

**ST MARK'S  
REVIEW**

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**St Mark's**  
NATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

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**The year of living  
graciously**

No. 253, September/October 2020 (3)

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# St Mark's Review

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# Editorial

It seems 2020 just won't stop. It still manages to pile insult upon insult. (Even now, after all we've seen, I write the day after the worst U.S. presidential "debate" in living memory.) In Sammy J's irreverent portrayal of the year's performance review, God asks 2020: "Is everything all right at home?"

We are at a "cultural moment". Nothing is as it was, and nothing seems clear. A series of acute shocks has now become, for many, grindingly endless.

The faculty of St Mark's knew early on that this might become a year to learn new things about God, or to relearn old things. So it has proven. Spring has now sprung on our beautiful Canberra campus, and after much life-giving rain. The world still turns, and God's grace keeps on giving. Yet, like others, we're still feeling our way forward.

It has to be acknowledged that we have fared well. We coughed our way through December, but none of our houses burned. We did run for cover in January as hail smashed to pieces our old buildings and not-so-old cars, but no one was hurt. Then we ran home, and taught from there for months. (My greatest physical hardship was my living-room armchair. I had self-indulgently hoped it would make a great office chair. I was extremely wrong.) We're back on campus now but like everyone else, we're distancing, hand-washing, and Zooming. Like others in Canberra, we're still repairing hail damage. But we're generally well, and have strengthened bonds of affection with far-flung students who are under much harder circumstances, in the USA, in Victoria, and in myriad other pockets of hardship.

We've written from our discipline areas in biblical studies, history and theology to address the year. In our various ways, we've discovered in 2020 "the year of living graciously". That is, like many Christian people, we're making halting steps to see again how our daily living can spring from the grace of God (rather than from those usual suspects—panic, despair, "scarcity," and so on).

The suffering-induced conceit that God does not exist becomes, in my own piece, a new apprehension of how Jesus' suffering puts him alongside us in ours. The ever-present suspicion that God's face has darkened against us becomes, for Andrew Errington, the discovery that God wants us back. Jane Foulcher has rediscovered the excellences embodied in our ecclesial

gatherings, made poignant by their absence, and more precious when they surely return. Even where homes have unexpectedly become forms of threat, Geoff Broughton has found new ways in Christ toward our best home. Jeanette Mathews shows how practices of care and cohesion arose from ancient Israel's experiences of disease, reminding us what makes true community now. David Neville has seen how the incarnate Jesus inducts us into trust, mercy, and gratitude in times of extremity, by Jesus' attention to a vulnerable one even at Jesus' own extremity. Michael Gladwin, with the longitudinal wisdom that history gives, shows how calamity has ever been thus, and that God and God's servants quietly move through and beyond it.

For our representative three students, Aden Cotterill has found again the constant dependability of God; Jacob Traeger is seeing the future now through the lens of hope; and the irrepressible Cathy Baxter has even found a smidgen of joy in Zoom and other technologies (that most mixed of all blessings!).

In offering this volume, we make no light account of the awfulness. We hear of people saying their last goodbye to beloved elders over a phone screen. We watch those graphs where red arrows stubbornly point upward. We know folk whose once-optimistic business has closed, whose family has disintegrated, whose mental or physical health has collapsed, whose loved-one is gone.

Closer to home, we know the pain of pastors and missionaries watching hard-won churches seeming now to crumble. We sense their discouragement and exhaustion, and the difficulty of knowing how to proceed. (We are already pondering how St Mark's might assist to rebuild, rejuvenate, and help these frontline ambassadors for Christ to move into whatever comes next.)

These are not simple travails, nor easily traversed. But this cultural "moment" stands against a backdrop of God's grace, who has not abandoned the world. We hope to show some subtle but clear glimpses of that—in the Bible, in history, in God, in Christ.

For 2020 and 2021, then, may you and we continue to discover new ways of living graciously.

**Andrew Cameron**  
Director, St Mark's National Theological Centre  
1 October 2020