

Testimony

by Donald Macphail

"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Proverbs 30.8-9).

It was in the early spring of 1950, at the age of sixteen, that I found myself really gripped by fundamental thoughts which concerned the eternal welfare of my soul. I just wanted to be alone and contemplate. Often I took a walk across the moorland from our little village of Arnol on the Island of Lewis, and sometimes I caught myself crying as I sat down to watch and listen to the water running and rippling in the burn beside me.

"Why am I alive in this complicated world? Surely there must be a purpose in it all. Something inside me tells me that I am accountable for the life I live, and I am afraid: I cannot bear the thought which convinces me of a life after death." With heaviness, depression, and inward tension, these convictions captivated my simple mind.

At this time the news spread of a spiritual awakening down the coast in the villages of Barvas and Shadar. In the secondary school which I attended, boys and girls from these villages spoke of how a certain wild minister by the name of Duncan Campbell, preached fearlessly and forcibly, hitting and thumping the pulpits, and pointing his finger at people who automatically became infected with the 'coorum' -- a term for conversion that seems to be considered by non-Christians in the Hebrides as a spiritual disease from which you may not recover. The next news I heard was that Mr. Campbell was to conduct a series of meetings in the mission hall at my home.

As far as I could recollect, I had never attended the parish church, and to avoid 'spiritual infection' I had more or less decided I would not be seen within its walls. However, this was a chance not to be missed. Out of curiosity I attended the first meeting in order that I might know for myself whether what I heard was really the truth. That very first night I was gripped by the Word read and preached, and could not stay away the following nights. Perhaps for the first time in my life I became aware of the presence of God, and began to understand something of my need of Christ as my Saviour from sin. From then on there followed days of secret struggle in prayer.

After a week of attending those meetings I could not resist the gospel call any longer. Vividly do I recall that dark Thursday night when the Word of God reiterated with conviction through my enlightened mind: *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30.19).* With what clarity I saw and understood the way of salvation in Christ, yet at the same time I was given an insight into the terrible consequences of rejecting Christ, the Lord's provision for my salvation.

After the midnight cottage meeting I endeavored to leave for home, but on looking around, outside the house, I noticed a man praying by the side of the wall. Shouts and heavy sighs were heard from people within, as if crying for help. I could not restrain myself any longer and touched that godly man. In a broken voice I told him that I wanted to get right with God before it would be too late. As he turned, I saw Christ in the very expression on his face. In compassion he took me by the hand and led me into the prayer meeting where nine other villagers were on their knees, seeking the Saviour. That night I was considerably relieved to have made a decision for Christ. At a subsequent prayer meeting, while a godly man from Shadar prayed, I became aware of the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit flooding my soul. I knew without doubt that my sins were forgiven. I confess with honesty that I had never known such deep peace, real joy, and inward liberty and freedom.

With considerable detail I could refer to other incidents which took place during the two following years on the Island of Lewis, of how we knew God's blessing in the meetings and saw many souls deciding for Christ. It was during a communion service conducted by Mr. Campbell at one of those meetings, that I heard God calling me to His service in a real way, through the text preached from Mark 11:1-11, with special reference to verse 3: *"Say ye that the Lord hath need of him."* With shame I confess that I sought to ignore His call for some five years, and

tried to console myself by taking opportunities of witnessing for Christ at my home where I was employed as a Harris Tweed weaver. After a rather hard, sifting experience, I pursued a definite conviction which was confirmed to me by the Lord's guidance, and now, I cannot but rejoice daily in that He has called me by His grace from the paths of sin, and set me apart to bring the glorious message of salvation to small Muslim communities who live under the shadow of spiritual death in the Federal States of South Arabia.

"Not until the loom is silent,
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned."

. . . *Donald Macphail. - Church of Scotland Mission*