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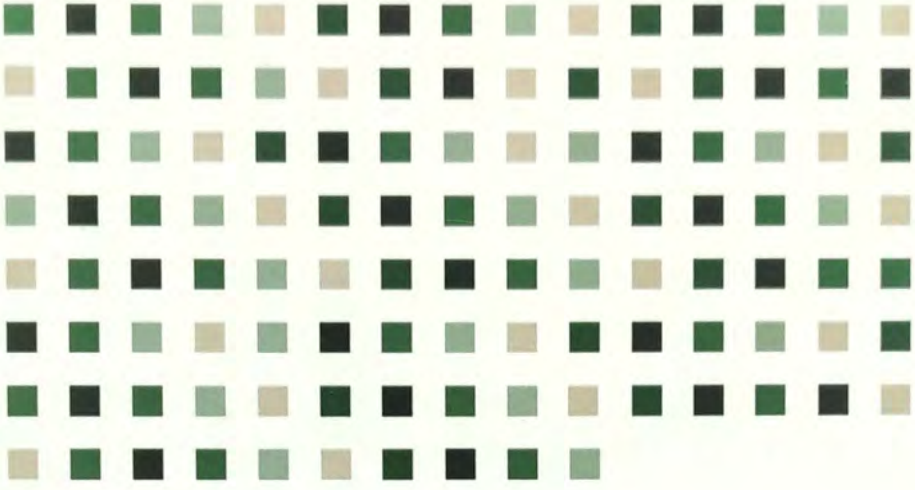


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Editorial

Our meetings in 2013 spanned 1500 years from the Edict of Milan in 313 to the birth of David Livingstone in 1813.

In March Pastor Robert Millar presented a paper on the Life of David Livingstone, a man of extraordinary achievements, the most remarkable being the sacrifices he was prepared to make and the suffering he was prepared to endure for the sake of Jesus Christ and His gospel. When asked why he had become a missionary to Africa, he replied, 'I was compelled by the love of Christ'.

A large crowd gathered in May to hear Dr Samuel Webb present his paper entitled *'Two Bibles in Ireland'*. Dr Webb's previous research on the King James Bible led him on to study the story of the Bible in Irish. This story is largely unfamiliar but should be known by all Christians in Ireland. It is a story of political ambition, lost opportunities and the tireless endeavour of a few, particularly William Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore, to give the Irish people God's Word in their own language. Although opposed and oppressed in his own day, in recent years Bedell's labours for the sake of Irish speaking people have been recognised. A plaque erected at Kilmore Cathedral in 1971 acknowledges him to be 'Optimus Anglorum' - the Best of the English.

In October Dr Maurice Dowling presented a paper on the Edict of Milan, the events which preceded it, the circumstances of it and the enduring effect it has had on the 'Christian world'. Particularly fascinating is how the Roman Empire evolved effectively into the Christian Empire and how the Christian church evolved from being the persecuted to becoming the persecutors.

The topics addressed in 2013 were all interesting, informative and very much appreciated by Society members and friends.

John Gault

About Our Contributors

Robert Millar BD

Robert is husband to Catherine, father of Sarah and Hannah, and has been Pastor of Mullaghmeen Baptist Church since September 2011. He is a graduate of the Irish Baptist College where he has recently returned to study for an MA which he hopes to complete in 2016.

Samuel W Webb BSc MD FRCP

After graduating in Medicine from Queen's University Belfast Samuel Webb trained in America and became a Consultant Cardiologist in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast. Married to Ruth they have two children, Stephen, a doctor in Cambridge, and Sheryl, a dentist in Northern Ireland, and five grandchildren. He is a lifelong member of Windsor Baptist Church and has benefitted from the ministry of all its pastors. The celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible in 2011 led him to explore the story of the translation of the Bible into Irish. He is passionate about preserving Irish Baptist Records and is working with the Public Record Office Northern Ireland to ensure that these are available to future generations.

Maurice Dowling BA BD MTh PhD

Maurice studied languages at Cambridge (where he became a Christian) and Prague. He then did three years at IBC after which he was appointed a tutor (in 1973), where he taught for nearly forty years until his retirement in 2012. Maurice taught a wide range of subjects - Old Testament, New Testament, Biblical languages, church history, doctrine, world religions, and even some philosophy. Over the past twenty years he has been visiting regularly the countries of the former Soviet Union, teaching and ministering in Bible Colleges, seminaries and churches. Maurice is married to Brenda and they have four children. Maurice and Brenda are members of Mountpottinger church where Maurice has served as an elder since 1988.



Doctor Livingstone, I presume?

Robert Millar

Florence Nightingale said that David Livingstone was the 'greatest man of his generation' ... so what was it about this man that made him such an Iconic figure, receiving such praise? Without a doubt Livingstone's upbringing had a lot to do with the making of the man that he would become.

Early life

Born 9 March 1813, Livingstone grew up in Blantyre South Lanarkshire just 8 miles from Glasgow, in factory tenement accommodation along with his parents and six other children and making do with just one room only 14ft by 10ft. David was raised in a Strict Presbyterian home, his father was a Sunday school teacher and a tea sales man, who gave out gospel tracts to everyone he met on his travels.

> *While traveling, thorough the neighbouring parishes in his vocation as a tea merchant, he acted as a colporteur, distributing tracts and encouraging the reading of useful books. He took suitable opportunities when they came to him of speaking to young men and others on the most important of all subjects, and not without effect. (Blaike p6)*

After some time the Livingstones left the Church of Scotland and joined an independent Congregational Church. It seems the family came under the influence of

revival preaching, influenced by the American revivalist Charles Finney, with David's younger brother, Charles, traveling to America to train under Finney.

At the age of ten, David started working 14 hour days in the mill as a piercer fixing broken flax fibres.

> *Piercers needed sharp eyes and the power of constant attention if they were to avoid frequent beatings. They also had to be unusually agile since their work often involved climbing under the machinery or balancing over it. Piercers walked anything up to twenty miles a day in the mills and much of this distance was covered crawling or stooping. Long hours on their feet often gave them bow legs and varicose veins. (Jeal p9)*

Twenty miles a shift on one's hands and knees would soon toughen the ten-year-old Livingstone up, a training that would certainly stand to him in years to come.

A typical day consisted of rising at 5am to be at the mill for 6am, working until 8pm, then attending school from 8pm-10pm followed by homework until midnight or later, and hen, of course, having to rise at 5am to repeat the cycle all over again. This was a routine that characterised Livingstone's childhood.

Even at this early stage in life, Livingstone's insatiable appetite for learning was evident ... in fact, with part of his first week's wages from the mill he purchased Ruddiman's Rudiments of Latin.

It is said that he would read in work by placing his books on the end of the loom and, after doing his duties fixing any broken fibres, he would glance down at his book for a few moments before having to leave it and crawl back to work. Livingstone worked several years as a piercer before being promoted to a spinner, even when he was training in medical school, and any time off from study was spent in the mill.

Conversion & Call

Although Livingstone was raised in a godly home, he himself was not converted until he was 20 years old ... in fact, in many ways, he fought against the faith of his parents. He had a keen interest in Science and this often brought him into conflict with his father who was scared that his son would be influenced by the spirit of the age. The story is told of David receiving a flogging from his father for refusing to read Wilberforce's Practical Christianity. It was in his twentieth year that Livingstone's father's faith became his own and shortly afterwards,[1] having heard of the great need for missionaries in China, he set his heart on becoming a missionary.[2]

Some relevant chronology:

1836 Anderson's University, Glasgow, to study medicine. (Remembering his upbringing and education, this was remarkable. He was, perhaps, the first ever mill or factory boy to enter university.)

1837 First contact with London Missionary Society.

1838 Begins a probationary year at the London Missionary Society in Essex. Undertook some theological study.

Livingstone had planned to sail to China to become a missionary there, but the opium wars and other political intrigue forced him to reassess.

1840

January Moves to London to continue medical studies. Meets missionary Robert Moffat and hears of the 'smoke of a thousand African villages yet to hear the gospel'.

November Passes exams to become Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, and is ordained a missionary in London.

December Sails for South Africa

1841

March Livingstone reaches Cape Town

Africa

One of the first things Livingstone noticed when he arrived in Africa, was how similar the Africans were to his highland forefathers.

> *The Xhosa people he had met with there reminded him so much of the highlanders of his grandparents' generation: the border tensions between settled and less settled clans, the cattle 'lifting' that was not seen as theft, yet could lead to outbreaks of fighting that transformed the landscape.*
>
> *(Waters p11)*

July 1841 Livingstone arrived at the mission centre at Kuruman. Moffat was absent and Livingstone found that things were not exactly as he had been led to believe.

> *Livingstone had not expected Kuruman to be an aesthetic paradise but he had expected the place where Moffat had laboured for twenty years to be large, densely populated, entirely Christian and within reach of other heavily populated areas. Moffat himself had spoken of the smoke rising from a thousand villages to the North. Livingstone was horrified to find that almost all his hopes had been false and the mental picture of the place which he had treasured for so long was a grossly distorted image. (Jeal p39)*

During the next couple of years Livingstone travelled back and forward from Kuruman, attempting to set up mission stations in other locations ... he did this successfully in Mabotsa in 1843. Livingstone's life in Africa was full of extraordinary stories, none more so than what happened to him on 16 February 1844, when he was attacked by a lion, which would have killed him but for the intervention of some loyal African helpers. Livingstone says the lion *'shook me like a terrier shakes a rat'*. He never fully recovered from his injuries and was left with a limp arm for the rest of his life.

Whilst convalescing after the incident with the lion, Livingstone started to get attached to Robert Moffat's daughter, Mary, who had nursed Livingstone during his recovery. In January of 1845 Livingstone married Mary Moffat. It would appear that romance (or at least the modern notion of it) had nothing to do with Livingstone's marriage to Mary Moffat.

> *Livingstone treated his impending marriage with a matter-of-factness that seemed to border on indifference... Writing to a friend who was shortly to begin a missionary career in India Livingstone advised him to choose a wife before leaving, on the grounds that the missionary he would otherwise have to lodge with would think him inferior. Livingstone also suggested the best sort of woman for the job: 'a plain common sense woman, not a romantic. Mine is a matter of fact lady, a little thick black haired girl, sturdy and all I want.'*
>
> *(Jeal p60)*

Some family chronology:

1846	**January**	Birth of their first child, Robert.
1847	**May**	Birth of their second child, Agnes.
1849	**March**	Birth of their third child, Thomas.
1850		Expedition northwards with family.
		Birth of their fourth child, Elizabeth, who died after six weeks.
1851		Birth of their fifth child, (William) Oswell.
1852		Mary and children leave for Britain.
1858	**November**	Birth of their sixth child, Anna Mary in Kuruman, Mary having returned to Africa earlier that year.

1859	Mary and children return to Britain.
1862	Mary Livingstone joins expedition.
April	Death of Mary Livingstone

Livingstone's family life left much to be desired. Whilst in Africa his family had to endure incredible hardship, and when they finally went home to the UK they lived as homeless beggars, depending entirely on the mercy of others to survive.[3] We must not airbrush over Livingstone's faults and failings. He was, indeed, a very driven man, he simply had to be to accomplish the things he did, but that inner drive also made him a hard man to get along with. His ambition was so strong that he was willing to sacrifice not only his own health and life but also that of his wife and children in order to achieve his goals. Other missionaries and explorers could not keep pace with Livingstone and often felt his displeasure for their weaknesses.

> *When George suggested they were all going to die, Livingstone could 'scarcely avoid a guffaw' at such spineless sentiments and finally did break out laughing at George's 'utterly mock cadaveric face'. This almost total inability to appreciate or sympathize with other people's physical sufferings owed a lot to Livingstone's tough and gruesome childhood in the mills.*
>
> *(Jeal p116)*

Livingstone achieved many wonderful things in Africa. He mapped Lake Nygami, he discovered the great falls which he named Victoria Falls, he discovered the link between mosquitos and malaria 20 years before the scientists of the time and he discovered the healing properties of quinine which is still used to treat extreme cases of malaria. He formulated a remedy composed of six to eight grains of resin of jalap, the same of rhubarb and three each of calomel and quinine, made up into four pills, with tincture of cardamoms and this usually relieved all the symptoms in five or six hours. A man's dose was four pills whilst one would be suffice for a woman. They received from the men the name of 'Livingstone's rousers' on account of their efficacy in rousing up even those most prostrated.

Slavery

One of Livingstone's greatest feats was not any of these medical or geographical discovers but rather his fierce stance against the slave trade which was rife in Africa at the time. Britain had abolished the slave trade many years previously, but the practice amongst the Portuguese and Arabs in Africa was as steady as ever and it appalled Livingstone.

He would write of it:

> *'All I can add in my loneliness is, may Heaven's richest blessing come down on every one, American, English, or Turk, who will help to heal this open sore of the world.'* [4]

> *'And if my disclosures regarding the terrible Ujijian slavery should lead to the suppression of the East Coast slave trade, I shall regard that as a greater matter by far than the discovery of all the Nile sources together.'* [5]

Seeing how far slave traders were willing to go to make merchandise of these poor Africans was a great motivator to Livingstone. *'Cannot the love of Christ'*, he asked, *'carry the missionary where the slave trade carries the trader?'*

In other words if greed and evil could take men right to the heart of Africa for money, surely the higher goal of the missionary should drive him further and further into unreached places. Livingstone's constant highlighting of this open sore caused the British government to send the Royal Navy to blockade East Africa and treat slave ships like pirates, an act that freed hundreds of thousands of slaves.

Missionary work

So what of Livingstone's missionary endeavours? Many today see Livingstone as nothing more than a great explorer but he himself said *'The end of the geographical feat is but the beginning of the missionary enterprise.'* The only convert that we know of from all Livingstone's endeavours was Sechéle, chief of the Bakwains. Does this then mean that Livingstone was a failure as a missionary? No, of course not ... Livingstone was no failure, he was called to be faithful in preaching the gospel, and leave the fruitfulness of that work is in God's hands, *'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.' (1 Corinthians 3:6)*

When Livingstone realised that there weren't going to be thousands of converts it didn't put him off, rather it caused him to think long term, and to think of those who would come after him. He reassessed his mission. He would be the one who opened up Africa for other missionaries to come behind him, to preach the gospel and to reap a harvest of souls. He said:

> *'I am immortal till my work is accomplished, and although I see few results, future missionaries will see conversions following every sermon. May they not forget the pioneers who worked in the thick gloom with few rays to cheer, except such as flow from faith in the precious promises of God's Word.'*

... so he pressed on into the heart of Africa. The ground that Livingstone covered in his travels is mind-blowing considering much of it was on foot, whilst suffering from malaria and other ailments. It is estimated that during his time as a missionary he

covered 29,000 miles and opened up a million square miles of the continent to the cause of missions. During these years Livingstone only came back to Britain twice - in 1856 as a great hero, receiving great acclaim for his work and in 1864 when he received a more subdued reception.

It was whilst back home in Britain that he inspired so many people for the cause of missions in Africa. Whilst home on furlough the University of Glasgow conferred upon Livingstone the degree of Doctor of Laws and on such occasions the recipient of the honour is usually subjected to some banter at the hands of the students. But when Livingstone rose, bearing upon his person the marks of his struggles and sufferings in darkest Africa, he was received in reverential silence. He was gaunt and haggard as a result of his long exposure to the tropical sun. On nearly thirty occasions he had been laid low by the fevers that steamed from the inland swamps and these severe illnesses had left their mark. His left arm, crushed by the lion, hung helplessly at his side. A hush fell upon the great assembly as he announced his resolve to return to the land for which he had already endured so much. *'But I return,'* he said, *'without misgiving and with great gladness. For would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude towards me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!" On those words I staked everything and they never failed!'*

Livingstone then returned to Africa and went missing for 6 years ... and many presumed he had died It was then that a young admirer and explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, was commissioned by the New York Herald to find the Scottish missionary. After two years of searching Stanley found Livingstone in the town of Ujiji on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and on 10 November 1871 he greeted him with the now famous words *'Dr Livingstone, I presume?'* to which he responded *'Yes'*.

Death

David Livingstone died in the area in Chief Chitambo's village at Ilala southeast of Lake Bangweulu in present-day Zambia on 1 May 1873 from malaria and internal bleeding caused by dysentery. He took his final breaths while kneeling in prayer at his bedside. His internal organs were removed, and buried. His body was embalmed, as best they could, by drying, and wrapping it in calico, bark, and canvas, it was then carried over one thousand miles by Susi and Chuma, two African porters and friends of Livingstone. They did this through extremely hostile countryside all the way to the west coast. The body was then taken to England where it was identified, partly by the arm crushed by the lion's jaw, and laid to rest in Westminster Abbey.

Conclusion

While by no means a perfect man, David Livingstone was indeed a great man and it is easy to see why Florence Nightingale would give him such an accolade. May the great God who inspired Livingstone to go to such extreme lengths to share the gospel with the unreached of Africa, inspire the reader to do likewise.

> *'And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.'*
>
> *(John 10:16)*

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Notes

1 Blaike, 1985, pp13-14

2 Blaike, 1985, pp15-17

3 Jeal, 1973, p99

4 Livingstone in a letter to the editor of the New York Herald

5 Ibid



Lithograph of Livingstone and his party negotiating the Zambesi rapids

(Wellcome Library, London)



Two Bibles in Ireland

Samuel W Webb

Ever since the Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland in 1169, Ireland has been a divided country. The Tudor, Jacobean and Williamite plantations served only to deepen the religious and cultural differences between the two ethnic groups. There was always going to be a need for Two Bibles in Ireland.

One of the tenets of the Reformation was the priesthood of all believers, which emphasised the right of every individual to read the Scriptures in his or her own language. The Bible had been frozen in Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire, for over 1,000 years. It had acquired a halo of antiquity and its contents were regarded as sacred, untouchable and, above all, secret. To query the Latin Vulgate was unthinkable because to do so was to question the foundations of the Medieval Catholic Church.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

In England, there were those who did. In 1382, John Wycliffe took the bold step of translating the Vulgate into English. It was the first rendering of the Bible in English but its weakness lay in the fact that it was a translation of a translation and subject to any errors in Jerome's work. Erasmus, in keeping with the Renaissance theme of *'ad fontes'*, recognised the need to study the New Testament (NT) in the original Greek. After consulting all the manuscripts available to him, he published his Greek NT in 1516. It released a perfect storm. The Vulgate was shown to contain serious translation errors. His work led to a flood of vernacular translations throughout Europe, beginning in 1522 with Luther's German translation followed by Tyndale's English NT in 1526. Further English translations followed so that by the time Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 there were at least seven English translations circulating in



Henry VIII

England. Henry VIII had ordered The Great Bible of 1539 to be placed in every parish church throughout the land. His daughter, Elizabeth, had been on the throne for 45 years and, during her long reign, religious differences had been buried in the *'via media'* of the Elizabethan settlement. With her motto *'semper eadem'* she had gradually become a relic of a previous age. Her father had gone to enormous lengths to secure the continuation of the Tudor line, but with her passing the Tudor dynasty came to an end. A new age was about to dawn.

The signing of the Treaty of Mellifont in the year of Elizabeth's death brought the Nine Years' War in Ireland to an end. Ulster, the most rebellious and Gaelic part of Ireland, finally yielded to English rule and the conquest of Ireland was complete. The process of subjugation had taken over 400 years. The question of a successor to Elizabeth was uppermost in the mind of every Englishman, especially the Bishops of the Church of England and their rivals, the Puritans.

King James VI of Scotland/ I of England

When the Queen breathed her last, a young man set out at once to ride non-stop from London to Edinburgh using a string of horses. These were waiting for him at inns all along the Great North Road. Seventy-two hours later, he arrived exhausted at Holyrood House. He was bleeding badly, having been kicked in the face by one of his horses. He had an urgent message for James VI of Scotland. The King was in his bed but not asleep, when he learned that he was now also King of England, a country infinitely more powerful than his own. He was also King of Ireland, a country infinitely less powerful than his own. England was well-civilised, well-governed, and a country gaining the respect of other European nations. Scotland, by contrast, was the poor man of Europe and the Scottish crown one of its weakest.



James VI of Scotland / James I of England

James was ecstatic at the news. He had rarely been outside Scotland and looked on England as The Promised Land. Now 37 years old, he had waited for this moment all his life. He had always been an admirer of the Church of England, a church which really knew how to appreciate a king, in contrast to Scotland where he said *'beardless boys had braved him to his face'*. When a leading Presbyterian called him *'God's silly*

vassal' James remembered that. He was never going to be a Presbyterian! Scotland was no place to be a king. In Scotland he had even been forced to acquiesce to the execution of his own mother! He believed himself to be *'every inch a king, and sparkling with divinity'*. For James, kings were higher than ordinary mortals and their decisions could never be questioned. In England he could be a real king and reign by Divine Right with Absolute power.

James couldn't wait to set out on his journey south. He kissed his wife goodbye in front of a crowd on The Royal Mile. He promised he would visit Scotland every three years. He returned once, 17 years later. A large cavalcade accompanied him on his journey where he was given a tumultuous welcome and greeted with adoring wonder. Thousands turned out just to catch a glimpse of him. The people had never seen a king before, as the life expectancy in 1603 was only 32 years and Elizabeth had reigned much longer than that. He was mobbed wherever he went and every town fired their cannons, if they had them.

As he journeyed south, James noticed that the rugged terrain of Scotland gradually gave way to England's green and pleasant land. He was determined to enjoy the trip. It took him one month to reach London. In Berwick, the most northerly town in England, he was given the keys of the city, together with a bag of gold. In Newcastle many prisons were thrown open and prisoners released. His journey south cost an enormous amount of money but he didn't care and threw gold coins to the crowds in the street. He dubbed more than 300 knights on the way and took every opportunity to peel off and go hunting for deer, which was his passion. As he neared York, he sent to London for a new set of velvet doublets. By contrast, he arranged for his wife to have Elizabeth's old fashioned hand-me-downs! In York, a fountain flowed all day with wine and every man was free to consume as much as he wanted. He ordered a single currency to be struck as a symbol of the unity between Scotland and England. The whole thing was a circus of excess and gaiety.

Two Incidents

Nevertheless, two incidents occurred as he travelled to London which threatened to spoil the occasion. In Newark, a young man who had been following the King's train was found to be a pickpocket. James immediately had him hanged without trial. This might have been permissible in Scotland but not in England where summary execution was unlawful. It was a bad mistake but he did not allow it to interfere with the jamboree. The second involved the Puritans. They thought their time had come. James had been brought up as a Presbyterian and the Puritans reckoned that he would be sympathetic to their concerns. They acted swiftly and presented the King with The Millinery Petition when he reached Leicester. It was said to have been signed by 1,000 of their ministers. The Elizabethan Settlement had been a compromise arrangement whereby the Church was to be Catholic in structure and Reformed in doctrine. The Puritans felt that the Reformation was incomplete and that

certain beliefs and ceremonies still reflected Medieval Catholic dogma. This action by the Puritans caused consternation among the bishops, who felt they had been outmanoeuvred by their rivals. They worried that James might give way and the Church of England might be disestablished. They need not have worried as James detested Presbyterianism. Presbyterianism was far too democratic for James, who believed passionately in the Divine Right of Kings. His Presbyterian upbringing had been a bruising experience and he had been repeatedly reminded that there were two Kingdoms in Scotland and that he was subject to one of them. James was in favour of bishops because he could appoint them and have them support his position as Head of the Church. His settled maxim was '*No Bishop: no King*'. Because the Puritans were not in favour of Bishops, they were depicted as opponents of the Monarchy and subversives of the State. Clearly, James needed religious peace and so he convened a conference at Hampton Court Palace.



Hampton Court Palace

Conference

The proceedings lasted three days and were pure theatre on a grand scale. It was mid-January 1604, and it was freezing cold. The opposing groups were ushered into the King's presence, James having ensured that the delegates were heavily weighted in favour of the bishops. The conference opened with a speech by James which lasted one hour. It was clear that he had no intention of conceding anything to the Puritans. He taunted them in return for the humiliations he had suffered at the hands of the Presbyterian Puritans in Scotland. Yet he still needed to give something to the Puritans in order to achieve religious stability. His opportunity arose when, almost as an afterthought because it was not on the agenda, the Puritans proposed a new translation of the Bible. James was well aware that there were many translations circulating in England such as those by Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew, Puritans, Bishops and Catholic scholars. He seized the opportunity to have one translation, which would bring harmony throughout his kingdom and be forever associated with his name. He lost no time in arranging for 47 of the most able scholars in the country to carry out the work. The task took six years and the result was the King James (KJ) Bible of 1611. While the scholars were at work, a watershed event occurred in Ulster – the Flight of the Earls in 1607 left half a million acres of land available for English and Scottish settlers.

The Plantation of Ulster represented a seismic shift of population and led to the KJ Bible becoming firmly rooted in this part of the island. The KJ Bible was based on The Bishops' Bible of 1568 and retained words which reflected the Anglican tradition.

Nothing which might undermine the King's authority, such as marginal notes, was permitted. It was a masterpiece of English literature with its pleasing rhythms and cadences beloved of so many. Great care was taken to ensure that it was suitable for public reading, with its words being polished and smooth. It was written for the ear rather than the eye. That is why so many passages remain embedded in the memory. A treasured copy from 1611 is in Friends' School, Lisburn, where I had the privilege of turning its pages wearing the all-important white gloves.



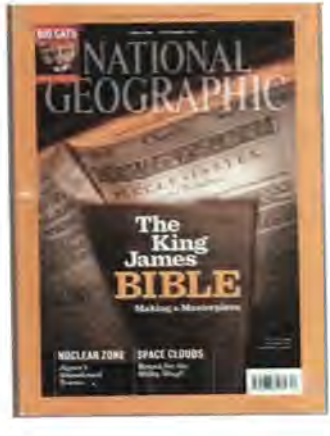
A 1611 King James Bible



Captain Scott's Bible

Religious conformity was imposed throughout the country and the KJ Bible became the Bible of the Nation for the next 300 years. Its influence reached all corners of the globe through the ever-expanding British Empire. Captain Scott carried a copy on his ill-fated journey to the South Pole. It had been given to him as a token of esteem and poignantly inscribed with Numbers 6: 24-26. Following the First World War, there was a flood of new translations and there is no sign of it coming to an end.

Although the use of the KJ Bible is rapidly diminishing, its legacy remains. Even the prestigious National Geographic Magazine featured the KJ Bible on its front cover to mark its 400th anniversary in 2011.



The Bible in Irish

The story of the English Bible is exciting, fast-moving and inspirational. In 1611, however, there were hundreds of thousands of monoglot Irish speakers for whom the publication was irrelevant. There had not been one publication of the Bible in Irish prior to 1600, despite the Church of England Articles of 1562 clearly stating:

> *'It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the primitive Church, to have public prayer in the Church or minister the sacraments in a tongue not understanded of the people'.*

The reason for this glaring omission was the failure of the Reformation in Ireland. This great movement sought to place Scripture alone at the centre of the Church's life and thought. It amounted to a revolution and was accompanied by immense social and political changes. Each country responded in its own way, with England and Ireland moving in very different directions.

The Reformation in England

In England, Henry VIII, the most powerful King in English history, dismissed the Pope and declared himself Head of the Church throughout England. The Church became part of the civil service, with Henry as its Chief Executive. Church and State coalesced into one body. This was the standard European solution to religious differences between nations during the 16th century and enshrined in the Latin phrase '*Cuius regio, eius religio*' - the religion of the ruler determines the religion of the ruled. To be a member of the State was to be a member of the King's church. To be a member of the King's church was to be a member of the State. To step outside this arrangement was an act of sedition and an undermining of the King's authority. This new Church polity took root in England. Every citizen became a member of the Church of England. The people received the Bible in their own language and read and discussed its contents in ale-houses up and down the land. The religious course of England moved decisively in a Protestant direction.

The Reformation in Ireland

As Ireland was part of the King's realm, it was expected that the same course of events should take place in Ireland. But Ireland was not England. Ireland had been isolated from the rest of Europe and virtually untouched by the Renaissance. It was a country whose language, history and culture were very different from England's. Henry had no interest in Ireland and was contemptuous of all things Irish. The country was inhabited by a primitive conquered people *('the wild Irish')* who lived in bogs and mountains. He regarded the Irish language as a barbarous language for a barbarous people. English was the language of education and sophistication and the Irish should learn to speak it. The Elizabethan poet Edmund Spencer (1552-1599) put it explicitly when he said:

'It hath ever been the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all means to learn his.'

Ireland was also a troublesome country. His father had had to deal with several rebellions and Henry himself was forced to put down a serious uprising led by Silken Thomas. Ireland was simply something he could do without. Needless to say, he never visited the country. For Henry, civilisation ended somewhere off the coast of Wales; beyond, there were dragons. This led one of Henry's advisors to say:

'It would be better if Ireland were simply to sink beneath the waves.'

Henry's only flicker of interest in Ireland was the fear that France or Spain might use Ireland as a base from which to attack England.

In 1536, Henry took the momentous step of declaring himself:

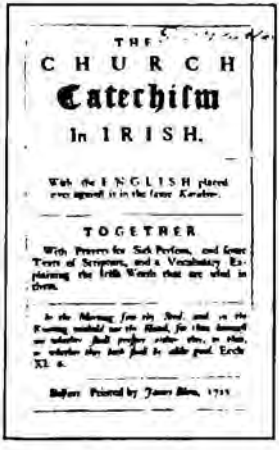
'... *the supreme head on Earth of the whole church in Ireland'*

and, in 1541, that he was now also King of Ireland. His policy was to impose his new status on the Irish people and to make Ireland English. Absolute rule meant that no one could question the King's decisions as Henry was answerable to God alone. The scene was set for a monumental clash of culture and religion.

All persons in authority were required to swear an oath recognising the King as Head of the Church. To deny Henry's new status was an act of rebellion punishable by death. For the ordinary people the most visible result was the dissolution of the monasteries. This caused much distress as these institutions had been an integral part of their way of life for over 1,000 years. Elizabeth took things further by introducing the Act of Uniformity, which imposed the Reformed Faith on the people of Ireland, something which was bitterly resented. This meant that all churches were to be switched from Catholic to Anglican overnight. The liturgy was to be in English not Latin, the substitution of one unintelligible language for another. Refusal to use the English Prayer Book of 1559 could lead to a fine or imprisonment. Every citizen was forced to attend the Parish Church each week or face a fine. Ordinary people were horrified by the widespread destruction of their relics, images and shrines. George Browne, the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, caused a fire to be lit outside Christ Church Cathedral into which the Church's precious relics were cast, including the crozier of St Patrick himself. The policy of Anglicisation was crass, tactless and doomed to failure. A revolution, such as took place in England, could never occur in Ireland. Political considerations took priority, the Gospel could wait.

The authority of the government was limited to The Pale so it was impossible to enforce religious conformity throughout the country. There was also a severe shortage of clergy, most of whom came from England and could not speak Irish. The Reformed Faith, it might be said, never learned to speak Irish. The absence of a university in Ireland until 1592 meant that no Irish equivalent of Tyndale emerged during the early years of the 16th century. The attempt to force the people to learn English was simply unworkable. Religion was used in a vain attempt to promote the

English language - such as through a catechism published in Belfast in 1722.


THE
CHURCH
Catechiſm
In IRISH.

With the ENGLISH placed
over against it in the same Character.

TOGETHER

With Prayers for Sick Persons, and some
Tears of Scripture, and a Vocabulary Ex-
plaining the Irish Words that are used in
them.

Belfast: Printed by James Blow, 1722

It stated:

'It will help them to learn the English tongue ... it is English that is intended to be taught them: For the ....true policy of the Government hath been to take away all difference of habit, language, law and religion and make all grow up into one people, as they are in England; where British, Roman, Saxon, Danish or Norman make no ... division'.

Another obstacle was the strangeness of the message. It was literate, biblical and personal and left little room for saints, holy wells and penitential exercises, which were deeply enshrined in the Irish culture. Finally, the opposition was strong, as the forces of the Counter-Reformation mounted a robust defence of traditional Catholicism. Scholars returned from rigorous training in tridentine colleges throughout Europe and maintained the loyalty of the Catholic population. It was just not possible to change the religion and culture of a nation by coercion. The people saw the new faith as something alien and an instrument to bring about their subjugation. They simply ignored the diktats from the Establishment and remained staunchly loyal to the Catholic Faith. The failure of the Reformation in Ireland was the single most momentous event in the history of Ireland.

The New Testament in Irish

Because of the failure of the Reformation it is not surprising that the translation of the New Testament occurred late. It was not published until 1602, 300 years after the Bible was translated into English and 200 years after the people of Wales received their translation. Even the Algonquin Indians of North America had the Bible in their own language a quarter of a century before the people of Ireland. The translation of the NT was the work of a number of Irish Anglicans led by John Kearney of St Patrick's Cathedral and completed in 1602 by William Daniell, Archbishop of Tuam. In the preface Daniell wrote that the native Irish:


TIOMNA NVADH

The New Testament in Irish, 1602

'... had hitherto been deprived of this means of salvation, it coming to them in the cloud of an unknown tongue' and Ireland, which had been a beacon of light in the past, *'doth sit in darkness through the ignorance of its ministers and the subtlety of Antichrist'.*

He travelled to England in February 1603 to present a copy to the Queen but whether she saw it is unknown as she died one month later in March 1603. Sadly, Daniell's work bore little fruit because there was no support from the Anglican hierarchy and so few clergy could speak Irish. Even James Ussher, that exceptionally gifted Archbishop of Armagh, referred to preaching and catechising in Irish as *'building castles in the air'*. He regarded Irish translations as a weakening of the English connection and an obstacle to the closer union of the two countries. This is curious in view of Ussher's own Irish Articles of 1615 which stated:

> *'The Scriptures ought to be translated out of the original tongues into all languages for the common use of all men: Neither is any person to be discouraged from reading the Bible in such a language as he doth understand ...'*

Daniell became disillusioned, took to alcohol and tobacco, and died a broken man in 1628. It was a melancholy end for someone who had devoted his life to the spread of the Gospel in Ireland.

The Old Testament in Irish



William Bedell

The translation of the Old Testament (OT) is a heart-warming story of one man, an English Anglican, William Bedell. He was born in Essex on Christmas Day 1571 and educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, after which he became a Church of England minister and spent several years in Italy where he translated The Prayer Book into Italian. In 1627, he was appointed provost of Trinity College, Dublin. Bedell quickly recognised the need to communicate the Gospel to the people in their own language. As Provost, he insisted that all divinity students learn Irish and he, himself, learned the language. After two years he became Bishop of Kilmore near the town of Cavan. He sought to direct the Church away from an exclusive mission to English speakers to one which reached out to the native population. He also worked tirelessly to relieve the hardships and poverty of the people. His attachment to the people and appreciation of the Irish language, however, did not go down well with his fellow clergymen, who regarded such involvement as inappropriate for an English Bishop in Ireland.

His supreme achievement was the translation of the OT into Irish. Bedell and his companions met each evening in his house. Their work was no mere slavish translation of the King James Bible into Irish. Bedell was a brilliant Hebraist and worked from the original Hebrew text.



The Old Testament in Irish, 1685





Four Bedell's Bibles, Cambridge University Library

In 1641, Ireland was engulfed in rebellion. Amid the fighting, Bedell refused to leave his Diocese and used his home to shelter hundreds of fugitives. But, as the uprising spiralled out of control, Bedell and his family were forced to leave their home and were transferred to a Norman Castle on an island in the middle of Lough Oughter in the centre of Ireland. Sadly, his many hardships took their toll and he died in 1642, aged 71. He was buried in the graveyard beside his church. A large slab on top of his grave shows the Bible and other symbols of mortality, as was the custom in those days. Close by, is a giant sycamore tree which Bedell himself planted - and which is still growing 400 years later. It is probably the oldest tree in Ireland.

Bedell's OT together with Daniel's NT were published in 1685. The combination was known as Bedell's Bible. There are only six original copies in existence, four of which are in Cambridge University Library. The venture was entirely funded by Robert Boyle, one of the founders of the Royal Society. Every schoolboy is familiar with him through Boyle's Law, which describes the relationship between the volume and pressure of a gas. The Dublin philatelic bureau issued a stamp in 2012 to commemorate the 350th anniversary of his discovery.

Unlike the KJ translation, Bedell's Bible was the private venture by a handful of men. The OT was the result of one man and a few friends, meeting in a house each evening in a remote part of rural Ireland. No national conference had been summoned by the King.



It is not surprising, therefore, that there was no demand for Bedell's Bible. The Catholic Church ignored it, seeing it as a Protestant Bible for a Protestant people. The one million Irish-speaking Catholics had to continue to listen to the Scriptures in Latin. The Anglicans had no use for Bedell's Bible, being more concerned with maintaining their elite

status and privileges as The Protestant Ascendancy. The Presbyterians neglected it - they were overcome with internal divisions which tore their denomination to shreds.

There were now 'Two Bibles in Ireland' - the Bible in English but few could read it and the Bible in Irish but nobody wanted it. Almost all of the Bibles in Irish found their way to the Gaelic speaking Protestants in the Highlands of Scotland. It is interesting that when Dr Samuel Johnston toured the Western Isles 100 years later, he found people reading Bedell's Bible. During the long 18th century, the Enlightenment caused a deep sleep to descend on the churches and any Bedell's Bibles in Ireland simply gathered dust. The Presbyterians and other dissenters suffered alongside Catholics from the repressive laws inflicted on them by the Ascendency. Baptist numbers fell from 2,000 to 500. Evangelical zeal withered and any concerted attempt to reach out to the native Irish simply did not occur. For over 100 years it was a case of *'the greatest story never told'*.

The 'Second' Reformation

With the dawn of the 19th century, the Reformed Churches awoke. The Methodists were first into action, invigorated by the 21 visits to Ireland of John Wesley. In 1799, they rediscovered Bedell's Bible and sent out Irish-speaking evangelists to preach the Gospel to the Irish people. The names of Charles Graham, James McQuigg and Gideon Ouseley are still honoured in Methodist circles. With the formation of the Baptist Irish Society in 1814, Isaac McCarthy and others travelled all over Ireland establishing new churches and helping to revive languishing ones. McCarthy was an indefatigable evangelist. In his first four years he travelled over 20,000 miles on horseback and on foot across Ireland's bogs and tracks in all weathers. His work is now totally forgotten.

The Anglicans and Presbyterians then quickly became involved. One of these was Edward Nangle, whose work on Achill Island was the subject of a paper delivered to this Society some years ago by Brian Thompson. In 1835 the Presbyterians made the ability to preach in Irish an essential requirement for all students for the ministry, and the General Assembly in 1841 described Irish as '*our sweet and memorable tongue*'

This renewed interest in the use of the Irish Bible caused one commentator to say:

> *'So did the church seek to undo one of the greatest mistakes of the Reformation, that of refusing the Scriptures in Irish to the Irish people at a time when Irish was still the main spoken language in the country.'*

The Great Famine in the late 1840s decimated Ireland, especially the Irish-speaking parts of the country. The population collapsed from eight million to six million in six years. Bedell's Bible continued to be used even though the use of the Irish language went into steep decline. By 1900, only a tiny percentage of the population spoke Irish

as their first language but by then Bedell's Bible had served its purpose and its work was done.

To mark the 400th Anniversary of Bedell's birth, a bi-lingual event was held in his honour in Kilmore Cathedral in 1971. It was attended by members of the Catholic hierarchy and a representative of the President of Ireland. A plaque was placed at the entrance to the graveyard.



Note: *'Optimus Anglorum'* ≡ the Best of the English.

... and in Ireland you can't get higher praise than that!

Another sycamore tree was planted in the shadow of Bedell's in the hope that when the Bishop's tree finally fades the new one will flourish to perpetuate his memory.

He is still remembered in the chapel of Emmanuel College, where there is a fine stained glass window showing Bedell with the Norman castle in the background. In St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, there is a corbel showing him holding a copy of the Scriptures and one of the Houses in Methodist College, is named after him.



Corbel in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast



The late Cardinal's Maynooth Bible

In 1981, a group of Catholic scholars led by Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich published the first Irish translation acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy and known as The Maynooth Bible. The late Cardinal's personal copy can be seen in The Cardinal O'Fiaich Library and Archive in Armagh. The Maynooth Bible is now available online for use in schools which teach all subjects through the medium of Irish.

In the early 16th century Erasmus said:

> *'I wish that The Scriptures might be translated into all languages so that not only the Scots and the Irish but the Turks and the Saracens might read them. I long that the farm labourer might sing them as he follows his plough and the weaver hum them to the tune of his shuttle'.*

500 years later his wish has been fulfilled and there are now ...

... TWO BIBLES IN IRELAND

The author wishes to record his thanks to:

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Cambridge University Library

Friends' School, Lisburn

The Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich Library and Archive, Armagh

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The Edict of Milan

Maurice Dowling

The year 2013 marks the seventeen-hundredth anniversary of the issuing of the Edict of Milan in AD 313

In the year 312 the Roman Empire acquired its first Christian ruler, Constantine, who for the next twelve years ruled only the western half of the Empire. In 313 Constantine and the then eastern Emperor, Licinius, agreed, in Milan, on a policy of favour towards the Christian church, while allowing all others to follow their own religious convictions. The so called Edict of Milan, which one historian has described as one of the major documents in the history of human freedom, cannot be discussed in isolation from a long history of often troubled relationships between church and Empire or without reference to the aftermath of Constantine's conversion.

The History of Persecution

First of all, the need for a perspective where this subject is concerned. It is important not to exaggerate the sufferings of the early Christians. The standard impression which people have of the early persecutions is derived directly or indirectly from a brief passage in Tacitus, a Roman historian of the early second century. In his account of Nero's reign Tacitus, writing some fifty years afterwards describes what happened to the Christians in Rome after the great fire of AD 64. To quote just a few lines

> *"... to get rid of the report that Nero himself had started the fire, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the people. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts they were torn by dogs and perished or were nailed to crosses or were doomed to the flames".*

This account has been mediated to many people through modern books and films, notably Quo Vadis, but what is often not appreciated is that this passage in Tacitus describes an isolated and untypical outburst of violence and relatively few Christians

living under the Roman authorities were subjected to violence of this kind ... but violence there was.

Some Reasons for Roman Hostility towards Christians

As the church grew, so too did the tension between the Christian message and Roman culture. It is a distressing fact of human history that distinctive minorities attract suspicion, contempt and violence and Christianity had certain features which made it an obvious target for Roman hatred particularly when people had learned to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism.

"A new and wicked superstition" ... a phrase found in the Roman writer Suetonius. Christianity was not the religion of a particular race or nation; it could not be regarded as part of the culture or the ancestral heritage of any particular ethnic group. Christianity was new, it had a very short and very dubious pedigree, and it showed no respect for barriers of race, religion, class or tradition. In the words of a modern historian, *"Christianity was novel and the Roman world was in many ways politically, economically and intellectually very conservative"*. The Christians were those who had forsaken the ways of their forefathers in order to embrace what Suetonius called *"a new and wicked superstition"*. Christians were atheists. The Romans could be very sensitive where religion was concerned. They expected the Empire's subjects to respect the gods of Rome even if only as symbols of Rome's power and greatness. For the devotees of most religions it was not a problem to respect the gods of Rome in addition to their own deities. Christians, however, would have nothing to do with Roman religion even by way of a token gesture. Christians were sometimes blamed for bringing down the anger of the gods upon society generally. The early Christian writer Tertullion sardonically summed up the attitude of many of his pagan contemporaries,

> *"If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague the cry is at once 'the Christians to the lion'".*

Christian Crimes

The second century Christian writer Minusius Felix records some comments of a Roman orator and quoting some of this report this Roman orator says

> *"... they, the Christians, have gathered together from the lowest dregs of the populace, ignorant men and credulous women and women are naturally unstable and have formed a rabble of impious conspirators at their nocturnal gatherings, solemn fasts and barbarous meals, the bond of union is not any sacred right but crime. They are a secret tribe that lurks in darkness and shuns the light".*

It seems that Christians were accused of cannibalism and gross indecency due perhaps garbled versions of the Eucharist and the Christian emphasis on love and sharing. A number of early Christian writers testify to such misinformation and they challenge their pagan contemporaries to produce any evidence that such charges are based on fact. At one point Tertullion again comments, *"no name of a crime stands against us but only the crime of a name".* To be a Christian was enough to provoke contempt and hatred. There was no name of a crime ... no *'nomen criminus'*; there was only the crime of a name ... a *'crimen nomanus'*. So, certainly persecutions there were ... hostility there was.

The Triumph of the Church

How was it that Christianity became the dominant religion of the Empire? How did we get to the situation that we see in AD 313? How did this small sect become so influential that eventually the Empire itself became Christian? History shows that some societies and cultures offer particularly strong resistance to the gospel, whereas others are more sympathetic and responsive. The growth of the church in some societies, as opposed to others, cannot be understood apart from certain cultural and historical factors so what was it about Roman religion and culture which contributed to so many abandoning the religion of their ancestors and joining the church and first among the factors that I have identified is the shapelessness of Roman religion. The more sharply focused and carefully defined a religion is the more likely it is to offer effective opposition to an opponent or a competitor. Roman religion was religion without a creed. It lacked a set of specific beliefs which might really grip the heart and satisfy the intellect. It was a religion marked by, in the words of another modern historian,

> *"indeterminate gods and colourless myths, mere fables concocted from details suggested by Latin topography or pale reflections of the adventures which had overtaken the Olympians of Greek epic".*

The number of available gods with their various specialties was open-ended. Successive rulers had their favourite deities as can be seen from coins which declare one or another god to be the Emperor's companion. The Roman world seemed to be positively ripe for a sharply focused and uncompromising creed ... a creed for which men and women would be prepared to die, if necessary.

The Universality of the Christian Faith

Well before the birth of Christianity many subjects of the Empire were being attracted to Judaism precisely because it had qualities which Roman religion lacked and which some Romans admired. An uncompromising belief in one God as distinct from a ridiculous multitude of deities, a form of worship that had none of the barbaric rituals

of so much pagan religion and a very high ethical and moral tone. Christianity had one very great advantage over Judaism in the matter of attracting those who were dissatisfied with Roman religion. Christianity was not the religion of a particular people or race. Christianity crossed ethnic and cultural boundaries in a way that Judaism did not. Converts to Judaism were always felt by the Jews to be in some sense aliens, even when in the case of men, they were prepared to take the step of circumcision and many Gentile men preferred to remain adherents and observers rather than become full converts. The Christian church, however, was able to incorporate people from any culture or way of life.

The Evangelizing Zeal of Christians

In Acts 8 we are told that those who were scattered from Jerusalem in the persecution which followed Stephen's death preached the Word wherever they went. The preaching and spreading of the gospel was not the work of professionals, full time workers or even apostles exclusively. Ordinary Christians felt the responsibility to evangelize their neighbours. Judaism was, to a certain extent, a proselytizing religion but its identification with one particular race and the Jewish tendency to remain separate from Gentiles, meant that Judaism lacked the mobility of Christianity. Furthermore among many Jews the universal vision had faded. As for traditional Roman religion no concept would have been more foreign to the devotees than the idea of winning converts but, from the beginning, the Christian church was marked by an evangelizing zeal to which an awareness of Christ's imminent return and to the wrath of God gave a special urgency.

The Christian Hope

Pagan religion and philosophy had little to offer by way of an afterlife. Mystery religions might offer some kind of eventual release of the soul from the body's prison but this was usually available only to the select few and even then only by means of some rather repelling rites. Judaism was vague on the subject of life after death. Christianity, on the other hand, offered what many people wanted - the certainty of complete acceptance by God, the assurance of everlasting bliss, the promise that the sufferings of the present world would be more than compensated for by the glories of the next, the confidence that in Christ good had triumphed over evil. From the very beginning Christianity was eschatological. It was marked by a firm belief in the complete victory of God and of Christ which would be manifested when the last things came to pass.

The earliest Christians awaited the imminent coming of Christ and even though this sense of the immanence of Christ's return became less marked as the centuries passed the Christian church held firmly to the belief *in "the resurrection of the body*

and the life of the world to come" to quote the Nicene Creed. When Peter spoke of a *"new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3)* he was speaking of the type of experience for which many people in the ancient world longed.

Christian Morality, Charity and Courage

Accusations of cannibalism, incest and orgies actually may never have been very widespread and they probably faded with the passing of time. Pagans became aware that Christians had strict principles and showed great care for each other and indeed Christian charity extended to those outside the church. Henry Chadwick, distinguished historian of an earlier generation, *says "the practical application of charity was probably the most single cause of Christian success".* He may be overstating the point but there is a point there. The early Christians should not be idealized, they were not perfect or sinless, but there is no doubt that Christian virtues had an impact on a world where it was not normal to care on a large scale for the poor, the sick, widows and orphans. Christian morality, like Jewish, held an attraction for those who were disgusted with pagan immorality. In addition there is evidence that Christian courage in the face of martyrdom made a profound impression on some non-Christians.

The Intellectual Appeal of Christianity

There soon developed an impressive Christian intellectual tradition. During the second and third centuries a solid body of apologetic literature was produced. Much of it was designed to argue that Christians were not guilty of the crimes which populist slander attributed to them, that Christian morality was superior to pagan and that Christianity was a religion worthy of intelligent people. Wisdom could be known in its fullness in Christianity but, at best, only partially in the great pagan sages. Around AD 170 the great pagan intellectual, Celsus, published a major work attacking Christianity. What is significant about Celsus' work is that he felt the need to deal with Christian claims and to disprove them. The fierceness of Celsus' attack indicates that Christianity was making an impression upon thinking people and Celsus writes in order to dissuade intellectual scholars from becoming Christians. There would have been no point in writing such a sustained attack for the mob as they would not nor could not have read it. About a century later another pagan scholar, Porphyry, saw that Christianity did not only appeal to the lowest classes but was becoming increasingly influential among the educated and this disturbed Porphyry.

The Lack of a Consistent Roman Policy

During the era of persecutions, as its known, from the beginning up to Constantine,

the church was able to grow, to debate, to become a major factor in society, partly because the Romans were sporadic, half hearted and inconsistent in their dealings with the church. The Imperial authorities had to deal with many other problems, political, military, economic and, more importantly, they lacked the religious or ideological fanaticism which a successful policy of extermination needs. By and large the people had no great interest in seeing a 'final solution', Nazi style, for the Christian issue and neither had their rulers. The idea that Christians were a threat to the Empire wore rather thin, not only because of the lives which Christians lived, but because the Empire's worst trouble makers, problems and enemies, internal and external, obviously had nothing to do with Christianity. Christianity thus became firmly established in Roman society although it remained the religion of a minority. Its influence at the beginning of the fourth century was such that the Empire became nominally Christian.

The Great Persecution and its Aftermath

In the year AD 303 the Emperor Diocletian began an intensive persecution of the church which proved to be the Empire's last major offensive against the church. The Great Persecution lasted longer and was more severe in the Empire's eastern provinces than in the west. Shortly after he became Emperor in AD 284 Diocletian had divided his Empire in order to make its general administration easier. He himself retained overall command but with special responsibility for the eastern provinces. In the east, Diocletian and his successor, Galerius, pursued a vigorous policy of persecution. The rulers in the western half of the Empire had little taste or time for persecuting Christians. They had too many other things to do, particularly fighting among themselves. The Great Persecution continued steadily in the eastern provinces during the period AD 303-312. Towards the end of that period, however, Galerius, the eastern ruler since AD 305, when Diocletian abdicated, decided the Empire was wasting valuable time and resources on its campaign against the church and he issued an Edict of Toleration in April of AD 311. This formally accorded to Christians the right to exist unmolested but it did not end persecution completely and it was not the decisive factor in the transformation of the Christian faith into the established religion of the Empire. The Edict was not unambiguously Christian and there was nothing in it that attacked paganism. What is significant about Galerius' Edict was that a Roman ruler was prepared to recognize officially the power and influence of the church within the Empire. However, even apart from this toleration Edict of AD 311 events were moving very much in favour of Christianity.

Constantine's Rise to Power

While Diocletian and then Galerius were ruling the east, the western half of the Empire saw a succession of rulers of whom the most significant is undoubtedly

Constantine. Constantine himself eventually joined in the Imperial infighting in the western provinces and after a period as vice ruler of the west, in AD 312 he defeated the reigning Emperor, Maxentius, at the battle of the Millvian Bridge in October, AD 312, thus gaining the control of the western Empire. A man of Constantine's upbringing and position would inevitably have come into contact with Christianity at some stage. The precise nature of Constantine's acquaintance with Christianity in the years before he achieved supreme power is difficult to determine. Whatever the background Constantine emerged victorious at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge having publicly acknowledged his allegiance to the God of the Christians. According to later Christian accounts, Constantine received divine aid in this decisive engagement. Contantine's contemporary the historian, Lactantious, writes:

> *"Constantine was directed in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and thus to join battle".*

Another contemporary, Eusebius of Caesarea, relates what is supposed to be Constantine's own testimony. He said that about noon when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens above the sun and an inscription, *"conquer by this sign" - "in hoc signo vinces".* It is not easy to separate fact from legend in a case like this. Possibly Constantine did have some kind of profound religious experience perhaps involving a dream shortly before the battle. We can call this experience a conversion in that he was obviously converted from one form of religious allegiance to the other, but whether Constantine really understood the essentials of the Christian faith is difficult to say. It could be that his new allegiance was to the God of the Christians, only vaguely understood, rather than to Christ and another historian of modern times suggests that Constantine, *"saw the cross not so much as an emblem of suffering as a magic totem confirming his own victoriousness".* However it came about and whatever its precise nature Constantine's conversion opens a new chapter in church history. In AD 313 Constantine as ruler of the west and Licinius the new ruler of the east agreed at a meeting in Milan to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to *"follow whatever worship each man has desired"* and to quote some other brief extracts from an English version of the Edict, preserved for us by the historian Lactantius, the Emperors declare:

> *"we thought it salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no man whatever should be refused complete toleration who has given up his mind either to the cult of the Christians or to the religion which he personally feels best suited to himself".*

The purpose is not only to grant freedom to Christians but, they say, to others also freedom for their own worship and cult is likewise left open and freely granted that every man may have complete toleration in the practice of whatever worship he has chosen. Not only should all persecution cease but also, according to the Edict, all property taken from the Christian church should be restored, something which

Galerius's Edict of AD 311 did not require. Constantine and Licinius obviously saw the Christian religion as the chief religion of the Empire with traditional Roman religion coming under the heading of *"any other cult"*. For the Christians of the eastern provinces the era of persecutions was still not completely finished. Licinius, the ruler of the east, accepted the fact that Christians were here to stay but he was determined that to make life as difficult as he could. After years of tension between the two Emperors however, in September of AD 324, Constantine defeated Licinius in battle and so achieved mastery over the whole Empire. A little more than twenty years after Diocletian had launched the great persecution the Empire east and west was under the rule of a Christian Emperor.

A New Role for the Roman Emperor

Constantine was hailed by Christians as God's deputy on earth, the representative of the divine Word. Eusebius of Caesaria says that

> *"... our Emperor, His (the divine Word's) friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God".*

At the time of Constantine's victory in AD 312 at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Maxentius, the defeated Emperor, perished in the River Tiber along with many of his soldiers. This, of course, led to Constantine being seen as a new Moses. Few people thought it strange that the Emperor should take a personal interest in the affairs of the church. For his part Constantine felt that his duty to secure peace in the Empire by healing rifts in the church. A major dispute to which Constantine gave his attention was the Arian Controversy. Arias had been causing a considerable stir with his view that Christ was a created being. When Constantine became ruler of the eastern Empire in AD 324 he decided to act and he summoned the Great Council of Nicea in AD 325, which eventually issued a creed condemning Arian type beliefs.

A New Relationship between Church and Empire

Christianity did not require the dismantling of the Imperial structures or of much of Roman culture. The Emperor was seen as God's representative, the administration of the provinces and the taxation system remained in place, the notion of the just war legitimized the killing of one's enemies, rich people could be accepted into the church without giving away all their wealth, art and architecture could be channelled into expressing Christian values. Instead of seeing them as essentially in conflict it was now possible to see the Christian church and the Roman state as two parts of one great divine plan. The church was granted special privileges and became the special object of Imperial favour. Bishops traveling to and from church synods were allowed to travel at Imperial expense. Churches received endowments and the church as a

whole took on the aspect of a vast and secure corporation. The Roman army began to acquire Christian insignia. The result of all this Imperial favour towards the church was that it became highly advantageous to be a Christian. Serious measures to eradicate paganism did not begin until well into the reign of Theodocius the First who became Emperor in AD 379. Nevertheless the new and privileged status of the church meant that many people accepted Christianity simply because it was convenient to do so. Pagans were not at first faced with physical persecution of the type once inflicted upon Christians, though that would come, but they could easily conclude that it was more profitable to be a Christian than not to be one.

The Church becomes Persecutor

The promise of religious freedom, which the Edict of Milan seemed to embody, did not become a reality. In time the new church/Empire relationship led to active persecution of dissidents, deviants. In the early fifth century Augustine justified the use of force against the dissident Donatist movement in North Africa quoting the words from the gospel story *"... compel them to come in".* The principle that the security of the Empire required ecclesiastical uniformity is seen to a certain extent in Constantine's day ... that's why he was so anxious to end the Arian and Donatist controversies. On his authority bishops could lose their positions, sometimes being forcibly removed by soldiers who then installed an orthodox bishop. Gradually it became normal for the Christian Empire, the church in effect, to make use of the sword of the state to use force to suppress heretical groups and their beliefs. Wrong belief was seen as evil in and of itself. It was felt to be a ruler's duty to exterminate such evil. Religious intolerance, including book burning, would become a sad feature of the Christian Empire.

The Postscript

The concept of the Corpus Christianum or the Corpus Christianorum, the Christian body where church and society are virtually identified, was a feature of medieval culture which the main Reformers did not reject. As we know they rejected so much else ... the Papacy, five of the sacraments to which Rome held, the concept of purgatory. They rejected so much but they did not reject this feature of medieval Europe, the idea of a Christian society, a Christian body. They were not advocates of freedom of conscience. The Anabaptists, whom we who are Baptists can regard as our spiritual forebears, however, were different and they introduced what was, in the sixteenth century, seen as a highly dangerous and highly subversive philosophy, that church and Empire should be separate and really the civil government has no right to be involved in the affairs of the church. One of the earliest representatives of the English Baptist movement, Thomas Helwys, wrote a book, published in 1612, entitled *"A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity"*, in which he made his famous plea for

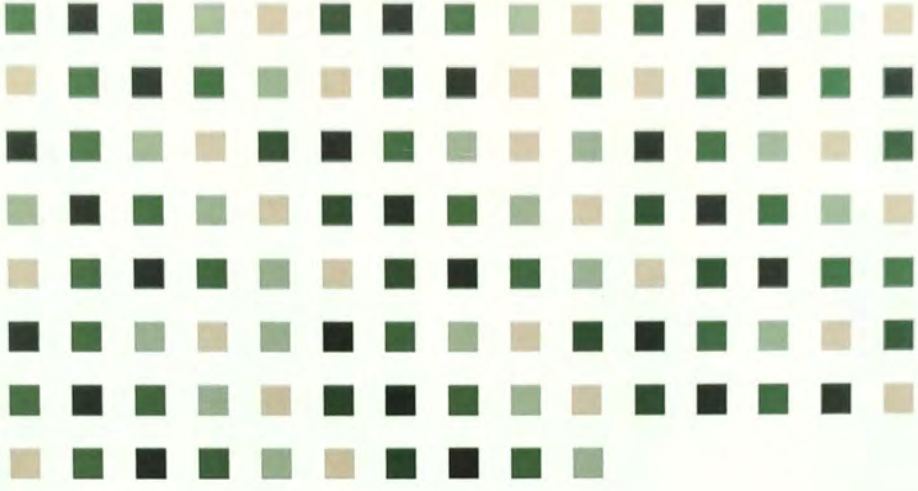
religious toleration, which in some ways echoes something of the spirit of the Edict of Milan. In his book, addressing directly King James, Helwys says,

> *"O, let the King judge. Is it not most equal (most fair) that men should choose their religion themselves, seeing they only must stand themselves before the Judgment Seat of God to answer for themselves. And if the King's people be obedient and true subjects obeying all human laws made by the King, the King shall not answer for it, for men's religion, to God, is between God and themselves. Neither may the King be judged between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever, it appertains not in the least to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure".*

... and, particularly daring given the anti-Catholic feeling in early seventeenth century England, Helwys believed that such liberty should be extended to

> *"... them of the Romish religion, if they are true and faithful subjects of the King, for we do freely profess that our lord, the King, has no more power over their consciences than over ours and that is none at all."*

The Edict of Milan, which one historian has described as one of the major documents in the history of human freedom, sadly did not materialize into real freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. In Constantine's Empire and the remaining history of the western Empire, the subsequent thousand year history of the eastern Empire, the state of church-state relations in medieval Europe, sadly the promise did not materialize but at least there were those who eventually took up the same sentiments and established them as the proper way to understand the relationship between the King and peoples' consciences.



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