



Eaglais na h-Alba

# HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL GAELIC

Dr. Duncan Sneddon

Tillidh ri Dia gach iomall tìr',  
is cuimhnichidh iad air:  
Seadh, sluagh nam fineachan gu lèir  
dhut gèill is urram bheir.

*Salm 22: 7*

## Introduction

This handbook is intended as a guide to Biblical and ecclesiastical Gaelic – that is, the kind of Gaelic used in the Bible and in church, both of which can be different in significant ways from everyday spoken Gaelic.

It is aimed primarily at those who wish to be able to preach or otherwise lead worship in Gaelic, but feel that their grasp of Biblical and ecclesiastical Gaelic prevents them from doing so, but it will also be useful to those who want to be able to read the Bible, take part in worship and follow sermons and prayers by others more fully and more clearly.

This broad grouping covers people with a number of quite different experiences with Gaelic. There are many people, for instance, who grew up with Gaelic as the language of the home, but who – due to backwards and discriminatory educational policies – were denied the opportunity to learn to read and write their own language in school. Many of these people can read Gaelic to a certain level, but a dense block of Leviticus can be formidable to them. Others may have spoken Gaelic as young children, but a family move to an English-speaking area meant they never got the chance to develop the range of Gaelic registers their parents had – it may be that Gaelic was still spoken in the home, but English was the language of school, work and the local church. Others may have gone through Gaelic Medium Education, and have a good grasp of the language, but without a family and church background with Gaelic, feel that “Church Gaelic” is outside their comfort zone. Those who have come to the language as adults will find that courses and materials – unsurprisingly – tend not focus on how to talk about justification by faith, or the Gaelic for “predestination”. You may find yourself nodding in recognition at one or more of these descriptions. And yet all of these people, despite perhaps feeling a lack of confidence in their Gaelic in certain registers, have something to contribute. All of them, with a little extra guidance and support, can bring their gifts to the church and use their Gaelic for the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Kingdom. This handbook is a modest attempt to provide such guidance and support. It includes sections on the different translations of the Bible and of some of the differences between them, key theological and ecclesiastical vocabulary, notes on potentially tricky aspects of the grammar used in the Gaelic Bible, guidance on the numbering system used for Biblical references and sung worship, and Gaelic names of different denominations, theological traditions and days and seasons of the Christian calendar. It has been produced primarily with the needs of Church of Scotland congregations in mind, but vocabulary used in other traditions has been included as well.

This handbook assumes that the user will have a reasonably good level of spoken Gaelic, but does not assume a strong familiarity with technical grammatical terminology. Where a technical grammatical term is used, it will always be followed by examples.

Feel free to print copies of this handbook for people who might find it useful, reproduce it in any form that seems practical, use it in group study or class and edit and adapt it as you see fit. You need no permission from me for any of these, though please reference this handbook if you are going to reproduce parts of it. I only hope and pray that you find it a useful tool, and that your efforts to improve your Gaelic in order to worship and lead worship in it will be blessed.

I am very grateful for help and advice I have received from different people in the production of this handbook, and in particular from Prof. Rob Dunbar, Prof. Donald E. Meek, Rev. Prof. Donald MacLeod and Roddy John MacLeod. Any faults remaining are of course my own responsibility, and I invite feedback on them, as well as suggestions for adding further sections to updated versions of this handbook in the future.

Dr. Duncan Sneddon  
Gaelic Language Development Officer, Church of Scotland  
Edinburgh  
July 2020

## Bible translations

Portions of the Bible were first translated in the seventeenth century, with the New Testament being published in 1767 and the full Bible in 1807. Various revisions have been made to the text over the centuries, and the most widely-used edition currently is the revision by Donald E. Meek (Scottish Bible Society, 1992), *Am Bioball Gàidhlig*. Professor Meek's work, which built on an earlier, incomplete revision by Rev Thomas M. MacCalman, updated the spelling and grammar of the Bible in line with modern usage (for instance, the old dative plural suffix *-(a)ibh* was dropped<sup>1</sup>), but was not a new translation. Thus, the Bible most widely used by Gaelic speakers today is fundamentally based on work going back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some parts – the metrical psalms in particular – show a marked Classical Gaelic influence.<sup>2</sup> Not unlike the Authorised Version in English, this gives the Gaelic scriptures a certain literary beauty and a weighty, formal dignity, but it is increasingly removed from everyday spoken Gaelic, and can be hard to understand in places.<sup>3</sup> For ease of reference, this version will be abbreviated as *ABG* in this handbook

Recognising this as a barrier to reading the Scriptures, there have been a few publications of portions of the Bible in more modern Gaelic, including a translation of the Gospel of Mark (*An Deagh Sgeul aig Marcus*, SBS, 1980), Paul's prison letters (*Facal as a' Phrìosan*, SBS, 1986) and a paraphrase of the Gospels by Tony Dilworth (*A Gaelic Gospel: Beatha Ìosa Chrìosd*, Saint Andrew Press, 2013). The most significant, however, is undoubtedly the new translation of the New Testament (*An Tiomnadh Nuadh anns an Eadar-theangachadh Ùr*, SBS, 2017). Produced by a team of translators from different denominations, this is a very clear, readable translation that most people – including native speakers in Gaelic-speaking communities – find easier to understand. Some churches have adopted it for use in services, and it would be fair to say that the most common response to its publication has been warm enthusiasm. For ease of reference, this version will be referred to as *ATN* in this handbook.

One minor difference between the two versions is that in *ABG*, accents are not written when used with capital letters, whereas in line with more modern practice in *ATN* they are. So, *ABG*: Adhamh, Ìosa, etc.; *ATN*: Àdhamh, Ìosa, etc. This difference is of course purely orthographical: when reading from *ABG*, the vowels should be pronounced as if they did have the accents.

If you are wanting to preach from a New Testament text in a sermon, or use a New Testament reading in a prayer meeting, then using the new translation is certainly a perfectly fine option. It will not be as familiar to people as the older version, but it will be easier for people to understand, and for younger people in particular. But, of course, such a modern translation is not yet available for the Old Testament or for the metrical Psalms. As such, it is worth spending some time getting to grips with the linguistic peculiarities of the older version.

An obvious – but often-overlooked – tip: if you are struggling with understanding a phrase or an idiom in the Gaelic Bible, look it up in English or another language you read better. Once you've done that, go back to the Gaelic version and try to make sense of how the passage fits together now you know what it means.

Both of these translations, as well as other versions, some hymns and the Apocrypha, can be read for free online at <https://www.bible.com/en-GB/languages/gla>. Bible.com also provides these versions as an app.

1 e.g. Lùcas 2: 1 *sna làithibh sin* becomes *anns na làithean sin*.

2 Classical Gaelic was the literary dialect of Early Modern Gaelic used by the learned orders in Ireland and Scotland from about the middle of the thirteenth century to the end of the seventeenth, and a bit longer in some areas by some scholars. This was the form of the language used in, for instance, Keating's *History of Ireland*, the professional poets of the clan chiefs and in the medical manuscripts of the Beaton's.

3 This version also strongly influenced the development of formal literary Gaelic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so many hymns and texts like sermons, catechisms and prayerbooks are markedly influenced by these older linguistic norms. This does not only happen in Gaelic, of course – think of the poems and hymns written in or translated into English in the nineteenth century that are replete with *thee, thou, hath, art* and other such forms that had fallen out of everyday spoken English centuries before.

## Difficult or uncommon words in Biblical and ecclesiastical Gaelic

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of difficult or uncommon words that one might encounter in the Gaelic Bible or in church, but simply some of the most common uncommon ones! These are mostly words which either I have noticed are common in the Bible or ecclesiastical contexts but not really outside of them, or that I have heard reasonably fluent Gaelic speakers ask about or say they didn't know. There are many terms that might not be found in more recent dictionaries, but either Dwelly's great dictionary or the online dictionary at [faclair.com](http://faclair.com) (which incorporates Dwelly) should see you right in most instances.

*àithne* (n. fem.) commandment. *Na Deich Àitheantan*, The Ten Commandments.

*am feasd* (adv.) forever, ever

*amhail* (adv.) as, like. In some older translations of the Lord's Prayer, this is used in the phrase *amhail mar a mhairtheas sinn dar luchd-fiach* ("as we forgive our debtors"). More recent translations omit *amhail*, and the meaning is not affected because the same sense is carried by *mar*. Likewise, 1 Corintianaich 15: 22 in *ABG* reads: *Oir mar ann an Adhamh a tha na h-uile a' faghail a' bhàis, is amhail sin mar an ceudna a nìhear na h-uile beò ann an Crìosd*; the same verse in *ATN* reads: *Oir mar a tha a h-uile neach a' bàsachadh ann an Àdhamh, mar sin cuideachd, thèid a h-uile neach a dhèanamh beò ann an Crìosd*.

*àros* (n. masc), abode, house. The metrical version of Salm 84: 4 has, '*S-beannaicht' an dream an còmhnaidh tha / ad àros naomh, a Dhè*, while the prose version has: *Is beannaichte iadsan a tha nan còmhnaidh ad thaigh-sa*. Similarly, the metrical version of Salm 63: 2 refers to *ad àros naomh*, which the prose version prefers *ad ionad naomh*.

*a-ghnàth* (adv.) always, continually. This is often used in the metrical Psalter to help a line meet the required syllable count.

*bàbhan* (n. masc.) bulwark, rampart. The metrical version of Salm 48: 13 has *Thugaibh fa-near a bàbhain bhreagh*.

*buidheachas* (n. masc.), thanks, gratitude 2 Cor 9: 15: *Buidheachas do Dhia airson a thìodhlaic do-labhairt*.

*cion-fàth* (n. masc.) cause, occasion. Salm 56: 2 in the metrical version has *gun adhbhar no cion-fàth*.

*cruth-atharrachadh* (n. masc.) transfiguration

*do-bhrìgh* (adv.) because, on account of. This is no longer used in spoken Gaelic (other terms like *air sgàth*, *los*, *air sàilleibh*, *a chionn* etc are used instead) but is quite common in *ABG*.

*dream* (n. masc.) folk, kindred, tribe, company, band.

*faraon* (adv. and conj.) in concert, at the same time. The metrical Psalter uses this word rather a lot, for instance in Salm 133: 1, *O feuch, cia mheud am math a-nis, / cia mheud an tlachd faraon*.

*feuch* (v.) behold. For instance, in *Taisbeanadh* 6: 2, *ABG* has *Agus chunnaic mi, agus, feuch, each geal*, while *ATN* has *Agus chunnaic mi, agus seall, each geal*. It has the same spelling as "feuch", which is a much more common word in contemporary Gaelic and means "try, attempt", but the context should make clear which is meant.

*fòs* (adv.) moreover, yet, still. Salm 46: 2 (metrical), *Ged thilgeadh fòs na slèibhtean mòr'*

*imich* (v.) go, depart. This is often used in the benediction at the end of the service in the plural imperative

form, *Imichibh ann an sìth* ("Go in peace").

*ìobairt-rèite* (n. fem.) atoning sacrifice

*labhair* (v.) speak. This is probably most commonly used nowadays in compounds like *neach-labhairt*, *luchd-labhairt* (e.g. *luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig*), but in ABC is simply the usual verb for speaking.

*maille ri* (prep.) together with. The *ri* then takes on the personal pronoun form, giving *maille rium*, *maille riut*, *maille ris*, *maille rithe*, *maille rinn*, *maille ribh*, *maille riutha*.

*-mhor* (suffix). Added to a noun, this makes the noun an intensified adjective. For instance, *aos* (age), *aosmhor* (aged, ancient)<sup>4</sup>; *eud* (jealousy), *eudmhor* (very jealous); *luach* (value), *luachmhor* (very valuable). Slightly differently, it is also used with *bàs* (death) to form *bàsmhor* (mortal) and *neo-bhàsmhor* (immortal).

*oifig* (n. fem) Office. Although contemporary Gaelic more commonly uses *oifis*, *oifig* is an older form. Neither of these forms appear in the Bible itself, but you will encounter *oifig* in older books of sermons and in the catechism (*Leabhar Aithghearr nan Ceist*) in discussions of the "Offices of Christ" as Prophet, Priest and King (*Fàidh, Sagart agus Rìgh*).

*pailt* (adj.) plentiful, abundant. This also gives us the (masculine) noun *pailteas*, plenty, abundance, and also the adverb *gu pailt* (as in the metrical version of Salm 128: 5, '*s bidh sonas ort gu pailt.*')<sup>5</sup>

*pill* (v.) This is an older form of the verb *till*, and is still current in some Argyll dialects. This was updated to *till* in ABC, but you will come across *pill* in older printings of the Bible and the Psalter, as well as in hymnbooks. Likewise on some audio recordings of services or sung Psalms you will hear this as *pill*.

*sé* (pron.) An older form of the nominative pronoun for "he, it (masc.)", where we now have *e*. This was updated to current usage in ABC, but you'll still see it in older printings of the Bible and other religious materials, e.g. *rinn sé*, where we would now have *rinn e*. The form *sé* is still used in Irish.

*sí* (pron.) An older form of the nominative pronoun for "she, it (fem.)", where we would now have *i*. This was updated to current usage in ABC, but you'll still see it in older printings of the Bible and other religious materials, e.g. *rinn sí*, where we would now have *rinn i*. The form *sí* is still used in Irish.

*so* (pron., demonstrative adj.). An older spelling for *seo*. This was updated to current usage in ABC, but you'll see the older form in older printings of the Bible and other such materials.

*ta* (v). An older spelling of the verb *tha*. Most instances of it were updated to *tha* in ABC, though some still remain in the Psalter (e.g. Salm 63: 1, *Ro-thartmhor a ta m' anam bochd.*). In older printings of the Bible and the Psalter, as well as hymn books, you will encounter this a lot. Likewise, some audio recordings of services or sung Psalms will hear this as *ta*. You will also often find the relative particle *a* combined with it as *ata* (= *a tha*).

*tèarmann* (n. masc.) refuge, sanctuary.

*trasgadh* (n. masc.) (act of) fasting.

*tùis* (n. fem.) incense.

*uchd-mhacachd* (n. fem.) adoption.

4 Having picked this word up in church, I once used it in a Gaelic class, referring to *an laptop aosmhor agam*, much to the amusement of my teacher.

5 *Tha pinn gu pailt agam* was another turn of phrase that amused my Gaelic teacher, as if I had said "Yea, I have a veritable multitude of pens". It's important to make sure the register of language you are using is appropriate for the situation!

## Grammatical constructions

The grammar used in *ABG* shouldn't cause too much trouble, but there are still a few constructions that may be unfamiliar to speakers of modern Gaelic. Donald Meek's revision updated most of the older forms that have largely if not entirely dropped out of use (as with the *-(a)ibh* dative plural suffix mentioned above) to contemporary ones, however there are still a few rather archaic forms to be found in the Psalter. This is because it is quite difficult to update the grammatical forms used in certain lines without upsetting the number of syllables it contains, and thus throwing off the metre. These requirements of metre mean that the Psalter, to a greater extent than the rest of *ABG*, adheres to the norms of its seventeenth-century core, with a strong Classical Gaelic flavour to it. There aren't too many of these, however, and once you see how they work you'll quickly get used to them.

### **air (x) ais**

One older construction that sometimes causes confusion is the use of a possessive pronoun between the *air* and *ais* in phrases like *chaidh mi air m' ais*.

This feature is still present in some Gaelic dialects in Argyll and Cape Breton, but most speakers of other dialects do not use it. There is no more to it than that the possessive pronoun is included, the meaning is not different. Thus:

*chaidh mi air m' ais = chaidh mi air ais*  
*chaidh thu air d' ais = chaidh thu air ais*  
*chaidh e air (a) ais = chaidh e air ais*  
*chaidh i air a h-ais = chaidh i air ais*  
*chaidh sinn air ar n-ais = chaidh sinn air ais*  
*chaidh sibh air ur n-ais = chaidh sibh air ais*  
*chaidh iad air an ais = chaidh iad air ais*

This feature is present in *ABG*. For instance, Salm 18: 37 has the phrase *cha do thill mi air m' ais* (prose version) and *nìor thill mi fhèin air m' ais* (metrical version), and Eòin 18: 6 in *ABG* reads, *An sin cho luath is a thubhairt e riu, Is mise e, chaidh iad air an ais, agus thuit iad air an làr*. *ATN* does not use this construction, thus Eòin 18: 6 in *ATN* reads, *Nuair a thuit e riutha, "Is mise e," tharraing iad air ais, agus thuis iad chun na talmhainn*.

### **do before the past tense of independent verbs**

Sometimes the past tense of an independent verb has a *do* before it. For instance the metrical version of Salm 16: 8 reads, *Do chuir mi romham, anns gach cùis*, where today we would have simply *Chuir mi* – (as indeed the prose version of the same text does). Likewise the metrical Salm 60: 1 is, *A Dhè, do thilg thu sinne uait*, and the prose version of the same text has, *A Dhè, thilg thu uat sinn*. This *do* still exists in modern Gaelic, but only in dependent forms (hence, *rinn mi sin*, but *cha do rinn mi sin, an do rinn thu sin?* etc.). The reasons for this are a bit complex, but it's best to just think of this as an archaic way of forming the past tense – and a handy one for the translators to use when they needed an extra syllable to fill out a line.

### **Feminine genitive singular with -e**

There are a number of feminine nouns which in the genitive singular you will sometimes see and hear with an *-e* at the end and sometimes without. For instance:

**cùbaid:** *air beulaibh na cùbaide* or *air beulaibh na cùbaid*<sup>6</sup>  
**eaglais:** *eachdraidh na h-eaglaise* or *eachdraidh na h-eaglais*  
**firinn:** *facal na firinne* or *facal na firinn*  
**seachdain:** *deireadh na seachainne* or *deireadh na seachdain*  
**seirbheis:** *àn dèidh na seirbheise* or *àn dèidh na seirbhis*

6 NB – as with *Sàbaid > Sàboinn*, *cùbaid* is generally *cùbainn* in Lewis.

Both sets of forms are correct. The forms with the *-e* are generally the ones you'll see in dictionaries and grammar books, but they may be considered a bit formal or old fashioned by many speakers, who will more commonly use the shorter forms. If you are learning Gaelic, it is probably best to pick one form and stick with it while you get used to how the genitive case works, and in time you'll develop a sense for when it's appropriate to use more or less formal grammatical forms.

### **Synthetic verb endings: *-(e)amaid; -eam***

Gaelic verbs are usually analytic (i.e. with the verb and pronoun as separate words, as in English "I did", "she sang" etc.), but there are also instances where synthetic forms are used (i.e. where the person is indicated by the form of the verb, which we can think of as the verb and the pronoun being combined in one word. This is what happens in for instance Latin, where *amo* is "I love", *amas* "you love", *amat* "he, she or it loves" and so on). In modern Gaelic these synthetic forms are effectively confined to two contexts. The more common is the first person singular and plural in the subjunctive or conditional mood of the present tense, i.e. "I/we would X", thus:

*dhèanainn* - I would do/make  
*dhèanadh tu* - you would do/make  
*dhèanadh e* - he would do/make  
*dhèanadh* - she would do/make  
*dhèanamaid* - we would do/make  
*dhèanadh sibh* - you would do/make  
*dhèanadh iad* - they would do/make

As you can see, the first person singular and the first person plural forms do not have a separate pronoun, but rather an ending (*-ainn, -amaid*) that indicates the person. So far, so simple!

The second context is less common in every day conversational Gaelic, but very common in ecclesiastical contexts. This is the use of the first person plural synthetic form as a hortative verb, i.e. as an encouragement to do so something. It works in exactly the same way as saying "let us X" in English. It has the same *-(e)amaid* ending as the subjunctive form discussed above, but the first consonant is not lenited. In practice, this is limited to a fairly small number of verbs in a fairly small number of set phrases:

*Beachdachamaid air* - let us consider  
*Dèanamaid ùrnaigh* - let us pray  
*Gaireamaid air ainm an Tighearna* - let us call upon the name of the Lord (a phrase often used to introduce a prayer)  
*Leughamaid ann an Leabhar...* - Let us read in the Book of...  
*Seinneamaid a-chum cliù an Tighearna anns an Xmh Salm* - Let us sing to the honour of the Lord in the Xth Psalm  
*Tòisicheamaid* - let us begin

There is a first person singular form of this as well ("let me X"), an exhortation to the self to do something, or a form of the present continuous ("I (continually) do X"). This crops up fairly often in the metrical psalms and occasionally in some older literature, but is now archaic and would not generally be used in speech, except in proverbial expressions like *Tuigim ged nach labhram*. It is formed by the use of the suffix *-(e)am*, and can be seen in Salm 18: 3, *Nis goiream air an Tighearna*. While the prose version of the same verse (*Gairmidh air an Tighearna*) is straightforwardly in the future tense, the metrical version could be thought of as either being a first person singular imperative or hortative (the Psalmist telling himself, "Let me call upon the Lord"), or as a first person singular present continuous ("Now I call continuously upon the Lord").

In Salm 63: 4, which reads:

*Mar sin an cian a bhios mi beò,  
beannaicheam thu a-ghnàth:  
Is ann ad naomh-ainm togam suas  
mo làmhan riut gach tràth*

the forms *beannaicheam* and *togam* are probably best understood as a present continuous (“I continuously bless you, as I am doing right now”; “I continuously lift my hands to your holy name, as I am doing right now”). The prose version of the same Psalm uses the straightforward future forms *beannaichaidh mi* and *togaidh mi*, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Rob Dunbar and Prof. Donald E. Meek for guidance on this point.

## Numbering

There are different ways of counting in Gaelic, but the differences between them are not so great as to present a big problem after a little practice. Basically most native speakers over the age of about thirty or so will use a system – similar to that used in French – which is based on multiples of twenty: *fichead* (20), *fichead 's a deich* (30), *dà fhichead* (40), *leth-cheud* (50 = “half a hundred”), *tri fichead* (60) and so on. Within the groupings of tens, we get, for instance *fichead 's a trì* (23 = “twenty and three”), *dà fhichead 's a còig* (45 = “two twenties and five”) and so on. So far, so simple.

Younger speakers, and those who have learnt their Gaelic mostly from school will be more likely to use a system based on tens, as in English. This is often thought of as the “new system”, but although it has been relatively recently re-introduced by the school system, it is in fact the older of the two. So we have *fichead*, *trithead*, *ceathrad*, *caogad* (NB, not *còigead*, as you might expect), *seasgad* and so on. And again, within the groups of tens, *fichead 's a trì* (23), *ceathrad 's a còig* (45) and so forth. Sometimes people will use both systems: it's not uncommon for people to refer to decades as *na dà fhicheadan* (the '40s), *na trì ficheadan* (the '60s) but *na seachdadan* (the '70s) – this being less cumbersome.

ABC uses the twenty-based system, ATN the ten-based one. So, for instance, Lùcas 10: 1 reads *An dèidh nan nithean sin, dh'òrdaich an Tighearna mar an ceudna deichnear<sup>8</sup> agus trì-fichead eile* in ABC, but ATN has *Às dèidh seo shuidhich an Tighearna seachdad neach eile*.

It is traditional and very common, though not universal, to use a variant of the twenty-based system for announcing readings and Psalms in church. This is a form of numbering which was once used in other contexts as well, but is now used almost exclusively in this one. This system can seem a bit intimidating at first, but you'll get the hang of it fairly quickly. Here are some examples, so you can see how the structure works:

- *An treas Salm thairis<sup>9</sup> air an fhichead* = the third Psalm upon the twenty = Psalm 23.
- *An treas-Salm-deug thairis air an trì fichead* = The third-Psalm-teen upon the three twenties = Psalm 73
- *An còigeamh Salm thairis air an sia fichead* = the fifth psalm upon the six twenties = Psalm 125.

Announcing chapter and verse for a reading, or the verses of a Psalm to be sung, is fairly straightforward once you have this construction learnt, though practising beforehand will save you having to do some quick mental arithmetic! There are some common phrases that are often used in this context, some of which are included here as examples:

- *Leughaidh sinn Facal an Tighearna ann an Leabhar Ghenesis, an treas-caibideil-deug, a' leughadh bhon toiseach.*

(We will read the Word of the Lord in the Book of Genesis, the thirteenth chapter [“the third-chapter-teen”], reading from the beginning.)

- *Leughaidh sinn ann an Litir an Abstoil Pòl a-chum nan Ephesianach, anns an t-siathamh caibideil, agus aig an deicheamh earrann.*

(We shall read from the Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, in the sixth chapter and at the tenth verse.)

- *Leughaidh sinn ann an Leabhar an Fhàidh Isaiah, anns an treas caibideil thairis air an dà fhichead, agus aig an ceathramh-earrann-deug.*

(We shall read in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, in the the forty-third chapter (“the third chapter upon the two twenties”), and at the fourteenth verse.)

8 Remember that Gaelic has words for a number of people (up to ten), as distinct from numbers just on their own, or numbers of non-human things. So *deichnear agus trì-fichead* = “ten and three twenties (of people)” = “seventy people”. Akerbeltz has a good explanation of how this works: [http://akerbeltz.org/index.php?title=Hoigh,\\_an\\_dithis\\_agaibh!\\_or\\_Personal\\_numeral](http://akerbeltz.org/index.php?title=Hoigh,_an_dithis_agaibh!_or_Personal_numeral)

9 In this as in the following examples, the word *thairis* is optional. It's just as correct to say, *An treas Salm air an fhichead*.

– *Seinnidh sinn a-chum cliù an Tighearna anns an dara-Salm-deug, dà rann bhon t-siathamh earrann.*<sup>10</sup>  
(We shall sing to God's praise from the twelfth Psalm, two stanzas from the sixth verse.)

– *Leughaidh sinn gu bhith seinn anns an dara-Salm-deug thairis air an trì fichead, dà rann bhon ochdamh-earrann-deug.*<sup>11</sup>  
(We shall read to sing [i.e. read these verses which we shall then sing] in the seventy-third psalm, two stanzas from the eighteenth verse [“the second-Psalm-teen upon the three twenties”].)

You will sometimes hear people using the ten-based system, e.g. *Leughaidh sinn ann an Salm ceathrad 's a dhà*. Some, especially if they are conscious that the congregation includes people familiar with the traditional system and others (younger people for instance) more familiar with the ten-based system, will announce a reading or a Psalm using both, e.g. *Leughaidh sinn ann an Leabhar Isaiah, an dara caibideil deug thairis air an dà fhichead, no caibideil caogad 's a dhà*. This might seem a bit cumbersome, but it ensures that everybody will understand what the passage is.

<sup>10</sup> Remember that the metrical Psalms are divided into four-line stanzas (*rann*, pl. *rannan*), and these do not always correspond with the Biblical division into verses (*earrann*, pl. *earrannan*). One *rann* might contain two *earrannan*, one *earrann* might be spread over more than one *rann*. The same thing happens in the English-language Psalter as well – just something to watch out for.

<sup>11</sup> Often sung to the tune “Stornoway”, this is a customary Psalm for the close of communion services.

## Church life

This section provides a list of common words for offices, objects and other such things that play a role in the worship and work of a church. It is by no means exhaustive, and as with the rest of this handbook I will welcome suggestions for additional items to be added in future editions.

altar	altair (fem.)
baptism	baisteadh (masc.); sàcramaid a' bhaistidh
benediction	beannachadh (masc.)
bishop	easbaig (masc.)
catechism	leabhar nan ceist (masc.)
collection, offering	tabhartas (masc.)
communion	comachadh (masc.); na h-òraidhean; sàcramaid a' chomanachaidh; Suipear an Tighearna
communion table	bòrd a' chomanachaidh
congregation	coithional (masc.)
convenor	fear-gairm (masc.); neach-gairm (masc.)
deacon	deucoin (masc.); diacon (masc)
diocese	sgìre-esbaig (fem.)
elder	eildear (masc.); foirfeach (masc.)
font	cuach-bhaistidh (fem.); mias-bhaistidh (fem.); tobar-baistidh (masc.)
General Assembly	Àrd-Sheanadh (masc.)
intercession	eadar-ghuidhe (fem.)
kirk session	seisean (masc.)
kirkyard	cladh (masc.)
lectern	leatran (masc.); ionad-leughaidh (masc.)
lector	leughadair (masc.)
manse	mansa (masc.)
mass	aifreann (masc.)
membership	ballrachd (fem.)
minister	ministear (masc.)
ministry	ministrealachd (fem.)
missionary	miseanaraidh (masc.)
moderator	moderatair (masc.); moderàtor (masc.)
order of service (leaflet)	bileag (fem); bileag na seirbhis
parish	sgìre (fem.); paraiste (masc)
pastor	aoghaire (masc.)
prayer	ùrnaigh (fem.)
precentor	fear/neach togail an fhuinn; fear/neach togail fuinn
presbytery	clèir (fem.)
priest	sagart (masc.)
priesthood	sagartachd (fem.)
psalmody school	sgoil fhuinn (fem.)

pulpit	cùbaid (fem); cùbainn (fem.); crannag (fem.); pubaid (fem.)
reader	leughadair (masc.)
reading (n.)	leughadh (masc.)
sermon	searmon (masc.)
service	seirbheis (fem.); coinneamh (fem.); searmon (masc.)
Sunday school	Sgoil Shàbaid; Sgoil Shàboinn (this second form is used in Lewis)
synod	seanadh (masc.); seanadh-eaglaise (masc.); seanaid (fem.)
vacant charge	eaglais bhàn (fem.)
vestry	beastraidh (fem); seòmar-aodachaidh (masc.); seòmar-culaidh (masc.)
youth group	buidheann òigridh

## Glossary of theological terms in Gaelic<sup>12</sup>

adoption (n.)	uchd-mhacachd (fem.)
adorn (v.)	sgeadaich
adornment (n.)	brèaghachadh (masc.); sgeadachadh (masc.)
assurance (n.)	dearbh-bheachd, dànachd (masc.) - dearbh-bheachd mu ghràs (assurance of grace)
atonement, the (n.)	obair na rèite (fem.)
attractive (adj.)	tarraingeach
attribute (n.)	buadh (fem.) - buadhan Dhè (divine attributes)
baptise (v.)	baist
baptism (n.)	baisteadh (masc.)
beauty (n.)	àilleachd (fem.); bòidheachd (fem.); brèaghachd (fem.); maise (fem.); maisealachd (fem.); òirdhearcas (masc.)
birth (n.)	breith (fem.) - bha e air a bhreith, (he was born) - rugadh e (he was born)
bondage, captivity (n.)	daorsa (fem.)
chastening, discipline (n.)	smachdachadh (masc.); ceartachadh (masc.); cronachadh (masc.)
commandment (n.)	àithne (fem.) - na deich àitheantan (the ten commandments)
communion (fellowship) (n.)	co-chomann (masc.) - co-chomann nan naomh (communion of saints)
communion (sacrament) (n.)	comanachadh (masc.) - Na h-Òrdaidhean (Communion services) - Seirbheis Comanachaidh (Communion service) - Suipear an Tighearna (The Lord's Supper)
congregation (n.)	coitheanal (masc.)  This is the spelling used in the Gaelic Orthographical Conventions, but you will come across the alternative spellings <i>cothional</i> and <i>co-thional</i> as well.
conscience (n.)	cogais (fem.)
conversion (n.)	iompachadh (masc.); atharrachadh nan gràs - chaidh mo iompachadh (I was converted)
convert (v.)	iompaich
counsel (n.)	comhairle (fem.)

<sup>12</sup> I am very grateful to Rev. Prof. Donald MacLeod of the Edinburgh Theological Seminary for permission to re-use the glossary he created for class use in this handbook. I have edited the glossary slightly and added a few items, but the vast bulk of the work here is his.

covenant (n.)	coicheangal (masc.); cumhnant (masc.) - coicheangal nan gràs (covenant of grace) - coicheangal na saorsa (covenant of redemption) - coicheangal nan gnìomh (covenant of works)  This is the spelling used in the Gaelic Orthographical Conventions, but you will come across the alternative spellings <i>cocheangal</i> and <i>co-cheangal</i> as well.
creation (n.)	an cruthachadh (masc.); an cruinne-cè (masc.) - cruthachadh de neoini (creation of out nothing) - dèanamh de neoini (creation out of nothing)
Creator (n.)	An Cruithear (masc.) - Cruithear crìochan na talmhainn (creator of the ends of the earth, Is. 40: 28)
creature, created being (n.)	creutair (masc.) - co-chreutair (fellow creature, fellow human)
cross (n.)	crann-ceusaidh (masc.); crois (fem.) <i>crois</i> is used especially by Catholics and Episcopalians
decree (n.)	òrdugh (masc.)
deity (n.)	diadhachd (fem.)
disciple (n.)	deisciobal (masc.)
dispensation (n.)	frithealadh (masc.)
disruption	dealachadh (masc.); sgàradh (masc.) - An Dealachadh (The Disruption of 1843) - Briseadh na h-Eaglaise (The Disruption of 1843)
duty (n.)	dleastanas (masc.)
effectual calling (n.)	a' ghairm èifeachdach
elect, the (n.)	an taghadh (masc.), às an taghadh
end (n.)	crìoch (fem.)
enemy (n.)	nàmhaid (masc.)
enjoy (v.)	meal - Dia a ghlòrachadh agus a mhealtainn gu sìorraidh (To glorify God and to enjoy him for ever)
equal (adj.)	coimeas, co-ionnann; co-leithid, ionnann
estate, state of being (n.)	staid (fem.) - staid peacaidh agus truaighe (estate of sin and misery)
eternal (adj.)	bith-bhuan; maireannach; sìorraidh - beatha maireannach (eternal life)
eternity (n.)	bith-bhuantachd; sìorraidheachd
evangelising (v.)	a' cur an cèill an t-soisgeil; a' searmonachadh an t-soisgeil; a' craobh-sgaoileadh an t-soisgeil; a' soisgeulachadh
exaltation (n.)	àrdachadh (masc.)
experience (n.)	fèin-fhiosrachadh (masc.), fèin-fhiosraichean (masc.)
expiation (of sin) (phrase)	ath-rèiteachadh (masc.); cadachas (masc.); comhdadh (air peacadh); dubhadh às (air peacadh);

faith (n.)	creideamh (masc.) - creideamh slàinteil (saving faith) - tre chreidimh (through faith)
faithfulness (n.)	dilseachd (fem.)
Fall, the (n.)	An Tuiteam (masc.) - tuiteam an duine (the fall of man)
fathers (n.)	athraichean (masc.) -Athraichean na h-Eaglaise (the Church Fathers)
fellowship (n.)	caidreabh (masc.); cruinneachadh (masc.); companas (masc.)
(our) first parents	(ar) ciad shinnsir; (ar) ciad phàrantan
forbidden (verbal adj.)	toirmisgte
foreknowledge (n.)	ro-eòlas (masc.) (You may also come across the older spelling <i>roimh-eòlas</i> )
form (n.)	cruth (masc.)
fruit of the Spirit (phrase)	Toradh an Spioraid
Gentile (n.)	Cinneach (masc.) (pl. Cinnich)
gift (n.)	tìodhlac (fem.) - tìodhlaicean spioradail (spiritual gifts)
governing (v.)	riaghladh
government (n.)	riaghaltas (masc.)
grace (n.)	gràs (masc.)
grace (prayer before a meal) (n.)	altachadh (masc.) - Rinn e altachadh (he said grace)
guide (v.)	seòl; stiùir; treòraich
guide (n.)	fear-treòrachaidh (masc.)
help (n.)	cobhair (fem.); cuideachadh (masc.)
holiness (n.)	naomhachd (fem.)
homooousios (ὁμοούσιος) (n.)	co-ionnan ann an nàdar
homosexuality (n.)	co-gnèitheachd (fem.); co-sheòrsachd (fem.)
human race (n. phrase)	an cinne-daoine
humanity (n.)	daonnachd (fem.) - daonnachd Chrìosd (humanity of Christ)
humiliation (n.)	ioraslachd (fem.); irioslachadh (masc.); ìsleachadh (masc.)
hymn (n.)	laoidh (masc.); dàn spioradail (masc.)
image (n.)	ìomhaigh (fem.); coslas (masc.)
immortal (adj.)	neo-bhàsmhor
immortality (n.)	neo-bhàsmhorachd (fem.)
indwelling (n.)	còmhnaidh (fem.)
inspiration (n.)	deachdadh (masc.) - air an deachdadh leis an Spiorad Naomh (inspired by the Holy Spirit)
intercession (n.)	eadar-ghuidhe (fem.)

invitation (n.)	cuireadh (masc.) - cuiridhan an t-Soisgeil (invitations of the Gospel)
John the Baptist	Eòin Baistidh
judge (n.)	breitheamh (masc.)
judge (v.)	toirt breith/ toirt binn
judgement (n.)	breitheanas (masc.) - Am Breitheanas Deireannach (the Last Judgement) - Là a' Bhreitheanais (The Day of Judgement)
justice (n.)	ceartas (masc.)
justification (n.)	firinneachadh (masc.)
kingdom (n.)	rìoghachd (fem.)
knowledge (n.)	eòlas (masc.), fios (masc.)
knowledgeable (adj.)	eòlach, fiosrach
law (n.)	lagh (masc.) - Lagh Dhè (Law of God)
leper (n.)	lobhar (masc.)
leprosy (n.)	(an) luibhre (fem.); lèbhraidh
liberty (n.)	saorsa (fem.) - saorsa a' Chrìosdaidh (the liberty of the Christian) - saorsa cogais (liberty of conscience)
liturgy (n.)	liotuirge (fem.)
mankind (n.)	cinne-daonna (masc.)
means of grace (phrase)	meadhannan nan gràs
mediator (n.,)	eadar-mheadhanair (masc.)
meeting (n.)	coinneamh (fem.) - coinneamh-chèist (question meeting) - coinneamh-mhìos/ mhìosail (monthly meeting) - coinneamh-ràith/ ràitheil (quarterly meeting) - coinneamh uaigneach (private meeting) - coinneamh ùrnaigh (prayer meeting)
mortal (adj.)	bàsmhor
mysterious (adj.)	diomhair, do-thuigsinn
mystery (n.)	rùn-diomhair (masc.)
nature (n.)	nàdar (masc.) - nàdar na diadhachd (nature of the divinity, divine nature) - nàdar na daonnachd (nature of humanity, human nature)
new birth (phrase)	an ath-bhreith; an nuadh-bhreith
obedience (n.)	ùmhachd (fem.) - ùmhachd iomlan (perfect obedience)
omnipotent (adj.)	uile-chumhdach; uile-chomasach
omnipresence (n.)	uile-làthaireachd (fem.)
omnipresent (adj.)	uile-làthaireach; uile-làthaireil
Only-begotten, the (n.)	An t-Aon-ghin (masc.)
opportunity (n.)	cothrom (masc.)

ordinance (n.)	òrdugh (masc.)
ordinary generation (phrase)	ginealachadh gnàthaichte
orphan (n.)	dilleachdan (masc.)
(under) pain of death (phrase)	(fo) phian a' bhàis
perseverance (n.)	buanachadh (masc.) - buanachadh nan naomh, buan-mhaireachdainn nan naomh (perseverance of the saints)
person (n.)	pearsa (masc.) - Pearsachan na Diadhachd (Persons of the Godhead)
pious (adj.)	cràbhach
poet (n.)	bàrd (masc.) The traditional term for a female poet is <i>bana-bhàrd</i> , but this term is less common now that it once was, may speakers will use <i>bàrd</i> for both male and female poets.
poetry (n.)	bàrdachd (fem.) - bàrdachd spioradail (spiritual poetry)
praise (n.)	moladh (masc.)
prayer (n.)	ùrnaigh (fem.)
predestination (n.)	ro-òrdachadh* (masc.); for-òrdachadh (masc.) * <i>roimh-òrdachadh</i> is an older spelling you may sometimes encounter
preparation (n.)	uidheamachadh (masc.); ullachadh (masc.)
prepared (adj.)	uidheamaichte, ullamh
preserve (v.)	glèidh; coimhead; cùm suas,
priest (n.)	sagart (masc.) - àrd-shagart (high priest)
privilege (n.)	sochair (fem.)
prophecy (n.)	fàidheadaireachd (masc.)
prophet (n.)	fàidh (masc.)
propitiation (n.)	rèite (fem.) - ìobairt-rèite (fem.) (atoning sacrifice)
providence (n.)	freastal (masc.)
punishment (n.)	peanas (masc.) - peanas a' pheacaidh (punishment of sin)
reconciliation (n.)	rèite (fem.) - ministrealachd na rèite (ministry of reconcilliation)
redeemer (n.)	fear-saoraidh (m.)
redemption (n.)	saorsa (fem.)
regeneration (n.)	ath-ghineamhainn (masc.)
religious (adj.)	cràbhach (often used of a good pagan)
repentance (n.)	aithreachas (masc.)
resurrection (n.)	aiseirigh (fem.) - aiseirigh Chrìosd (the resurrection of Christ) - aiseirigh nam marbh (the resurrection of the dead)
revelation (n.)	foillseachadh (masc.); taisbeanadh (masc.)

righteous (adj.)	eanraic, ionraic, fireanta - firean (a righteous person)
right (n.)	còir (fem.)
rule, regulation (n.)	riaghailt (fem.)
sacrament (n.)	sàcramaid (fem.)
sacrifice (n.)	ìobairt (fem.)
salvation (n.)	slàinte (fem.,)
sanctification (n.)	naomhachadh (masc.)
saviour (n.)	slànaighear (masc.)
seed/posterity (n.)	sliochd (masc.)
self (pron.)	fèin - fèin-cheasnachadh (masc.) (self-examination) - fèin-eòlas (masc.) (self-knowledge) - fèin-mhothachadh (masc.) (self-consciousness) - fèin-rannsachadh (masc.) (self-examination)
servant (n.)	fear-frithealaidh (masc.); seirbheiseach (masc.)
service (n.)	frithealadh (masc.); seirbheis (fem.) (also used in the sense of <i>church service</i> ) A church service can also be "searmon" (masc., lit. sermon) or "coinneamh" (fem., lit. meeting)
sex (in the sense of biological classification)/ gender (n.)	gnè (fem.)
slave (n.)	tràill (fem.)
sovereignty (n.)	àrd-uachdranachd (fem.)
suffering (n.)	fulangas (masc.) - fulangas Chrìosd (suffering of Christ)
suffering (adj.)	fulangach - An Seirbheiseach Fulangach (The Suffering Servant)
total depravity (phrase)	truailleachd iomlan
transform, transfigure (v.)	cruth-atharraich
transformation, transfiguration (n.)	cruth-atharrachadh (masc.)
vengeance (n.)	dìoghaltas (masc.)
vengeful (adj.)	dìoghaltach
Virgin, the (n.)	An Òigh (fem) - An Òigh Muire (the Virgin Mary) - ann am broinn na h-Òighe (in the virgin's womb)
want of conformity (with the law) (phrase)	uireasbaidh coslais (ris an lagh)
want of original righteousness (phrase)	a bhith easbaidh na ciad fhireantachd
will (n.)	toil (fem.) - toil Dhè (will of God) - fèin-toil (self will)
wonder	iongantas (masc.); mìorbhail (fem.)

## Denominations and theological traditions

Baptist Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Bhaisteach</li> <li>- Aonadh Baisteach na h-Alba (Scottish Baptist Union)</li> </ul>
Catholic Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Chaitligeach</li> <li>- - Eaglais Chaitligeach na Ròimhe (The Roman Catholic Church)</li> </ul>
Church of Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eaglais na h-Alba</li> </ul>
Episcopal Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Easbaigeach</li> <li>- Eaglais Easbaigeach na h-Alba</li> </ul>
Free Church of Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eaglais Shaor na h-Alba</li> <li>- An Eaglais Shaor</li> </ul>
Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Shaor Leantainneach</li> </ul>
Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Shaor Chlàireach</li> </ul>
Methodist Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eaglais nam Meathodach</li> </ul>
Orthodox Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An Eaglais Ortadogsach</li> <li>- Eaglais Ortadogsach na Ruise (The Russian Orthodox Church)</li> <li>- Eaglais Ortadogsach na Grèige (The Greek Orthodox Church)</li> </ul>
United Free Church of Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eaglais Shaor Aonaichte na h-Alba</li> <li>- An Eaglais Shaor Aonaichte</li> </ul>
Anglican (adj.)	Anglach
Biblical (adj.)	Bioballach
Calvinist (adj.)	Calbhanach
conservative (adj.)	glèidhteach; glèidhteachail
contemplative (adj.)	meòmhrachail; smuaineachail
evangelical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (adj.) soisgeulach</li> <li>- (n.) soisgeulach (masc.)</li> </ul>
historical (adj)	eachdraidheil
liberal (adj.)	libearalach
Liberation Theology	Diadhachd na Saorsa
Lutheran (adj.)	Lùtaireach; Lùtharach
moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (adj.) modaratach</li> <li>- (n.) modaratach (masc.)</li> </ul>
mystical (adj.)	fàidheanta; diamharach
Presbyterian (adj.)	Clèireach, Clèireil
reformed (adj.)	ath-leasaichte
Scriptural (adj.)	Sgriobtaireil

## Times and seasons

Advent	Aidbhein (fem.); An Teachd (masc.)
Advent Sunday	Didòmhnach an Teachd
Ascension Day	Diardaoin na Deasghabhalach; Latha na Deasghabhalach
Ash Wednesday	Diciadain na Luathre; Diaciadain na Luathadh
Christmas Day	Latha na Nollaige
Christmas time	Àm na Nollaige
Easter Day	Latha na Càisge
Easter time	Àm na Càisge
Good Friday	Dihaoine na Ceusta
Lent	Àm a' Charghais; An Carghas
Maunday Thursday	Diardaoin nan Òrdaighean; Diardaoin a' Bhrochain Mhòir; Diardaoin nan Ìnean; Diardaoin an Fhuilt; Diardaoin Borb; Diardaoin na Bangaid
Pentecost	A' Chaingis; Latha na Caingis
Saint X's Day -	Latha Fhèill [name of the saint in the genitive case], e.g. Latha Fhèill Anndrais, Latha Fhèill Phàdruig etc.

## Online Resources

There are many places online where you can find helpful resources for Gaelic. Here are some I would recommend in particular.

**akerbeltz.org** – Helpful information on Gaelic pronunciation, grammar and idiom.

**dulingo.com** – A free online mini-course in Gaelic. Good as a refresher if your Gaelic's a little rusty.

**faclair.com** – A very good online dictionary, with sound files for many words.

**gaelicgrammar.org** – Explanations of Gaelic grammar, with examples.

**learngaelic.net** – Learning resources, including videos and audio files and listings for Gaelic classes and private tutors.

**mangolanguages.com/available-languages/learn-scottish-gaelic/** - A good free online course.

**ansgeulmor.co.uk** – Gaelic worship resources, including prayers, hymns, recordings of services and resources for children.

**bible.com/en-GB/languages/gla** – Gaelic Bibles, free to read online (and as an app).



121 George Street  
Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

 [facebook.com/churchofscotland](https://facebook.com/churchofscotland)

 [@churchscotland](https://twitter.com/churchscotland)

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)