would be wrong to vote for New Labour. As they say, that aged well! Our politics will not dictate the timing of God's plans – our focus must be on being pilgrim disciples, and striving to bring forth the conditions for humanity to flourish.

HOPE

Human flourishing requires hope. Without the sense that our work, or effort, will achieve something, it becomes drudgery. Near limitless human energy is expended in the pursuit of ultimately hopeless endeavours. But the anticipated goal of God's purposes points us to see where true hope is to be found. In one sense, all Christian endeavour in political engagement is an experiment in hope: the anticipation that our nation can be set on a fruitful path towards a common good measured by God's standards.

But our worldview should lead us to be cautious in where we invest our hope. Or in whom. Our ultimate hope should give us a sense of perspective, not only in the final outcome of this world's story, but in the short term. There's a dreadful sense that Christian morality is on the slide in Scotland. Post-Christian culture is heading back into the morality of might that characterised the Greco-Roman world.

If the church in Scotland needs a reorientation it is this: we are the fearful Israelites in the story of David and Goliath. Jesus has already vanquished the most powerful opponent we face. We are therefore at a point where we should rise as one and engage the routing evil.

Take climate change as an example. We know we are doing serious damage to the environment. The ensuing climate change we are all contributing to will have disastrous consequences impacting most devastatingly, and most immediately, the poorest communities on earth. We are already witnessing it in sub-Saharan Africa. The waves of displaced people – not the refugees from war, but more so the ones we dismiss as 'economic migrants' – are just the beginnings of a vast human tragedy.

We have very limited tools to create change in people's habits. Fear and the anger it brings, not hope and joy, are the driving forces in most responses, Greta Thunberg's celebrated rage being a prime example. In Scotland, the Green agenda has been synonymous with the most progressive social agenda – fear, again, that (biblical) norms are a component in the damage we are wreaking as a species.

The Christian worldview offers a better, more hopeful, alternative. The New Heavens and the New Earth will not be an environment magically protected from catastrophe. Instead we will act in harmony with all of God's created order. There can be no legitimate disconnect from that in the present – unless we think it is OK to go on sinning! Renewed humanity is not a destructive consumer. Christ, as the second Adam,

It's quite easy to distance ourselves from the person who is really political (or who has different politics!), but they need your fellowship and prayer.

creates in his disciples a new heart, to rightly pursue the creation mandates given to the first Adam – to live as a gardener in God's world. That new heart for walking in God's ways should offer hope in a world mired in fear. Elections are an opportunity to express that.

RECONCILIATION

Human flourishing is impossible while barriers to fellowship remain. Tribalism – whether political, ideological or religious – hinders any community. Such division is overcome only through biblical patterns of reconciliation: specifically, repentance and forgiveness. The New Testament church lives this out, removing barriers between slave and free, etc.

There are significant challenges in how we implement this in Scotland. Our political landscape is sharply divided in particular on the question of Scottish independence. That division seeps into everything. For example, the Committee set up to investigate what went wrong with internal grievance procedures within the Scottish Government (mistakes that led to the loss of nearly one million pounds in costly litigation) is divided essentially on Unionist/Nationalist lines. Because it is a binary question, with no room to fudge a compromise, our society faces inevitable division.

Scotland needs to see good patterns of reconciliation. One place to start is within the church. We need to be really deliberate about how we speak to one another around divisive political issues. Deliberate to avoid attacking the person – so called *ad hominem* attacks. Deliberate to preserve dignity – for example, avoiding using 'Tory' as a slur. Deliberate to speak the truth of our own, and opposing, views. And most of all, deliberate to seek reconciliation when these lines are crossed – as they will be.

Going into this election, congregations, with all we've learned about doing events online and with physical distancing in place, can be of service in our communities. Organise hustings events – and be careful to set the tone well.

Pastoral care will remain important in our witness. Elections as divisive and as investment-demanding as this one looks set to be can take a terrible toll on people. It's easy for personal piety to take second place to the busy demands of political involvement – and that can lead to Christian brothers and sisters becoming a bit isolated from fellowship, and from God. It's quite easy to distance ourselves from the person who is really political (or who has different politics!), but they need your fellowship and prayer.

SERIES CONCLUSION

If you were looking for a series that would dissect issue by issue the policies we can support, and the parties we might vote for, this series hasn't delivered. Thankfully, there are great resources available for that! Check out CARE Scotland, the Christian Institute, and Evangelical Alliance, who all produce excellent briefings on specific issues.

Instead, the focus of this series has been to see how a Christian worldview shapes our approach more generally. The Creation narrative should have a profound bearing on how we approach so many of the issues that are central to all politics. Human dignity, identity politics and the ever-evolving challenges of human rights are all emotionally charged areas. The rapid change in public policy in these areas reflects a deep-rooted change that has taken place in how Scots think about the world. We need to be sure about our worldview's foundations to go forward.

The reality of the Fall and sin need to shape our perspective on reality. It's so easy to be swept along with the spin that seems part of politics today. Our doctrine of sin should teach that we don't need spin to be deceived – our hearts are perfectly capable of self-deception. It should remind us to pray the simple prayer: 'Lord, show me myself.'

As we think about the reality of who Jesus is, and what he accomplished, we should constantly seek to correct our perspective. Jesus' Lordship easily overturns all human institutions. This is not because we want a rigid theocracy, but because he assures human liberty through the new hearts he gives us.

A Christian worldview, arranged along these kinds of priorities, will be challenging to articulate in our society. But more challenging will be the radical ideal of living out the individual character these priorities call us to.

It is not easy to see the Image of God in those who strongly disagree with us!

It is tempting to downplay the extent of our own fallenness, especially when we are successful!

In a culture war, where hegemony is bitterly fought over, remembering that 'Jesus is Lord' is not just a campaign slogan.

Sustaining hope when our initiatives fail requires that we be rooted deep in the life-giving streams that flow from God himself.

We ourselves need to flourish, and so may we be like a tree planted by a river. ●

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

HEAVENLY FATHER, we bow before you and reflect, in the spirit of thanksgiving and praise, on that great fact of history, the rising from the dead of the Lord Jesus.

We give thanks for Jesus, risen and exalted. Lift our eyes, we pray, high into the heavens, to the One who sits on the Throne of God.

We thank you for the Lord's Day, for that day in every week in which we are reminded of the resurrection, a day when we rejoice and celebrate that Jesus is Lord. On that day, with believers throughout the world and throughout the gospel age, we can say, 'The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed!'

We thank you that in the resurrection you declare so clearly that Jesus' incarnation, his becoming a human as we are, was not just for the years of his humiliation. The Son of God is the Son of Mary for all eternity.

The resurrection of Jesus authenticates the Bible's claims about Jesus' death, about God's call for all men to repent, and about eternal life that is offered to us. We thank you for the Gospel!

We thank you that the resurrection was a creative act of the triune God that surpassed even the creation of the world. In the resurrection body of Jesus we see your greatest creative work.

We thank you that Jesus' resurrection was the first-fruits of a great harvest in which we will be part. We thank you for the hope that this gives us: that if we die in Jesus, then we will be raised from death to newness of life with a body like the body which Jesus has. And so we look to a future beyond the grave, for Jesus has defeated sin and sickness and death.

We worship and adore our risen Saviour; we praise him and we remember that he who is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother is also the one to whom you have given all power on heaven and on earth. And so we tremble, but in faith come boldly to the throne of grace.

We thank you that when our great high priest entered into heaven once for all, having made eternal sacrifice for sin, he fulfilled the type of the Old Testament high priest entering the Holy of Holies bearing the symbol of life, the shed blood of the sacrificed beast. Jesus entered heaven bearing his newly created body, the epitome of Life, the radiance of the glory of God, the exalted, glorious priest after the order of Melchizedek.

We thank you too for the motivation for mission that flows from the resurrection. The resurrected Jesus gave the Great Commission. And it was the resurrected Jesus who fulfilled his promise and, having returned to heaven, asked his father to send the Holy Spirit, who came at Pentecost. We have a unique Gospel, a Gospel of life and promise. There is no other name by which we can be saved but the name of Jesus, our risen Saviour, who himself declared, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live...'

And so we give thanks, in wonder and praise, for the great fact of the resurrection.

The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed — glory to his name.

Amen ●



A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING
FOR THE RESURRECTION

WHY DID GOD RAISE JESUS FROM DEATH?

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about
Jesus' resurrection

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



Re: Invisible Hands, February 2021

Dear Mr Macdonald

Your Editorial 'Invisible Hands: The Pursuit of Prosperity in a Servant Economy' was unusual given that consideration of Christian ethics rarely includes economic life. For that reason what you did was brave. Much of what you said about substantially secularised economics represented fair comment. That said, two points of disagreement:

Matthew 22:39b '*...you shall love your neighbour as yourself*' (ESV). This suggests to me that self-interested behaviour is not necessarily inappropriate and certainly not inevitably sinful, although it falls short of the sort of 'servant' or 'gracious' actions described elsewhere in your editorial. To some extent, economics since Adam Smith in the mid-18th century has been an analysis of how far self-interested behaviour does or does not produce socially desirable outcomes. Incidentally, for all his probable deism Smith did emphasise the role of the rule of law, government intervention and conscience.

You write, '*...there is no Christian contribution among the key milestones of economics*'. That goes too far. Until about 1850 in Britain and the late 19th century in the USA most academic/professional economists were also clergymen. Thomas Chalmers always thought that his ability in 'mathematics' (i.e. economic theory) was a tool to use to the glory of God. One of Chalmers's biographers (H. Watt, 1943, p. 86) notes how Chalmers once said one of his chief earthly ambitions was to contribute to developing economic theory (see also my *Thomas Chalmers and the Struggle for a Christian Nation* (2018)).

Sadly, for some decades now, there has been something of a cold war between theologians and economists given their very different views of human nature. Theologians tend to view economists as fundamentally amoral and the economists tend to regard theologians as vague sentimentalists. The value of this editorial is that it contributes to a necessary dialogue between the two disciplines.

Yours sincerely

Esmond Birnie
(Senior Economist, Ulster University)

We would love to hear from you...please write the editor at:
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Edinburgh, EH1 2LS
or e-mail editor@freechurch.org

the HOPE MAIL INITIATIVE

Can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

We are a team of four British-Korean Christian friends who met through university and church in London.

As the HOPE MAIL Team, each of us has a different role: Christina, our founder, is in charge of production; MJ is Instagram Content Manager and writes our messages; Hej, treasurer and admin; and Bo, Communications officer. Although we are at different stages in life, some of us working and some studying, we are all united in Christ Jesus.

What is the HOPE MAIL Initiative?

The HOPE MAIL Initiative is a UK-based Christian organisation. Our mission is to equip people to send Christ's hope to and encourage their loved ones by sharing the Word and love of God with them! Anyone can send a HOPE MAIL, a package containing verse cards, postcards, stickers and handwritten messages of encouragement, to anyone in the world, for free!

Prayer is also a big part of our mission, and we meet weekly to pray for the Initiative and its recipients.

What was your inspiration for the HOPE MAIL Initiative? How did it come about?

Our founder, Christina, was reflecting on how we can love our neighbours even during these socially-distanced circumstances. She runs a small business, selling Christian stickers and cards, and so realised that this God-given talent could be used to equip people to better love, encourage and send much needed hope to their neighbours – even from a distance! Thus The HOPE MAIL Initiative was born! Then, there was a clear need for prayer and so a prayer group was formed several weeks later, which grew into our current Team.



HOPE MAIL Initiative founder, Chris Kil



How do you pick which verses to use?

We choose verses that are based on the hope of God, that is Jesus Christ, through prayer, reflecting on the Bible and sermons.

How important is design/art to your work? What part does it play in communicating the message?

A very big part! We feel that art can be used as a vessel to glorify God and we hope that the intentional simplicity of our designs does not distract from, but magnifies and draws attention to, his Word.

What are your aims and aspirations for HOPE MAIL?

We are very excited for the future of the HOPE MAIL Initiative. Our aim is to continue the work we are doing now, equipping people to share hope, with Jesus being the centre, and drawing them to God. Our aspiration is to grow and encourage people worldwide, perhaps even expanding to have headquarters in other countries! Having said that, we have utter faith that God will take us where we need to be, when we need to be there, and provide the means and strength to do his work. Whatever his plans are, we will always be grateful for, and content in, his perfect will.

How can people get involved or support your work?

Please pray with us – we share our weekly prayer points on our Instagram: [@thehopemmailinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/thehopemmailinitiative)

Supporting our Instagram will help raise awareness of the Initiative so that more people can send hope to and encourage their loved ones. You can also help fund the Initiative via PayPal or ko-fi, or by buying HOPE MAIL products. To find out more, please visit our Instagram [@thehopemmailinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/thehopemmailinitiative) or ko-fi.com/thehopemmailinitiative.

Lastly, the best way – send a HOPE MAIL. The online form can be found on our Instagram bio, or accessed at tinyurl.com/y4d4qv5h. Send someone you love a reminder of God's hope today! ●

PLATES FROM THE PEWS



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

I'm Angus MacRae, aged 53. I am delighted to be married to Ann, who is a much better chef than me! We have three adult children, Anna, a nurse in Edinburgh; Eilidh, a physio married to Andrew MacLeod, one of the pastors in Tain and Fearn; and Iain, who still lives with us and works for the Scottish Ambulance Service at mobile Covid testing centres. I grew up in the Isle of Lewis but moved to Edinburgh in 1985 for university and to train for the ministry. I was ordained in Kilwinning in 1992, and married Ann in 1993. She is a doctor caring for patients with addictions and has always been a huge support to me in life and ministry. She gives me and our family her constant love and helps the church with her musical talents and her care for others. God has given us different abilities that seem to match up. We spent eight years in North Ayrshire, then 19 years at Dingwall and Strathpeffer in Ross-shire. In March 2020, shortly after lockdown began, I accepted a call to the Free North Church in the city centre of Inverness. We enjoy the real beauty of our new city and surroundings, including getting out into the mountains and forests. But we also see ugly things in our city that only the beauty of the gospel can heal.



What are some favourite Bible verses or hymns?

The answer probably changes all the time. I love the Psalms and the four Gospels, especially John's Gospel. God used Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus to call me into ministry. These short letters still shape me as a pastor-teacher. I have been relying this week on Psalms 18 and 27, being reminded that God is my Light, my Rock, my Shield, the ever faithful God of my salvation. I need to depend on God's unchanging character, trusting His good word and waiting for Him. Yesterday I was thinking about the old hymn,

My Hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness...on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. I am also blessed by 'modern classic' praise songs with good and faithful lyrics, particularly songs by Sovereign Grace, Getty Music and City Alight. One that comes to mind is Sandra McCracken's song, *We Will Feast in the House of Zion*, full of hope for what God will do for his people after this life. I am looking forward to singing again in church when the Covid crisis passes. Singing Psalm 100 again with a large congregation in full voice will be wonderful. I hope soon we can begin to learn some newish songs, such as *Show Us Christ* and *The King in All His Beauty*.

What are some ways the Lord has taught you in your walk with Him?

God often uses troubles to expose our weakness or sins of pride and unbelief. God reveals his faithfulness and mercy as he strips away our unfaithfulness. God taught us as a couple to trust his will when our first child was dangerously ill, having been born two months early. At the time we felt carried along on a wave of loving prayers. We have often been humbled to see God's power to heal and to save in answer to prayer. My walk with God benefited from visiting in East Asia in 2007, spending several weeks with OMF missionaries and local believers in Thailand and Cambodia. My eyes were opened in a new way to spiritual warfare and the victory of Christ. I need the mighty Christ to overcome the same relentless enemy we face in secular Scotland. I am thankful for the vitality the Holy Spirit brings to us through being part of the growing global church. It is good to know our God is on the move everywhere. Our part in his huge purposes may seem very small but we are always under his constant and loving gaze!

God has been kind to us in the past year as we have come alongside his people in the Free North. Making a fresh start in a new home and city while figuring out how to do ministry under public health restrictions has been a challenge. It has forced us to prioritise the main things, the things that only God can do. I am encouraged by some new church members, signs of spiritual maturing and a good response to online worship. God sent us Carrie Marlow, a new staff member now working with women. We enjoy a close and mutually enriching partnership with Chris Davidson and his church planting team in the Merkinch area of Inverness, one of the most deprived areas in Scotland.

RECIPE, TO SERVE 4-6
ADAPTED FROM 'CLASSIC' BY MARY BERRY

4 large skinless boneless chicken breasts,
sliced into bite-sized pieces
2 large onions, sliced
2 to 3 cm fresh ginger, peeled and grated
2 large garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp medium curry powder
1/2 tsp turmeric powder
1/4 tsp ground cloves
200ml chicken stock
1 tbsp mango chutney
200ml double cream
4 dried curry leaves
Salt and pepper
Fresh coriander to serve

Heat 2 tablespoons sunflower oil in a large frying pan. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Brown in two batches over a high heat for 3-4 minutes until golden and sealed and set aside. Then use the pan and another tablespoon of oil to fry the onions over a medium heat for 10 minutes until soft. Add the ginger, garlic and spices. Cook for 30 to 60 seconds. Pour in the stock, add the mango chutney and bring to the boil for a couple of minutes to reduce the liquid slightly. Add the cream and curry leaves and season with salt and pepper. Bring back up to the boil, then add back the chicken, cover with a lid and gently simmer for 5 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Remove the curry leaves, decorate with the coriander leaves and serve with rice and extra mango chutney. The flavour develops nicely if made a day ahead and gently reheated. The dish can be frozen. ●

MALAY CHICKEN CURRY

Do you have any good memories associated with this meal?

Yes, I prepared it for Neil and Dayspring MacLeod when they last stayed with us in July 2019! They and their friends took some brilliant photos of our families, including my parents. My dad became ill soon afterwards and passed away that September. These are precious memories. My wife prepared the same meal yesterday and I dropped it off to a family in our congregation who have just welcomed a new baby boy into their lives. It was great to connect (in a socially distanced way!) with that very happy family and their extremely excited brand-new big sister. I hope they liked the Malay curry ●

(This has been my most popular recipe when served to others since – well, July 2019! I like to add in a sprinkle of cinnamon and serve with couscous. The last folks we made a 'baby meal' for requested it specially! -DM)

Sleepless in Jerusalem

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.

MY HUSBAND'S NAME IS KNOWN ALL OVER THE WORLD, BUT FEW PEOPLE NOTICE ME! His name has been recited regularly across the centuries — all because his path crossed that of Jesus of Nazareth. That miserable phrase, 'suffered under Pontius Pilate', has been repeated time after time after time.

Pontius needed that case like he needed a hole in the head. For Roman civil servants, appointment as procurator of Judea was a poisoned chalice. Judea was an unruly province and I'm afraid to have to say that my husband hasn't always made the wisest of decisions. Bringing in troops with the emperor's bust on their spears when people knew that the Jews regarded that as blasphemy — that wasn't one

of his better moments. And as for diverting temple money to finance the aqueduct — he should have known that would lead to trouble.

When Jesus was paraded before him, poor Pontius was under considerable pressure. He was anxious to avoid the possibility of more adverse reports going in to Rome about maladministration. He certainly didn't ask for the Jesus problem to land on his plate.

Most of us had some inkling of the stir that Jesus had been causing. We had our spies on the ground and there were all sorts of stories going around about the startling things he was saying and doing. Opinions were diverse. Some people hated him with an intense hatred; others regarded him as a potential deliverer from — well, from us, the Romans who had been occupying Judea for some time.

That was the problem for Pontius. So far as Rome is concerned, Caesar rules and Caesar alone, and quite a few potential rivals had been crushed. Sometimes it was a violent business, with our favoured method of execution in evidence. I've seen people being tortured to a slow and agonising death by crucifixion, and it's not a sight for the squeamish.

And now they were screaming for the crucifixion of this Jesus, 'they' being, to our surprise initially,



the religious leaders of the Jews. We might have expected them to *welcome* a possible Messiah, but it looks as if their religiosity was often a cover for naked power. They were determined to get rid of him one way or another. And that's where I come into the picture. I knew there was a lot of turmoil and somehow or other things were going to come to a head. And then — that terrible night. I lay down as usual, but I struggled to drop off, and then when I did I was troubled by weird dreams. They were all about the very Jesus who was being dragged before my husband.

I'd heard about some of the things he was supposed to have said and done and, whatever else they might say, it didn't really sound as if he was a likely rival to Roman dominance. But his enemies were adamant — my husband must sign the death warrant.

But in the dream I saw him as a good and righteous man. Did it come from the gods — or from God? I don't know. There's plenty of precedent for God speaking to people through dreams; the Jews' holy book tells of the dreams of Abraham, Joseph, Solomon and even the likes of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.

Maybe people can be led astray by dreams, ideas that come from somewhere in their subconscious minds, and some have done bizarre and evil things in response to what they thought they heard in a dream. But that *dream* — it wasn't really a nightmare, although I have to say it disturbed me. I couldn't get it out of my head. I kept hearing that the accusations against Jesus were all false. Not only was he no political agitator, but he was no evil-doer of any kind. It seemed to me that his slate was clean, and that my husband would be making a grave mistake if he were to condemn him to death.

What was I to do? It wasn't a world in which we women had influence — at least not in civic affairs. But at least I could try with my own husband! Maybe he would pay heed, or if he was wavering, it might help to tip the balance in favour of dismissing the case.

He was busy that morning, but I sent him a note (a 'text' as you would say), advising him to have nothing to do with Jesus. Of course that was going to be difficult, but I'm sure Pontius himself knew in his heart that he should have nothing to do with condemning the Man to death. I think he always knew that he should have set Jesus free. He had seen many revolutionaries and desperados in his time and it was pretty obvious that Jesus was not one of them.

He tried various ways of getting out of making any decision at all. He tried to shift the onus on to Herod. When that didn't work he tried using the Passover custom of a free pardon for one prisoner. Surely people would shout for Jesus to be released and we could all sleep peacefully in our beds. But, no, they wanted

a rebel released instead. Then he had Jesus scourged in the hope that that would satisfy their blood-lust. He kept saying there was no basis for a charge of sedition, but none of these expedients worked.

My dream backed up his suspicion that there were ulterior motives behind the demand for Jesus' death, and I hoped that my message would persuade my husband to send Caiaphas packing with all the other enemies of Christ. I say 'Christ' — that's the whole question really. Is Jesus actually the Christ, the promised Messiah for whom generation after generation of Jews have been waiting?

All I can say is that I was greatly unsettled by the dream and felt I had to put my oar in. Unfortunately my husband didn't seem to take my advice. Maybe the pressures on him (past mistakes, present pressures, future threat) forced him into a corner and made it pretty well impossible for him to do what he knew he ought to do, both in obedience to his own conscience and in upholding our famous Roman justice.

When it boiled down to a choice between his career and agreeing to Jesus' crucifixion, I knew which way it would go. All it needed was a whisper that if Pontius were to let Jesus go he would be acting against Caesar's interests. That persuaded him to do the dirty deed.

And, anyway, you need a bit of ruthlessness to be a Roman ruler and my husband didn't get to where he was by being weak-kneed. He wanted omelettes and that meant cracking eggs. So Jesus became another statistic in the grim roll of people condemned as rebels against Rome, even if others see them as innocent victims or even martyrs.

But I can't forget that sleepless night. I keep wondering whether this One was different. I mean, it turned out that 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' wasn't by any means the last anyone heard of Jesus. ●

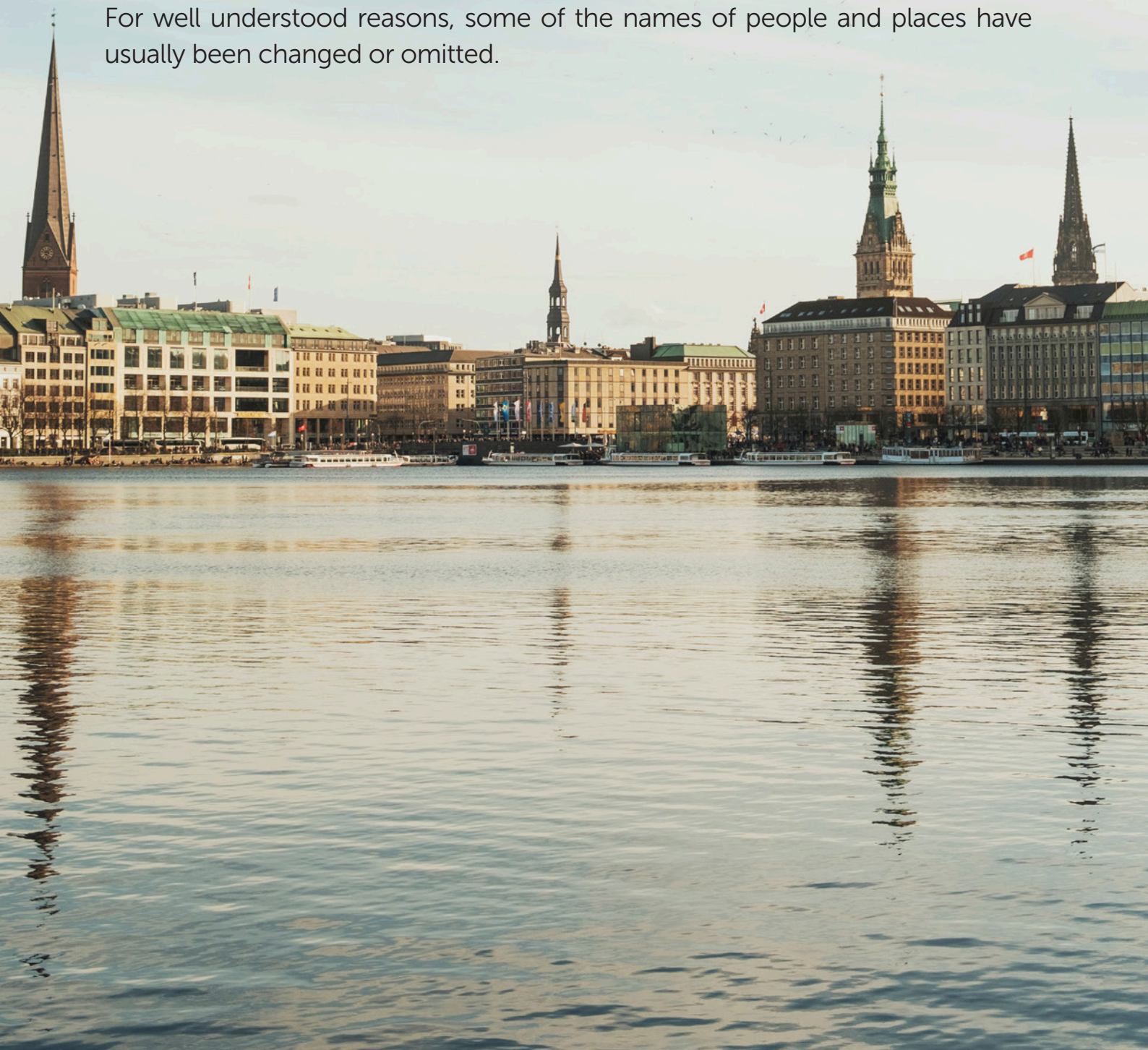
Rev. David J. Randall spent forty years in pastoral ministry in Macduff before retiring in 2010. He has served in a number of locumships, written several books and is a member of the Free Church congregation in Broughty Ferry.



PAGES FROM ADAM'S DIARY

The Story of Mohammed the Laser (Part 3)

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, some of the names of people and places have usually been changed or omitted.



The Gospel is a message of peace from the Prince of Peace in a world drowning in chaos and turmoil.

IN THE LAST TWO ARTICLES, I HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT A DEAR BROTHER OF MINE BY THE NAME OF MOHAMMAD, NICKNAMED LASER, WHOM I MET IN ATHENS, GREECE, YEARS AGO. In those days, before his conversion, he was a notorious thug with a widespread reputation for violence and criminal mischief. I came in contact with him because we desperately needed help to send a young woman back to her husband and child in Central Asia. We were told that Laser could help us and, in fact, he did. However, in subsequent days, in exchange, he wanted to know how he might receive the Holy Spirit so that he would have supernatural power. I explained to him that the principal work of the Holy Spirit was not to give us supernatural power for further indulgence and exploitation of sin but to free us from sin's destructive power and to empower us to do the will of God and deeds of righteousness. I noted that the Holy Spirit fashions, as it were, on the tablets of our souls the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19). We become more and more like the Saviour. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit gives those who believe in Christ's redeeming work of salvation extraordinary courage and grace to live righteously and to be the light in this present darkness.

In response, Laser had said, 'I want to become a Christian and receive the Holy Spirit.' He prayed and made a profession of faith. In the following months, there was a visible change in his life – a true picture of repentance. Later he moved from Greece to Germany where he met a lovely German Christian lady in church and they married. She was tragically killed in a car accident.

He had wanted to receive supernatural power from the Holy Spirit. To survive the death of his wife required such enablement. Very early on it was clear to me that the Spirit of God had turned that sinful man into a fisher of men. Mohammad had an easy way of relating to people and speaking to them about the Lord. He always alluded to his own past as an evidence of the power of the blood of Christ to wash us clean from our sins. In Germany he worked in a depot loading and unloading lorries and spent his earnings to serve our Lord as an itinerate evangelist. Among the people he had led to the Lord was a distinguished professor in the University of Hamburg.

On one of my visits, he and his professor friend organised a gathering and asked me to explain to the audience the Gospel and to also answer the question, 'Why should a Muslim choose Christ?' I began with the statement that followers of Christ do not choose him. He chooses them. I had not chosen Christ, but God, in his unmerited, sovereign, immeasurable grace, had chosen me in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-10). Jesus said, *'You have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit'* (John 15:16). I noted that

every religion and prophet or leader of that religion, as well as every philosophy or school of thought, has a message. The message of Jesus Christ to humanity is the most beautiful, incomparable message I have ever heard. It is called the Gospel, which means Good News. It is good news because it is a message of hope in a despairing world. It is a message of life in a world obsessed with death and destruction (John 10:10). It is good news because it is a message of love in a world filled with hatefulness. Where else do you read, *'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you'* (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:29)? The Lord Jesus' message is a message of forgiveness in a world where men, societies and nations are determined to exact revenge (Luke 6:29; Matthew 18:21-35; 5:38-40). The Gospel is a message of peace from the Prince of Peace in a world drowning in chaos and turmoil.

I went on to elaborate that there are people who were born into this world and their ideas brought humanity pain, suffering, conflict, death and misery. Millions of people have lost their lives as a result of the religious and secular ideas such people conceived. We feel our world would have been so much better if these men had never been born. However, for a moment, try to imagine what kind of a world we would have if Jesus Christ had not come to our world? This Galilean carpenter, who lived for only 33 years, did not have any formal education and did not travel more than 100 miles from where he was born in Bethlehem. He moved around his home country of Israel for three years as an itinerate preacher, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and his followers were a band of mostly misfits. He did not lead an army but captured the hearts of kings and princes, and billions of people throughout the last 2000 years consider him their Saviour and Lord. I am one of them. What Plato, Aristotle, Hume and the religion of my forefathers were not able to do, he did. He brought light into my heart and changed a tomb into a temple of the living God. No religion and no ideology in the history of mankind has had such a positive impact on the world. If I were to recount only a list of schools, universities, hospitals, humanitarian organisations, institutions, and those movements and endeavors which have been the by-products of his person and teaching, it would be a multi-volume encyclopedia. Millions of his followers have gone into the world as missionaries bearing his light and his beautiful message of life and hope; and some, in the process, have given their lives in his service.

After a while, a man amongst the audience began to heckle me. It began with questioning, then mocking, and eventually turned to insults. While puffing on his cigarette and acting like Socrates questioning the beliefs of a schoolboy, he began to ask, 'Where



did Adam find wives for his sons?' I responded, 'I am not certain how your question is relevant to what I have just said. Nonetheless, if I answer your question, will you believe?' He looked at me like a fox ready to outmaneuver its prey. I said to him that the God who created the world out of nothing would not have had any difficulty creating wives for Adam's sons.

Next, 'Do you really believe that the sun stood still?', referring to the biblical account of Joshua 10:12. 'How can anyone with any intelligence believe that?!' he said. I answered that, in fact, astronomers have now pinpointed the date of that event to October 30, 1207 B.C. I am not certain exactly what happened on that day but I do believe that account just as I believe Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday, April 7th on the day of Passover of the Jews, around AD 30. I also believe that he was buried on that day and he rose from the dead sometime early Sunday morning, April 9th, 2000 years ago. He began to laugh.

I turned my gaze to the audience and continued that the God who ordered the laws of physics and rules and reigns in the universe is able to suspend natural laws with absolutely no difficulty. And after all, if we were able to scientifically prove or disprove and verify all the biblical assertions, in what sense would we then require faith? Central to our spiritual journey with God is that we walk by faith and not by sight: *'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible'* (Hebrews 11:1-3). I further explained that after Jesus rose from the dead, he showed himself to many and told one of his doubting disciples, Thomas, who refused to believe he had risen from the dead, *'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'* (John 20:29). It is by faith that I believe Christ rose from the dead. And that is not any less spectacular than God ordering the sun to stand still. By faith we Christians also are waiting the return of Christ to establish a Kingdom without end wherein the righteous and righteousness dwell. I further noted that, 'A greater miracle than the sun standing still is that sinful human beings like me are saved from the abyss of darkness.' My friend Mohammed, who was sitting in the back, was in tears, nodding his head. However, this man moved from question to question. Before I could answer one, he would start asking another. Finally, he asked, 'Did Jesus turn water into wine?' I said, 'Yes!' He said, 'He could have started a profitable tavern.' I retorted, 'His reason for coming to this world was to save sinners lost in their sins. He did not need to start a tavern. He owns the universe, including the very ground upon which you stand, and he also owns the very breath in your nostrils.'

At this point, he placed his hand on his groin and made an exceedingly offensive gesture. It was clear to me that this man's intention was not illumination but disruption. He was there to subvert and sabotage the objectives for

that gathering. I was there to foster faith and he was there to spread doubt. Who he was and how he had come into that congregation, I was not certain. Neither did I know how to stop him from hijacking the meeting. He was working hard to provoke an angry response from me. So, when he made that offensive gesture, I was grieved and felt embarrassed. I bowed my head and, in my heart, I prayed, 'Father, the spirit of your adversary has come into this meeting to dishonour your holy name. It is not me who is being mocked. He is mocking you. I am only your servant trying to sow the seed of belief; he is sowing the seed of unbelief. Please help me.'

As I lifted my eyes from my Bible and looked at him, smugly puffing on his cigarette, he once again placed his hand on his groin as a gesture of defiance and insult. However, this time, no sooner had he done that, when suddenly a long burst of fire jetted out from between his legs. It was as though a rocket engine had been fired off from between his legs, shooting out flames. People around him leapt out of the way to avoid catching fire amidst gasps of shock. He himself flew off his chair, and as he stood up hopping, fire was jetting out from his front and forming a pigtail-like flame from his behind. In seconds, his entire mid-section was engulfed in flames. Several of the men huddled around him and covered him with their jackets to quench the flames. He was taken out to a hospital.

Later we learned that apparently the cigarette lighter in his trouser pocket had begun to leak. And when he put his hand on his groin, the cigarette between his fingers had ignited the lighter fluid and caused the burst of flame shooting out from underneath of his legs from the opening of the cigarette lighter. It was extraordinary that his injuries were minimal. He who had mocked the Lord was now severely mocked. Once we reassembled together, numerous jokes followed. Many in the audience believed that the Lord had kindled a fire under him to shut his mouth. But some dismissed what had happened as coincidence. For me, there was no question who had set the pants of that discourteous, insolent scoffer on fire. I learned early on in my faith that it is a perilous and terrifying thing to ridicule the Lord or his servants since one runs the risk of becoming an object lesson of God's sense of humour or his wrath. The Lord immensely blessed the meeting organised by my friend Mohammad in Hamburg; and after the meeting, several people in that audience committed their lives to Christ. ●

Several readers have asked how they can support Adam's ministry. For information about the Adam Support Group, please contact either:

Evan Macdonald (Chairman)

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POETRY PAGE

GOOD FRIDAY

BY CHRISTINA ROSETTI

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter, weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,
A horror of great darkness at broad noon —
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more
And smite a rock.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was one of the most influential poets of the Victorian era. She was a prolific writer who came to the public's attention in 1862 following the publication of her collection, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Influenced by the Oxford Movement, she identified with the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England. Her faith was a major theme in her poetry. She also wrote the Christmas Carols, 'In the bleak midwinter' and 'Love came down at Christmas'. In *Good Friday*, Rossetti regrets feeling cold and unmoved by Jesus' sacrifice, comparing herself unfavourably with those described in the biblical narrative. Yet, her tone shifts in the final verse, recognising that she needs God himself to move her from spiritual dryness, just as he made water spring from a rock in the desert. ●

BOOK REVIEWS



All of our books this month are great, but we are especially excited about our Book of the Month. A powerhouse of a biography of Thomas Chalmers, it has been highly praised by Principal Iver Martin and Rev. Dr Carl Trueman, amongst others. It really isn't to be missed!

BOTH-AND

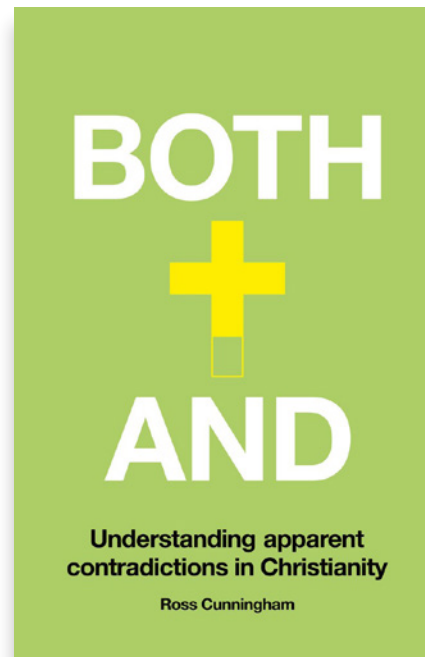
ROSS CUNNINGHAM (2021)

If you want to explore key Christian tenets in a fresh and imaginative format, this is the book for you. Ross Cunningham deftly juxtaposes core truths to expose and address some of the tensions arising from them. The book examines apparent contradictions in the divine nature, then in the experience of salvation, and concludes with apparent contradictions in the characteristics of being a Christian. So, for instance, we learn how God is three and one, how Jesus is God and man, how Christianity involves both perseverance and preservation and how the Christian can be confident and humble.

The author ably demonstrates how these seemingly opposing theological aspects hold together when Scripture is correctly examined. The start of the 23 sections have striking illustrations which cause us to ponder these paradoxes. After reading this book I was enlightened and thankful for such a great salvation. This is a smart book for a smart age, attractively presented and of great use to both new and more experienced Christians and also for explaining the gospel to non-Christians. ●

This book is available from Christian Focus.

Gari Lewis, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Llwynhendy



BOOK OF THE MONTH

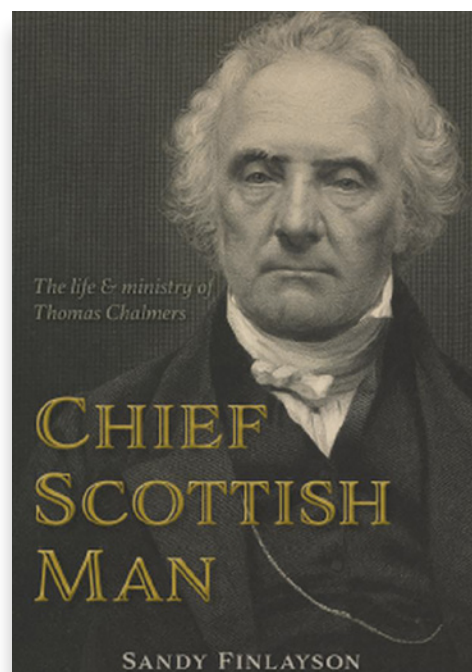
CHIEF SCOTTISH MAN

SANDY FINLAYSON (2021)

Altitude on a flight changes our perspective. If we fly high, we travel far more quickly, but the detail of the landscape below is lost to our eyes. We see greater detail of the ground if our altitude is low, but we lose the distance travelled. Reading biographies is like travelling at different altitudes. Some can feel like we are skimming the ground's surface. They can go into every small detail where you feel trapped in the 17th century. Other biographies go to the other extreme and give an overview where the author covers great distance but at the loss of information about the individual. Sandy Finlayson's book on Thomas Chalmers, *Chief Scottish Man*, finds a sweet spot of detail and distance. As you read this book, you get a sense of what formed Thomas Chalmers without being stuck in one period of his life for too long. So if you are interested in a neat, compact, but rich biography with the right altitude to keep you engaged, the *Chief Scottish Man* is it ●

This book is available from Free Church Books.

Chris Davidson, Merkinch Free Church, Inverness



THE GARDEN, THE CURTAIN & THE CROSS

CARL LAFERTON & CATALINA ECHEVERRI (2016)

All sixty-six books of the Bible weave together to tell one grand, beautiful story of God redeeming a people for himself. This is a glorious truth for little souls, yet there are few board books for very young children that have a firm grasp on communicating this wonder. While there are many children's books that are about the Bible, there are few that are written without either being focused on isolated Bible stories or being written as an actual Bible for children.

This newly released board book of Carl Laferton's *The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross: The True Story of Why Jesus Died and Rose Again*, however, has managed to provide for even the smallest child a telescopic view of the glorious story of God's salvific plan. Like being stirred to praise at the Lord's magnificence by a view of a wide swath of the night sky, Laferton's book stirs small souls to wonder by a wide-lens view of God's grand redemption story. With this sweeping view of God's goodness throughout the story of the Bible, it is no wonder that Laferton's book begins and ends with rejoicing — first in the Garden of Eden and then forever in heaven!

Being a board book, this story is simple enough for small children and can also be a helpful tool for reaching out to children who have never heard of the Gospel before. The artwork by Catalina Echeverri further enriches the story and makes it easier to comprehend. Echeverri's bright colours and thoughtful presentation help to weave in the Gospel so that those who cannot read will understand the story and those who can read will be enriched by the truths highlighted by the pictures.

As a constructive criticism: Jesus is portrayed as a cartoonish figure, which fits with the book's style, but may be unhelpful in that God is viewed only on the basis of being our friend. The marvel of God being our friend is that he is also the holy and awesome living God, but the cartoonish figures in *The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* do not highlight that truth well. So, while a wonderful book, the artwork and story could be clearer on the holiness of God and why exactly the cross is actually needed for people to be friends with God. ●

This book is available from Free Church Books.



Claire Hall, Merkinch Free Church, Inverness

RELATIONSHIPS

SHARON DICKENS (2020)

This is a really helpful book. Its focus is on how, as Christians, our relationship with God is our most important relationship and should influence all the other relationships we have in life. It consists of nine short chapters on different aspects of relationships and does not shy away from the many difficulties that we as sinful humans encounter. Throughout the book there are helpful examples from the author's own life and experience and she consistently points the reader to God's Word as our source of truth and guidance. In each chapter there are a number of 'Stop' points where the reader is asked to think about their own life in relation to what they have read, and I found this really helpful to reflect on the relationships in my own life. While I enjoyed reading this by myself, I think it would be a really good book to read together with a friend or mentor, to encourage one another in following Jesus in this crucial area of life. ●

This book is available from Free Church Books.

Mairi de la Haye, St Peter's Free Church, Dundee



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>

MISSION MATTERS

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

“I’VE READ THE BIBLE, YOU KNOW.” I’m not saying the man was a liar, but as Her Majesty said recently in another context, ‘some recollections may vary’.

Recent research suggests that Bible reading is worryingly lacking within the Church. Only 15% read the Bible daily, 29% admitted to reading the Bible ‘a few times a year’ and 15% never read the Bible at all. If Bible reading is so low within the Church, we can only assume that it is rare in the general population. It is highly unlikely then that you will encounter anyone who has read the Bible to any meaningful level.

My point? Why not graciously call people’s bluff and ask them to read the Bible with you?

This is not as crazy or difficult as it may seem. Also, this is not the latest gimmick in the marketplace of evangelistic tools. Have a look at Philip in Acts 8 to see how to read the Bible with someone.

Clearly people reject a gospel they have never hear of. They refuse to follow a Christ of whom they know virtually zero. People may have a legitimate grievance caused by meeting some really nasty Christians and witnessing the hypocrisy of the Church. We know that’s not the whole story and that humanity is so deeply flawed that there are no righteous people, not even one. However, if we ask our friends to engage directly with the character of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible, then they will get to the unmediated core of the Christian faith.

There are various steps in getting to read the Bible with a friend.

Step 1. Reading the Bible with a person assumes that you have a good existing relationship with them, a friendship good enough for them to take up an honest challenge. If they back out or turn down the invitation then there is no harm done. Accept that it may not be the time. People turn down invitations all the time, it’s not the end of the world!

Step 2. Take the weirdness out of the situation. This does not involve you sitting beside them as either you or they read out of a big black book in Starbucks. Get the text of the Bible in a user-friendly form or even ask them to listen to a passage in audio form and then

agree to discuss the content. This is not so strange as people do this all the time in book clubs. Damien Barr, writer and host of TV literary programmes, notes, ‘Book sales are higher than ever and book groups continue to flourish.’ Books are in at the moment and people have great questions.

Step 3. Agree that you will read a small passage before you meet up and then discuss it. I recommend that you leave Leviticus or Revelation for another day. Maybe have a look at John 3, where Jesus has a conversation with a very smart religious figure, or John 4, the account of a conversation with a five-times-married woman.

Step 4. Have a relaxed discussion and ask questions of your friend. A great conversation will mean that you will listen more than you speak. Anyone fresh to the Bible will be full of questions. It really is the most interesting book ever written. Remember, it’s the breath of God in written form.

Step 5. Be an observer of God at work. The Bible is described in very powerful terms: it is like a sword which can penetrate the deepest recesses of our being. It is like a seed which is small but can grow and produce fruit in the most unlikely places. Don’t you love the famous Martin Luther quote, ‘While I drink my glass of Wittenberg beer, the gospel runs its course’? I might contextualise and change the drink to a cappuccino, but you get the point. Any deep work will be done by God.

My own experience was that after being given a Bible at school from the Gideons, I simply could not put it down. After reading the four gospels in the space of two hours, I realised that I was not reading the Bible but the Bible was reading me. How much more powerful would it have been if I’d had a guide in these early years who could have pointed out the key features?

These days there are helps to read the Bible with someone. May I recommend that you have a look at The Word One to One (www.theword121.com)? You can even download notes to help your shared Bible-reading, although getting the nice book is much better.

Get going, release the lion. ●

Cuimhneachan (Memory)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

CHA TOIR E FADA GUS AM BI SAOGHAL AIR AN ROBH SINN GLÈ EÒLACH NA CHUIMHNEACHAN DHUINN. Bidh ar dachaigh agus na bha a' còmhnaidh innt', 's dòcha gun sgeul air mòran dhiùbh a-bhos an seo, gu dearbh, 's ma dh' fhaodte gu bheil iad uile air a dhol dhachaigh romhainn.

B'e seo dachaigh 's na thogadh sinn, agus tha mòran glè thaingeil airson an teagaisg a fhuair iad nan dachaighean a thaobh modh, dicheall, coibhneas 's mar sin air adhart. Bha àite mòr aig a' Chruthaidhear nar dachaighean agus nar coimhearsnachdan. Tha sinn taingeil gu bheil seo ann an iomadh dachaigh fhathast, ach do chuid, chan eil ann ach cuimhneachan air nì a dh' fhalbh.

Cha tug e fada gus an robh sonas agus sith Gàrradh Edein na chuimhneachan do dh'Adhamh agus do dh' Eubha.

Bha an Cruthaidhear faisg orra agus E air àrainneachd air leth a thoirt dhaibh, 's cha robh air a thoirmeasg ach aon nì. Cò nach iarradh fuireach ann an àite mar seo le bòidhchead agus fois? Gu mì-fhortanach, mar a tha fios againn, cha b' fhada gus an robh an dachaigh a chaidh a thoirt dhaibh na cuimhneachan glè ghoirt dhaibh.

Air taobh a-muigh a' ghàrraidh, bha saoghal ag àithne dhaibh saothair a dhèanamh, 's chan e sin a-mhàin, ach nuair a bhiodh an làithean a-bhos seachad, bha coigreach, air an robh am bàs, gan toirt às an t-saoghal-sa. Gu cinnteach, bhiodh fìor chuimhn' aca air Gàrradh nam beannachd.

Aig an àm-sa nar n-eachdraidh, tha co-chomann, comhludair agus cuideachd dhaoine na chuimhneachan dhuinn. Gabhaidh sinn biadh leinn fhin aig gach àm; tha ar saoghal air leth bho shaoghal ar càirdean. Chan e atharrachadh furast' a th' againn, agus tha e gu cinnteach eu-coltach ris a' bheatha air an robh sinn eòlach.

Nuair a bha Iòseph air a bheannachadh gu mòr ann an Iùchairt Phàraoh, agus e mar mheadhan air a bhith a' frithealadh do na bràithrean a bhuin cho cealgach ris, dh' aithnich Iòseph iadsan ged nach do dh' aithnich iadsan esan, 's bhiodh an dachaigh agus an athair agus Beniàmin, a' tighinn air-ais gu a chuimhne, agus tha fios againn gun do bhuin e glè choibhneil ri na bràithrean.

Air an t-slighe dhachaigh, nuair a thuig na bràithrean gu robh an t-airgead fhathast nan saic, thàinig na rinn iad air Iòseph air-ais gun cuimhne, agus b' e cuimhneachan goirt a bha seo, oir chan e a-mhàin gu robh e làidir nan cuimhne, ach bha e cuideachd nan cogaisean. Fhuair iad a-mach mu na rinn sinn, shaoil iad, ach sheall Iòseph deagh eisimpleir dhaibh oir, 'Bu gheug thorrach Iòseph', aig an robh a neart anns a' Chruthaidhear, a bheannaich gu mòr e.

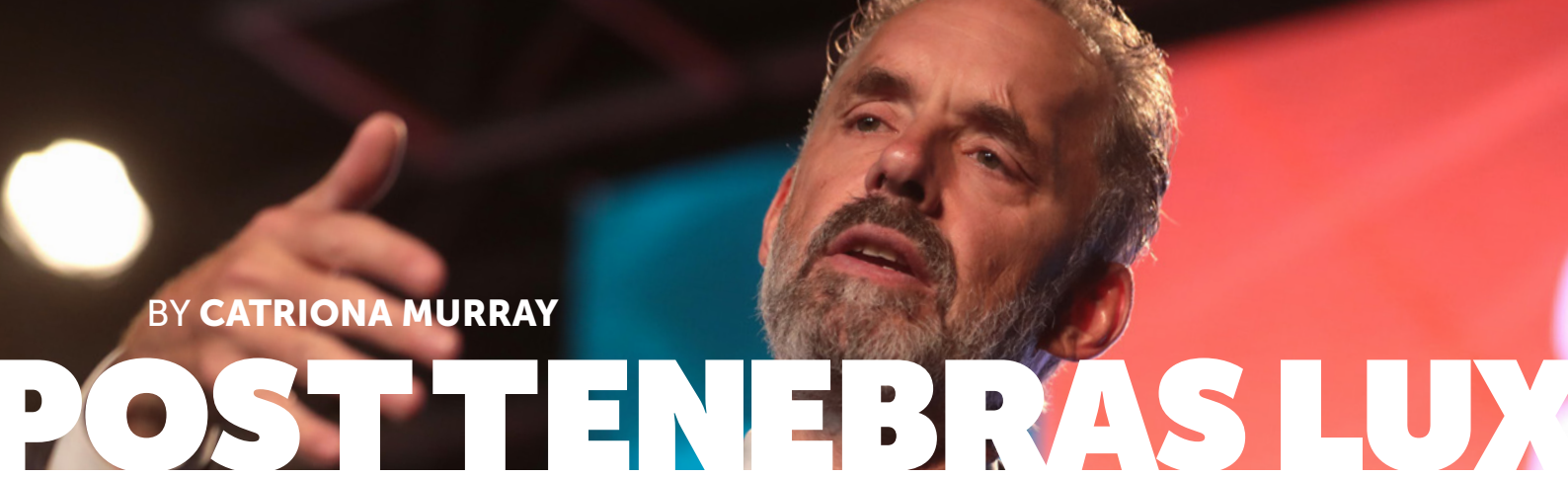
Tha a chuimhneachan fhèin aig a h-uile duine beò agus, 'Is aithne do chridhe duine searbhias anama; agus na aoibhneas cha bhi co-roinn aig coigreach.'

Bidh gach suidheachadh anns am bi sinn san t-saoghal-sa mar chlas sgoile far a bheil cothrom againn ionnsachadh, agus fàs ann an gràs agus ann an eòlas, air neo gun aon smuain a bhith againn mun Chruthaidhear.

Dhan Chrìosdaidh a tha a' fiachainn ri bhith toilicht' anns gach staid sam bi e, tha là air thoiseach air, ann an àite far nach cuimhnichear àmhghar nas mò. Tha iad sàbhailt' ann an Gàrradh tèaraint', beannaicht', 's gun dòigh aig nàmhaid an t-sith-sa a bhriseadh.

Ma bha a bhith air taobh a-muigh Gàrradh Edein na chràdh-spioraid do dh' Adhamh agus do dh' Eubha, nuair a thèid sluagh Dhè dhachaigh, 'siabaidh Dia gach deur on sùilibh'. Is e a tha seo ceann-uidhe beannaicht' anns nach eil aon chuimhneachan sàraicht'. ●





BY CATRIONA MURRAY

POST TENEBRAS LUX

MANY PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ADHERE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH — AND, OF COURSE, MANY WHO DO — FOLLOW WITH INTEREST THE CAREER OF JORDAN PETERSON. He is a Canadian psychologist and, more recently, YouTube sensation, whose political and cultural conservatism has been regarded by many as welcome contrast to the apparently all-pervasive ‘woke’ narrative of public life.

What fascinates many Christians, of course, is the question of where Peterson stands in relation to God, and he has been opaque on the subject whenever it is raised. Some of his statements tend to imply that he is agnostic, and others that he believes in the existence of God as the only rational explanation for our existence... but he seems not to have yet obtained that saving knowledge of Christ which would settle the matter once and for all. You get the sense, at times, that Christians want to claim him for their side because he is undoubtedly fiercely intelligent and winsome in his discourse. It would be a coup to count him as our spokesman, and not the devil’s.

We like the things that he says, and we are willing him to decisively answer that he IS a Christian. What an ally he would make — and what an enemy.

Lately, Peterson has been saying this about Christians: ‘The way you live isn’t sufficient testament to the truth.’ We are limited in what we do with the magnificent freedom bestowed upon us in salvation — and Peterson is saying, with almost childlike simplicity, that if we really and truly believed what we profess, our lives would demonstrate that power irresistibly. Words, too often, are our testimony, when a life lived in the liberating love of Christ should be its own witness.

Of course, Christ had an answer for the kind of objection that Peterson raises: ‘What’s that to you; you follow me.’ Mere men, flawed sinners — albeit saved by grace — are not who Peterson or any other unsaved person should look to for guidance. That comes in, and only in, the perfection of Christ himself. I think with horror of how far astray I could unwittingly lead a fledgling believer if the

Shepherd was careless enough to abandon them to my example. Mercifully, he is not.

Nonetheless, when a man whom we suspect of being drawn by the Gospel truth suggests that those who profess Christ act as a stumbling-block and not a magnet, I think we would be wise to listen.

I cannot speak for other Christians, but I can reflect on my part in this. It does not require too much examination of my own conduct to see that, in fact, Peterson is right: I do not always live as though I believe the whole truth of God.

Sometimes, in the course of my private devotions, the enormity of what I’m doing will hit me. That I should be able to freely converse with the Creator in my own home is a staggering fact to which my vocabulary cannot do justice. The God who said ‘let there be light’ and there was; the God who created man from the dust; the God of Abraham and Isaac; the God who parted the waters, and the God who gave his only Son...it is with him I am communing.

And what does this immeasurably perfect and holy God get in return? So very little that I’m afraid it counts as nothing — less than nothing, in fact, because so much of the time I am not merely inert, but actively sinning in thought, word and deed.

My testimony to others has always been that Jesus not only took me through the worst experience of my life, but turned that pain into blessing. And that is a true statement. I am awed over and over by how he carried me, first in his arms, and then aloft upon his shoulders, showing death that victory does not belong to the grave.

Yet, if I don’t tell people this, would they suspect it from the way I live? They would not. It is a personal privilege that I enjoy, and that I honestly thank God for daily — but do not share with others by living it out as I should.

Our faith saves no one; not even ourselves. It is the person in whom that faith is vested who effects change.

Therefore, it is not our job to speculate on the state of another man’s soul, but to glorify God for what he has done with ours. That is the miraculous way of living that the child in faith expects to see and that speaks louder than a thousand words. ●

Photo by Gage Skidmore