

A COMMENDATION BY THE REVD KEITH JARVIS ON THE LIFE OF DON JACOBS, A MENNONITE MINISTER

Donald R. Jacobs wrote an enlightening autobiography in 2012 entitled 'What a Life! A memoir'. He tells of his own upbringing in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. His mother had a Mennonite background, his father Lutheran. Eventually they settled into a Mennonite church, but he always questioned his background. His parents asked if he would like to try a different school in Virginia. There he saw another face of the Mennonite faith, and came to the Lord as a young teenager. From then onwards he thought of himself as a Mennonite Christian, and tried to work out what that meant.

During his first year at teacher training college he met Anna Ruth, who came from a solid Mennonite background. After they were married, he taught at the Lancaster Mennonite High School.

The Mennonites of Lancaster were stricter in observing rules, and Don had much to learn!

From there he spent a year in the University of Maryland, planning to move to Germany for further study in Anabaptist history. Instead he felt the call to overseas work, specifically to Tanganyika (now Tanzania) a British Protectorate at the time. In readiness for this, they moved to London for a year for further training, where Don took an English Teacher training course, whilst Anna Ruth studied Swahili. They attended Westminster Chapel on their first Sunday, intending to try out the different churches, but after sitting under Martyn Lloyd Jones' ministry that day, they decided that was the place for them!

They stopped in Kenya on their way, and met African Christians who had been persecuted by the Mau Mau movement for refusing to take an oath to kill, and refusing to participate in the pagan practices that went with it. In Tanganyika they finally found their spiritual feet in the East African revival which had begun in Rwanda and Uganda in the 1930s.

At first they appreciated the effects of the revival, and the way it was truly interdenominational. They were concerned about how the message lined up with what they had learned in the strict Lancaster Mennonites. But as they saw it working out practically in relationships, they saw their own need to be open and honest with the brethren. One especially, Zedekiah Kisare was in close fellowship with him. Zedekiah was to become the first Tanzanian Mennonite bishop. The first bishop was 35 year old Don Jacobs, who held the position for two years. Don also met and shared with other revival leaders, including Dr Joe Church, William Nagenda and Festo Kivengere of Uganda.

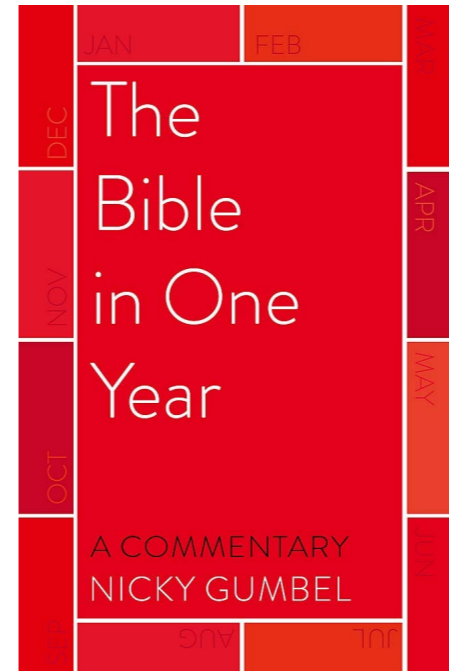
During their first furlough they returned to the States, and Don took the opportunity to complete a doctorate in Cultural Anthropology, which was to help create new attitudes in missionary work. After his second term in Tanzania he was asked to help lead the work in Kenya, based in Nairobi.

There again he met and shared with the revival fellowships reaching out interdenominationally.

During this time he was approached to set up an evangelistic outreach in Nairobi, led by African Enterprise. Because Michael Cassidy was a South African, at the time of apartheid, Tom Houston of the Nairobi Baptist Church approached him, and assured him that African Enterprise shunned apartheid. So Don became a co-ordinator of the mission, inviting Festo Kivengere to join the team. This was to make a major change for African Enterprise, as Festo was to become leader of the East African section, and later Don was invited to join the international board of African Enterprise.

He finally returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he was to become an advocate for mission. He travelled widely in this role, and also as an ambassador for African Enterprise. I was to meet him and hear him speak at different revival fellowship meetings in England and Africa. He stayed at our home in one of his visits to England, and my wife and I were privileged to stay with the Jacobs in the States ten years ago, when I was invited to share in their revival fellowship meetings. Don went to be with the Lord in February this year aged 91. We are so thankful that we knew the Jacobs, and many others associated with the East African revival.

RESOURCE REVIEWS



THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: A COMMENTARY

Nicky Gumbel

London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019
ISBN 978-1-473-67706-7 | pp. 816, £25

Nicky Gumbel's daily programme for reading through the Bible in a year has been available as an App for some time. With over 3 million subscribers, it is clearly very popular. Now it has been released in the form of a single volume hardback book.

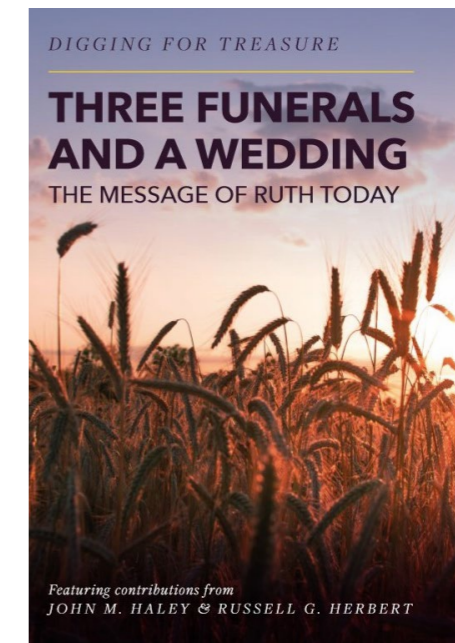
Each day offers a general opening illustration which sets a unifying theme for that day's readings. Three passages are then cited from the Psalms, the New Testament and then the Old Testament, with devotional commentary and a short prayer written for each one.

This has not been written as a piece of biblical scholarship, but by that, do not think that the commentary is lacking

in depth. The reflections offer deep spiritual insight and practical wisdom for everyday discipleship, written in a style that is accessible and engaging. Besides being a rich resource for personal devotional use, preachers will find here a useful mine of illustrations, quotations and inspirational nuggets.

At over 800 pages long, this is a physically large volume, and when you consider that it does not contain the actual Bible text itself, it is easy to see why many would find the App a more convenient option, as far as portability is concerned. For all that, there is much to be said for having all this material in one place, in printed format. I for one am very pleased to have it in my study. Inspiring stuff.

Reviewed by the Revd Dr Russell Herbert who is the Superintendent Minister of the Gordano Valley Circuit.



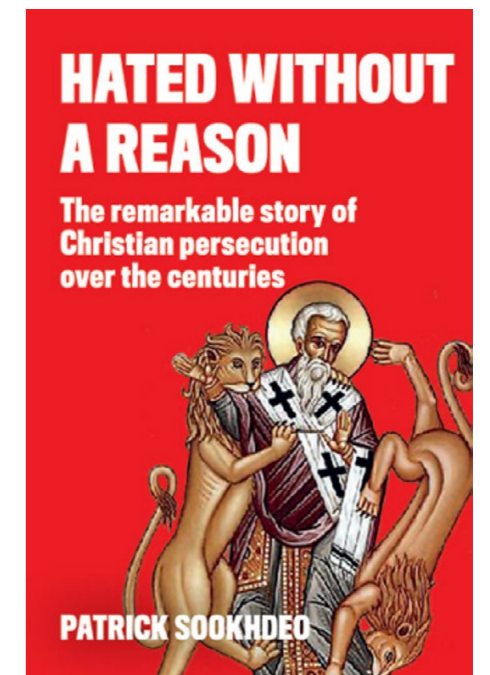
THREE FUNERALS AND A WEDDING: THE MESSAGE OF RUTH TODAY

John M. Haley & Russell G. Herbert

Ilkeston: MET, 2020,
ISBN 978-0-86071-825-3 | pp. 52, £6
Available via the MET website

This book is part of MET's Digging for Treasure series for expository preaching and is supporting Bible Month 2020. Although Bible Month has often been observed in June, it can be any four-week period of the year. Russell Herbert's teaching on Ruth 1 provides a great example of an expository sermon, focusing on tragedy and hope, very apt for 2020. His chapter on Ruth 3 looks at how he would preach it, with the theme of 'How can we be sure and certain when life is not?' John Haley, in his teaching on Ruth 2, explores God's covenant-love. In the final chapter Haley opens up Ruth 4 through sharing a guide to sermon preparation, focusing upon God's care, especially the providence, perseverance and provision of God's grace. Each chapter ends with a prayer and with questions for reflection which are suitable for individuals and groups. Both contributors help us to understand the historical context of the book of Ruth, and apply its message to life today.

Reviewed by the Revd Derek Balsdon who is a Methodist Presbyterian, and serves as the MET Development Worker.



HATED WITHOUT A REASON

Patrick Sookhdeo

McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2019,
ISBN 978-1-7321952-4-0 | pp. 272, £14.99
Best obtained from the Barnabas Fund website

Who does not love the glorious promises of Jesus? What about this one, 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.' (John 15: 20)?

The Revd Dr Patrick Sookhdeo was born in 1947 in Guyana. His father converted from Hinduism to marry his Muslim mother. They moved to the UK in the 1950s. Patrick converted in 1965, later studying at London Bible College. In 2000 he was awarded a doctorate from London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. He explored interfaith dialogue and grew concerned about the persecution of Christian minorities in Islamic nations.

A lecturer at 10 academic institutions, he has advised the UK Government and NATO on security. His grasp of this material is comprehensive. However, he writes, 'Hated Without a Reason cannot try to cover the entire scope of this glorious and uplifting history.' Nevertheless, the coverage is extensive. Starting with the persecution of Jesus, it continues with the Apostles and their contemporaries. Further chapters cover the Roman Empire; Islam; the first century, N. W. Europe; China; Japan; Korea; South Asia; the 20th Century - and Christians as persecutors. Some detailed accounts: some amazing stories.

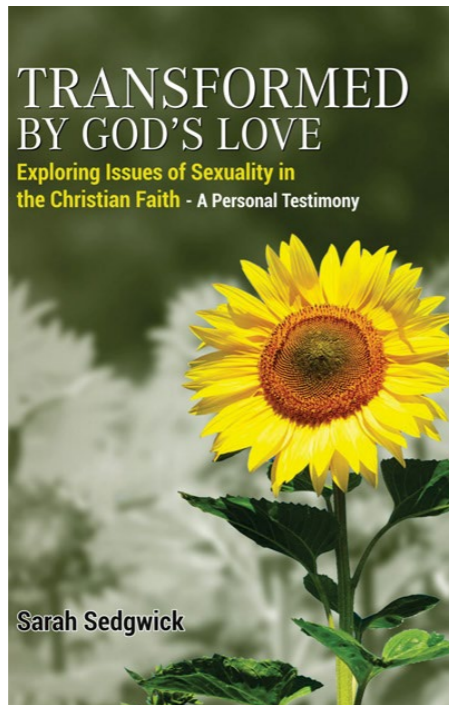
Did you know the Roman Theban Legion of 6,600 Egyptian Christians were massacred for refusing to slaughter other Christians and worship Roman gods? Not resisting, they laid down their weapons, offered their necks to their killers, firm in faith to a man? Did you know the Ottoman Empire, during 1914 -1923, committed genocide? 3.75 million Christians were victims. Adolf Hitler noted the Great Powers' inaction and was encouraged to think he could act with impunity.

Towards the end of the book he analyses different Christian responses to persecution with helpful conclusions.

Uplifting and moving, this book reveals how true discipleship attracts persecution. Scholarly, but an easy read, it explains much which is new to the West and shows powerfully how history has repeated itself in different contexts. Lessons from the past are applicable today.

Reading this will strengthen your faith in these days of opposition to the true Gospel.

Review by Richard Iball, member at King's Cross Community Church Hexthorpe.



TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S LOVE

Sarah Sedgwick

London: Kingdom Publishers, 2019
ISBN: 978-1-913247-04-01 | pp.110, £12.99

Sarah's book provides a thorough and practical guide to what the scriptures teach about sexuality. What makes this book so authentic is that it was born out of her own searching. The book tells Sarah's story and explains how she found Christ as her redeemer and understood that the call to follow Jesus would involve changing her whole lifestyle. Coming from the LGBT community herself she describes how God has guided her as she has searched his Word and acknowledges the difficult and costly decisions. The book describes how she found her way back to God; finding, as she grappled with scripture, that those scriptures would set her free to be who God has called her to be. She challenges the church not to be simply 'gay affirming' out of some false sense of compassion, and recognise that compassion without truth is no compassion at all.

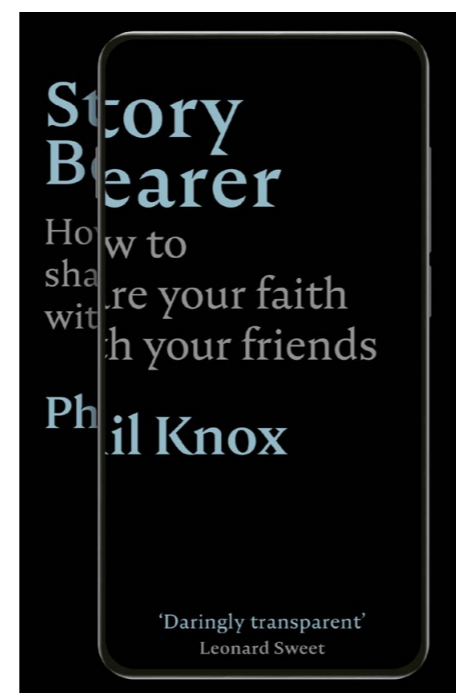
Her conviction that her identity is found in Christ and not in her sexuality challenges what has become society's and to some extent the church's accepted norms.

What is more exciting is that she has experienced God's transforming work even in her sexuality. Turning on its head the prevailing belief that we are not able to bring this area of life under Christ's sovereignty, Sarah acknowledges the importance of being part of a body of believers who stood alongside her as she sought God. She reflects on how different her journey may have been if she had not had the prayerful loving care from a body of believers.

Tackling the hard topic of sexuality, she encourages the church to be teaching truth not conforming to society's expectations. Recognising that the church is 'divided, hesitant and unsure', she asks the question: 'Do we believe that God can bring revival amongst the gay community and do we truly want to see that revival?'

If so, this book is a valuable tool because it is not simply abstract theology. Although the theology is well grounded in scripture, it is rooted in practice. It describes a battle for holiness in a world that seems to have forgotten what the term means. It shows that, when we open our lives up to God's transforming grace, we can find freedom and life in all its fullness.

Reviewed by June Farrant, a Director of Transformed Ministries (transformedbygodslove.com) and also the Pastoral Lay Worker at Trinity Methodist Church, Long Eaton.



STORY BEARER

Phil Knox

London: IVP, 2020,
ISBN 978-1-78974-155-1 | pp.192, £9.99

Phil Knox knows how to tell a story - and to tell it well. He has the gift of a way with words that flow into pictures as anyone who has heard him speak can tell you. He tells stories of his own failings and frailties with disarming honesty and builds up the stories of those around him. His writing is no different. His voice is authentic and persuasive as he addresses the subject of personal evangelism and the story that we must tell as people belonging to Jesus.

One of the great things about Phil is that he loves to communicate. Whether it is to a gathering of 11-16-year-olds or in his current role at the Evangelical Alliance as head of mission to young adults. His book draws in readers of any generation and lets us know that we can do it. We can share our story, because, by the time we are a few chapters in, it feels like the most natural thing in the world to do.

Shot through with his own 'Spoken Word' poetry, Phil blends theology with the massively practical approach to making the story of Jesus real. Right there in the early pages, he gets us excited about the possibility of our involvement in sharing the story of Jesus: 'A story bearer bears and shares the story in such a way that others are caught up in it. And, even better than that, they get to know the Author for themselves.' (p. xix)

Phil takes us through the reasons to share the stories of our faith and the deep need the Christian has to share Jesus. He takes us through the issues of the generational approaches to story and how messages are best received. Above all, he shares something that is a message from his heart to ours. He includes online links to additional materials. The evangelical imperative is to share the good news of God's love to the world around us and Phil Knox makes that imperative feel real and obvious and possible.

There are the pre-COVID challenges to the truth that give us pause for thought - we do need company, we do function best in physical proximity - and there

aren't answers to these questions right now... although I expect that he will have some ideas to share soon, and the principles are solid. I will leave you with some of his words; 'Evangelism is a collaborative effort, not a solo sport.' (p. 143). It is Biblical. It is sound advice.

Reviewed by the Revd Catherine Hutton, currently Superintendent Minister of the Norwich Circuit.



A SAD DEPARTURE: WHY WE COULD NOT STAY IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

David J. Randall

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015
ISBN-13: 978-1848716612 | pp. 198, £11.63

The blurb on the back cover of this book begins 'If you care at all about the Christian church you must brace yourself for a roller-coaster of emotions as you read A Sad Departure'. As someone who was married in the Church of Scotland I can testify to the truth of this. The book tells of the departure of around 40 ministers and their congregations from the Kirk, either completely or in part, over the issue of same-sex relationships; ignited in 2009 by the decision of the General Assembly to uphold the right of an Aberdeen congregation to proceed with a call to a minister who was living in a homosexual relationship with another man. The writer David Randall had served as a Church of Scotland minister since 1971 before deciding, along with many others, that he could no longer minister in a church which had endorsed a decision that in

his words 'represents a clear departure from the attitude to the Bible that has been professed by the denomination, as well as by the worldwide church, over the centuries.' (p.2)

The book is honest enough to acknowledge that 'there has not been unanimity among evangelical ministers, elders and members over the issue' (p.4). Those who have left - the book lists 40 ministers at the end, all male - have made different journeys; some into the Free Church of Scotland, others into the United Free Church, still others into new independent fellowships, 21 of which are also listed in the book. By its very scope it does not tell the story of those who have stayed: following a gathering of 350 evangelicals in Perth on 14 June 2013 COSEN - The Church of Scotland Evangelical Network - was set up to support those whose witness to evangelical truth has continued within the denomination.

There are some differences between the story the book tells and the current plight of Methodism; for example, a few of those who left the Kirk seemed to think the rot set in with the ordination of women in 1969! However, the vast majority of those whose stories are told found themselves facing similar questions to many evangelical Methodist ministers today facing the possible redefinition of marriage by the Conference- is it right to leave the church we love? Where will we go? What about our homes and families? Is it still possible for us to remain faithful to our denomination and to Scripture as the ultimate rule of faith and practice?

Those lay and ordained who seek to hear God's voice on the 'pilgrimage of faith', on which we will find ourselves, may benefit greatly from reading these stories, especially the stories of those who have been on a similar journey and who have ultimately found themselves taking steps of faith along different routes to friends and colleagues.

Reviewed by the Revd Dr Tim Woolley the Vice-Chair of MET.