

Avoch Linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland

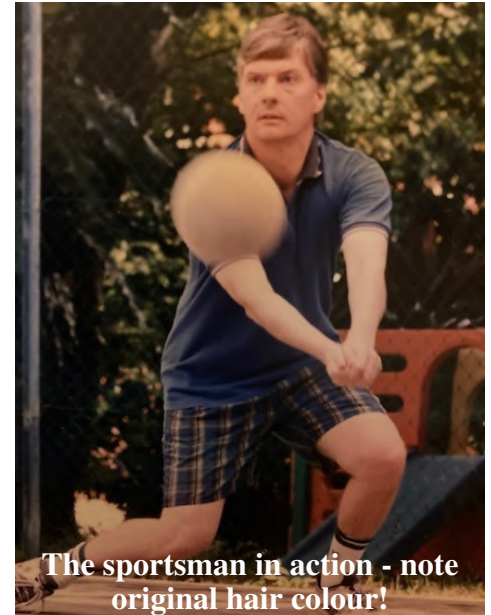
Quarterly Newsletter Issue 11 March 2022

Living in the Mission Field

Having heard a fascinating account of Warren and Stroma's mission work at a recent meeting in Fortrose Free Church, I was keen that their story was shared with our linked congregations. I'm grateful to them for allowing me to summarise their missionary journey.

Douglas Simpson

Warren attended Fortrose Academy in the 70's with an interest in languages, music and mathematics. He was a talented sportsman winning the U-14 Singles Scottish Schools Badminton Championship as well as playing basketball at county level and being in the school's football team. A Borderer, Stroma attended Earlston High School enjoying English, French and the Sciences and played hockey and badminton. Medicine was her chosen career from an early age – even as a very young child, the gift of a nurse's outfit and kit had to be quickly adjusted to look more like a doctor's!



The sportsman in action - note original hair colour!

After school, both Warren and Stroma moved on to Edinburgh University, Warren pursuing a Mathematics degree (with much music-making thrown in), while - a few years later! - Stroma studied Medicine. After university, Warren spent two years in Liège, working on campus with students from Belgium and Francophone Africa (in a joint project with Operation Mobilisation and the GBU – the French-speaking branch of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students). His call to the ministry came in his mid-twenties, so after a period of training and work in Information Science, he studied at New College and was ordained in 1990 following a probationary period at St Catherine's Argyle Church. Having attended Sunday School, Youth Fellowship and a school Scripture Union group, Stroma was challenged by a friend in first year at university to develop a deeper Christian commitment. This led to involvement in the Christian Union and Holyrood Abbey Church of Scotland - a lively church with excellent Bible teaching - where during a sermon from Romans, she sensed a call to the mission field. Questioning whether medicine was the right way forward for her or not, she prayed and then spoke to her pastor who advised her to “put herself in the way of mission” ... which she duly did.

Warren and Stroma met when Warren was the visiting speaker from Belgium at a student group, led by Stroma at Edinburgh. Later, on Warren's return from Belgium, they found that they attended the same church. They married in Earlston in 1987 spending the first years of married life in Edinburgh, whilst they both pursued further medical and theological training.

Their combined call to mission took greater shape in 1991, when they joined OMF International, sent out jointly by their churches to work in East Asia which has a population of around two billion. The first two years were spent in Seoul learning the Korean language and then

they moved to Pusan where they were involved in a range of ministries. Warren worked in large (3000+) church while Stroma took a part time post in a nearby hospital, meeting local Christians and doing mission work with students at the university. Their ability to speak and function in Korean (as foreigners) meant that there was no shortage of mission opportunities for Warren and Stroma during this period.

In 1998 they were invited to move to Singapore for Warren initially to teach at the Discipleship Training Centre, a small residential theological college which aims to give Asian graduates the theological foundation to be 'the Christians God wants them to be' and the ability to share their faith 'with a servant spirit and a shepherd heart.' They lived at the college with Stroma usually cycling over to the OMF International offices where

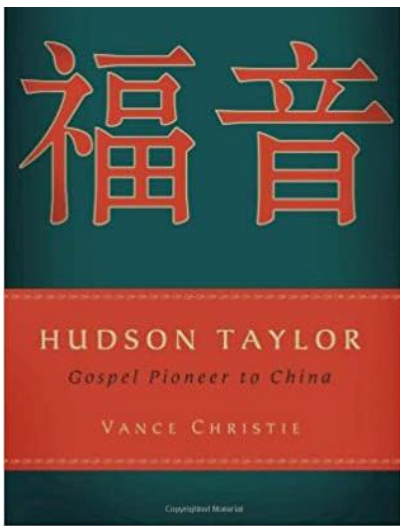


Warren and Stroma in Singapore

she served as the International Medical Adviser coordinating a team of doctors whose job was to keep the 1400 missionaries and their families healthy, seeing parents, sending overall policy, managing medical emergencies, travelling to many countries in the area as well as carrying out medical and psychological screening to ensure the suitability of new workers for mission work. They lived alongside their students developing close relationships with them and working on the principle that Christian character is not just formed in the classroom – it also emerges from times playing volleyball, doing chores and even sharing in the dishwashing rota! Music was also an important vehicle for cross-cultural worship and Warren was involved both in college and at his local church where he directed a classical ensemble that played before and during services every month.

2011 saw the intrepid pair return to the U.K. to support ageing parents. Warren took up the position of Master's Programme Leader/ Tutor at All Nations Christian College in Herefordshire working with people of many different nationalities, enjoying diversion by creating a multi-cultural choir that met every week. Stroma formally 're-entered' the NHS initially in Inverness. In England she worked part time as a GP while sharing some of the College pastoral and teaching duties. She was invited to join the Board of Friends International eventually becoming Chair. An abrupt move to the Borders followed (due to family circumstances), with Warren working as a locum minister near Jedburgh until, in 2018, the Parish Profile for Avoch linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church appeared on the internet and grabbed his attention.....

When asked at a recent presentation about the lessons they have learned from their time in Mission - they mentioned the abiding realisation that God is at work in the world. For example, it is easy to be discouraged by the decline in UK church attendance, but we forget the much more positive signs in other countries. A plaque in Singapore states "When Song Hoot Kiam [an immigrant from China] was baptised in 1840, there were six Protestant communicants in all of China. When he died in the year of the great martyrdom [1900], there were 60,000." Now, observers reckon the church there in tens of millions



HUDSON TAYLOR, Gospel Pioneer to China by Vance Christie

When Warren and Stroma were interviewed recently in the Free Church regarding their time abroad as missionaries, Stroma opened her presentation by asking who founded OMF? I knew that OMF originated as the China Inland Mission, and that I should know the name of the founder, but his name escaped me. This prompted me to read a biography of the founder of the CIM, James Hudson Taylor, which had been lying unread in my library for too long.

This turned out to be one of the most fascinating and easy to read biographies I have read and is a wonderful example of faith in action. Before he was born his parents prayed 'Dear God, if you should give us a son, grant that he may work for you in China'. As a young boy, not yet a teenager, Hudson sometimes said to his parents that when he was a man he intended to be a missionary and go to China. It was not until after he returned from his first seven years of mission work in that country that his parents told him of their prayers for him before he was born.

When he was 17 he randomly picked up a pamphlet he found in his parents' library. Fifty miles away his mother was praying for her son's conversion. As Hudson read the well-known phrase 'the finished work of Christ' he realised the full simplicity of this. Christ was the full and perfect atonement for sin. The debt was paid by the substitute. Christ died for his sins. His mother knew of his conversion without any human agency telling her.

The story of his initial training in the medical profession and preparation for the mission field is filled with instances of practical total reliance on God for the provision both for the simple necessities of life and the ability to succeed with the mission work. After a time witnessing and building up churches on the eastern seaboard of China, Hudson, then aged 33, felt a calling to evangelize the inland regions of China. Once again his specific prayers were answered and he opened a bank account in the name of 'China Inland Mission' with £10. The story of his work, and that of all those whom the Lord guided to join him, is a fascinating read, a complete vindication of the efficacy of prayer, and a book which is difficult to put down. He died aged 73 and was laid to rest, with his first wife and four of their children, in Chinkiang on the banks of the Yangtze River, roughly 150 miles inland from Shanghai.

Following the communist takeover of China in 1949 all missionaries had to leave and by 1953 the organisation was working in Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia and Siam, amongst other places. In 1964 it was renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship and is now OMF International. There are now just under 1,400 members from forty nations serving East Asians.

Finally, on a personal note, I was delighted to find an, albeit tenuous, link with the CIM. In the book a conversation is recorded in 1869 between Hudson Taylor and Charles Judd, who had been a missionary in China for around a year at that time. Charles Judd was the father of Harold Judd, born in Guiyang, over a thousand miles inland from Shanghai, in 1878. Harold Judd, as a chartered accountant and partner in the firm from 1906 to 1939, has his name incorporated in the firm with which I was associated for over fifty years, Mann Judd Gordon & Co. **Jack Kernahan**

A Prayer of Hope for 2022

I wrote this eight years ago and share it again as I feel it is still very relevant during these difficult times.

We are all familiar with the traditional song, *The Twelve Days of Christmas* and with this in mind I reflected on twelve gifts that we'd all like to have and that I personally consider necessary for everyday living.

*Father God grant us the **FAITH** we desperately need to sustain us at all times. Without **FAITH** there is nothing.*

*Never let us give up **HOPE**. If we cannot **HOPE** to make the world a better place, what is the point? Grant us **JOY** in our hearts. A smile costs nothing – one size fits all and it may be the only good thing that someone may experience all day.*

*Please help us to be willing to **COMMUNICATE** effectively so that we avoid misunderstandings. Thank you for friends and **FELLOWSHIP** – revel in them. Too many are outcasts. Loneliness is crippling.*

*Grant us both **COURAGE** and **CONVICTION** – the tools we desperately need in order to stand up for our beliefs. Experiences are never wholly bad but rather are character forming. Help us to be proud of the good bits and learn from the others.*

*Help us to **TRUST** You at all times, even when the future looks so bleak. Please grant us **ENDEAVOUR** to strive constantly, to give of our best and to encourage everyone else to do likewise.*

*Help us to be **HONEST** first with ourselves, secondly with our God and then with the rest of the world.*

*Grant us the **COMPASSION** that is always so very necessary in our daily lives. But for the Grace of God we are all just an accident or disease away from becoming disabled with the ensuing consequences.*

*Let us **PRAISE** Your name fulsomely. Let us also praise the youngsters we meet for a little praise goes a long way.*

I end with the two last verses of a poem I wrote recently as a Prayer of Hope for 2022.

*Prayer alone needs action too
since both go hand in hand
God urges us to help each other
to do our utmost for one another
throughout this troubled land*

*He has made this wonderful world
with resources to use and enjoy
Help us to share, there's enough for us all
He is there, everywhere when we stumble and fall.
Help us stop those who want to destroy.*

Maggie Wynton



Messy Church

On a Saturday afternoon in early December a group of the young and young at heart gathered in the upstairs room for a Covid-aware Kids Corner extravaganza. Activities included a mini theatre production, Christmas card creation, storytelling and of course the consumption of tasty treats and drinks. Fun was had by all so a big thank you to Linda and her helpful little elves, Bridget and Stroma.

Douglas S



Kids Corner

Kids Corner is the new name for Sunday School. It meets during the Sunday Service and is presently attended by Cameron and Aliya with others coming along from time to time. Our leaders are Margaret, Marina, Stroma, Catherine and Helen and thanks to each of them for their enthusiastic support!

We use Scripture Union materials resources along with a couple of bible games and try to ensure have basic bible teaching and, hopefully, plenty of fun!

Linda.

Three Wishes for 2022

Back in November I received an email from Douglas which read “I wondered if you might consider a wee article under the heading ‘Three Wishes for 2022’ - or something along these lines” It seemed an interesting idea, so I said, “I’d try.” What follows is the results.



Recently, when surfing the internet, I came across this wish, “I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes.” I thought that was a strange wish but when I researched further and found the origin of the hope was a Neil Gaiman quotation “Make your mistakes, next year and forever.” Further digging revealed that Gaiman was noted for using allusion in his writing, so the wish really meant if you are making mistakes, then you are trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something.

So in 2022 I hope to keep on trying new things and hopefully not make to many mistakes.

In Mathew chapter 28 verses 18 to 20 we are given the Great Commission.

“18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” With Presbytery’s Mission Plan in mind, mission is going to have a much higher profile in our activities than previously.

My second hope is that our missional thinking will be inspired and revitalised and result in many of the unchurched in our local community coming to the realisation that they are indeed sinners and need a saviour. Not an easily achievable aim so, my report card reads “Must try harder”

Even in these days of restrictions to control the spread of the Covid 19 virus we have many reasons to be thankful, not least the availability of vaccinations, our health service and a population who are generally willing to follow the advice given regarding wearing facemasks and maintain a social distance etc.

My father had a cousin who was a very serene and sweet lady, daily at some point she would say “This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it.” I’m sure this attitude influenced her outlook on life so I’m sure, if I follow her example, it will help me lead a more contented life.

My final wish is that I should be more Thankful.

Bob Moore

With Aileen in Tiree

'It's the ugliest island ever,' said the Sgitheanach (Skye person). 'The A82 is the deadliest road in the country,' reported Google.

I hadn't ventured further than Tore for months, safe in a Covid-free bubble, but the promise to visit young city relatives, newly settled on Tiree, the furthest West island of the Inner Hebrides, was stronger than my fears. The sudden, imminent three night cancellation of a small house (right), determined my resolve.



With no time to research (three books ordered from the library, arrived long after my visit), the plan was just to socialise and cycle, seeing the 29 square miles, and enjoying single-track roads, sparse traffic and long vistas. I did use the really useful Community Bus once, joining those taking home their 'big' shop from Scarinish Co-op.

In Autumn it was a quiet island. Few tourists were apparent. Many sheep were around - it is still predominantly a crofting island. A flat island, with only two hills, Ben Hough and Ben Hynish, an ordinary bike would have sufficed, but a hired electric bike did help with strong head-winds.

My house was unexpected: the tiny, thatched, traditional Tiree house, with its three foot thick stone walls, minute windows, and narrow door, was surprisingly snug. 'Tiree is a living architectural museum of croft-houses, unique to the Hebrides' (Mairi Hedderwick 'An Eye On The Hebrides').



I found Heylipol church. Magnificently huge, its unlocked door paid tribute to the rigours of wind and sun. Inside, a large screen, a wealth of electronic equipment, familiar books and a tea table. On my next trip I'll include a Sunday, and attend a service.

Beside vast white beaches, wind-surfers were still enjoying themselves, in their wet-suits. There is a primary and a secondary school with a large shallow fresh-water loch (Loch Bhasapol), perfect for wind-surfing lessons.



It was fine to relish a simpler, slower life, to appreciate the friendliness and the warmth of a strong community. Youngsters building community life, earning their living in unexpected ways, building businesses and using the world-wide web was heart-warming to witness.

Aileen Fraser

Phoenix India Update

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to cause heartache and disruption throughout India, with the situation particularly difficult in the state of Maharashtra, in which Nagpur is situated. The very strict lockdown was maintained for a significant part of the year, restricting every part of society. During the first lockdown, Phoenix India set up a JustGiving campaign page and issued an appeal to all our supporters, friends and family. The response was utterly amazing. Within just a few days of starting the appeal we were able to buy and distribute 300 food parcels. We went on to achieve a total of £6,819, which was used to purchase and distribute a total of 720 food parcels. It also funded the purchase of hand sanitiser and enabled training to villagers and manufacture of face coverings. The face coverings were made by the staff and students of the Women and Children's Development Programme (DWCDI) tailoring class, which had ceased operating as a result of the pandemic but was permitted to undertake this key activity.

The tough restrictions affected all the Phoenix India funded projects. Health camps, women's support groups, skill training, day care centres, water conservation, agriculture awareness training, landless labour and other village level meetings were all suspended as people were not allowed out of their homes and all modes of transport was prevented from operating. Government projects were also shut down, resulting in the temporary withdrawal of Government funding for the Comprehensive Rural Tribal Development Programme (CRTDP). During this period, CRTDP continued to manufacture face masks and endeavoured to distribute these along with hand sanitizer to villages within their catchment area.

As the lockdown in India relaxed, CRTDP was able to resume many of the regular, ongoing projects but it was a slow process as people were reluctant to interact due to the obvious concerns about being infected with the Covid-19 virus. Over the course of the past six months or so, things have improved considerably. CRTDP was awarded project extensions to two of the water conservation and agriculture awareness projects. Funding for self-help groups has also been awarded, which will allow CRTDP to manage the distribution of low interest loans to poor farmers for the purchase of seeds and fertiliser. Village level meetings for landless awareness and rural development training, health camps and tailoring classes have all resumed. CRTDP is also working hard to re-establish the HIV/AIDS awareness and support project.

Renovation work has been completed at Nagazari village, which included replacement of four toilets, two septic tanks, installation of a drinking water pipeline to the community centre and guest house and painting of the CRTDP buildings. These essential works were completed after the restrictions had been reduced and labour and materials were available.

The Mother and Child Care Centre at Yerangaon has also been fully renovated. The works, which included repairs to the Phoenix India funded building and compound wall and a complete re-painting of the establishment, has been extremely successful. The building has been renamed the Jussi Brodd School of Excellence, after the late Rev. Jussi Brodd, who was a great friend and benefactor to CRTDP. The centre provides care and education for around 30 children from the surrounding villages and is also a source of great support to the mothers.



CRTDP staff and villagers attend the inauguration of the Yerangaon Mother and Child Care Centre



Yashoda's father, Keshavrao Raut (Sarpanch), cuts the ribbon to formally open the centre

In the lead up to Christmas, CRTDP undertook their annual distribution of blankets to the poorest and most needy people in the rural areas surrounding Nagpur. The distribution programme focused on the elderly, orphans and people with disabilities. The blankets were donated by Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). CASA has provided CRTDP with blankets for many years. At this time of year, a blanket can be a life saver, so this small gesture can make a huge difference in the lives of some of Nagpur's poorest and most vulnerable.

Ken and Yashoda Hossack

Gate in the Snow



While out dog-walking last year above Fortrose I was struck by this gate etched against the snow. The branches of the tree above made amazing silhouettes against the white background and there was the road leading into the distance. With no sketchbook handy all I could do was take a quick mobile-phone photo. It was a case of getting back home and getting painting using the photo and the memories. I've called it 'Gate in the Snow'.

I don't try and come up with a 'message' but I suppose sub-consciously as a Christian there are subtle moments that come into a painting. For instance the gate can be a symbol of entering into the Kingdom. The way is not easy, things

look cold and dark but there is a road beckoning forwards. There are the dark entanglements of sin, perhaps symbolised by the tree branches but there is the redeeming work of Jesus transforming life and character. It is he who brings light and beauty from the darkness...making us white as snow (Isaiah 1:18)

William Mather



TRAIDCRAFT
Fighting poverty through trade

Fairtrade Fortnight runs from the last week in February and first week in March (21st Feb to 6th March.) Traidcraft Exchange are encouraging us to join forces in this movement to fight injustice in trade. The accelerating change in our climate is endangering people across the Global South and trade justice and climate justice go hand in hand.

One farmer, Ali Said Katumda from Tanzania says that they are in the front line of the climate crisis, facing increased risk to his crops from rising temperatures and extreme weather.

However, we can all help. Ali plans not only to endure the effects of climate change but to thrive despite them, increasing the income and wellbeing of himself and his family.

So have a go at the 'Join the Movement Quiz' for £1 only and raise money to support the people in the Global South. A Traidcraft prize of a jar of coffee, bar of chocolate and bag of tea bags will be won by the person with the most correct answers!

Thanks Linda

Traidcraft Exchange has run a huge range of projects and campaigns in our fight for trade justice, from fighting for better climate change policy in the UK to supporting beekeepers in Tanzania. Charge your guests a small fee to test their knowledge with our fun quiz!

1. TRUE OR FALSE, the UK has produced 2.3% of the total CO₂ emitted globally since 1750, despite having less than 1% of the world's population?

2. TRUE OR FALSE, honeybees sleep every day?

3. Our partner trading company, Traidcraft, sold its first Fairtrade product in 1979, but in which year was Traidcraft Exchange set-up?

A: 1975

B: 1986

C: 1992

4. TRUE OR FALSE, a typical hive has 10,000 bees?

5. Our Juicing Justice project in Senegal working with women fruit farmers, led to the creation of a new export-quality fruit juice. Which fruit does the juice include?

A: Madder

B: Mangoes

C: Dates

6. TRUE OR FALSE, a bee can fly up to 20mph?

7. Our disability inclusion project in Tanzania supports disabled people in coffee and cocoa supply chains. TRUE OR FALSE, coffee is Tanzania's largest export crop?

8. TRUE OR FALSE, the UK government has agreed not to fund the fossil fuel industry any longer?

9. TRUE OR FALSE, 46% of the UK's carbon emissions are not included in official government figures of our carbon footprint?

10. TRUE OR FALSE, bees produce honey to build the hive with?

11. Which country is coffee believed to originate from?

A: Ethiopia

B: Columbia

C: Kenya

12. TRUE OR FALSE, the majority of the world's poorest people are women?

13. TRUE OR FALSE, climate change targets in international trade deals are not enforceable?

14. Per head, which country's people enjoy drinking the most coffee?

A: Italy

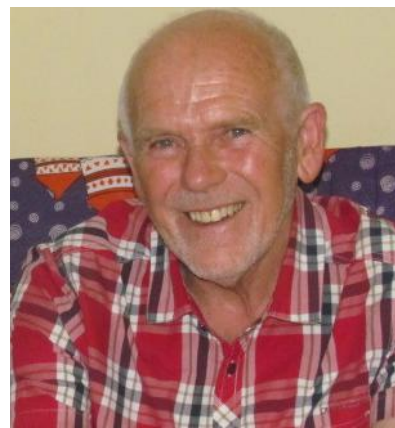
B: USA

C: Finland

Spring – Season of Hope and Renewal

Thou renewest the face of the earth. Psalm 104:30

I've occasionally heard someone say 'spring is sprung' on a really fine day when winter seems finally to have passed. The sun is shining, the first bumble bee of the year has been spotted buzzing around the orange stamens of purple crocuses, yellow daffodils are brightening gardens everywhere and white new lambs are bouncing around in the fields. Spring has arrived.



It's a catchy phrase. In fact, it's the first line of a quirky little bit of verse, usually attributed to the American, Ogden Nash. In it, he plays around with words for effect but manages to catch the vibrancy of the spring season right at the start with the use of surprising grammar and spelling. Every season has its own particular character, of course, but there's a very special feel to spring that somehow encourages a feeling of joy in just taking in the sheer wonder of it all: pollen-dusted yellow catkins hanging on the hazels, fat green bursting buds on the chestnut trees, the singing of the birds as they set about their nesting duties. To use the modern idiom, what's not to like about spring? The Old Testament Song of Solomon refers to the spring song of the birds all those years ago. The many generations since then have enjoyed those same springtime wonders of nature and experienced the uplift of hearing and seeing them. Sadly, ours is an age of declining bird populations and the pleasant, gentle purring sound of the turtle dove, particularly mentioned by the writer, is sadly missing from most of Britain now.

Some years ago, my wife and I made several journeys by car to the south of France during the Easter break. As we travelled down through Belgium and Luxembourg, then ever southwards, we became witness to the steady progress of spring. To begin with, things were not that dissimilar to what we'd been seeing in northern England before catching the overnight ferry for Zeebrugge, like the first green buds on the stumpy, pollarded willow trees growing along the edge of Belgian water meadows. Further south, at our favourite overnight stopping place, we enjoyed the stunning sight of a whole yellow carpet of primroses around the little village church. By the time we were coming to journey's end in the much warmer temperatures of Provence, the Judas trees were in their full, deep pink glory in the towns. Each one was observing its own flowering time but the thing was that we were seeing them one after another as we passed down the autoroute because spring was progressing northwards in tune with the difference in latitude.

Those features of nature are what mark out the seasons of the year for all of us and spur our longing for the positive feeling that lengthening days can bring. In the Psalm quoted at the beginning, we are aware of the hand of God at work, renewing and refreshing. Despite all the difficulty, worry and trauma that Covid has brought to so many in its wake, the familiar pulse and patterns that the Creator set into being, remain, ever on hand to offer balm for the mind and encouragement in the face of challenge. As we look around, we can see everywhere that message of hope which spring brings, written on the face of the Creation in so many different ways.

And the continuation of the poem? 'Spring is sprung, the grass is riz' ... I think I'd best finish it off at that point. There are former teachers in our congregational ranks who probably won't like the liberties being taken with the language!

Douglas Willis

The Trouble with the World is Me!

Thanks to Willam Mather for allowing me to use this item adapted from a fascinating talk he gave at a local discussion group. JDS

One of our favourite Christmas carols starts with the words: “Hark! The herald angels sing: glory to the new-born King! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled...It finishes: “Born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing: glory to the new-born King!”



William Mather Self-portrait

Very familiar. Some of us have sung this many times. But what do we mean about God and sinners? And why reconciled? What’s this about ‘no more death? And what’s this so-called ‘second birth’?

G K Chesterton – the British essayist, novelist and poet, who died in 1936 - contributed to The Times letters in 1910 with probably the shortest letter ever. The subject was “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton’s reply: “Dear Sir, I am,” yours sincerely etc. That was it – a letter of two words!

In essence he was saying: There is something wrong with me from the beginning. Basically I am the problem, I am imperfect - just like everybody else. I am in a mess. Therefore the world is in a mess. This is what is wrong with the world. This is the trouble with the world. It’s been there from the beginning. We are all born imperfect!

The historic Christian perspective is that this basic ‘imperfection’ stems from the much misunderstood and much maligned doctrine of ‘original sin.’ If this is correct it points to something that needs to be dealt with - or at the very least acknowledged. Chesterton also wrote in 1910 in *The Unfinished Temple* that: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.” This paper is an attempt to try and help us understand this ‘difficulty’ and explore why it might be helpful not to leave this ‘ideal’ untried!

Discussion on original sin has often formed part of the dialogue between different faiths. The Uganda Muslim theologian, and former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Badru Kateregga co-authored a book in 1980 with David Shenk, a Christian theologian, called “Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue”. The book makes clear that Islam takes quite a different view while at the same time acknowledging the story of Adam and Eve. Badru Katerrega writes: “The Christian witness that the rebellion of our first parents has tragically distorted man, and that sinfulness pervades us individually and collectively, is very contrary to Islamic witness.

“Islam teaches that the first phase of life on earth did not begin in sin and rebellion against Allah. Although Adam disobeyed Allah, he repented and was forgiven and even given guidance for mankind. “Man is not born a sinner and the doctrine of the sinfulness of man has no basis in Islam.’

The discussion reached the headlines recently when an English head teacher, Katharine Birbalsingh, created a media storm by stating, ‘Children are born with original sin.’ In a torrent of a

of abuse shwas accused of everything from 'biblical inaccuracy' to 'medieval nonsense'. Even The Times got involved. Referring to writer and philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote in his 1762 novel, *Emile*, "There is no original perversity in the human heart" and "There is not a single vice to be found in the heart of which it cannot be said how and whence in entered", *The Times* describes Rousseau's approach as a "remorselessly optimistic assessment of the human condition". However, it adds, "It was enough to get the book publicly burnt and Rousseau arrested." The article continues, "The notion of original sin remains an issue of heated debate to this day. In an age of secularism and pluralism, the notion may seem an anachronism but there is an essential truth in it and it retains the power to shock."

In the Old Testament there are numerous acknowledgments to the universal sinfulness of humankind says Ronald Wallace, Professor of Systematic Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. Writing in the Dictionary of the Christian Church he quotes Genesis 8 verse 21: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth".

Wallace comments: "There is resignation or penitence that man is born into an inevitable sinful condition. Man seems to inherit this bondage from his birth. Man seems to sin involuntarily and inveterately, and yet feels responsible for so doing...sin not only develops with him it also envelopes him." Wallace adds: "He finds his community life warped and inhuman in its ideals. He finds this is so despite the most zealous efforts to bring about community reformation or even revolution."

In the Jewish Hebrew tradition, the rabbis were aware of such problems in a limited way, attributing the universal sinfulness of man to the fall of the sons of God described in Genesis. As a result they believed man has developed an evil impulse or imagination in the soul, exerting the strongest pressure toward sin. Genesis 6:5 says "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually".

The New Testament takes this further. The apostle Paul was the first to link up the phenomenon of original sin with the story of the fall in Genesis 3. He saw the connection between sin coming into the world through Adam and being set free from that sin through Jesus Christ. The true significance of Adam was made clear in Christ. In Romans 5:19 Paul writes: "For as by the one man's disobedience – Adam - the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience – Christ - the many will be made righteous."

Interestingly Jesus does not himself talk about the doctrine of original sin. That came after his death and resurrection. Yet he speaks and acts often in such a way as to imply it, for example he opens up concepts such as:

a) All men are lost. In Mark 2:17 Jesus says: "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners" and in Luke 19:10 that he has "come to seek and save what was lost". In other words all people are sinners and so "lost" from God, so need to be 'found' or in another word "saved."

b) All men are evil. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus says: "if you then, though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him". In Luke 11:4, as part of the Lord's prayer he teaches his followers to pray: "forgive

us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” By this analysis we are all sinners, needing both forgiveness for ourselves and also practising towards others.

c) The things of man’s nature are contrary to God. In Mark 7:15 he says “It is what comes out of a person that makes them ‘unclean’. He continues in verse 21: “from within, out of men’s hearts come evil thoughts: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a person unclean.”

Christian history has seen many great thinkers. Among the earliest was Tertullian, (160-220) the African apologist, theologian and moralist. He coined the term ‘concupiscence’ for man’s inborn evil desire. The dictionary says this means to covet ardently or to have strong desire – especially sexual desire. Tertullian saw this in terms of humanity’s innate sinfulness – a strong inborn evil desire to covet ardently what is wrong.

This was developed by one of the greatest of the early church fathers, Augustine of Hippo, Bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa (354-430). Augustine insisted that “our sinfulness is not because of our willing assent but because of our ancestry.”

This is noted in the Dictionary of the Christian Church by David Wright, Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History, Edinburgh University. He comments that Augustine said that the phrase in Romans 5:12 “because all sinned” implies that all men subsist in – or have the nature of – Adam when he sinned and that Adam’s sin was our sin. Augustine saw original sin as the inherited guilt of Adam and taught the necessity of inward grace to enable man to obey God.

This implies it is impossible to experience freedom from sin and to live the Christian life without the grace of God working in a person’s heart and soul.

The Times Leader-Writer of 30th October 2021 continues: "It is not just religious doctrine but sound science to note the imperfectability of human nature. That is not a counsel of despair but a call to education and social reform. While it is true that no neurologically typical child is born with racist feelings, there are innate human faculties, and a suspicion of others is probably one of them. In an environment where hostility is encouraged rather than squashed, the results can be horrifying. The violence incited in recent genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda show the potential for human depravity and the urgency of creating structures that keep aggression and hatred in check."

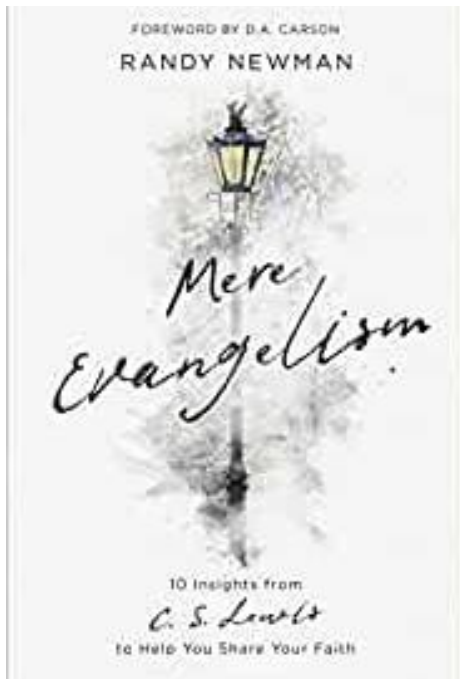
"That task," says *The Times*, "is the justification for constitutional societies bounded by liberal political rights. The most repressive regimes have invariably believed humans were destined for a higher state, whether through racial purity or proletarian self-emancipation. Humans need not only to be taught the good but to have their initial impulses restrained. Ms Birbalsingh’s views may be unfashionable in their stress on sin, but any parent, however doting, must recognise she has a point."

In the light of all this it must be agreed that the imperfectability of human nature is a call for education and social reform.

Or put more simply: the problem with the world is me!

William Mather

From the Bookshelves

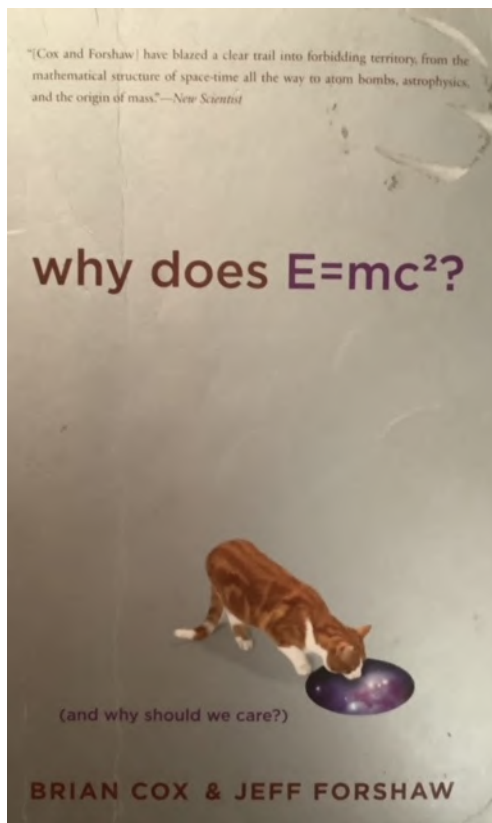


Mere Evangelism - 10 Insights from C.S. Lewis to Help You Share Your Faith

Randy Newman the author of this book was himself a Jewish convert to Christianity aided in his conversion by the writings of Lewis. He is now the Senior Fellow for Evangelism, and Apologetics at The C. S. Lewis Institute so is well conversant with Lewis's approach to evangelism. Over the past two years I have read two other titles on evangelism "The Natural Evangelist" by J John, and "Stay Salt" by Rebecca Manly Pippert both well written and easily understood.

However, I have found this title to be the most helpful so if you are moved to read only one title on evangelism make it this one which is well recommended. I closed the book with the desire to be a better evangelist and read more from both C.S. Lewis and Randy Newman.

Bob Moore



Why does E=mc² Brian Cox and Geoff Forshaw.

As it says on the cover of this fascinating little book E=mc² is an equation that most of us know but few of us understand. Cox and Forshaw set out to explain Einstein's Theory to the maths-shy general public. I didn't understand it all but I certainly have a better grasp of its significance and of the way modern scientists view our world and how it got the way it is. It also gives clear examples of how it matters to each one of us in many different ways. Along the way some popular misconceptions are exploded. Here are a few examples.

You may have grown up thinking that the earth travels round the sun in a lovely elliptical motion. It doesn't. It "falls in a straight line round the sun". There's no such thing as gravity, only curved spacetime. Perhaps you believed that parallel lines can never meet. Not so. Two people walking on parallel lines due north

from the Equator will meet at the North Pole. Parallelism only works in 2 dimensions. Time is not constant. It moves more slowly in fast moving objects. Without this knowledge your sat nav would lead you up the garden path!

I found many of the ideas propounded by these two brilliant scientists fairly mind blowing as they grapple with fundamental questions and make fascinating discoveries in an attempt to understand how it all began. Cox and Forshaw would support the Big Bang Theory before which there was.....nothing.

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that God has put eternity into the mind of man and certainly when you contemplate the wonder and absolute precision of our universe it's much more satisfying to the human soul to see the hand of a Creator in it all. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Sorry, Messrs Cox and Forshaw, I love your brilliance and your book but I'll go along with Herman's Hermits when I think of the implausibility of creation without the hand of a wise designer - "Something tells me I'm into something good!"

Douglas Simpson

Favourite Hymn

*Oh love that will not let me go
I rest my weary soul in thee
I give thee back the life I owe
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be*

*Oh light that followest all my way
I yield my flickering torch to thee
My heart restores its borrowed ray
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be*

*Oh joy that seekest me through pain
I cannot close my heart to thee
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be*

*Oh cross that liftest up my head
I dare not ask to fly from thee
I lay in dust's life's glory dead
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be*

I love this hymn written by George Matheson in the 19th century. It reminds us that a life given over to God will enjoy security, hope and joy. No matter what adversity comes our way, Matheson (who was blind) assures us that we can always 'trace the rainbow in the rain' and as we rest in God's promises look forward to life everlasting.

It's the gospel in 20 beautiful lines!

Douglas Simpson

Bob's Playlist

While pondering my hopes for 2022 I found some musical items which I found helpful. I enjoyed them so much I made a play list for future reference.

They can all be easily found on Youtube.

Count Your Blessings by *The Celebration Choir*

Yes, I Know *Gaither Vocal Band*

Seeking the Lost Sacramento *Central Church*

Day by Day by *various*

Loyal by *Lauren Daigle*

Sparrows by *Jason Gray*

O Weary Soul Keep On by *Sol Fenne featuring Steph MacLeod*

Bob Moore

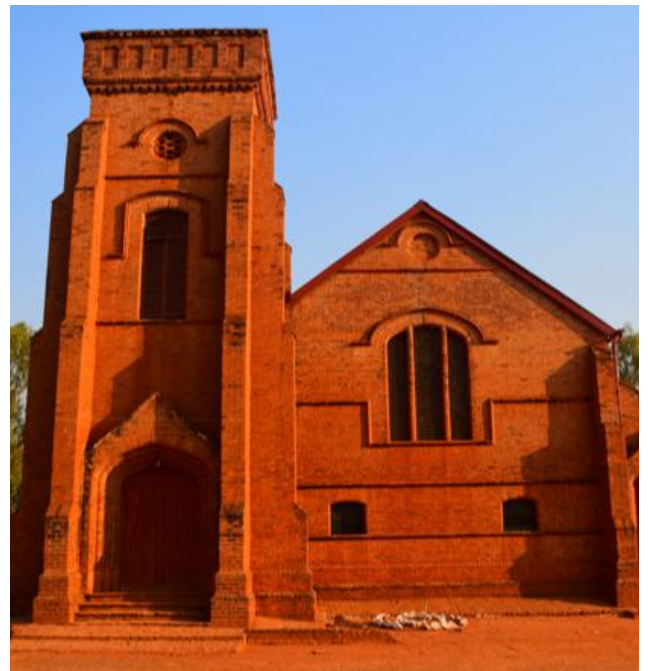
Do you have a favourite hymn to share - with just a few words about what it means to you? If so, please do so. See email address on back cover.

Church, African Style



When the editor asked me to write a piece on church in Malawi, I realised just how much church services in that small African country has been part of my memories of a place I've visited often over the last, almost thirty years.

Of all the times I've been to Sunday morning worship in the old, red brick church (right) at Ekwendeni mission, in the north of the country, the one that stands out the most is probably the very first. I was so struck by the enthusiastic participation of the large congregation and the sheer power of the singing that day. It sounded like it might easily raise the red tin roof! A small, enthusiastic group of young boys calling themselves Heaven's Singers was providing some of the music with a few, rather basic musical instruments. An upturned wooden box served as their drum, along with really effective home-made tambourines made out of Coca-Cola bottle tops.



The visiting choir of ladies from scattered villages out in the dusty-red, dry season countryside performed several items, swaying with their music as they sang in their beautiful harmonizing, distinctively African way. I'd seen them arrive just before church began, packed into the open back of a lorry, a cloud of dust billowing out behind as they travelled along the bumpy, untarred road. No doubt they would have been singing all the way from home along their dusty route, each big jolt provoking an outburst of hilarity. They looked so colourful in their matching choir outfits, carefully made at home from the same blue and white patterned fabric.

When it was time for the offering in church, everyone peeled out, row by row from their seats, to place whatever they were giving into red plastic buckets placed at the front. But this was no sombre procession. To the background of more lively singing from the choir, many of those moving along the aisle swayed rhythmically to the music as they went down with their offering. Even above the

enthusiastic choir singing, I could hear the sound of bird song. A black and white African wagtail was perched at an open window where the hot, dry outside air was doing its best to enter. I couldn't help thinking of the amusing song that begins: 'All God's creatures have a place in the choir...'

Singing and dancing are such a part of African life. I once travelled up to Livingstonia in a pick-up in the company of two ministers. The old mission station there is located high on top of the escarpment of the Great African Rift Valley, with a breath-taking view down over the massive, blue Lake Malawi to the hazy, distant mountains of Mozambique on the other side. From the lake shore, access is by a road notorious for its steepness, its never-ending sequence of hairpin bends and the very uncomfortable inconvenience of the rock outcrops along the extremely rough track.



Just as we reached the start of the ascent, one of the ministers suddenly announced to the driver that he should stop the vehicle. He said we shouldn't proceed any further without prayer for our safety in what lay ahead! My abiding memory of the following morning at Sunday worship in Livingstonia church is of the two ministers in their dark suits and white dog collars out at the front, dancing alongside more, colourfully dressed ladies from yet another visiting choir.

One of the best moments my wife and I had at any kind of service was when 120 years of Scottish mission to Malawi were being celebrated out of doors at Mzuzu. Under the cloudless blue sky, the large sports stadium was packed before the President and his entourage arrived. When a really jazzy version of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' blasted out through the loudspeakers, some of the assembled ministers sprang to their feet out in front of the crowd, dancing as only ministers in black gowns can.

There's an unrestrained joyfulness in African church services that goes along with all the colour and singing – and the wagtails that memorable day weren't averse to adding their own contribution.

Douglas Willis



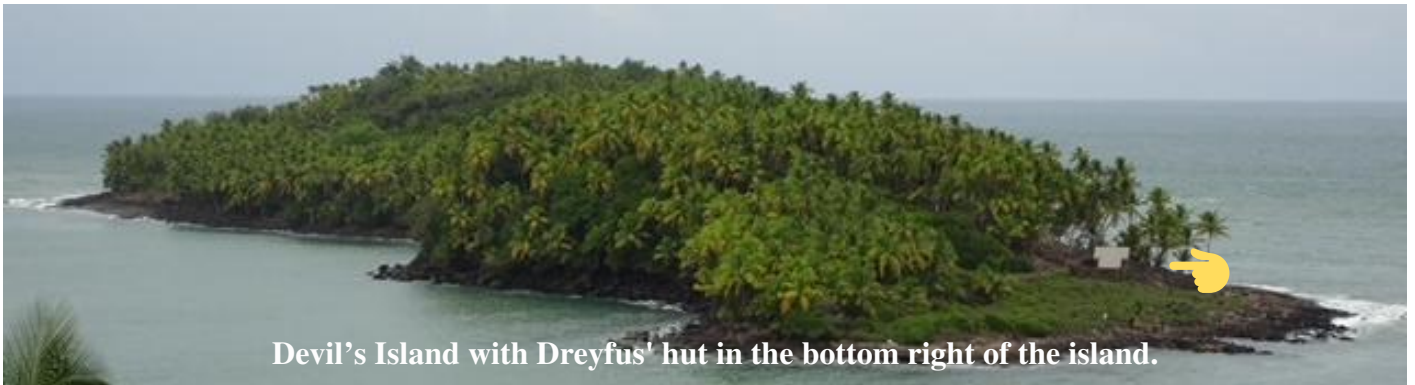
Stroma the Adventurer (I)

In Cambodia on the Mekong

Pardon and Salvation

Around 300 miles north of the Equator, in the Atlantic Ocean 7 miles off the coast of French Guiana lies a group of three small islands known in French as the Isles du Salut, or in English the Salvation Isles. They were so named when missionaries from the mainland fled there to escape the plague. They are now more famously known by the name of one of the islands, the smallest – Devil's Island, and their fame is for being a place from which escape was virtually impossible, the French penal colony which existed there from 1852 to 1946.

One of the islands, Royale, is now open to visitors. Among the lush vegetation, where beautiful peacocks can be admired and the antics of monkeys and agoutis (a cross between a guinea pig and a rabbit) enjoyed, are constant reminders of the grim days of the penal colony: decaying prison blocks, the roads made by the convicts and the graveyard where most are buried, since very few survived the brutal conditions in the equatorial heat. It could be described as hell in paradise. St Joseph's Isle housed the 'reclusion', the blocks where returned escapists and offenders of colony rules were kept in silent and totally dark solitary confinement, while the smallest, at quarter of an acre, was Devil's Island itself, usually reserved for political prisoners.



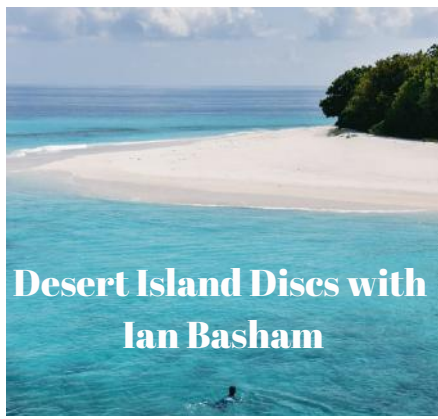
Devil's Island with Dreyfus' hut in the bottom right of the island.

While nowadays probably the most well know prisoner is Henri Charriere who spent nine years in the colony and whose story, in particular, his escapes, is told in the book and film 'Papillon', the most infamous prisoner was Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army wrongfully convicted of spying for Germany, who was kept in appalling solitary conditions on Devil's Island from 1895 to 1899. Eventually Dreyfus was offered a pardon – which he refused. There was nothing to pardon as he had not committed the crime of which he had been accused and wrongly condemned. Eventually the case was re-tried and it was found that he had been falsely accused. He was justified and freed. He had not committed any offence. His position was restored and on 20 July 1906 Dreyfus was made a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur.

But the whole of mankind is in a different situation to that of Alfred Dreyfus. We are all guilty of crimes, having sinned against God. How could we be justified? It is only through the work of Jesus Christ, made sin for us. 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5:21). In this way God remains just and becomes the justifier of sinners who by grace believe in His son, Jesus Christ.

The awfulness of the penal colony, the seemingly incongruous name 'The Salvation Islands' and the refusal of acceptance of pardon by Dreyfus seem perfectly combined in the words of the blind hymn writer Fanny J Crosby: "The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives."

Jack Kernahan



I was in first year secondary at Fortrose Academy and our class for “music” (really only singing at that time) was seated in a large circle. Having set us off on some dirge, the teacher, Mrs Down, progressed around the circle listening. She stood behind me for a moment then asked “Ian, are you singing tenor or bass?”. “I don’t know, Miss”. Even if I had known what these technical terms meant, my answer would have been the same. “Well, I think it might be better if you didn’t sing at all.”

I spent the whole of my time until leaving school sitting in class without uttering another word. I have chosen as my first disc *The Mingulay Boat Song* as a reminder of that time. So, on the island, I will be parading along the beach singing “Hill you ho boys, let her go boys ...” at the top of my voice, thumbing my nose to the spectral memory of Mrs Down.

School concerts in the Town Hall were essentially choral affairs with an occasional *Three Little Maids from School* and girls’ PE demonstration. But one year a senior boy, who had transferred from Cromarty Junior to take his Highers, walked confidently on stage, alone, and sang *The Goodbye Song* from Whitehorse Inn. He was an accomplished tenor and we had seen nothing like this before (boys were reluctant singers). I was captivated and would have given anything to be him.

Apart from this, my musical experience was limited to Radio Luxembourg and musicals shown by the weekly itinerant cinema in the Gordon Memorial Hall. I developed a love for these and in my imagination became a cross between the sophisticated grace of Fred Astaire and the balletic physicality of Gene Kelly. When I went to Aberdeen I was able to experience musical theatre and, ever since, have been a frustrated song and dance man. In the days we had house parties, I would sometimes perform George Melly’s version of *Frankie and Johnnie*. Sheena accompanied me on piano but had to wait for me to start as she could not anticipate which key I might be in. She would also be prepared to change key to follow my fairly random variations. Interestingly, since getting a hearing aid a few years ago, it seems I can now follow key and more or less sing “in tune”. So now I do join in (quietly) in church, encouraged no doubt by the social distancing.

Fortunately, our children and grandchildren have inherited Sheena’s musical ability, not mine. When son Scott was a student in Edinburgh, he formed a group and wrote and performed sixties-style songs. The band rehearsed in our attic so we became very familiar with the repertoire. We often went to their various gigs and other engagements. One time the *Spooks* was the resident group at the Fringe Club. We were in the balcony of the venue, which was a former church, when a young man standing nearby came over and said “They’re great aren’t they? I’ve come from Glasgow to see them”. “Yes, we like them”. “See the singer in the front, he was born in Aberdeen, you know”. “Really?”. We did not feel we could admit “Yes, we were there!” I’d choose Scott’s psychedelic composition *Mile High Strawberry Pie* (accessible on YouTube) as a reminder of those times.

When we were in Ghana we often went on a Saturday night to a nearby hotel to listen to High Life music and watch the Ghanaians, dressed in their colourful kente cloth, dancing with so much natural rhythm and

fluidity. In 1957 Sandy Brown, an Edinburgh clarinet player and one of the most innovative musicians in the British “Trad Jazz” scene, produced a record Afro McJazz. Among this compilation of original tunes based on African music, my favourite has always been *Go Ghana*.

It combines the sounds and complex-rhythms of High Life with the vitality of late fifties/early sixties jazz and reminds me of the happy, relaxed atmosphere of colourful, vibrant Ghana.

On a Mediterranean cruise, our ship was departing from Naples in early evening twilight. The captain announced that we were to sail past Capri and that he would shut back the engines so that we could savour the atmosphere. We sailed on to Maria Callas singing *O Mio Babbino Cara*. I do not know Puccini’s opera and have never felt the need to understand the words. The beauty, poignancy and sadness of the voice and music are quite enough for me.

There are many great love songs in musical theatre, but I have always believed the best to be *Some Enchanted Evening* from *South Pacific*. It reminds me of acne-beleaguered late adolescence when fantasy, unrequited love and painful longings were very much part of one’s being.

Tain’t Nobody’s Business if I do is one of the great original Blues songs. It has been recorded by many artistes including Bessie Smith, but my favourite has always been Jimmy Witherspoon.

When we were in Hong Kong he came to the local jazz club and, although then in his seventies and recovered from throat cancer, he was still a formidable blues singer. I could not believe my good fortune to be sitting within touching distance of the great man!

If I go to church on Sunday,

Then shim sham shimmy all day Monday,

Well, it ain’t nobody’s business if I do.

And if I treat my neighbour right, then spend all my money – that’s all right.

Ain’t nobody’s business if I do.

As with the later Blues, spiritual music arose from the deprivation, hardship and misery of American slaves and their descendants. People with very little in their lives to enjoy or look forward to, they found solace in believing that one day they would have a happier time, even if that time were to be in another life. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* gives that promise:

I look over Jordan, and what do I see, coming for to carry me home?

A band of angels, coming after me, coming for to carry me home.

The book I would take with me is *The Lord of the Rings*. It is the only long book I have got through since being made to read *Vanity Fair* in school. I am a very slow reader and only managed LOR by finding a book of maps of the journeys with summary accounts of the stages. I have always been intrigued by the world of dwarves, elves, dragons etc. and this book would provide endless enjoyment.

The “leisure” item would be a trumpet. With so much time at my disposal, surely I would be able to learn to play like Bix Beiderbecke and even perhaps transcend my current virtuoso performances of *I’m Coming Virginia* on the kazoo?

Ian Basham



A Bereavement Service was held in November and led by Rev. Graeme Bell and the Pastoral Care Team. The service was to remember friends and family who had passed away over the years and those who passed during Covid when families were not able to have the funerals they wanted and sometimes not able to attend because of travel restrictions.

The service consisted of hymns, readings and then the congregation were invited to come forward and place a dove on the Christmas tree in remembrance of their loved one. It is hoped that the service helped families in their journey of grief as Christmas approached. *The snowdrops have risen, the sign of new beginnings, so be it with you.*

Anne Fiddes

Carol Singers on Tour

Led by Rev Graeme Bell, a hardy group of carol singers braved chilly temperatures to regale the residents of Rosemarkie, Fortrose and our new Care Home during the days leading up to Christmas. A big thanks to Graeme, technical guru Keith Lorraine and our team of enthusiastic vocalists!

Douglas Simpson



Danger - Church Notices!

At the evening service tonight the sermon topic will be - 'What is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Mrs B remains in hospital and is having trouble sleeping. She requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those unwanted items around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa will be speaking tonight at church. Come along tonight to hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.

The Weight Watchers will meet at 7pm. Please use the large double door at the side entrance.

The Ladies Literary Society will meet on Wednesday. Mrs Johns will sing "Put me in my little bed" accompanied by the Pastor.

Potluck Supper this Sunday. Prayer and medication to follow.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES.....

Samson slayed the Philistines with Axe of the Apostles

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire at night.

Solomon, one of David's sons had 300 wives and 700 porcupines

The epistles were the wives of the apostles

Christians have only one wife. This is called monotony.

At the end of an anti drink sermon:

Minister: What will we do with whisky?

Congregation: Throw it in the river!

Minister: And wine?

Congregation: Throw it in the river!

Minister: And beer?

Congregation: Throw it in the river!

Presenter: Amen and now let us join together to sing our last hymn "Shall we gather by the river"

Teacher's Prayer

Lord, I've not been grumpy, I've not lost my temper and I've been unfailingly kind, considerate and fair. But now I'm going to get up and go to work and I'm going to need a lot more help keeping this up.

Douglas S

Is Dannie our Oldest Reader?



Dannie Reid, Avoch's oldest man, photographed on his 98th birthday in January, with his wife Kay who is 89 years of age.

They live in Kilmarnock. Kay hails from the Isle of Lewis and is a native Gaelic speaker. Dannie's civil service career ran from 1940 to 1984 - apart from a period during the war when he became an RAF navigator, graduating in Canada.



Stroma the Adventurer (2)

This time on a bike in the Phillipines.

A huge thank you to Douglas Simpson for taking on the editor role for this newsletter and doing so with minimum fuss and maximum effectiveness.

The newsletter belongs to all of us, so if you'd like to edit a future one, just get in touch. In the meantime, please submit all contributions for the June edition to:

calum.macsween@btinternet.com
by Friday 29th April - earlier if possible.



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