



 THE  
**RECORD**

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THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
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**Editor** • John Macdonald  
The Editor, Free Church Offices,  
15 North Bank Street, The Mound,  
Edinburgh, EH1 2LS  
[editor@freechurch.org](mailto:editor@freechurch.org)

**News Editor** • Dayspring MacLeod  
[dayspring.macleod@icloud.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@icloud.com)  
07974 261567

**Missions News** • Sarah Johnson  
Free Church Offices, 15 North Bank Street,  
Edinburgh, EH1 2LS  
[sarah@freechurch.org](mailto:sarah@freechurch.org)

**WfM Editor** • Fiona Macaskill  
8 Campsie Drive, Glasgow, G61 3HY  
[rfmacaskill@me.com](mailto:rfmacaskill@me.com)

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

**Seminary News** • Rev. Thomas Davis  
St. Columba's Free Church, Johnston Terrace  
Edinburgh, EH1 2PW  
[thomas@stcolumbas.freechurch.org](mailto:thomas@stcolumbas.freechurch.org)

**Prayer Diary** • Dayspring Macleod  
[dayspring.macleod@icloud.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@icloud.com)

**Design & Layout** • Fin Macrae @DUFI Art  
[www.dufi-art.com](http://www.dufi-art.com)

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[offices@freechurch.org](mailto:offices@freechurch.org)

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# WELCOME TO THE MAY RECORD



**T**HIS MONTH WE FEATURE **TAIN AND FEARN FREE CHURCH** – you will read about the recent history of the congregation and the providence which has been a blessing and an encouragement to them as they serve the Lord in Easter Ross.

You will also find the first instalment of a new devotional series by the Rev. Colin MacLeod, Gairloch, Poolewe and Torridon Free Church, in which Colin reflects on anger and tidal power!

I'm grateful to the Rev. David MacPherson for sending an update on the work of Operación San Andrés in Collique, a timely reminder of the extraordinary legacy of the Free Church's work in Peru – a subject we will return to in next month's edition.

Next month's *Record* will also include a report from the 2021 General Assembly, and on the issues facing the Free Church now and into the future. Glancing back to the road travelled thus far, I happened to be reading *The Monthly Record* from a century ago. The May 1921 edition contained a timeless exhortation, which must always be appropriate at this time of year:

'There is need for earnest prayer that the deliberations of the Assembly will be wisely guided, and that the decisions arrived at will bear the seal of the Divine approval.'

Those of us who are able have been setting aside our screens and returning to worship in person in recent weeks. *The Record* continues to be available in print, so if your congregation needs to re-start delivery of the magazine now that you are back meeting together, please get in touch and we'll be very pleased to arrange that for you. ●

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

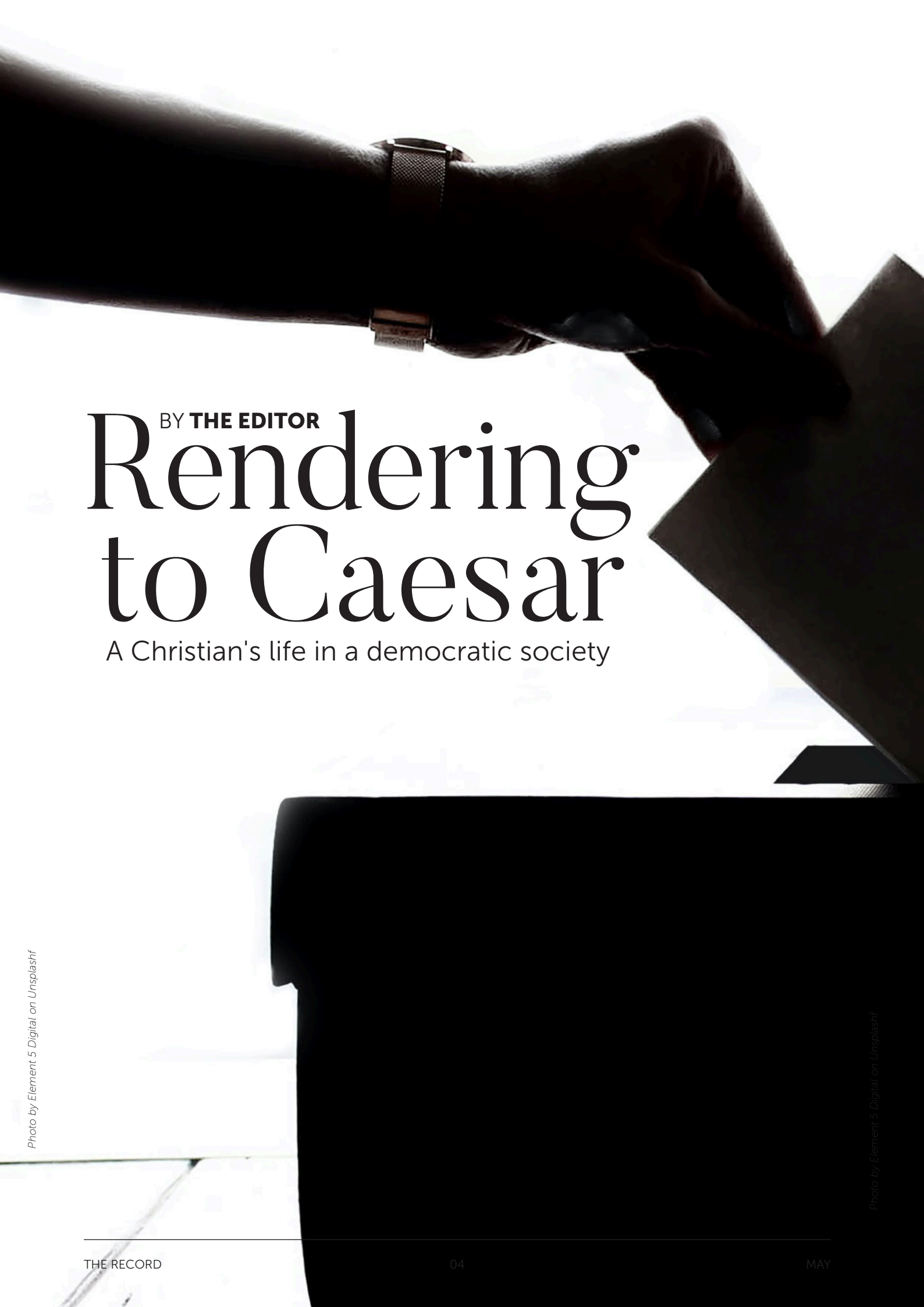
Yours in Christ

John

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

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BY THE EDITOR

# Rendering to Caesar

A Christian's life in a democratic society

Photo by Element 5 Digital on Unsplash

Photo by Element 5 Digital on Unsplash

**WE EXERCISE OUR RIGHT TO VOTE THIS MONTH.** The Parliament we return to Holyrood will influence Scottish society. It will affect some aspects of our lives through the legislation and policy it pursues, and perhaps even on the constitutional question of independence. Choosing our Parliamentary representatives is a privilege we have become used to. It is a duty supported by our Reformed theology. But it is not the end of our work as Christian citizens of a democracy.

### **CRADLES OF DEMOCRACY**

The concept of democratic rule pre-dates Christianity. Some historians have argued, though not to universal acceptance, that pre-Babylonian Mesopotamia and the Gana sangha ('republics') in what is now India, which existed between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C., were examples of early democracies. Regardless, the city-state of Athens has become history's primary reference point for the origins of democracy. Popular government was also a feature of the Roman Republic. Assemblies were held in the Forum at the heart of Rome. But, while the territory controlled by the Republic expanded, decisions were only made by those who attended the Forum, making it impractical for most citizens to participate.

In the centuries which followed, popular governments largely consisted either of the entire citizenry or of delegates chosen by the aristocratic class. But the rise of the nation-state in Europe saw direct democracy give way to representative forms of government.

Despite democracy's pagan origins, Christian thought has shaped its modern development. This includes its influence on the institution which had the most significant impact on representative government, the English Parliament.

Parliament grew out of judicial councils called by the monarch and evolved into a legislative body. By the end of the 1400s, new laws required bills to be passed by Parliament, as well as the monarch's approval. But, during the English Civil War, the Levellers and other Puritans demanded broader representation, universal male suffrage and a shift in power from the aristocratic House of Lords to the Commons. The restoration of the ►►

monarchy in 1660 delayed this attempt at democratisation, but did not prevent it. By 1782, King George III was forced, against his will, to accept the Commons' choice of prime minister and cabinet. And the Reform Act of 1832 began the expansion of the franchise, which culminated in universal suffrage in 1928.

The impact of Christian thought on national government has continued into the contemporary era. While they acknowledge that there are counter-examples, like the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa's initial support of Apartheid, Robert Woodberry and Timothy Shah have argued in the *Journal of Democracy* that Protestant Christianity has 'a powerful affinity with democracy'.

More than that, they make the case that Protestantism has created, and continues to create, social conditions which allow democracy to be established;

that the presence of Protestant Christianity often promotes democratisation.

As the main reasons for this effect, they point to the rise of religious pluralism and the independence of church and state, the development of democratic theory, mass education, printing and the public

debate of ideas, economic development and the reduction of corruption. This is most clearly seen in the West and in well-established democracies like South Korea. Woodberry and Shah also trace democracy-fostering conditions like the rise of non-governmental institutions in India and economic development in Nigeria to the presence of Christianity.

## Whether or not our Christian worldview is effectively represented at Holyrood, democracy reaches beyond Parliament.

### SEAT AT THE TABLE

However, Woodberry and Shah also point out that the relationship between Protestantism and democracy is not a direct one. While the theology and practice of Protestant Christians has often created the right conditions for democracy, the church has not necessarily advocated for democratic government. It is likely this relationship, though, which has resulted in a degree of alignment between Protestant doctrines of the state and the principles of liberal, representative democracy. And this may explain the Protestant church's lack of institutional involvement in democratic government — the alignment of underlying principles made active involvement seem unnecessary.

By contrast, in the post-war era, the effort to reconcile Catholicism with popular government gave rise to Christian Democracy, a political movement which has held long-lasting influence in both mainland Europe and Latin America by applying Catholic social teaching to public policy. Christian Democratic parties have been at the heart of many governments throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union being the most electorally successful example.

Explicitly Christian political parties have only ever been at the fringes of UK and Scottish politics. Although Holyrood's partially proportional voting system has given smaller parties an opportunity to be represented, no Christian party has won a seat. At the 2003 election, the Christian Independent Alliance attracted just over one thousand votes, fewer than the British National Party. The Scottish Christian Party did much better in 2007, gaining just over 30,000 votes. Their total shrank by two-thirds over the next two elections, however. There are, of course, Christian candidates, but there is no expressly Christian party on the ballot this year.

Given the benefits of applying Christian thought to public policy and political discourse, the idea of a Christian political party should not be dismissed out of hand. Still, quixotic bids for election with great ideas but no chance of success don't achieve anything. They may afford an opportunity to speak the truth, but they do not present an opportunity to take any action. Minor parties like the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party have shown that gaining a seat in parliament is possible.

Added to this, small parties often have a very narrow focus. That might be good enough for Action to Save St John's Hospital (stood in 2007) or Ban Bankers' Bonuses (2011). But it is not enough for those meant to represent the concerns of the Kingdom of God. A political party can defend the sanctity of life and also have a plan to improve transportation. In fact, it must do both, and much more besides. For a Christian party to be worth Christians' votes, it must have a strategy to achieve electoral success, as well as possessing a sound, comprehensive manifesto.

### **ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL**

Whether or not our Christian worldview is effectively represented at Holyrood, democracy reaches beyond Parliament. We miss most of what matters if we only pay attention to national elections.

Mark Dever, a Baptist pastor and author on ecclesiology, writes that 'Jesus establishes a biblical theology of government' in Mark 12:17 when he says, '*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*'

Augustine understood that Christians are citizens of two cities, simultaneously. As citizens of the City of God, our loyalty lies first with our Redeemer and his commands. But he has placed us, for now, in the earthly city and calls us to seek its welfare (Jeremiah 29:7). Christians must be a blessing to our communities. That is a responsibility which extends beyond casting a vote every few years.

Legislation passed in Parliament is certainly of great significance, and deserves our attention. Nevertheless, choosing and influencing Parliamentarians is not enough on its own. A great many of the decisions on the implementation of legislation, the allocation of funding and the administration of the state are taken at local government level. Beyond this, if we are to influence the legislative direction of our society, we must necessarily consider how to have an impact on the other institutions of civil society, the media and — most importantly — the individuals we know and love within the communities we serve.

On top of that, having a well-argued position is not enough. In fact, on its own rhetoric is merely a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1). Love acts. We must therefore be people who do not simply speak, but also act in order to address the issues which affect our communities. The early church influenced their society without access to the levers of the state. They did so through acts of service, in love. From our own denomination's history, the way in which Thomas Guthrie influenced education policy in Scotland serves us well as an example. He didn't merely call for change, nor simply vote for it. He opened schools providing free education.

When it comes to making arguments on matters of religious liberty and public morality, the Free Church will have more credibility and therefore a greater positive impact if our people are known as those who act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8).

We want just and good legislation and national policy. And so the Free Church as an institution, and we as individual Christians, should take the opportunity afforded by our democratic society to speak. But we must spend much more of our energy on action. Primarily, action in our communities, directly addressing the injustice, poverty, and other issues that we and our neighbours face. Action affords credibility, and credibility allows influence. Righteousness exalts a nation — and righteousness is in deed as well as in word and in thought.

The denarius that Jesus showed to his inquisitors in Mark 12 bore Caesar's image and inscription. We bear the image of God, and his law is inscribed on our hearts (Hebrews 10). May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us as we seek to serve as Christian citizens in our democracy. ●

**The early church influenced their society without access to the levers of the state. They did so through acts of service, in love.**

# WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

## FRANKLIN GRAHAM ADS PROTECTED BY LAW



Bus adverts reading, 'Lancashire Festival of Hope with Franklin Graham – Time for Hope' were banned by Blackpool Council in 2018 on account of 'heightened tensions' and local complaints regarding Graham's views on homosexuality. However, last month a court ruled that this amounted to religious discrimination.

Judge Claire Evans decided that, even if they caused offence to some, the adverts were protected by the Equality Act of 2010. 'All religions and beliefs are characteristics protected by law,' she wrote. 'The domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights have consistently affirmed that a pluralistic, tolerant society allows for the expression of many different and sometimes diametrically opposed beliefs.' Blackpool Council showed 'a wholesale disregard for the right to freedom of expression' and 'gave preference to the rights and opinions of one part of the community' over another, concluded the judge. ●

## BLACK CHRISTIANS CRITICISE GOVERNMENT'S RACE REPORT



Black church leaders in the UK have published a statement concerning the report of the government-appointed Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which was published on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

The National Church Leaders Forum noted Black Christians' 'feelings of deep hurt, especially concerning the suggestion that institutional or systemic racism in the UK no longer exists. This runs counter to their lived experiences.

'The Christian faith promotes justice based on God's call to love our neighbour as ourselves, and those in authority to administer fairness for everyone. Racism along with other intersectional factors lead to disparities and inequities in employment, education, health, housing and much more.

'While significant progress has been made in our multicultural society, much more needs to be done before the UK can justly regard ourselves as a beacon of racial justice in the world.' ●



## JIM ELLIOT PLAQUE TO BE REWORDED



Wheaton College, an evangelical university in Illinois, USA, is rewording a plaque honouring alumni Jim Elliot and Ed McCully, reports *Christianity Today*. Along with Nate Saint, Roger Youderian and Pete Fleming, Elliot and McCully were killed in 1956 after making contact with the indigenous Waorani in Ecuador on a missionary trip. The plaque, donated by classmates the year after the men were killed, currently reads 'For generations all strangers were killed by these savage indians'.

Wheaton president Philip Ryken said that the term *savage* 'has been used historically to dehumanize and mistreat indigenous peoples around the world. Any descriptions on our campus of people or people groups should reflect the full dignity of human beings made in the image of God.' ●



## STREAMING SERVICE LAUNCHED

SAT-7, a Christian broadcaster which reaches 25 million people in the Middle East and North Africa, has just launched the first Christian on-demand streaming service in the region. SAT-7 has been broadcasting Christian satellite TV programmes since 1996, and has featured a dedicated kids' channel since 2007. Now around a fifth of the network's 25-year back catalogue can be streamed via the web and mobile apps.

'This is God's season for the Middle East and North Africa,' SAT-7 CEO Rita El-Mounayer told US-based National Religious Broadcasters. NRB recently gave her organisation their International Media Award for 2021. 'People across the region are intrigued to see that God really does care about them. They're asking: "Who is this Jesus?" and our local Christian presenters and their guests make God's love visible to them in ways they respond to.' ●

## NEW SECRETARY GENERAL FOR WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

The World Evangelical Alliance, with which the Free Church is affiliated through the World Reformed Fellowship, has appointed Dr Thomas Schirrmacher as its new Secretary General. Dr Schirrmacher, a German theologian, spoke in his inaugural address about the need to uphold the authority of Scripture. He referred to the need to advocate for persecuted Christians, a founding aim of the WEA, and also sought to prioritise evangelism. 'Mission is not always the being of our local churches,' he said. 'We often have to be reminded as evangelical churches that we have to put the witness of the Gospel into the centre.'

The World Evangelical Alliance was established in 1846. It now includes members from 129 countries and represents around 600 million Christians. ●

## ARCHBISHOP WANTS INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT TO PREVENT DAM CONFLICT



Dr Mouneer Anis, the Anglican Archbishop of Alexandria, has called for intervention from the international community to prevent conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia, according to *Church Times*. Egypt depends on the river Nile for 97% of its water. Ethiopia has built a hydroelectric dam on the tributary Blue Nile, prompting fears that Egypt's water supply could be threatened. Recent talks involving Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan made no progress on agreeing safeguards.

In early April, Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said that 'nobody will be permitted to take a single drop of Egypt's water, otherwise the region will fall into unimaginable instability.' Asked to comment on this statement, Dr Anis noted that it was made in response to a decision by Ethiopia to resume filling the dam's reservoir, despite no agreement having been reached with Egypt.

'The water of the Nile is a gift from God to the people of the three countries,' said Dr Anis. 'I urge the international community to move very quickly in order to prevent a real disaster in the region. If war erupts, it will affect badly the whole region of the Middle East and Europe. Prevention of any disaster is much easier than dealing with its consequences.' ●



## CHURCH ATTACKED ON PALM SUNDAY



Two people, understood to be newlyweds, blew themselves up outside a busy Roman Catholic cathedral during a Palm Sunday service in the city of Makassar, on Sulawesi island, Indonesia. At least 20 people were injured in the attack, according to *Associated Press*.

National Police Chief Gen. Listyo Sigit Prabowo told the press that the bombers were members of the militant group Jemaah Anshorut Daulah, which has pledged allegiance to Islamic State and was also responsible for suicide bombings at Indonesian churches in 2018. 'We are still searching other members of the group,' Prabowo confirmed. ●

## CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S NEW CAMPAIGN AGAINST HOUSE CHURCHES



China's Ministry of Civil Affairs has given notice that it is launching a new crackdown on 'illegal social organisations', including house churches, according to *International Christian Concern*. *Radio Free Asia* reports that the campaign has already begun in Sichuan province, where a list of illegal organisations was published at the end of March. The list included the long-persecuted house church, Early Rain Covenant Church. Father Francis Liu of the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness told *Radio Free Asia*, 'In the eyes of the Chinese government, any religious group that refuses to submit to the Chinese Communist Party, or even charity groups, are seen as "illegal organizations," for the government is fearful that these civil groups can become a force that overthrows them.' ●



## FREE CHURCH SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

**T**HE BOARD OF TRUSTEES HAS SET UP A FREE CHURCH SAFEGUARDING TRAINING SCHEME in order to ensure that all those working with children and vulnerable adults in the Free Church (including all ministers and office bearers) can receive safeguarding training. The training scheme is being managed by the Safeguarding Training Coordinator, Donald Macleod (Stornoway).

There are two ways to access training. Please get in touch with Donald at [donald.macleod@freechurch.org](mailto:donald.macleod@freechurch.org) to book a training session for your congregation; or any groups or individuals can register themselves for one of the online training sessions which will be running throughout the year. For more information and to register for a place, please visit our website: [freechurch.org/resources/safeguarding](http://freechurch.org/resources/safeguarding) ●

## FCYC CONNECT

BY **KIRSTEN MACDONALD**

**T**HIS YEAR IT'S ALL ABOUT CONNECTING! FCYC Connect will be hitting screens all across the country this summer, bringing together young people and leaders for a week of crazy challenges, entertaining activities and the opportunity to learn more about God and how he wants us to live our lives to the full!

Taking place on Zoom each evening from Monday

12th to Friday 16th July, there will be three Connect events on offer

- Connect Kids for those in P5-P7
- Connect Juniors for those in S1-S3
- Connect Seniors for those in S4-S6

For more information and to sign up, visit the FCYC Connect page at: [freechurchyouthcamps.org/connect/](http://freechurchyouthcamps.org/connect/) ●



# WFM UPDATE

BY FIONA MACASKILL

**I T FINALLY FEELS LIKE WE ARE TURNING A CORNER AND CAN START TO MAKE CAUTIOUS PLANS FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.**

At our WfM communications group meeting in April we were all surprised to note how busy we are already, though. Diaries are starting to fill up with reunions with friends and families and the return to the football run, etc. Yesterday I asked my class to write a letter to themselves, which we sealed in envelopes and tucked away in my drawer till next spring. We talked about what we have learned over the last year and what new habits we want to keep and old ones we want to keep at bay. When I asked what they liked most about the last year, most of the answers revolved around time. They all loved the fact that they could plan their own day, eat when they wanted, do their work, then get on with something else. The other thing which they had in common was that they missed the structure that daily routine brought to their lives pre-pandemic.

Much as we have missed physical church, it was such a blessing to still have our weeks centred on online services and prayer meetings. Our prayer meeting is better attended than ever and such a blessing to our congregation. Those of you on social media should hopefully have noticed the increase in posts from the Women for Mission Facebook and Instagram pages. We want to encourage you to pray for the groups and individuals we support and to read books about mission and missionaries. Over the next few months you

will see regular updates on our work and past projects, advice on setting up a group in your congregation if you don't already have one, book reviews and hopefully some recipe recommendations from our cookbooks. If you don't already follow us, then check out our Facebook and Instagram pages, @womenformission. If you have any recommendations for books, favourite recipes, or fundraising ideas, then feel free to share them with us.

Please make sure you put the date for the WfM AGM and 21/22 project launch in your diaries and join us on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May at 2pm. ●



WOMEN FOR MISSION

## WfM Online Annual General Meeting

Saturday, 22 May 2021

Watch live on YouTube at 2.00pm

Visit [womenformission.org](http://womenformission.org) for more information or follow us on social media @womenformission

## The Doctrine of the Church

### RCRT

Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology

### EDINBURGH DOGMATICS CONFERENCE

Organised by the Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology

**Zoom Conference taking place on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> and Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021**

#### Conference Speakers:

Professor Gerald Bray; Dr Andrew Clarke; Professor Oliver Crisp; Professor David Fergusson Professor Tom Greggs; Professor Tony Lane; Professor Tom Noble; and Professor Stephen Williams.

The Cost of the Conference is £25.

**The conference is intended for academics, postgraduate students, ministers and others with a serious interest in academic theology.**

A full programme and information about how to pay available. To book email Professor Andrew McGowan: [director@rcrt.scot](mailto:director@rcrt.scot)

# WHAT'S YOUR STORY – TAIN & FEARN CHURCH'S NEW BUILD PROJECT

Reflection on the ups and downs of the journey so far. BY **JULIE MACLEOD**



*Rev. Alasdair MacAulay and Rev. Andrew MacLeod outside the old Tain Health Centre - the site of the new proposed church building*

**T**HIS TIME LAST YEAR, OUR NEW CHURCH PROJECT WAS AT A COMPLETE STANDSTILL. Nothing was seen to be happening, yet people continued to pray. We had neither the funds nor the personnel to move this forward. But now all that has changed.'

Alasdair MacAulay has been the minister of Tain and Fearn Free Church since 2012. He was joined late in 2017 by Rev Andrew MacLeod as assistant minister. Together they serve the needs of a growing church, where the membership has doubled in the last eight years. There are now 285 people in the congregation with just under half of that number being communicant members. The church also plays an important role in serving the needs of the surrounding community where two thirds of the postcode areas are classed as areas of deprivation.

The congregation's motto is **COMMITTED TO CHRIST/COMMITTED TO CHURCH/COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY**. Our mission is to reach, influence

and serve our community for Jesus and we seek to do this through youth work, lunch clubs, parent and toddler, a craft group, and specific support for those struggling with hardship or addiction. The church regularly holds fundraising events for mission work and charities and has gained a lot of respect for its work.

Over the last decade the current church building in Tain has become increasingly inadequate to meet the needs of the congregation. Unlike the church building in Hilton, which has been extended in recent years, there is no room to extend in Tain. Plans were drawn up for a new building just across the road from the current church. As well as a place of worship it will provide multiple rooms and flexible spaces which can cater for the work of the congregation and be used by community groups as well. The project is estimated to cost in the region of £1 million and we hope to commence the year-long building project early next year.



Architect's visualisation of what the new church building will look like

The journey so far has been a long and challenging one. Alasdair MacAulay recalls that lack of space was starting to dominate conversations several years ago:

'The issues were space in Tain church and space in the Hilton hall, where we desperately needed more room for a huge increase in Sunday School.' In Tain, the church was filling up, the Sunday School and creche were being held in the same room, and we didn't even have a space for a visiting speaker to go before the service. We also had to stop certain activities such as congregational lunches due to lack of space.

***'When it's done, we will be able to expand many of our activities and do lots more outreach, hosting events that all the community will be welcome to attend.'***

Around that time, the site of the old health centre, close to the existing church in Tain, was due to come on the market. With its own car park and situated on a prominent corner site right beside two public car parks, it was ideal for the planned new church. Alasdair believes that God had a hand in the timing.

'We were in the middle of completing an extension to the Hilton church hall when the old health centre site should have come up for sale. However, a telecoms issue prevented a small number of staff from relocating to the new building. This led to a delay of a year before the site went on the market, during which we were able to finish and pay for the Hilton hall extension. If it had gone for sale any earlier we would not have been in a position to bid for it.'

Despite a lot of interest in the site, including a

property developer, the congregation was able to purchase it with the help of a loan from the Free Church centrally. Within a year plans were being drawn up for the new building. But then the plans hit a major snag with the closure of the Free Church Loan Fund. With no obvious alternative funding, the project gradually ground to a halt. Three years on, in 2019, it was effectively 'dead in the water'. As well as the funding issue, some key people were lost from the project, and costs were spiralling upwards. With spirits in the congregation already at a low ebb, further challenges were added in 2020 as COVID brought fundraising activities to a halt.

Despite the challenges and delays, Alasdair has remained firm in his faith. He believes that the Lord has given the site to the church and intends for a new church to be built.

'When it's done, we will be able to expand many of our activities and do lots more outreach, hosting events that all the community will be welcome to attend.'



Andrew and Alasdair with the current Tain Free Church in background

During 2019, prayers were specifically focused on the provision of people with the leadership skills needed to get the project going again. The congregation were also praying for three new families to increase the Sunday School intake. Alasdair feels quite emotional when he recalls how God has amazingly and faithfully answered these prayers. By early 2020 four new families had come into the congregation, three with children of Sunday School age. It is these same families that also provided three gifted and capable people to lead the church build project; people with the relevant qualifications who are willing to get involved. God answered two prayers in one. Recently the central Church loan fund re-opened, allowing the church to receive a loan for £150,000 towards the build cost. Together with the incredible fundraising efforts of the congregation and generous donations from individuals within the community, the

church is now within striking distance of the crucial halfway figure of the total project cost. A challenge which seemed impossible six months ago is now very real and achievable within this year. If anyone can help us get there we would be delighted to hear from them.

It is expected that the project will go out to tender this year, and with a skilled Grants and Loans Team within the congregation it is hoped that we can raise £350,000 through grant applications to a variety of bodies.

If you would like to offer your support, please visit our website ([bit.ly/TainNewChurch](http://bit.ly/TainNewChurch)) to make a donation, sign up to our regular newsletters or follow us on our Facebook page @TainFearnFreeChurch You can also contact our treasurer Mrs Anne Wilkie by email at [tandffc.treasurer19@gmail.com](mailto:tandffc.treasurer19@gmail.com) or send a cheque to her at 10 Duthac Wynd, Tain, IV19 1LP. ●



## TAIN + FEARN

### CHURCH HISTORY

In 1900, the majority of the Free Church of Scotland joined the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church of Scotland. In Tain virtually the whole congregation and the minister entered the union. The few who remained with the Free Church were dispossessed of the imposing church building which sits in the centre of Tain and is now the meeting place of Tain parish Church of Scotland.

Ten years later in 1910 a corrugated iron church was erected on the current site on Scotsburn Road which had been purchased by the Free Church remnant. This building served the small congregation until 1938 when it was replaced with the current church building. From early on, it suffered with structural problems necessitating the addition of side buttresses to support the roof. In the mid-90s a new hall was built at back of the church to replace the one that part of the original "tin" church.

Tain and Fearn congregation was formed when Tain & Edderton was united with Fearn in 2009. They continue to worship in two locations at Tain and Hilton which are 8 miles apart. ●

### INTERVIEW WITH JAMES SKINNER, ELDER AT TAIN & FEARN

James and his wife Murdina came to Tain Free Church nearly 50 years ago. At that time, the oil industry was expanding in Easter Ross, causing the local population to double. James, a young General Practitioner in his mid-twenties, joined Fearn Medical Practice to serve the needs of the families moving into the area. For the young couple it was a wonderful time to join the Church along with other young families new to the area. James and Murdina had their first child baptised in the current Free Church building, followed by two siblings. They both helped with the Sunday School on Sunday afternoons. Up to 40 children from the community would attend, half of which had no family connection to the church.

When asked to give a perspective on how the Free Church in Tain had changed over the years, James said 'Numbers attending have fluctuated over the last fifty years, never really going much above 80. It was only quite recently, that the church has seen something of a revival with quite a movement of people coming to faith and we now regularly have 100-120 people attending the Sunday morning service in Tain'.

When asked what changes he had noticed most, James said 'Over recent years people have come to us from different denominational backgrounds, or indeed, no church background at all. The services are less formal than they used to be and there is a real sense of excitement and anticipation each Sunday as we are encouraged by seeing the Lord at work'. ●



# MAY/JUNE 2021 PRAYER DIARY

Please send requests to Dayspring MacLeod ([dayspring.macleod@icloud.com](mailto:dayspring.macleod@icloud.com)). Other than a few specific requests, we will be focusing on the 'big prayers' of the Bible this month

## Wed 10<sup>th</sup>–Wed 12<sup>th</sup>

In worship of the Lord and remembrance of who he is: Psalm 145:8-10, Revelation 5:12. *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. ... 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!'*

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

Pray for all those who have been affected by Pray for the Queen and the rest of the Royal Family as they mourn the Duke of Edinburgh. Ask the Lord to be as near to Her Majesty as he would to any widow who has entrusted herself to his care; also that the grieving process will give space for deep family rifts to heal.

## Sun 16<sup>th</sup>–Tues 18<sup>th</sup>

For those you know who are struggling mentally, emotionally or spiritually, and particularly who may be discouraged or distant from the Lord: Eph. 3:17-19. *...And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

## Weds 19<sup>th</sup>–Fri 21<sup>st</sup>

Pray for the Free Church General Assembly, asking God's blessing on the new Moderator, Rev. Neil MacMillan, as well as a long-awaited rest for the outgoing Rev. Donnie G. Macdonald. Ask the Lord to pour his wisdom and grace upon the Fathers and Brethren as they seek to do his will regarding the running of the church.

## Sat 22<sup>nd</sup>–Mon 24<sup>th</sup>

For missionaries, including those who work with Operacion San Andres, and for yourself in sharing the gospel: Eph. 6:19-20. *Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

## Tues 25<sup>th</sup>–Thurs 27<sup>th</sup>

For yourself, as you reflect on any actions, thoughts or attitudes which may come between your perfect peace with the Lord: Psalm 139:23-24. Search me,

God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

## Sun 25<sup>th</sup>–Tues 27<sup>th</sup>

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.

## Fri 28<sup>th</sup>–Sun 30<sup>th</sup>

For the young Christians that you know: Psalm 119:9-11. *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

## Mon 31<sup>st</sup>–Weds 2<sup>nd</sup>

For yourself, and for anyone whom you feel has wronged you: Matthew 6:12-14. *And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*

## Thurs 3<sup>rd</sup>–Sat 5<sup>th</sup>

For the persecuted church, including many whom Dr Adam has served: 1 Peter 5:10-11. *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever.*

## Sun 6<sup>th</sup>–Tues 8<sup>th</sup>

For your own minister and elders, and others whom you know in ministry: Eph. 1:18-20. *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...*

## Weds 9<sup>th</sup>–Fri 11<sup>th</sup>

Let the anxiety and uncertainty of this life recede as you pray along with John in Revelation 22:20, *Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

# MORALITY AND HOW WE GOT THE COVID VACCINE

BY **DR ESMOND BIRNIE**, Senior Economist, Ulster University Business School

**H**OW GOOD IT IS TO HAVE A THEOLOGY IN WHICH THERE IS NO TENSION BETWEEN USING THE BEST MEDICINE POSSIBLE AND LOOKING DIRECTLY TO THE LORD FOR ANSWER TO PRAYER.' Thus wrote the American Presbyterian Francis Schaeffer as he battled cancer in 1979. Ultimately, as Christians, we can describe the near-miraculous roll-out of the Covid vaccines in less than one year as another aspect of God's common grace to humanity (Matthew 5:45). But what are some of the more immediate explanations?

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson told a meeting of his backbench MPs that 'greed' had produced the vaccines. He later claimed this was only meant to be a joke.

Those of us who believe that a market economy, albeit one constrained by law and guided by ethics, is the best option for our society may feel that with friends like the PM, who needs enemies! The PM's 'mis-speaking' might be used by some to support a level of state control which is neither morally right nor economically effective.

The Prime Minister's take on morality is perhaps not so much anti-Christian as pre-Christian. One of his biographers, Andrew Gimson, has written, 'It is clear [Mr Johnson] is inspired by the Romans, and even more by the Greeks and repelled by the early Christians.' In his remarks about the vaccine Boris Johnson was probably less Pericles and more Gordon Gekko, the character from the 1987 film *Wall Street* who produced the infamous line 'greed is good'. He was probably saying what others think.

The Prime Minister in fact touched on a debate which has existed since the start of modern economic thought. The early 18th-century Dutch writer Bernard Mandeville argued that vice, and especially the greed which underpinned conspicuous consumption, was a good thing in order to give people jobs through growing the economy. His contemporary, the Scottish philosopher (and economist) Adam Smith, was pained by Mandeville's hymn of praise for vice and tried to rebut him. Smith, for all his affinity to the religiously agnostic or even atheist David Hume, seems to have believed in something akin to the Christian concept of the moral conscience. According to Smith, we all have an inner guide or 'impartial spectator' as to what is the right thing to do: 'The all-wise Author of Nature has, in this manner, taught man to respect the sentiments and judgments of his brethren...' (Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*).

In reality, the research for, and production of, vaccines drew on a wide variety of motivations amongst the international teams of scientists and business people. Some of those motivations were strongly humanitarian. Some, yes, related to a perception of business opportunities. It is notable that AstraZeneca is producing its vaccines at cost price or zero profit through to at least the summer of 2021. At the same time, some pharma firms are thinking about their longer-term position, which isn't necessarily a bad thing because without profits there may not be the resources to invest in future drug research.

If the Prime Minister had wished to use a less colourful and more accurate way of speaking, he could have said that the production of the vaccines owed quite a lot to profit-seeking. And profit need not be a (morally) bad word. Standard economic theory, back to Adam





*As Christians, we can describe the near-miraculous roll-out of the Covid vaccines in less than one year as another aspect of God's common grace to humanity.*

Smith, defines profit as both a reward for taking risks and as a signal to produce what society finds relatively useful. And if markets sometimes fail, we know from experience that governments sometimes also fail to make wise decisions. The experience of the pandemic is that profit-seeking firms, albeit with large amounts of state intervention especially in terms of paying for research, have produced a better outcome than relying solely on state control. After all, if we think of the classic state-run economy, the old Soviet Union during 1917-1991, this was not particularly successful at producing pharmaceutical advances.

Given the imperfections of human nature, a market economy with government interventions tends to produce better outcomes than the available alternatives. The vaccine outcome is yet another demonstration of that. Yes, there certainly have been times during the recent past when parts of so-called 'Big Pharma' have demonstrated ethical flaws: one estimate (BMO Global Asset Management) is that the industry had to pay out fines and settlements of about \$50 billion over the last decade given various failures to meet regulatory standards. There will always be ethical dilemmas around pricing life-saving drugs. Too high a price denies some access, especially in poorer countries, but a system of price controls that sets prices at a very low level will probably throttle innovation and hence cost lives in the longer term.

As with any part of our economy or society, it is a mistake to either demonise or beatify the pharmaceutical industry. The people who work in that sector are, like all of us, fallen human beings who need God's grace. We should pray for Christian research scientists and business managers to exercise a godly influence. In 2020, through God's common grace, Pharma delivered the goods in terms of the Covid vaccine. ●

Dr Esmond Birnie is Senior Economist at Ulster University Business School



# MALCOLM JOHN MACKAY (1933-2019)

BY **REV. HUGH FERRIER**

**M**ALCOLM JOHN MACKAY — BETTER KNOWN AS CALUM OR CALUM IAIN — WAS BORN IN STORNOWAY IN 1933. His early years were rocked by the loss of both of his parents. His mother died when Calum Iain was only 16 and his father when he was 19.

He eventually moved to Glasgow and started work in the Linwood Car Factory. In 1955 he married Maggie and in 1965 they returned to Stornoway, where Calum began work with Scottish Hydro. He was to remain with them until his retirement.

Calum Iain was a regular church-goer and he started attending the High Church of Scotland where some of the family were baptised. However, it was in the early 1980s that the Lord began a work of grace in Calum's life and he made a public profession of his faith in 1983.

Calum Iain was a true gentleman. Although quiet in nature he was always warm and encouraging. In 1989 he became a deacon in the High Church and a few years later he became an elder. Calum Iain took his role as an elder in both the High Church of Scotland congregation and later the High Free congregation seriously and he executed that office with great diligence. He was committed to attending both the mid-week and Saturday evening prayer meetings. He would often engage in pastoral visitation and was an accomplished and willing leader of the praise. Even when unable to attend church services Calum Iain was always prayerfully mindful of the congregation, and the first question he always asked upon visiting him in his home was regarding their welfare.

Calum Iain loved and was loved by the Kirk Session, whom he affectionately called 'the boys'. His face would shine when in their company and he would endeavour to be with them even when his own health was poor. The last Communion that the Kirk Session had with Calum in his home was a truly a special time — a time when we were so conscious of the joy and peace of the Lord so evident in Calum Iain.

In recent years Calum Iain's illnesses were a real struggle not only for him but also for those watching. Despite the debilitating nature of his illness he was always thankful for everything that was being done for him.

It was, without any exaggeration, a pleasure and a privilege to be with him in his home. Those of us who were found in his home can indeed testify that after coming away from his presence we always felt the richer for that time of fellowship.

He was surrounded at all times by his loving

family, who listened to his prayers and earnest pleas that they too would trust in the Lord for themselves. On 26th October 2019 — after 64 years of marriage and many years of humbly walking with his Saviour — Calum Iain passed from time into eternity. He was gone from our circle but, as he loved to sing, he was still 'safe in the arms of Jesus'. As a Kirk Session we acknowledge that we are poorer as a result of his departure, but we continue look to the Lord to raise up men who will carry on in the work that our friend and brother was so committed to. ●

Isaiah 46:3-4

*"Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the people of Israel,  
you whom I have upheld since your birth,  
and have carried since you were born.  
Even to your old age and gray hairs  
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.  
I have made you and I will carry you;  
I will sustain you and I will rescue you."*



# WILLIAM JOHN MORRISON (1937-2020)

BY **REV. HUGH FERRIER**

**W**ILLIAM (WILLIE) MORRISON WAS BORN IN STORNOWAY IN 1937 AND BROUGHT UP IN SEAVIEW TERRACE. After completing his National Service in Germany, Willie returned home where he trained as a butcher. He worked for many years in the town — latterly working at the Fisherman's Cooperative — and lived with his brother Austin on Seaforth Road.

It was following the death of his mother in the early 1980s that Willie, along with his brothers, started attending services in the High Church of Scotland. During this time a work of divine grace began in Willie's life and he came to faith in the early years of the ministry of the Rev. Roddy Morrison. It was in August 1983 that Willie publicly professed his faith, to the joy of many.

Willie was a friendly and caring man with a keen sense of humour and was always ready to testify to the Lord's grace both in conversation and in prayer. In the late 1980s Willie became a Deacon in the High Church of Scotland and was often found sharing in the leading of the worship in the local hospital and care homes. After a number of years Willie became an elder and was tireless in visiting his area. In so many ways Willie was an exemplary elder — a man devoted to his congregation, a man who loved his brothers on the Kirk Session, a man who was a constant and unwavering friend and support to his minister. Even in old age and ill health Willie endeavoured to carry out his duties as an elder to the utmost of his abilities and to the increasing admiration of the congregation. It's no exaggeration to say that nothing was ever too much trouble for him.

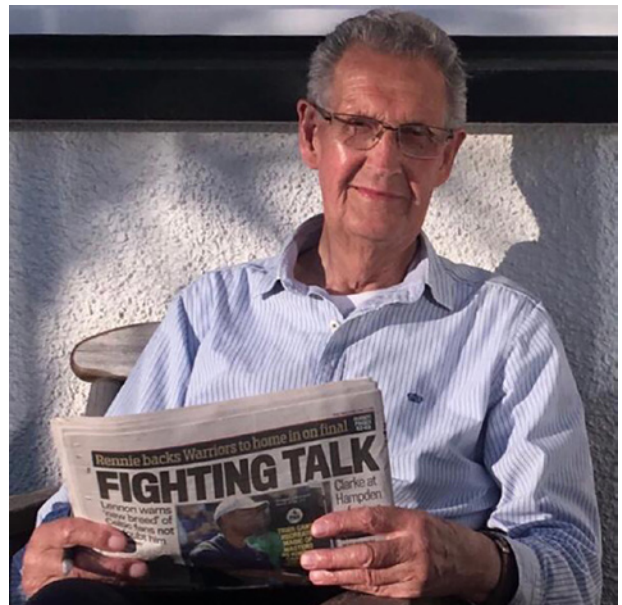
Willie was always praising the Lord for his goodness to him and this was very apparent when he met Marann Macleod, whom he married in 1998. It was upon marrying Marann that Willie found himself moving from Seaforth Road to Guershader, where he was to live for over twenty happy years.

During Willie's long illness he displayed a great spirit of joy and contentment. Despite increasing pain and weakness he persisted in attending the services on the Lord's Day, as well as the Tuesday and Saturday night prayer meetings. All who heard him pray can testify to the way in which Willie's prayers warmed their hearts as he prayed with love and affection for the congregation, that all would know the blessing of being 'wrapped up in the bundle of life'. Despite his frailty, his vision for the future of the congregation and his desire to be found among the Lord's people was undimmed.

When it was evident that his time on earth was drawing to a close Willie again showed characteristic humility and grace both within his home and Bethesda Hospice, where he was so lovingly cared for by Marann and the whole family. He was loved by them and they were loved by him. Willie was a man who felt no shame in expressing his deep and abiding affection for those closest to him. It was with his family surrounding him that Willie left our circle to join the Lord's redeemed in glory on 4 January 2020. The passing of Willie has been a great blow to the Kirk Session and congregation of the High Free (Stornoway). We lament the fact that we will no longer feel the warmth of his handshake, hear the gentle and winsome humility of his prayers, see the twinkle in his eye or receive Christ-centred counsel and encouragement from his lips. However, we take heart from knowing that for Willie the seasons of pain and suffering have at last come to an end and that he's now gazing on the face of the Saviour whom he loved, and sitting by what he so often spoke of as 'the beautiful shore'. ●

John 14:1-4

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."*



# ONE BIBLE. MANY VERSIONS. HOW DO I CHOOSE?

Free Church Books asked **REV. THOMAS DAVIS** for some advice on how to make this important decision...

**B**UYING A CUP OF COFFEE SOUNDS SIMPLE: IT JUST NEEDS TO BE HOT, BLACK OR WHITE, AND COFFEE-ISH, RIGHT? Well, the reality is a bit more complicated. First of all, you need to choose which coffee shop. Is it going to be Starbucks, Costa or a local café? Once you overcome that decision, the options only increase. Is it going to be a cappuccino, mochaccino, americano, long, short, tall, skinny, flat? (Does anyone know what all these actually mean?!) It's all coffee, but there are tonnes of options.

For readers of English, choosing a Bible in 2021 can

a bit like choosing a coffee. KJV, ESV, NIV, NLT, TNIV, RSV, NKJV, NJB, NEB, GNB, NASV – these are just some of the many options. This vast selection has left us with the very opposite problem of our ancestors. 500 years ago, Christians in Scotland were desperate for just one Bible in English. Today, we have so many options at our fingertips, it can be hard to know where to start. Which version should you choose?

Well, there's no definitive answer to that question and people's choices will be different. But here are seven things to keep in mind when choosing a Bible version.



Photo by Sixteen Miles Out on Unsplash

### **We must never forget that the Bible was written in Ancient Hebrew and Koine (Common) Greek**

Every Bible written in another language is a translation of that inspired original. The Hebrew and Greek are in a category of their own.

### **The Bible must be translated into the common languages that people use**

So while we always recognise the authority of the original, the fact that very few people know Hebrew and Greek makes translation work essential. That was one of the great emphases of the Reformation. Men like William Tyndale risked their lives to translate the Bible into a language people could understand. A century after Tyndale, the writers of the Westminster Confession of Faith insisted that the Scriptures must be translated into the vulgar language of every nation (WCF 1:8). And the same principle still applies; English Bibles today should use the language that is in common use.

### **Although there are many options, there are really only two main types of translation: literal and dynamic**

Literal translations are trying to be exactly that; they seek to translate words as literally as possible, and to keep the order of words close to the original. That is not always possible, but that is the aim. Examples of this type would be the NIV, the ESV and the New American Standard Version. Dynamic translations focus not so much on words, but on meaning. A dynamic translation will use different terms and adjusted word order to make the meaning as clear as possible. Examples include the New Living Translation and the Good News Bible. Here's an example from John 17:17. Taken totally literally, the Greek says: *'Sanctify them in the truth; the word your truth it is.'*

So the ESV and NIV translate this, *'Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.'* You can see that the words are translated fairly literally and the order is almost the same. It's a very good translation.

The New Living Translation translates the same verse as, *'Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.'* This has swapped the word 'sanctify' for the phrase 'make them holy' and it has added the words 'teach them'. That's not the exact words, but it is exactly what Jesus meant. It is also a very good translation, which brings us to the fourth point.

### **Every translation has strengths and weaknesses**

Sometimes people can speak about different Bible versions as though one is the best and the rest are rubbish. This is not very helpful. There is, of course, one that is best, but it's written in Hebrew and Greek. English versions all have strengths and weaknesses. Usually, literal translations are closer to the original, but can be harder to read and take

in. Dynamic translations are easier to understand, but they may lose some of the finer details. Here, I also want to mention the King James Version. This is a remarkable translation, one which served the English-speaking church for centuries. Today, there's no denying that much of it no longer reflects the common language of current English speakers. But at the same time, the old language of the KJV has a beautiful, poetic character that can often be helpful and memorable for a reader today. Like every other English version, it has its strengths and weaknesses.

### **Don't be dogmatic until you are a) fluent in Ancient Hebrew, and b) fluent in Koine Greek**

Often people can have very strong opinions which they are not qualified to hold. I remember once being told by someone who didn't like the ESV that it had missed out hundreds of words that appear in the original Greek. I thought that sounded bad. But I later discovered that Koine Greek puts the definite article before a person's name (so it says 'the Peter said...', 'the Paul went...' 'the Philip ran...'). English, obviously, doesn't do that. So it's perfectly appropriate for lots of words to be left out.

### **It's good to try different options**

Rather than pick one version and never deviate from it, it's better to try and use a variety. A more literal translation is brilliant for close study of specific verses. A dynamic version is excellent for reading longer sections. So if I am studying a verse or paragraph, I will use the ESV, NIV or NASV. But if I am reading through several chapters in one go, I will often use the NLT. And, of course, today we have the huge advantage that we can access all these versions online at the click of button.

### **Choosing a translation is a privilege, not a problem**

We said at the start that we have the opposite problem to our spiritual ancestors who had no Bible in their own language. God forbid that we forget that many people today still have exactly the same problem. The work of Bible translation has a vast amount still to do, and it is a work that we should support in prayer and financially. And as we choose our English version, we must never forget that having to make that decision is a brilliant problem to have. ●

If you're looking for a new Bible to keep or give away, Free Church Books has a great selection available at [thefree.church/bibles](http://thefree.church/bibles).

# Can Anything Good Come Out of COVID-19?

Operación San Andrés (OSA) is a diaconal ministry founded by Dr Luis Campos, a former pupil of Colegio San Andrés, a school founded by the Free Church of Scotland. OSA's ministry is directed to the poor and marginalized in the community of Collique, a sprawling collection of shanty towns on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. At the heart of OSA's ministry is the 'Luz de Esperanza' congregation. You can learn a little more about OSA on their website: [operacionsanandres.org](http://operacionsanandres.org)

**REV. DAVID MACPHERSON** reflects on the gracious providence of God evident in these past months of ministry.

**A**RE YOU WEARY OF COVID-19? I am. It's been devastating in so many ways and on so many fronts. So many deaths, so much pain, so much loss. It seems almost obscene to ask the question... Can anything good come out of COVID-19? As I formulated the question, my mind was drawn to words of Nathanael in John's gospel: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' I love Philip's answer — 'Come and see.'

As we wrestle with the question of whether anything good can come out of COVID-19, we can follow Philip's lead. Let me invite you to 'Come and see...'

## NEW DISCOVERIES OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

It's been a fraught year but we serve a faithful God. Let me share with you something of Analy's experience of God's faithfulness in times of Covid. Analy participates in OSA's program for women, Talita Cumi, and her twelve-year-old son Anderson is part of our Educational Enrichment Program. Analy begins each day echoing the words of the psalmist, 'Lord, you are my refuge and my strength...I put my trust in you alone'. And Analy has discovered the Lord to be her strength in the midst of Covid. Listen to her own words: 'When the pandemic hit I lost my job...soon there was no money for water, electricity, or food...I felt like I would faint under the load...then I began to receive help from OSA. I prayed to the Lord: Thank you, Lord, for preparing me for the pandemic.' The preparation Analy is thankful to God for is the skills she learnt in the OSA pastry classes. I'll let Analy take up the story: 'To begin with I was afraid that because of the pandemic nobody would buy my

*pastries, but with faith and a smile, and the lovely aroma of the pastries, I soon had plenty clients.'*



*Soup kitchen helpers!*

## NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD'S CHILDREN IN COLLIQUE

COVID-19 has had a devastating economic impact on thousands of families in Collique. With the help of many OSA supporters we have been able to put in place an emergency relief project that has focused on food aid for soup kitchens right across Collique, especially in the poorest neighborhoods up on the dusty hillsides. Quite apart from the number of people helped — over 2,000 daily meals — this has allowed us to build precious



Collique Panorama

relationships with key folks in parts of Collique we previously had no presence in, thanks to Covid!

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE IN GOD'S NAME

New relationships lead to new opportunities. As we look ahead into 2021 and beyond there are doors opening that we could never have imagined. With God's help, we look forward to grasping these new opportunities for witness and service for the Luz de Esperanza congregation and OSA health programmes as we reach out to the poorest of the poor. Let me close by sharing with you our first encounter with one community, Las Lomas de San Felipe, that regally looks down on Collique from the very highest point in town. We'd heard that the neighbours there had started a soup kitchen and so Noe, our soup kitchen guy, headed up the hill to investigate. On arrival he discovered they were cooking with the very last of their supplies: a big pot of soup with rice and a few scraps of vegetables. Noe suggested our arrival might be an answer to their prayers, and the community leader pointed to an old lady sitting nearby and explained: 'She prays for us.' An old lady praying to the eternal God who hears and answers prayer! The next thing we know we are being offered a plot of land to build a church!

Can anything good come out of Covid? I hope that as you've read these stories you've been able to 'come and see' and judge for yourself. ●



Supplies for Operación San Andrés

Rev. David MacPherson is Executive Director of Operación San Andrés. Before taking up this role, he was minister of Bon Accord Free Church.



Kid's lunch at Operación San Andrés, Collique

## STUDYING AN MTh IN MISSIOLOGY AT THE ETS CENTRE FOR MISSION

This month we are interviewing current and former students on the MTh Taught Masters in Missiology offered through the ETS Centre for Mission. We are delighted to hear from Màiri MacPherson, Cate Otanes and Graeme Wilkinson as they tell us about their experiences on this course.

### **Please tell us a little about yourself.**

**Cate:** I am from the Philippines, married to Keven. We are part of Merkinch Free Church, a church plant in a housing scheme in Merkinch, Inverness. I am a full-time student studying a Masters of Theology in Missiology under Dr Alistair Wilson.

**Graeme:** I am 38 years old and am originally from Bishopthorpe, a village on the outskirts of York. I grew up being taken to church by my mum until the age of 12 or 13 when I stopped going. It was not until around the time of my 30th birthday that I came to faith and started to attend York Baptist Church. It was around the same time that I felt drawn to study theology. When I was made redundant by Aviva, I applied to York St John University to read Christian Theology and was accepted. After completing my degree, I moved up to Edinburgh to further my studies at ETS, and I am in regular attendance at St Columba's Free Church.



*Graeme Wilkinson*

**Màiri:** I am originally from Northern Ireland – although that's perhaps difficult to tell from my name! I have lived in Edinburgh for around 7 years and I am a member of the St Columba's congregation. I am married to Samuel and in my spare time you can usually find me playing musical instruments or watching rugby.

### **What made you apply to study the MTh in Missiology at ETS?**

**Cate:** I decided to study the MTh in Missiology at ETS because I have always been interested in mission. After obtaining my honours degree in Theology, I decided to pursue a Masters, and I found that the MTh in Missiology programme offered by ETS best fit my interests.



*Cate Otanes*

**Graeme:** I was coming towards the end of my second year at York St John and we had to do a module looking at Theology and work. The module was designed to



make us think about what we wanted to do once we had graduated. During this time, I felt the desire to study theology further and started to do some research on specialist Bible colleges. One of the institutions that came up was ETS, so I booked an appointment to go and have a look around. At the time I originally enquired about the MTh in Scottish Theology and Church History. However, having met with Professor McIntosh and Dr Alistair Wilson on my visit day, it became clear that the better fit between my undergraduate degree in Christian Theology and the two courses was the MTh in Missiology. So, I applied for the MTh in Missiology and graduated with a MTh in December of 2019.

**Màiri:** For my undergraduate degree, I studied French and German at the University of Edinburgh, specialising in postcolonial and cultural studies in my final year. That year I was also deeply struck by the conviction that my faith ought to penetrate every aspect of my life, including my academic studies. However, how could I ever reconcile it with what I was learning about colonialism and the impact of Christendom across the world? Could I really engage with these topics in academia in a God-honouring way? I knew I wanted to go on to further studies following my undergraduate degree, and I mentioned this to my friend's dad one evening while he was visiting. He suggested the new MTh in Missiology commencing that September at ETS, where he just so happened to be a professor. I applied for the course and every logistic fell into place – in the very way we always pray for, yet are also always surprised by.



*Màiri MacPherson*

#### **What have you enjoyed most about the course?**

**Cate:** The Mth Taught Masters in Missiology Programme consists of nine essays and a dissertation. My course enabled me to explore various topics and issues in mission such as globalisation, Pentecostalism, and missional hermeneutics, all important topics to tackle. With the help of Dr Wilson, my supervisor, the essays helped me gain a better understanding of what

God is doing in his world and how the church is to participate in his mission.

**Graeme:** The first thing that I enjoyed about the course was considering the tension between Christian orthodoxy and how we make that understandable to people in different contexts without compromising the Gospel. Another was doing my Masters thesis, which contrasted the British colonial method of missionary work, where missionaries would build a large infrastructure in terms of churches, hospitals, schools, etc, with the much simpler methods of strategic church planting and discipleship adopted by the Apostle Paul.

**Màiri:** The course has enabled me to grapple with topics which I had previously studied in a secular setting – such as translation, multiculturalism and globalisation – but now with a theological framework. I have continually been encouraged to engage with writers from across cultures, languages and theological traditions, opening my eyes to the unity which the Christian faith offers in its diversity.

#### **How has the course helped prepare you for ongoing involvement in the Church's mission?**

**Cate:** The course has helped me understand God's mission and the Church's mission by reading and engaging with scholarly literature by individuals worldwide. Thus far, the essays I have done are equipping me to think and act missionally as a church member and as a neighbour in our scheme.

**Graeme:** Although I am currently working for HSBC, the wide variety of topics on the MTh in Missiology syllabus has helped me to prepare for ongoing involvement in the Church's mission. It has given me the grounding that mission happens in a wide variety of places and that not all mission has to be paid full-time missionary work. Whether or not it is God's plan for me to be involved in full-time missionary work in the future, for the moment the mission field that he has given me is the people that I encounter through the work that I am doing at HSBC.

**Màiri:** It has been an immense encouragement to see my studies in Missiology already apply directly to my job as Mission Coordinator for the Free Church of Scotland. Through critically examining contemporary themes in mission and engaging with very recent scholarly works, I have been able to apply what I learn at a practical level as we try to engage the entire church in the work of mission in the 21st century, both in Scotland and across the world. ●

**If you would like any more information about the MTh in Missiology, please visit [ets.ac.uk](https://ets.ac.uk)**

*People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.*  
Proverbs 14:29 NLT

### **TIDAL TURBINES NOT TEMPER TANTRUMS!**

People tend to either love them or hate them — tidal turbines, that is. Views and opinions about their usefulness ecologically, economically and even aesthetically vary widely, but they are a fact of life now; a reality we have to recognise and increasingly so as environmental issues come into greater and greater prominence.

But I think there's a great lesson to be learned from these marmite monstrosities, and it has to do with dealing with anger, which Proverbs 14:29 speaks of.

Tidal turbines do not stand in the sea and say, 'Peace, be still'; that would defeat their very purpose. Rather they stand in the sea to capture its tempest and turn it into a force for good. The point and purpose of them is to harness the howling gale, the surging sea, the terrifying tempest and use it for bigger, better and brighter purposes.

We probably tend to either deny we feel angry or minimise just how angry we feel at times. Things in life can trigger angry feelings and impulses, like injustice and unfairness. But rather than denying or diminishing or deflecting anger, why not be a tidal turbine? That anger in our hearts and minds is like a storm-tossed sea, a surging within which can begin with a swell of irritation, slowly rising to waves of aggravation and all too soon resulting in nothing short of a tempest of anger. Why not take the power and energy of this and capture it for good? We can harness the howling gale we feel within at times, control it and channel it for bigger, better and brighter purposes.

Psalm 4:4 says, '*Be angry and do not sin.*' That's it in a nutshell. Jesus said the Laodicean church made him feel sick not because they were hot heads or cold fish, but because they were tepid (Rev. 3:16). They were lackadaisical, apathetic, and therefore had no passion or zeal for anything much, let alone the Lord and his cause and Kingdom.

I think of Jesus driving out the money-changers and lenders in the Temple in John 2:13-17. John reflected on the incident in this way: '*His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."*' Or again in Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, '*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*' The word 'gentle' describes a wild horse broken in: it's power under control. Passion harnessed. Tempest trained.

So, a hot temper can show foolishness; but a harnessed temper can be used in faithfulness. Don't let temper take control, but take control of temper and use that passion, zeal and energy and channel it in a positive way to address the things that Jesus had zeal for: injustice, unfairness, oppression, persecution and everything that dishonours the name of God. Let's not be tepid, but with our temper, be a tidal turbine, capturing, controlling and channelling that power for good. 'Holy Spirit, give me the zeal of Jesus today and grow self-control in me, making me a tidal turbine.' ●



# REFLECTIONS

# REFLECTIONS?

BY **REV. COLIN MACLEOD**

# Let go of 'Fine'

**DAYSRING MACLEOD** ponders a recipe for revival



Photo by Elena Rabkina on Unsplash

**H**OW ARE YOU? Are you fine? I'm fine — but there are many different kinds of 'fine'.

There's bearable fine, ecstatic-but-playing-it-cool fine, contented fine, indifferent fine, I-don't-want-to-talk-about-it fine, turmoil fine, angry fine, easygoing fine, in-a-hurry fine. It's got to be right up there with 'nice' as one of the most bland and yet most common descriptors we use. If we meet on the street and you tell me you're fine, I don't really come away with any more information about you. It's a placekeeper adjective — say 'fine', move on with your day.

A baseline definition of *fine* might be 'acceptable, unremarkable, benign'. So if you tell me you're fine, my assumption is that you're not inordinately upset or happy about anything, you're just going through the motions of a day. Unperturbed.

In many ways this is a good thing. Surely 'acceptable' is better than unhappy! There's nothing wrong with having a fine day. But what about a 'fine' life? And what about a 'fine' spiritual life? Is your walk with the Lord acceptable, unremarkable, benign? It is so easy to be content with a fine spiritual walk — one where we pray when we really need to, we show up at church, we read a few Bible verses most days, we know God loves and forgives us. But we really live through our comforts and our distractions — sports, music, movies, food or relationships take up far more of our attention and our emotions. 'Fine' often means hurtling through life's obligations and pleasures without taking enough time with the Lord to truly refresh our souls or hear what his Word is saying. No wonder we often feel spiritually depleted, and no wonder that weariness bleeds into our mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

It is easy, especially when coming out of a period of struggle, to coast for a while, just being thankful to have the pressure off, but not really seeking more of the Lord. Like Israel, we repent and return to the Lord when in dire need, but drift away from him in times of plenty. We accept 'fine' as if it's a gift.

Fine is not a gift. Jesus said, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' He promised to those who lived with open hands 'a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over'. Many of us have experienced a closeness with the Lord in times of darkness and pain, but have we experienced his overwhelming goodness when our path is easy? So often that is the time when I have slipped — not only into complacency, but also into self-centredness, indulgence, ambition, irritability. When the world is good to you, you seek more of the world's goodness. When you recognise that even the world's good things come only from God, you dig deeper into his fellowship.

I believe we will experience revival — first as individuals, then as communities, and even as cities or nations — when we earnestly and faithfully seek the Lord not just for his comfort in pain, but for his abundant life.

Here's the catch. When I prayed for abundance in the past — half-heartedly — I pictured it coming upon me as sheer joy. As a new interest when reading long-familiar Bible stories; as a sense of the Holy Spirit's power and strength. What I didn't realise is that before filling our cup to overflowing, God first wants to carve out space in our cup that we have filled up with rubbish.

Hosea tells us to 'break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he comes and rains righteousness on you'. All of those things that take up our mental space and give us more enjoyment and comfort than God does — he wants us to choose him instead. All the relationships that we rely on more than we do on him — he wants us to understand that our stability, strength and saving love aren't found in them. Think of all those sinful habits that we've gotten used to justifying to ourselves. All those attitudes which twinge away at our peace of mind. All those verses that strike at our heart even as we try to ignore them. We let our financial 'security' keep us from generosity.

Our abundance must go if we want to make space for God's abundance. Nothing can be held back. We must challenge ourselves constantly before the Lord, asking him if there is any sin or selfishness which is keeping us from full unity and common purpose with him.

Our abundance must go if we want to make space for God's abundance.

There are three things I think we must keep in mind if we wish to truly seek God's very best for our lives, and his greatest use for our lives. The first, as we've just discussed, is repentance and sacrifice. The second is *waiting*. I have only recently noticed how common a theme this is in the Bible. Abraham believed God would fulfil his promise of a son for ten years before Isaac was born. Daniel fasted for three weeks before God's messenger appeared to answer his agonising questions about his visions. I don't know about you, but if I fast for a whole morning I feel like I've earned a spiritual breakthrough! If we really 'set our heart

to understand and to humble ourselves before God', as Daniel did, that means trusting God's timing to answer and not doubting if it takes a while. He so often works through the waiting. I have learned to appreciate the phrase 'and

What about a 'fine' spiritual life? Is your walk with the Lord acceptable, unremarkable, benign?

God remembered'. This phrase is used for someone who has been waiting a long time — Rachel, Hannah, Joseph — and is so expressive not because God forgets, but because we can sometimes *feel* forgotten. Sometimes he is simply teaching us to endure in times that feel like silence.

Finally, abundance is not about persuading God to fulfil our wishes for our lives, but about being *conformed* to his desires for us. This means making us look more like Jesus in our character and in our very ability to be fulfilled by relationship with the Father. Sometimes the answer to our prayer will not be the material blessing we were expecting, but a change to our desires. The end goal of abundance is not just to be peaceful in our spirit, but to be so satisfied in Christ's goodness and beauty that we choose to take our solace in him rather than our own interests and passions; that we react to difficulty and pain as he would; that we take joy in the midst of things that would ordinarily be a struggle; that we show off the 'scent' of Christ in our interactions.

And ultimately, because Christ's great passion is for his people, his abundance in our cup overflows — where? *Onto those around us*. Shalom (the peace of unity and completeness) in our homes. Care for the poor. Compassion for those who oppose us. Generosity of spirit even when we would usually be discouraged. Praying mercy for our enemies.

I'm not at abundance yet. The Lord is still carving out space that he wants to fill. There is still fallow ground to plough. But I have tasted his goodness, and I want to be filled up and overflowing — and never just 'fine' again! ●

# Hopeless end or endless hope?

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.

**T**HE MORE WE HEARD AND SAW IN JESUS, THE HIGHER OUR HOPES ROSE THAT OUR MESSIAH HAD COME AT LAST. As Jews we looked for the fulfilment of the prophecies. And for a while there was a hope that burned within our hearts and lifted our weary heads.

But then it all seemed to come to a horrible end when we saw Jesus hounded to his death at Golgotha; our hopes were dashed.

My name is Cleopas and my wife and I were two of the disciples of Jesus. I know there are twelve who were known as *the* disciples, but there were many others of us who also came to believe in him.

Can you imagine what it was like for us all as we witnessed the growing tide of opposition to Jesus? There were people who hated him and were determined to get rid of him. We watched helplessly as a combination of people engineered things so that he was condemned to be crucified as a rebel and blasphemer.

Well, I've seen a few zealots in my time who have challenged the power of Rome – usually at the cost of their own lives – but Jesus was totally unlike them. His words were words of peace and non-violence. He spoke about giving Caesar his due, but certain people believed that the charge most likely to succeed was that of being a threat to Roman power.

And they did succeed; they got him condemned to death by crucifixion. There was a crowd of us watching from a distance as they nailed him to the cross and hoisted it up. My wife, Mary, was among the women near the cross. We were devastated that it had come to this, that he had allowed it to happen. For we believed he could have stopped it. He could have called for heaven's angels to come to his rescue, but he patiently endured what was done to him, while his enemies didn't have a clue about what was really happening. They heard Jesus cry 'Finished' and they rubbed their hands together and thought that was that. So much for his silly talk of life and salvation!

Later we came to realise that that word was by no means a grim admission of defeat; it was a mighty cry of victory – victory over sin and death and hell.

But that's jumping ahead. It all happened on a Friday and what a long Saturday followed. And on the Sunday the most amazing thing happened. In the afternoon Mary and I set off to walk the seven miles back to our home. As we walked, we tried to piece together the things we had heard from Jesus and what it could all mean. Was he gone for ever? How could he be the victor over death's power if he himself was dead and buried in the tomb? Had we all made a big mistake and it wasn't as we had thought?

As we walked along, a Stranger fell in step with us. Don't ask me how we didn't recognise him. All I can say is that you don't normally expect to meet up with people you know are dead and buried.

But, to begin with, we thought he was a visitor to the region who didn't know what had been happening in Jerusalem. And imagine this – we were telling *him* about what had happened. How often we've smiled since at the incongruity of it.

We told him about the cross and all the hopes we'd had. We told him, too, about the confused events of that morning, because we knew that some of the believers had gone to the tomb and found it empty – Jesus' body wasn't there. Some of the others had rushed out to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they hadn't seen Jesus.

Anyway, as we walked, it was as if the Stranger gradually took over the conversation. He asked how we could be so slow to understand what the prophets had said would happen. He explained how everything in the Scriptures pointed to the Messiah who would come, not as a military leader, but as a servant King who would be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows who would be pierced for our transgressions. We recognised the words from the Isaiah scroll, and we were intrigued by this Stranger's words. We wanted to hear more.

We had soon covered the seven miles to Emmaus and we didn't want this conversation to come to an end. So we invited the man to stay with us, and it was as we shared a meal that the scales suddenly fell from our eyes. He took bread and broke it and gave it to us – just as we heard had happened at what the others called his last supper.

Imagine our amazement and joy. The very Master who had been laid in the tomb was there in front of us. As we've looked back we've wondered: was

it his voice? Was it something in his manner? Was it the realisation that his hands and wrists had wound-marks in them? Whatever it was, we realised that the Stranger was no stranger at all. It was Jesus himself. He was alive again, and that answered so many of the questions we had been asking.

But hardly had we recognised him before he was gone. I don't know how it happened but he was just no longer there. We heard later that he could appear in places where the doors and windows were shut, and it seems that he could *dis*-appear as well.

Our feet were tired but we immediately set off to return to Jerusalem, and when we burst in with our news we found that the others were already rejoicing because Jesus had appeared to Simon, too. What an evening it was with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem!

And then it happened again. As we discussed it all, Jesus himself was suddenly among us. He wished us peace and set our startled minds at ease. He said we shouldn't be troubled. 'It is I myself': how I remember and treasure the words.

He explained the Scriptures to us – how it had been prophesied that he would suffer and die and on the third day rise again, so that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. It all fell into place. We have much still to learn, but what a difference it makes to trust in this risen Lord and seek to live in the light of his death and resurrection. We started with shattered hopes – now we have a hope that burns within our hearts and gives us strength for every passing day.

He lives. He saves. He strengthens and comforts his people. And he still says, 'Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest for your souls.' His be the glory, this risen, conquering Son; endless is the victory he o'er death has won. ●

**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 Powerhouse of God: Prayer

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.





## Human beings, even in the church, measure success by size, activity and noise.

**I**N THE COURSE OF THESE YEARS OF WALKING WITH OUR SAVIOUR, I HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THE ENDURING IMPACT OF A PERSON'S LABOUR FOR CHRIST DEPENDS UPON THIS ONE FACTOR — those things which endure are rooted in Christ alone and are achieved in complete trust in God's own enablement.

I have learned that those ministries and Christian endeavours whose fruits remain throughout the ages and do not dissipate are wrought in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. When we study and carefully examine the lives of such people and such ministries, we see a principle thread that is common to all of them — their all-consuming drive and motivation is to honour and glorify the name of the Lord and him alone! There is no shadow of any human self-promotion and self-aggrandizement. The spotlight is steadfastly kept upon God. All else will evaporate in time.

On the night our Saviour was betrayed, among the last words he spoke to his disciples are these which are recorded in John 15:1-5: *'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing!'*

### THE WHITE-HAIRED MAN

I want to tell you a story which will illustrate this observation. I have had the blessing of knowing, and the honour of serving, the family of a minister who was killed at the hands of Muslim fanatics simply because he bore the name of our Lord — a Christian. In one of my visits his wife, now an elderly lady, told me that, before his martyrdom, her husband used to go around the neighbourhoods in their city of two million people (now nearly five million) putting his hand on the walls of neighbours' houses and praying for the salvation of the inhabitants.

She said, 'Our church was small. We met in the basement of our own home. We had twelve members, five of whom were our own family. My husband had to work to support us. He sold melamine dishes which he put in two large saddle bags on the back of his bicycle and, as he roamed the city, he would place his right hand on the walls of homes and pray for them.

'Some 20 years after he was murdered for his faith and fellowship with Christ, one day there was a knock on our door. When I opened, there were two young

girls, about 14 and 16 years of age. They asked for the man with the white hair. They both were wearing cross necklaces, and they were keen that I would notice their necklaces. I asked them, "What do you want with the man with the white hair?" The older girl replied, "My sister and I have become Christians. We were looking for someone knowledgeable to answer our questions about our faith. Our mother remembered before we were born, when she was in university, in this house, there was a Christian man with white hair who used to come, put his hand on the wall of her home and pray. She remembered that on one occasion my mother's father, our grandfather, came out and spoke to this man and they became friends until our grandfather passed away. In fact, our mother believes that our grandfather became a Christian. Although she herself does not believe anything, she told us about the white-haired man who lived in this house. We are here to speak to him."

'I told the girls that the white-haired man they were looking for was my husband. And he was taken to heaven to be with Christ many years ago. But that they are the fruits of the seed he planted. I embraced them and took the girls to the basement of the house where our small congregation used to meet. The memories are still there. The chairs and small wooden pulpit are left there untouched and occasionally believers secretly come together in that basement church to meet and pray.'

Why am I telling you this story? Human beings, even in the church, measure success by size, activity and noise. The church at Sardis had cornered the market on those (Revelation 3:1-6). Our Saviour was not impressed! He measures success by faithfulness, sincere love for him, and enduring impacts rooted in God's own empowerment by his own life-giving Holy Spirit (Revelation 2:8-11).

This dear elderly lady, who bears the marks of that faithfulness and devotion to the Lord Jesus, told me that she was convinced that there were hundreds, if not thousands, of Christians in all those neighbourhoods, streets and alleys where her husband used to walk and pray. She was persuaded that many across the city of several million people had come to faith, like the two sisters, long after her husband had been taken to be with the Saviour. The labours of that dear man walking and praying for the neighbours and people in that city were not in vain. They brought phenomenal fruits and continue to do so, the fruits which were rooted in his love for the Saviour and complete trust in God's sovereign grace and power. She also believed that the wave upon wave of conversions of tens of thousands of people in that country, and even in that region, were due to the prayers and sacrifices of those like her



husband — a man unknown in the world, but famed and celebrated among the hosts in heaven. A small church and an ordinary man of God used by God in extraordinary ways and with colossal impact for the Lord.

## TWO PATHS

During these years in which I have served our Saviour, I have learned there are two paths to go about his service. One way is to do the work of God in the wisdom, giftedness and ingenuity of man — in our own strength. The other path is to serve the Lord according to his ways, in his power and through the enablement of his Holy Spirit, who characteristically uses ordinary people to achieve extraordinary works. Both of these ways appear to be successful. However, the fruit of one will endure, while the other will fritter away like a puff of cloud on a hot summer day.

We have numerous examples in church history. The church at Sardis had all the appearances of success. It was loud, flashy, flamboyant and pretentious. However, by the second century, nothing was left of it, other than its ruins in Asia Minor. Sardis is the fifth church our Lord addresses in Revelation. He says to Sardis of the past and the Sardises of the present day, *'I know your works, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead'* (Revelation 3:1).

Then there is a frail, but faithful, church in Smyrna. It had probably all the marks of failure. There was nothing ostentatious and showy about it other than its faithful zeal and devotion to Christ. Our Saviour says to them, *'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)...Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days, you will have tribulation. Remain faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life'* (Revelation 2:9-10).

The mark and the witness of this modest church remained into modern times. It was home to Christians into the early 1900s. It is alleged that one of the several waves of Christian massacres in Turkey was instigated by a Palestinian Ottoman officer in Smyrna — the modern-day city of Izmir in the Republic of Turkey. Thousands of Christians lost their lives. We shall meet these faithful saints when we are with the Lord at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

One church was fleshly, accommodating to the idolatry of Rome and benefiting from it. The other was unassuming, refusing to accommodate to the ways of the world and the idolatry of the time. So, it was crushed by Rome. I can imagine the senior minister of Sardis even being invited to Rome to pray and pronounce blessings upon the arrogant self-conceited emperor Domitian and the equally smug empire of which he was the supreme representative.

Not so for the saints at Smyrna whose blood he spilled. They refused to bend the knee before his repugnant image. Some of the Christians of Smyrna were offered as a sacrifice at the altar built to the

worship of Domitian. Others were thrown before wild beasts in the Coliseum for the entertainment of the citizens of Rome, who viewed themselves as the center of civilization, far above brute barbarians. One church had all the appearances of success and the other of failure. One was built on the foundation which rested on human pride, wisdom and strength; the other upon the wisdom and power of God. One was conformed to the pattern of this world; the other refused to adopt the ways of the world. Smyrna was in the world, but not of the world. The flashy church proved to be nothing more than a flash-in-the-pan. The burning star which endured was the modest, faithful Smyrna.

## PRAYER

What is the secret? The secret is doing God's work in God's way. The secret is knowing the God of the Bible intimately. Not just knowing about him, collecting a lifetime of information about him. But knowing him intimately. We also would do well to give heed to this reminder by the apostle Paul, *'We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us'* (2 Corinthians 4:7). He goes on to say: *'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life may also be manifested in our bodies'* (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

It is the Spirit of God who will empower believers to stop the mouths of lions, quench the power of fire, conquer kingdoms; but it is also that same Spirit who will give them courage and enable them to endure mocking, flogging, torture, imprisonment and even death (Hebrews 11:32-38).

We cannot in our own strength overcome the powers of darkness. We cannot in reliance upon our own wisdom and ingenuity build the church and advance the Gospel in the world. To undertake and fulfill this heavy responsibility, we need the empowerment of God, and for that we must be given over to prayer, as that precious martyr who went about putting his hands on the walls of homes in his city and praying for them. The source of power is in God the Holy Spirit, not in gimmicks, gigs, programmes, bands or theatricals. ●

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

Evan Macdonald (Chairman)

[evan.m@ntlworld.com](mailto:evan.m@ntlworld.com)

07981 756786

or

John MacPherson (Secretary)

[johnmmacpherson@btinternet.com](mailto:johnmmacpherson@btinternet.com)

07484 397670

# POETRY PAGE

## THE SABBATH

BY REV. JAMES GRAHAME

How still the morning of the hallow'd day!  
Mute is the voice of rural labour, hush'd  
The ploughboy's whistle, and the milkmaid's song.  
The scythe lies glittering in the dewy wreath  
Of tedded grass, mingled with fading flowers,  
That yester-morn bloom'd waving in the breeze.  
Sounds the most faint attract the ear — the hum  
Of early bee, the trickling of the dew,  
The distant bleating midway up the hill.  
Calmness sits throned on yon unmoving cloud.  
To him who wanders o'er the upland leas,  
The blackbird's note comes mellower from the dale;  
And sweeter from the sky the gladsome lark  
Warbles his heaven-tuned song; the lulling brook  
Murmurs more gently down the deep-worn glen;  
While from yon lowly roof, whose curling smoke  
O'er mounts the mist, is heard, at intervals,  
The voice of psalms — the simple song of praise.

But chiefly man the day of rest enjoys.  
Hail, Sabbath! thee I hail, the poor man's day.  
On other days the man of toil is doom'd  
To eat his joyless bread, lonely; the ground  
Both seat and board; screen'd from the winter's cold  
And summer's heat, by neighbouring hedge of tree;  
But on this day, embosom'd in his home,  
He shares the frugal meal with those he loves;  
With those he loves he shares the heart-felt joy  
Of giving thanks to God — not thanks of form,  
A word and a grimace, but reverently,  
With cover'd face and upward earnest eye.

Hail, Sabbath! thee I hail, the poor man's day.  
The pale mechanic now has leave to breathe  
The morning air, pure from the city's smoke;  
While, wandering slowly up the river side,  
He meditates on Him, whose power he marks  
In each green tree that proudly spreads the bough,  
As in the tiny dew-bent flowers that bloom  
Around its roots; and while he thus surveys,  
With elevated joy, each rural charm,  
He hopes, yet fears presumption in the hope,  
That heaven may be one Sabbath without end.

This excerpt forms part of a longer poem, published anonymously in 1804, and written by James Grahame (1765-1811). Grahame was born in Glasgow and followed his father into the legal profession. Aged 44, against the advice of friends, he decided to become a minister, and was ordained into the Church of England. He is best known as a poet, however. His work is often devotional and several of his poems feature vivid descriptions of Scottish scenery and wildlife. ●



# BOOK REVIEWS



Our book reviews this month are all written by women, and it's wonderful to see the breadth of interests on show. We would highly encourage you to read any and all of these books; read on to see why. And, if you are a woman who enjoys reading herself, please do email Miriam at [books@freechurch.org](mailto:books@freechurch.org). We are always looking out for more reviewers, and ladies in particular!

**THE HAND AND THE ROAD:  
THE LIFE & TIMES OF JOHN A. MACKAY  
JOHN MACKAY METZGER (2010)**

This biography opens a window into the life, work and thought of an influential Scot in twentieth-century Christianity, John Alexander Mackay (1889-1983). Written by his grandson, it provides substantial information on Mackay's remarkable life, from his early upbringing in the Highlands, his teenage conversion during a communion season in Rogart, his call to mission when a student, and his missionary service in Peru and Latin America to his leadership of Princeton Theological Seminary. Biographical events are married to excerpts from diary entries and private letters, along with Mackay's published writings, to reveal his vision, keen intellect and deep spirituality.

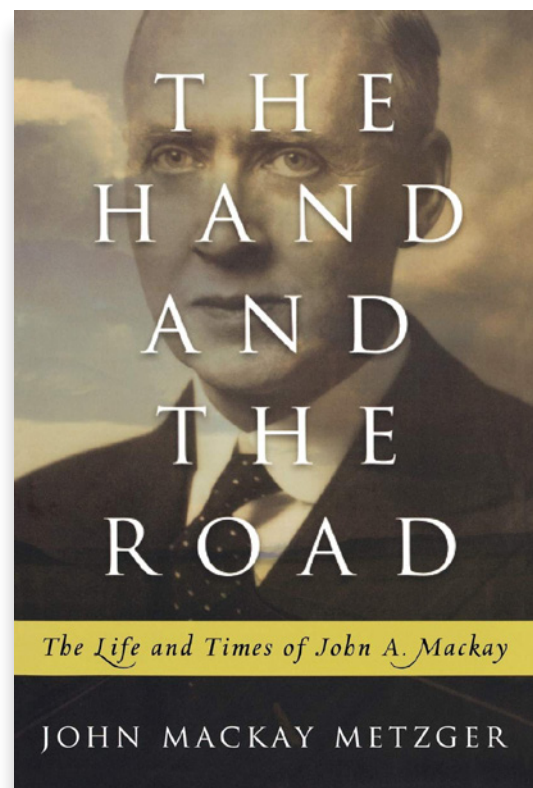
As someone who saw Mackay's legacy first-hand, having taught in Colegio San Andrés, the school Mackay founded as a Free Church missionary in Lima, it was intriguing to read of his friendships with a wide array of people, including leading young political activists, Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno and distinguished archbishops. The book details Mackay's involvement in the ecumenical movement, combining his great passions for church unity and for mission. Always a proud Presbyterian, he did what not many have done either before or after, retaining strong evangelical convictions while working actively, and sometimes controversially, across the global church spectrum.

Throughout his life, Mackay unashamedly spoke out publicly and clearly on the political hot potatoes of his day, such as the nature of religious freedom. His was a surprisingly contemporary voice, raising issues such as community, diversity

and social justice, providing a model and stimulus for prophetic engagement in society today. All in all, the book makes a fascinating read on a legendary Free Church figure and acts as a great jumping-off point to dive into the thought-provoking writings of Mackay himself. ●

This book is available from Amazon.

Catriona Macdonald, Buccleuch FC, Edinburgh



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>

## GOOD AND ANGRY

DAVID POWLISON (2016)

In 2020, *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer was without doubt my 'best book of the year'. Some books you just know are THAT good. They are the books that become gifts that you send as soon as possible to those you care about. That's why I also just know absolutely that, even though it's not yet the end of March, *Good and Angry* by David Powlison will be my 'best book of the year' in 2021. It simply oozes levels of insight, grace, wisdom and maturity that I have never before encountered on the subject of anger – and I have read quite a few.

Let me show you exactly what I mean. I was still in the introduction when I was confronted by the challenging truth, 'To get anger straight is to get your life straight.' It was followed hot on the heels by the upside-down miracle statement that 'Anger is meant to be laced with mercy and loving intent.' And in chapter two, the thought-provoking crumbling of what is so often assumed: 'The opposite of tantrums and bitterness is not a placid temperament and unflappable demeanour.'

If these snippets of rich fare aren't enough to whet your appetite to read more, then perhaps you've never felt bad anger or never felt yourself on the receiving end of someone else's bad anger that has assaulted your soul. And, sadly, I'm pretty sure that none of us can make that claim.

In fact, I don't just invite you – I URGE you – to join me in reading this book. I do this because I want all of us who love Jesus to be well equipped to defeat the evil of bad anger. Then just watch the revolution that happens in you and around you when you replace it with the practice of good anger that is our true calling from God. ● This book is available from Free Church Books.

Catherine Knights, Lord's Hill Church of England, Southampton



## BOOK OF THE MONTH

JESUS, LOVER OF MY SOUL

JULIAN HARDYMAN (2020)

I immensely enjoyed Julian Hardyman's 2019 book *Fresh Pathways in Prayer*, and this book, whether deliberately or not, functions as a companion piece. Subtitled 'Fresh Pathways to Spiritual Passion', this book enticingly leads the reader through *Song of Songs*, and its offer of deep spiritual intimacy with Jesus. It is wonderfully refreshing and encouraging; it is very hard not to be uplifted by a book whose every page is filled with the fact that Jesus finds you delightful, attractive and precious, just as you are.

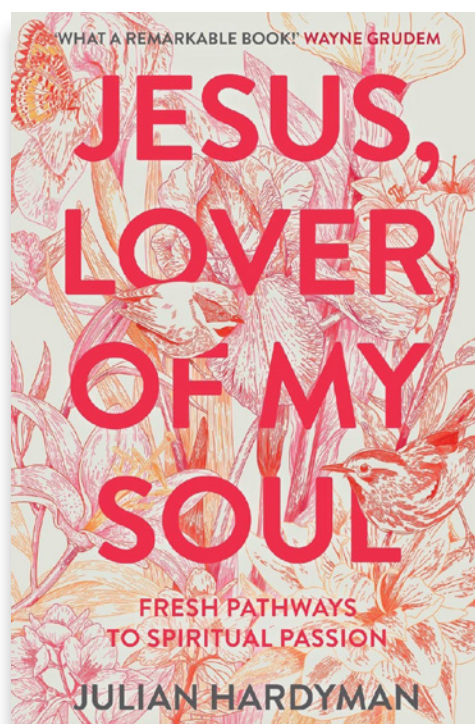
Alongside being an enriching reminder of God's love, this book also offers much grounded wisdom about the blessings, and challenges, of romance and sexual intimacy. It is a book that I would thoroughly recommend to any married couple, anyone considering getting married, anyone reflecting on singleness and anyone struggling with sexual sin. Which, I suppose, covers all of us. Having grown out of a series of sermons at Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge, this book is helpfully peppered with reflections from church members and from Julian Hardyman's own decades of pastoral ministry. This is especially important in the pair of chapters on specific sexual sin, but brings a sympathetic heart to the whole book.

*Song of Songs* is a singular book of the Bible, and Julian Hardyman's exploration of it provides a singularly beautiful read. It gave me such joy to read, and has

inspired me in my marriage, and more importantly, in my relationship with Jesus. ●

This book is available from Free Church Books.

Miriam Montgomery, Free Church Books



# MISSION MATTERS

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

**B**ETWEEN 2000 AND 2004 I WITNESSED THE TAIL END OF AN AWAKENING IN A CHURCH. The church was the Congregational Church in Pontefract in West Yorkshire. A number of Free Church ministers were privileged to preach there during a season of unusual fruitfulness resulting in over 200 people being converted. These events were even more remarkable as the peak followed the miner's strike of 1984/85. West Yorkshire was a dark, tense and divided place in those days.

A simple strategy was employed. Thousands of booklets containing stories of people who had become Christians were distributed in the area. Two-week-long evangelistic preaching campaigns were held with coffee mornings each day, at which there was another (at least) 30-minute sermon.

What caused the awakening? It could only have been God. There were other elements, of course: a minister who was driven by an obsession for evangelism, a church of new and young believers and a focus on one thing.

There was one other thing which was central: prayer. Even now, over 20 years on, I can still remember these prayer meetings. Generally they took place in an old Portacabin which was damp and smelly. The carpet was one of the foulest pieces of material I have ever trod on and yet the atmosphere was heavenly.

What features made an impression?

**Freedom.** There was a lack of awkwardness. You know that feeling when prayer meetings are managed carefully. People are asked to pray; there is a set piece which remains unchanged week after week, month after month and year after year. In other meetings there are long awkward silences. At the meetings in Pontefract, however, it seemed that the people were bursting to pray, like old friends who had got together and were pouring out their news. The language was not unnatural, no weird voices or high English, just Yorkshire people being what they were. There were silences but they were full. There is a sound of silence when God is in the room.

**Focus.** There was a sense of a coming eternity. It was as if time was so limited that there was no room for flippant or minor issues. When the fire of hell can be sensed, Margo's flu seems insignificant. The whole prayer culture of the congregation was orientated towards asking God to bless in the changing of lives, in raising the spiritually dead to life. When people are on an emergency call there is no room for padding.

**Fervency.** I remember one man stood up with actions suggesting that he was grabbing hold of God. His prayer is with me to this day. 'Lord, where are you? For your own glory will you please come among us. Please, are you sleeping? We need you.' Fervency is urgency bathed in passion. Woodrow Kroll is an American evangelist who is certainly not in our tradition. He famously said, 'Fervent prayer produces phenomenal results.' Hopefully we are in the tradition of the apostle James, who said that 'the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working'; he then cites Elijah who 'prayed fervently' for drought, then for showers, and 'heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit'.

**Faith.** There was a belief that God could do it. These were people who had witnessed miracles in their own lives and in their entire community. Their petitions seemed ridiculous at many levels as they asked God to save people who appeared to be stuck fast in the most deadly of sins.

What's the point of this?

In the next few months you will hear about our vision to establish a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland. A healthy church will always have a vibrant prayer culture. As a student in the 70s in Glasgow there was a character who preached in the congregation. He was hard-core Glaswegian with an accent and bluntness to match. I will never forget when he gave the intimations one Sunday as follows: 'The services next Lord's Day will be as usual...we pray that one day they will be unusual.' Get it?

Lord, send the rain! ●

# Mar uisge air an fhaiche bhuaint'

## (Like rain on mown grass)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

**A**IG AN ÀM-SA DEN BHLIADHNA NOCHDAIDH MÒRAN LUSAN ANN AN GÀRRÀIDHEAN, ged a bha sinne gu math cinnteach gu robh iad air bàsachadh,'s nach fhaiceadh sinn tuilleadh iad.

Tha iad air a bhith marbh ann an dorchadas a' gheamhraidh, gun sgeul orra. Tha am beothachadh san t-saoghal nàdarra a' tachairt ann an dòigh cho sàmhach 's nach eil cuimhn' againn cò ris a bha cuid de na lusan coltach, gus an nochd feadhainn, agus an ceann ùine, chì sinn blàthan àlainn.

Nach ann ann an dòigh glè shàmhach a tha obair an Spioraid ann a bhith a' dùsgadh iomadh cridhe a tha marbh gu bhith a' tighinn beò? Aithnichidh sinn an uair sin, air na nì daoine, agus air na chanas iad, gu bheil atharrachadh air a thighinn nam beatha.

An ain-fhios dhaibh, chì daoine eile toradh an Spioraid, agus 's dòcha gu bheil am fear no an tè-sa làn de theagamhan, a' ceasnachadh nan cridhe am buin iad gu firinneach dhan Chuthaidhear. Aithnichidh sinn air a' chuideachd a ròghnaicheas iad càit' a bheil an cridhe.

Is e obair an Spioraid a th' ann a bhith a' dùsgadh muinntir às an t-suain spioradail anns a bheil iad.

Chì sluagh an uair sin maise ann an Crìosd, agus glè thrìc fairichidh iad ciontach,'s gun cinnt aca gu bheil am peacaidhean air am maitheadh.

Thig iad gu bhith a' faicinn bàs an t-Slànaigheir mar an aon bhunait-tearaidh, agus chì sinn mar a threòraicheas an Spiorad iad gu obair Chrìosd air a' Chrann-cheusaidh. Nach tig facail an Abstoil Eòin gur cuimhne, nuair a tha e a' labhairt mun Spiorad, ' Cha labhair e uaithe Fhèin: ach labhraidh E na h-uile nithean a chluinneas e. Bheir Esan glòir dhomhsa; oir gheibh E dem chuid-sa agus nochdaidh E dhuibh e.'

Abair ministrealachd shocair, shàmhach! Spiorad na Firinn a' treòrachadh inntinnean dhaoine gu Crìosd agus iadsan a thig ann am firinn, bidh iad a' tighinn à dorchadas gu solas. Bidh iad beò an àite a bhith nan cadal gu spioradail. Bidh an sluagh-sa feumail ann am baile, ann an sgìre, agus nì iad feum ann an adhbhar Chrìosd air thalamh.

Bidh iad coltach ri na lusan a chì sinn a' nochdadh an-dràsta; bidh cuid dhiubh meanbh ach àlainn, feadhainn eile le barrachd neairt, ach mar a tha na lusan de chaochladh cumadh is dath, bidh an sluagh-sa eu-coltach ri chèile, ach buinidh iad uile dhan aon teaghlach.

Tha cuid air an toirt beò leis an Spiorad cho socair 's nach eil fios aca dè an là no an uair a thachair seo, ach canaidh iad, 'Air dhomh a bhith dall, tha mi a-nis a' faicinn'.

Tha feadhainn eile air an dùsgadh às an cadal, agus tha iad cinnteach cuin a thachair seo, ach is e obair an Spioraid a th'ann a bhith a' toirt dhaoine beò.

Ag èisteachd ri còmhraidhean àlainn mu 'bhuachaillean soisgeulach' air an robh cuimhn' aig mòran, ged a bha na teachdairean-sa a-nis aig an sonas, bha e cho soilleir gur e obair an Spioraid air an robh an fheadhainn a bhruidhinn mun timcheall glè mhothachail. Thug E nithean a chuala iad tric nan òige gu bhith a' tighinn beò dhaibh, agus thuig iad slighe na Slàinte.

Is e a bha cho annasach gu robh an Spiorad-sa ag obair cho socair; bha E a' dol às an t-sealladh, mar gum biodh, agus a' treòrachadh an inntinnean gu Crìosd. Abair ministrealachd àlainn, agus fìor eisimpleir.

Is e ar n-ùrnaigh gum biodh an Spiorad -sa a' beannachadh gach oidhirp a tha teachdairean a' dèanamh aig gach àm. ●

# CLOSED SUNDAYS

BY CATRIONA MURRAY

# POST-TENEBRAS LUX

**T**HERE IS A SAYING IN GAELIC WHICH ROUGHLY TRANSLATES AS 'WE WILL NOT ASK OF NEIL THAT WHICH HE HASN'T RECEIVED'. This is not a reference to Neil's worldly goods, but rather those endowments of intellect and character that he may have missed out on. It is a wise reminder that we are all different in the gifts and talents department, and that Neil is no less valuable a person for lacking in academic prowess, musical ability or table manners.

The wisdom inherent in the proverb is something we could usefully apply to the unbelieving world. As Christians, we are frequently guilty of expecting too much. When we spot sinful behaviour, our first instinct is all too often hectoring. We see lifestyles of which we cannot approve, we hear arguments against the rights of the unborn...and before we know it, our fingers are poised in the wagging position. Out come the placards and, like so many Pharisees before us, we take to the public highway to proclaim the guilt of others.

We walk a fine line between setting a good example and setting our self-righteousness on a pedestal.

I am a fine one to talk. Ask any Lewis secularist and they will tell you that I am a Bible-thumping Sabbatarian. Their Catriona Murray wants to keep everything closed on Sundays. Let me be clear about this once and for all: I don't actually think it's the place of the church, or of people like me, to impose a six-day economy on others. Render unto Caesar...and commerce is very much Caesar's department. What I do insist upon, however, is my right as a citizen to express a preference for the status quo, and to do what I can to preserve an atmosphere in which everyone can enjoy the benefit of Sabbath rest. Thankfully for atheists, this is a democracy and neither I nor any other Wee Free can cast more than one vote.

What I did occasionally lose sight of in trying to make a reasoned argument along these lines was that I could not expect unbelievers to see my point of view. As I told them many times, I had the advantage there: while I had once been in their position, they had never yet come to occupy mine. As such, then, I should have been wise to the fact that an atheist is just a Neil until the Holy Spirit gets to work on them.

Once we actually accept this fact and permit it to influence our conduct and discourse, we must see that picketing pride marches and abortion clinics will get us nowhere. Surely no Christian seeks the outward conformity that disguises hearts still in rebellion against God?

These Neils do not profit from our haranguing. We cannot ask of them what they have yet to receive. Without God's gift of grace, they will not see the error in their ways.

Besides, what if we turn the tables upon ourselves a little? We don't like it when the Neils point out our hypocrisy, or call us out for being the stumbling-blocks that we sometimes are to the faith of others. I have personally bristled at accusations of that kind; but, do you know something? When I am scrupulously honest with myself, I can only be relieved at how little my doubting enemies know of my sinful nature. Indeed, I should be grateful for how little they have cast up of my wrongdoing when I compare it to what they might easily have added.

Gaelic communities of long ago wisely understood the Neils. They did not cast them out, or set them apart. It was simply accepted that any shortcomings in their conduct could be attributed to a lack of understanding. Such communities were so close that, in working together, others were able to supply Neil's deficiencies.

We cannot cover our own sins, far less those we see others committing — so why point them out? No amount of tutting or head-shaking will bring an unrepentant sinner home. Shaming people into conformity, or forcing them, makes poor use of God's free gift of grace.

In acknowledging, therefore, that we cannot expect the fruit of the Spirit from those who have yet to receive him, what does that tell us about ourselves? It is a reminder that while we can't ask Neil to give what he hasn't got, we ourselves have to answer for what we do with that which we have been given.

The undeserved privilege of God's grace has to start showing itself in our conduct, or who will believe that we are changed — and why would Neil want what we have if it has only served to harden our hearts? ●