



REVEREND DR. DONALD MACEWAN

CHAPLAIN AT ST ANDREWS UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND

Donald MacEwan has been the Chaplain at the University of St Andrews in Scotland since 2011. His journey to St Andrews took him from childhood in Glasgow to university in Aberdeen, two years living in Japan, four years in Ireland, and ten years as a parish minister. He was drawn to chaplaincy for its immense variety, exploring different expressions of faith, encountering people facing all sorts of experiences, sharing the lives of people discovering who they are, regardless of faith or philosophy of life.

When he's not with students or staff, he enjoys playing golf on one of St Andrews' many courses, or packing for a trip with his wife, in recent years to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Caribbean and Oman, invariably bumping into someone from St Andrews.

After 13 years as Chaplain, he has decided to become a student himself! He is undertaking a two-year Masters in Creative Writing – but continues to work part-time as Chaplain.

Life in the Presence of God

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Like many people, faith began in me from my parents. They taught me a simple prayer to say each night before going to sleep, a litany of blessings for my family. I'm sure I gabbled my way through it far too fast – but I said it. My father prayed before significant meals. Once a week, from the age of four, we joined a community for worship and I learned stories from scripture with other children.

What intrigues me is why I continued to believe in God when so many did not. After all, when the teenage years of questioning came, I questioned. I remember watching a ground-breaking series on TV called *Life on Earth*, in which David Attenborough, patiently and logically, explored the truth of evolution by natural selection. I told my teacher of religion I could no longer believe in God as Creator, and that instead, I believed in evolution. She was kind and didn't criticize me. She said I could believe in both; God the Creator and evolution as the way creation takes place. And that has remained my approach.

Throughout my life this pattern has recurred. Someone presents a case for an alternative to God, showing at best the irrelevance, and at worst the impossibility of the Divine. But to me, I see not opposition but integration, or even enhancement. Here are some examples.

Many contemporaries turned away from God because their pleasure in their bodies, in sex and in love, seemed to invalidate the God they'd hitherto encountered: disapproving of sex, judging them for desire, condemning them for anything but heterosexual marital love (and not particularly keen on that either). But sex and love seem to me now, 25 years into marriage, as the infinitely complex and beautiful gift of a loving Creator, though open to the most damaging of behavior.

Or take injustice – how can a loving God allow so much pain and suffering? There's no simple response to this deepest of questions. But faith in God is not in opposition to the impulse for justice, for the flourishing of all that lives on the earth. Rather, trusting in God as Maker, Redeemer and Hope has led me to do what I can, in my own small way, for those who suffer – giving my time and my listening attention, in care for them.

Some have rejected God in favor of art. But to me all human creativity, in imagination, craft, commitment and beauty emerges from the creative nature of God, breathing innumerable worlds into being.

Even now, with degrees in theology and decades in ministry behind me, I do not have *proof* of God's existence. There are problems galore for this fragile planet and all for whom it is home. But I continue to pray, not so rapidly as when a boy, in the trust that God is, and is infinitely loving, creative and wise. And I find that every aspect of life is richer, more meaningful and more hopeful in the presence of God.