

Còmhradh – Argyll Faith and Culture Conversation

Glencruitten House, 14 November 2015

“Being a Nation Today” - Summary of Proceedings

Opening Worship

Text: I am the way the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me. (John 14 v 6)

PARAPHRASE 18

- 1 Behold! the mountain of the Lord
in latter days shall rise
on mountain tops above the hills,
and draw the wondering eyes.
- 2 To this the joyful nations round,
all tribes and tongues, shall flow ;
up to the hill of God, they'll say,
and to his house we'll go.
- 3 The beam that shines from Zion hill (Voice 1)
shall lighten every land ;
the King who reigns in Salem's towers
shall all the world command.
- 4 Among the nations he shall judge ;
his judgements truth shall guide ;
his sceptre shall protect the just, (Voice 2)
and quell the sinner's pride.
- 5 No strife shall rage, nor hostile feuds
disturb those peaceful years ;
to ploughshares men shall beat their swords, (Voice 1)
to pruning-hooks their spears.
- 6 No longer hosts, encountering hosts,
shall crowds of slain deplore :
they hang the trumpet in the hall,
and study war no more.
- 7 Come then, O house of Jacob ! come
to worship at his shrine ;
and, walking in the light of God,
with holy beauties shine.

Scottish Paraphrases, 1781

Isaiah 2: 2-5 (t. Glasgow)

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Reading: Psalm 107 v 1-16 The Lord's enduring love

Thought: The Church is witness that the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; therefore the church must concentrate first on the outcast and stranger, those on the edge. (Barthian analogy). **Prayer**

NATIONAL IDENTITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM CHRISTIAN FAITH – Donald Shell

What are we talking about?

- Ideology has given way to Identity in much contemporary politics.
- Each of us has multiple identities, eg gender, ethnicity, religion, national allegiance
- Patriotism love/devotion to country; Nationalism involves a policy programme
- Nationalism is an ideological “empty bottle”; can be filled with ideologies of left or right.
- Some see national identity as “in our genes”; others as historical and circumstantial; others as manufactured through myths, flags, anthems, indoctrination.

An overall framework from Christian theology

- Doctrine of creation: humans made in God’s image, to be good stewards of whole earth making it a home for all. Diversity an expression of humanity made in God’s image. Through to Revelation where John sees many nations worshipping in heaven and bringing treasures into heavenly city.
- A darker side associated with human pride and rebellion. The tower of Babel; confusion of language; mutual incomprehension; a providential judgment. Babylon seen as seat of rebellion until destruction seen by John in Revelation
- Between these two contrasting theological strands we must work out our theology of the state, another aspect of God’s providential care for the world; “God’s servant for your good” (Rom 13) but can be possessed by evil (Rev 13).
- The Kingdom of God established through Jesus Christ; God’s rule through His people embracing in principle whole public realm including our politics.

Some Insights/Examples/Qs

- Post WW2 a proliferation of states- independence and break up of multi-national states. Also growing globalisation. We need to support diversity of cultures (languages?) and be ready to allow powers to supra-national bodies.
- Different forms of power in the modern world Eg financial, economic, social, political;. Democracy based on equal worth of every person attempts to make political power most fundamental; need to make global corporations accountable.
- “Blessed are the peacemakers”: One aspect of peace-making is to build patterns of government that encourage consensus rather than conflict. Devolution so far seems designed to maximise conflict. We need to re-think constitutional arrangements.
- Delay and disappointment can in sovereignty of God become time well-used. Outcome of 1979 referendum gave time for flowering of culture and strong growth of civil society in Scotland. How can we all use well time provided by outcome of 2014 referendum? Nationalists need to think harder about post-independence constitution and policies. Westminster needs to think harder about UK wide arrangements (Proposals on EVEL indicate shallow short-termism).

JAMIE MCGRIGOR

Very recently the people of Scotland voted firmly to stay in the United Kingdom, a sensible decision and one which cements a relationship between our Union cousins which has stood the test of time for 300 years. The UK is respected and envied worldwide. The mother of Parliaments, the defender of freedom, the proclaimer of tolerance, a focal point for those in danger. It astonishes me that anyone would not want to be a part of that, yet during the referendum campaign those of us not of the Nationalist view were made to feel in some way unScottish which I think was unfair because why would a wish to safeguard the best for Scotland and the Scottish people be in any way subversive or unpatriotic and why should patriotism just be linked to being an SNP supporter, and why should the saltire flag not belong to me just as much as it should belong to Brendan O'Hara or Nicola Sturgeon. Scottish people who want to preserve the Union are every bit patriotic Scots as those who bid for separation. National identity in Scotland which respects us all is a different matter from nationalist identity in Scotland.

A number of points call for consideration when consideration is given to the question of whether Scotland is better off within the UK or as an independent nation.

- As regards the European Union it has been made clear that Scotland would have to leave the EU in order to rejoin using article 49 of the Treaties. This point has been confirmed by Jose Barroso, Romano Prodi and Herman Van Rompuy.
- The UK maintains 220 embassies, consulates and missions and over 200 British Council offices whereas an independent Scotland would be expected to have just 70-90 embassies.
- Foreign leaders like President Obama of the United States, Li Keqiang the Chinese Premier and the Pope have indicated that they would prefer to see Scotland remain within the UK.
- There is a dark side to nationalism – identified by Albert Einstein as the measles of mankind and by George Orwell as power hunger, tempered by self –deception.
- Scotland has flourished under the Union, particularly through the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment which led Arthur Herman to the conclusion that the Scots invented the modern world. Robert Adam, David Hume, John McAdam; George Stevenson, Thomas Telford, John Witherspoon, Andrew Carnegie, Alexander Bell and James Watt are examples of Scots who shaped the modern world.

The fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants should be engrained on Scottish national identity. We Scots should be proud of our national identity. It is also about humility, kindness, tolerance and above all common-sense and humour and an acceptance of life being unfair, especially to Scots.

BRENDAN O'HARA

In the 1950s and 1960s it felt natural for Scotland to be part of the Union. Independence was not even on the agenda. British-Scottish identity appeared to be an exclusive club – which excluded Catholics. The Catholic community in the west of Scotland, for their part, were more identified politically with Ireland than with Scotland.

The sea change that has occurred is evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of Catholics voted against devolution in 1979 but the vast majority voted “yes” in the 2014 Referendum.

In economic and cultural terms there is an increasing sense of being Scottish and the SNP has moved from the periphery to become the dominant force in Scottish politics. It is important to notice that it is not an ethnic but a civic nationalism that is prevailing. This is illustrated by groups like Asians for Independence. We now have an inclusive Scotland – one where resettled Syrian refugees will have a vote.

Mid Day Worship

Text: Truly, Truly, I say to you he who does not enter by the door into the sheepfold but climbs up some other way is a thief and a robber ... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. (John 10 v 1, 9)

Hymn

We will walk with God, my brothers,
we will walk with God.
We will walk with God, my sisters,
we will walk with God.
We will go rejoicing
till the kingdom has come.
We will go rejoicing
till the kingdom has come. (Swaziland)

Reading: Psalm 101 Character of a righteous ruler

Thought: It is not the humanity of the preacher that makes preaching interesting but rather the humanity of God that makes preaching work. (Wm Willimon on Karl Barth)

Prayer

Poem

We need a Messiah
who will bear the weight of our torment,
plucking us from the dust of our thralldom,
and raising us on high.
And when he comes
the government will be on his shoulder ...

And I noticed with a smile
that shoes were out of fashion;
for all Creation was holy ground.
And I knew
that Pharoah was no more.

(A' Mheanbhchuileag, The Midge, Fergus MacFhionnlaigh)

Workshop – Ingredients for a National Anthem

If a new national anthem were to be written for Scotland what would we want it to contain?

The language would need to be prepared in such a way that it could be sung in English, Scots and Gaelic.

A faith dimension – invoking St Andrew, the singing of the Psalms, celebrating a history, expressing aspirations.

Words on the Mace of the Scottish Parliament – wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity.

The land – as it has shaped the people; a spiritual landscape; embraced by its beauty; caring for our land and for each other.

Solidarity, communion – we are all Jock Tamson’s bairns. Inclusivity. A tartan nation.

Social justice (Micah 6:8); liberty; the common good.

Forgiveness.

Learning.

Internationalist outlook – emigration; Burns “shall brithers be for a’ that”; celebrating with others the world we live in.

Recognition that we have come through hardship in our history.

Belonging, yearning, far horizons, big sky.

Peace – a peace-making nation. Thinking in terms of what we can give.

“Love that will not let me go.”

Closing Worship

Text: Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient unto death –
even death on a cross.
(Colossians 2 v 6-8)

Thought: The Christian criterion for deciding which approach to take to the imagined communities of nationhood in any particular context must be determined by the concerns and the values of the coming Kingdom of God. (Wm Storrar)

Reading: Psalm 103 Meditating on the Lord's goodness

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen

Hymn

May the God of peace go with us
as we travel from this place;
may the love of Jesus keep us
firm in hope and full of grace. (Ae fond kiss)