

Còmhradh: Argyll Faith and Culture Conversation

The Willows, Connel 27-28 April 2018

Faith and the Literary Arts: in Conversation with Kenneth Steven

Summary of Discussions

Kenneth Steven writes:

On the Friday evening participants read perhaps a dozen of my poems. The intention was to offer a wide selection of work to try to give a real sense of development. I started out in Highland Perthshire as the son of writing parents excited by what I term 'wildscape'. I wrote about herons and otters; I was inspired by Glenlyon and by the last pearl fishers camped there in the summers. In time this evolved into writing about imagined stories past and present, and when I was over on the west coast (as I was every summer without fail) the poems that poured from the pen were about those I encountered from old crofting worlds and the wildscape of the island shores I explored. And in time this changed to become writing inspired by the Celtic Christian story and about Iona. As a writer of faith I became ever more absorbed by that world, and challenged by it.

On the Saturday my minister Ken Ross asked me about all these corners of my writing and how they had grown and changed. I much valued these questions for pushing my own thinking and letting me see how these different 'edges' of writing were influenced and changed over time.

In the afternoon I talked a little about the writing process and offered simple first steps into finding and crafting poetic inspiration. I feel privileged to have been invited to lead the Còmhradh: it's my hope I was able to pass on something of the inspiration I feel as a poet and writer of faith.

A Small Selection of Kenneth Steven's Poems Read at the Còmhradh

The Small Giant

The otter is ninety percent water
Ten percent God.

This is a mastery
We have not fathomed in a million years.

I saw one once, off the teeth of western Scotland,
Playing games with the Atlantic –

Three feet of gymnastics
Taking on an ocean.

Stung me, remembering how I'd thumped them
With thick books, reduced them to squashes on walls,
Nothing more than broken bits on carpets.
This little bowl, this bit of beginning
Rooted out by the gardener, reminds me
Of something bigger I keep choosing to forget,
About what beauty is, and where that beauty's found.