

Can two walk together?

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The title of this paper is a piece of piety. The person who most clearly taught me that I should be at best suspicious and at worst sceptical of judgments reached about those whose played a part in Scottish ecclesiastical history was Ian Henderson, who gave his first book, written, when he was a minister in Fraserburgh this title.¹ The text from the book of Amos continues “except they be agreed”. And in this paper I want to ask to what extent the frequent coupling of the names of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang in late nineteenth century Glasgow reflects agreement between the two men or perhaps masks considerable differences between them

In the 1970s, two pioneering articles published in the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* by the late Donald Withrington explored the crisis facing the Churches and the development of a new social conscience.² The earlier article paid tribute to Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang for leading a crusade to improve the housing of the urban poor, first through the Presbytery of Glasgow’s Housing Commission and later through the General Assembly’s Home Mission Committee chaired by Macleod, and the Commission to Enquire into the Religious Condition of the People, chaired by Marshall Lang. In his second article Withrington describes the established Presbytery of Glasgow “led by” Lang and Macleod taking the housing issue to the Church of Scotland General Assembly. A.C Cheyne says that “men like Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod brought

¹ I. Henderson, *Can Two Walk Together* (London, 1948)

² D. J. Withrington, “The Churches in Scotland: c 1870 – c 1900: Towards a New Social Conscience, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XIX, (1977) 155-168; “Non-Churchgoing, c1750-c1850, A Preliminary Study”, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XVII (1972) Withrington was not the first to draw attention to the importance of the work of Lang and MacLeod in encouraging the Church of Scotland to re-discover a social conscience. J R Fleming refers to the “good work” of the Presbytery of Glasgow’s Commission on the Housing of the Poor. J. R Fleming, *The Church in Scotland 1875-1929* (Edinburgh 1933) 177. Remarkably A.L. Drummond and J.B.P Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1978) make no mention of the social concern of the Presbytery of Glasgow nor of Donald MacLeod, and mention Marshall Lang only in the context of his work on liturgy and early moves towards the reunion of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland.

a whole series of reports and debates on bad housing and its religious implications”.³ S.J. Brown also link the two men together in a 1991 article.⁴

As Glasgow’s middle classes moved further westwards work began in the mid eighteen fifties developing a site high above the river Kelvin. The Park area was built with wide streets, grand circuses and spectacular views of the Clyde or across to Gilmorehill, where the new university buildings were nearing completion. Columned entrance halls led onto four or five story town houses, with rich plasterwork and cornices. It was a place for the rich, where houses were sold for sums over £7000.⁵

Park Church was built in 1857. Its first minister was John Caird, later to be Principal of the University of Glasgow, and he was succeeded in 1863 by Archibald Charteris. When Charteris left to become Edinburgh University’s Professor of Biblical Criticism in 1868, the congregation chose Donald Macleod, much younger brother of Norman. Donald Macleod had been minister of Lauder and then of Linlithgow and he was to spend forty years in Park Church. “I began with fear and trembling” he wrote, “but the influence of my predecessors was manifest, and the tone of loyalty and brotherliness which they inspired was most encouraging, and made the forty years during which God spared me to minister to this kindly and warm-hearted congregation a time of comfort and joy.”⁶

In 1886, the population of the Park parish was 7538, 789 people were communicant members, just less than 10% of the parish population. The Christian liberality of the congregation, (its total givings to the work of the Church) was £3709, the highest in the Presbytery of Glasgow. The nearby congregation of Hillhead was the only other congregation whose Christian liberality exceeded £3000. In 1905, the year Macleod retired, the congregation had grown to 901 communicants, with a Christian liberality of £5151, the only congregation in the Presbytery whose liberality exceeded £5000. Hillhead’s liberality by then had risen to £4189, the only other one over £4000. The stipend paid to Macleod in 1905 was £1000, an astonishingly high figure at a time when the average stipend in the Presbytery of Glasgow was £317.⁷ Macleod retired from Park Church in 1905, and died in 1909.

A time of comfort and joy, Donald Macleod’s Glasgow ministry have been but it was also a time of remarkable industry. As well as preaching twice a Sunday, in the morning

³ A.C. Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk* (Edinburgh, 1983) 135

⁴ J.J. Brown, “Reform, Reconstruction and Reaction: The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 44, (1991) 498

⁵ Advertisement for 1 Park Terrace, reproduced in P. Hillis, *The Barony of Glasgow*, (Edinburgh, 2007)

⁶ S. Smith, *Donald Macleod of Glasgow*, (London, 1926) 95

⁷ Figures taken from the annual *Church of Scotland Yearbook*, (Edinburgh, 1906)

to an influential congregation, and in the evening to a far wider group, Macleod edited *Good Words* from his brother Norman's death in 1872 to 1905, and he was heavily involved in the work of Glasgow Presbytery. He was appointed convener of the General Assembly's Home Mission Committee in 1888, chaplain to three monarch's and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1895. *The Glasgow Herald* recorded on the day following his death, that "no great public monument in the Church or in the city was considered complete without his influence and co-operation."⁸

Park was a daughter church of the Barony of Glasgow, a parish which separated from Glasgow Cathedral in 1595 but for many years provided worship in the Cathedral crypt. A separate building was provided next to the Cathedral in 1800, but in 1889 a new church was opened opposite the cathedral. The sum of £28,000 which paid for it was raised by the minister of the Barony from 1873 to 1900, John Marshall Lang. Lang had been less than impressed with the old Barony church where Norman Macleod made his reputation. It was a square building with galleries all round and a lofty pulpit. The new Barony was built in the Gothic style in red sandstone, with cathedral-like pillars and a chancel and nave. A side-chapel contained a fresco of Christ. Marshall Lang abolished seat rents, introduced a daily service, marked Holy Week and the congregation chanted prose psalms. His preaching attracted two thousand people to evening services.

Marshall Lang's first charge was the East Church in Aberdeen, where he was to be succeeded by Robert Flint. There he persuaded the congregation to stand to sing, but the Presbytery of Aberdeen censured him and put an end to the innovation. After five years in the rural Aberdeenshire village of Fyvie, Marshall Lang moved first to Anderston in Glasgow in 1865 and three years later to Morningside, at that time a village with no houses beyond it. In 1873, he moved to the Barony in Glasgow, where he was to remain until in 1900, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, then Secretary of State for Scotland and a friend of Marshall Lang's nominated him as Principal of the University of Aberdeen, a post which he held until his death in 1909.

Marshall Lang was a towering figure in the Church of Scotland, representing it at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America, invited to be guest preacher in the Scots Church in Melbouorne for four months in 1887, Moderator of the General Assembly in 1893 and President of the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance in 1899. He published books of sermons, and on liturgy, New Testament scholarship, and, of major importance for this paper, the church and its social mission, the Baird Lectures for 1902. He also chaired a very important commission on the Religious Life of the people, whose work complemented the pioneering work on housing of Donald Macleod's Home Mission Committee.

One of Marshall Lang's sons, Cosmo Gordon, became Archbishop of Canterbury, another, Marshall Bunchanan was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1935. He wrote of his father, "He was not a scholar, not a theologian, but in spite of hard public and pastoral work he read widely and eagerly. He was a very powerful preacher, with a

⁸ *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 February, 1916

real gift of eloquent speech and a fervour which was commended by his fine voice and presence. I suppose he might be described as a liberal Evangelical. ... Above all he was a man of deep, unaffected, undemonstrative piety, whose religion was the inspiration of his life.”⁹

Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang were to become good friends and neighbours, living only four doors apart in Woodlands Terrace, and their families saw a lot of each other. Cosmo Gordon Lang said that from his childhood he had a great affection for Donald Macleod.¹⁰

Although Macleod and Marshall Lang are frequently linked together as joint representatives of a new attitude within the Church of Scotland towards social reform, the two men were in fact different in their approach. Marshall Lang, for example, was a high Churchman, while Macleod criticised anything that could be described as “ritualism”. Marshall Lang saw social conditions in terms of the broadest issues they presented, Macleod much more in terms of the individuals they affected. While both men analysed and criticised society, and both expressed sympathy for those marginalized in society, Marshall Lang tended to stress the social analysis whereas Macleod vividly described the conditions in which the poor were forced to live. Through the pages of *Good Words*, Macleod addressed a far wider audience than Marshall Lang.

Both men owed a lot to Robert Flint, whose sermons on the Kingdom of Christ on Earth, delivered in Aberdeen in 1859 and published in 1865 pre-date anything else which in a similar way claims that the Kingdom of God is realisable now, that the Kingdom of God is not co-terminous with the Church, and that the Church stands alongside other secular agencies in promoting but not dominating an understanding of the Kingdom. It was this understanding of the Kingdom of God, inherited from Flint, which enabled Macleod and Marshall Lang to break out of the church-centred view of social improvement and allow for the work of civic, municipal and secular agencies (which was expanding rapidly in the days when Macleod and Marshall Lang were ministers in Glasgow) not only to be acknowledged and praised but to be recognised as making their own contribution to the Kingdom of God on earth.

Donald Macleod’s social theology is expressed in a book of sermons he published in 1893, *Christ and Society*, which he had earlier contributed as a series of articles which he contributed to the magazine *Good Words* during his editorship. The articles he commissioned for *Good Words* and other contributions he wrote provide further evidence of his social theology. John Marshall Lang’s social theology is most concisely expressed in his 1902 Baird Lectures, *The Church and its Social Mission*. The social theology of both men is also reflected in the speeches they made to the General Assembly.

⁹ Quoted in J.G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, (London, 1949) 4

¹⁰ SMITH, *Donald Macleod of Glasgow*, p 152-3

Macleod's sermons are much more political in content than Marshall Lang's lectures in that he criticises specific practices like the production of goods cheaply being only possible at the price of low wages, or commercial malpractice. Like Marshall Lang, Macleod recognises that politically the doctrine of *laissez-faire* has been abandoned in the passing of legislation protective of the weak, but he is far more critical of what he sees as economic *laissez-faire*. 'Laissez-faire, or in other words, 'Leave alone, do not interfere, let evils work their own cure' is but an equivalent for the 'Survival of the Fittest' of the Naturalist; and this implies the correlative sinking, suffering, and social destruction of the weakest".¹¹

Although, along with Flint and Marshall Lang, Macleod attacks socialism for neglecting God and, in its extremer forms, for destroying individual liberty, he is more sympathetic to some of its aims and ideals, and less inclined to see individual liberty as always desirable. "The exaggeration of individual freedom, each unit being guided by self-interest, thus leads to a half-concealed warfare, and to the excitement of those passions which warfare of every kind is sure to generate".¹²

Macleod is also far more critical of the Church than Marshall Lang. Social theology played a far greater part in Macleod's overall theological outlook than it did in Marshall Lang's, and Marshall Lang's liturgical interests were never shared by Macleod, who constantly attacks what he frequently calls "ecclesiasticism". "Those very Christians who, within the sphere of 'religion' busy themselves with ecclesiasticisms and theologies, or theories and signs of Salvation, have all the while, in other spheres, fought and do fight a continual battle against God, and conduct social, commercial and political life on principles which are in direct antithesis to the laws of Christ's Kingdom".¹³ As well as claiming that society is founded on selfishness, he blames its ills on "Christians who go to Churches and repeat creeds, and are more or less busy about the redemption of their own souls [but] have scarcely ever attempted to bring into play the mighty spiritual powers which God has armed them with, and commanded them to employ; and ... have consistently and continually fought against his laws, and done just the very opposite of what Jesus Christ set forth as the rules of his Kingdom".¹⁴ He insists that "it would be no exaggeration were the words 'social inequality' written over the doors of the vast majority of our Protestant Churches, so exclusively do they seem to be reserved for people who are 'better off' or those at least who can appear there in 'Sunday clothes'".¹⁵ In the light of passages such as those quoted, it is remarkable that, given the extremely well-off congregation to whom these sermons were preached, he could dedicate *Christ and Society* to his congregation "in affectionate remembrance of a ministry of nearly

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197

¹² *Ibid.*, p 200-1

¹³ D. Macleod, *Church and Society*, (London, 1893) 34

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47

twenty four years, during which, owing to the kindness of its members, not an incident has occurred to mar a harmony characterised by perfect confidence and warm personal friendship”.¹⁶

Macleod and Marshall Lang were at one in recognising the extent of poverty within the city of Glasgow, for which they both use the image of the Upas Tree, which, according to legend, was believed to have the power to destroy other growths for a radius of fifteen miles.¹⁷ However they disagreed, sometimes publicly and sharply about whether intemperance was the cause or the consequence of poverty. Macleod’s view was expressed in a powerful passage in a speech he made to the General Assembly of 1888 which requires full quotation not only to convey a sense of Macleod’s use of vivid imagery, but because the images he employed in this speech he was to use several times in expressing his sympathy for the man, and, very significantly, the woman, who found release in drink, for which so many Churchmen condemned them.

Think of the life of many a working man, coming home from his day’s hard labour, tired and depressed, to one of these houses. It may be that the wife has a washing, and the atmosphere is full of the steam of the washing tub, and of the clothes hung up to dry, and she, poor soul, is perhaps irritable and tired also; the children, as children always are, are noisy and restless; the baby, whom the mother scarcely has time to attend, crying and fretful in the cradle. What can a man in these circumstances do? Do you expect every evening the sweet picture presented of the book taken down to read, and a recreation in the one-roomed house of ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’? Alas! The room up several stairs in a close in Glasgow is a different affair from the cottage in Ayrshire, amid fresh air and a thousand outside beauties. Where is the man to go for relaxation, or rather for escape from the state of things I have pictured? If he goes to the ‘close-mouth’ or to the street to smoke his pipe, he is met by the chill air of the foggy frosty night and an atmosphere laden with the smoke and fumes of manufactories. Where is any resource to be found? Need I answer? The only resource he finds is too frequently the public house. Or I ask you to imagine the life of the labouring man’s wife? She may be, as many of them are, a woman who has been trained to method and system, and who can make the fireside bright for her husband; but how many of these poor mothers, with the very best intentions, have not been so trained? They are overwhelmed with toil – children to clothe, babies to feed, houses to tidy, the washing, cooking and the thousand little economies of one who has to manage a little wage, making it meet house-rent, school-fees, and a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Dedication

¹⁷ S Checkland, *The Upas Tree*, (Glasgow, 1977) iv

thousand petty expenses – these accumulating a burden of care upon what is often a feeble frame and nervous temperament, produce naturally prostration and despair, and a craving for anything which will break up the monotony of ceaseless activity, and afford some stimulus and excitement to raise her, even momentarily, above herself. She is also led to the terrible resource of strong drink. Fathers and brethren, you remember the story of Bunyan, who when he saw the man brought to execution, said ‘There goes John Bunyan, but for the grace of God’. Dare we, as we contemplate the trials of our poorer brethren, and the sins of intemperance into which they are so often betrayed, assume the Pharisaic attitude of those who thank God that they are not as those who have so fallen in the battle of life. Nay, rather but for the grace of God and for the circumstances in which by his mercy we have been placed, would we be better than they?¹⁸

These were images and pictures Macleod was to repeat in a speech on non-Church-going at the General Assembly of 1889¹⁹ and they also formed part of a sermon on intemperance in Macleod’s *Christ and Society*.²⁰ Marshall Lang seconded Macleod in the 1889 debate, but said he wanted to qualify a number of Macleod’s remarks. He referred to what Macleod had said about intemperance being caused by poverty. Marshall Lang “thought the order might be inverted, and that it might be said that poverty was caused by intemperance ... he thought that if they were to lock up the public houses, they would remove a large amount of temptation which surrounded the poorer classes”, to which Macleod retorted “It was all very well to say ‘shut up the public houses’ but did anyone fancy for a moment that intemperance could be cured by that?” Marshall Lang was as inclined to stress the significance of intemperance as a cause of poverty as Macleod was to minimise it. In a debate in the 1891 Assembly Macleod referred “to the evil effects of overcrowding and to the way in which drinking habits followed upon the misery of the home,” whereas Marshall Lang insisted that wherever his commission had visited “there stalked the giant form of intemperance. Again and again they were told that the Church, or any philanthropic society might do what they liked, but so long as they had a public house for every 120 or 160 of the population, their work would be useless”.²¹

Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang’s differing attitudes to the relationship between intemperance and poverty comes out in the books which express their social theology.

¹⁸ D MacLeod, *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor*, (Glasgow 1988)

¹⁹ References to the debate in the 1889 General Assembly are drawn from *The Glasgow Herald*, June 1 1889

²⁰ MacLeod, *Christ and Society*, 298-9

²¹ *The Glasgow Herald*, 28 May, 1891

The two men disagreed on abstinence. Although refusing to comment disparagingly on those who support total abstinence, Macleod wrote

I am not a total abstainer, and I decline to be so on principles which have commended themselves to me both from reflection and experience ... I claim for myself what I accord to others – the liberty of judging and of acting according to conscience. The course I take in this matter is what I believe to be not only in harmony with the teaching and example of Christ, but involved in the very spirit of the Christian religion, whose object is to train men to the right use of freedom, and to the exercise of self-control, or, in other words, Temperance.²²

Marshall Lang, however, supported the position that

in view of the temptations to which multitudes are exposed, of the misery and shame associated with the quaffing of ardent spirits, it is expedient, in the exercise of Christian liberty, to forego a right to the use, not merely, perhaps not at all, for personal safety, but rather for the sake of others, so that the protection and helpfulness of the covenant of Christian brotherhood may be more effectually realised, and the protest against indulgences which lead to intemperance may be emphasised.²³

However, the two men understand each other's point of view. Although Marshall Lang insisted that "the wretched dwelling, with all its attendant features, is largely a consequence of intemperance, he realised that "there can be no doubt also that it is largely a cause of intemperance". And although Donald Macleod believed that "there are social causes which, to the shame of the Christian community still exist" he nevertheless poses the question "What is the chief cause of pauperism?" and answers "Drunkenness".²⁴ And both men agree that the provision of more wholesome alternatives to the public house is an essential measure to combat drunkenness. Macleod asks, in his supportive way, what produces drunkenness: "May we not safely assert that among other causes this one may be named – that we have been fighting against God, we have been neglecting those laws of his in human nature which make men crave for some brightness, some alleviation of its hardship, some change from its monotony, some excitement to deliver for a while from its dullness and despair? What do we give them? Little or nothing ... We ought to supply them with healthy mental change and healthy amusement".²⁵ And Lang, in more judgmental vein writes

²² MacLeod, *Christ and Society*, 290

²³ J.M. Lang, *The Church and its Social Mission*. (Edinburgh, 1902) 178

²⁴ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society*. p 298

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p33

The charm of the public house is largely owing to its being a place where men can congregate, gratifying their social instincts, and breaking the dull monotony of life. If we would save men from the dangerous, we must supply the wholesome and really creative sociality. Do as we will, to many the superior place, with the superior entertainment, will have no charm. Those who have toiled in the endeavour to reach persons who frequent the smaller drinking-houses, and to give them a better variety for their leisure hours, know how disappointing the toil is. The men most wanted prefer to snug in their old haunts²⁶

Macleod's speech to the 1889 General Assembly stressed three of his favourite themes. "During the Glasgow exhibition", Macleod said, "when there was music in the open air, when that music was listened to not merely by visitors from other places but by the working men and the poor, the police had to report that many of the public houses of Glasgow had almost been empty. We have to recognise the sacredness of amusement". Marshall Lang, however, "questioned whether the poor took advantage of the amusements provided, or of the parks which were to be found in the neighbourhood of our large towns".

Macleod had criticised the increase in Sunday working, not on the grounds of sabbatarianism but because working on Sundays deprived those who had to work in very poor conditions and surroundings during the week of the opportunity to enjoy leisure time, and in particular the provision of transport on Sundays which Macleod was well known for supporting. In dealing with Sunday working, Marshall Lang made a barbed criticism of Macleod, who had been a supporter of Sunday transport so that those in cities might enjoy the countryside. "Dr MacLeod referred to Sunday labour, which was a great and growing evil, and there was no class for whom he had greater sympathy than the conductors and drivers of the tramway cars, and he urged that they should not give an example in this matter that they ought not to do".

Granted that Marshall Lang had, on two occasions in the General Assembly heard a version of Macleod's evocation of this scene, and may have read it in Macleod's book, his reference to the working man's need for recreation is highly critical. "Where food is insufficient, where squalor reigns, where the atmosphere is vitiated and unwholesome, the craving to get out, to realise some additional sensation, some fuller life, leads to the only appreciated source of the desired stimulus. And a reckless unconcern for all except the gratification of the moment is a concomitant of habitual poverty".²⁷

Although Macleod and Marshall Lang both regarded the improvement of social conditions as necessary to combat non-Church-going, they were at one in still regarding a reformed territorial parochial system as indispensable and workable. In a lecture in the

²⁶ LANG, *Church and Social Mission*, 183

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 184-5

winter of 1885-6, Donald Macleod said that “if the terrible social problems which present themselves in all our great cities, are to receive a solution at the hands of the Christian Church, it can only be by the revival of the efficient and thorough work which an endowed territorial system is alone fitted to furnish”.²⁸ He then went on to say that the weakness of the parochial system lay in the *quoad sacra* parishes and burgh Churches which relied on seat rents set by the town councils, and where the minister “becomes the minister of the congregation which he has attracted, and not the minister of the parish”.²⁹ As a result, Macleod concluded that “in most of our large cities the parochial system can scarcely be said to exist”.³⁰ In his speech to the General Assembly of 1888, introducing the overture from his Presbytery Macleod again argued that “the Church at large should make the parochial system more efficient”.³¹ He once more criticised the *quoad sacra* Churches and their ministers who spent their time entirely on people living outside the parish. “What time can a minister with a thousand communicants find for territorial work? And even if he does territorial work, where could he put the people of the district if they wished to come to a Church which is already fully let to others”.³²

Marshall Lang, in his 1901 Baird Lectures insists that “a thorough system of ministration – a division of the country into small areas or territories, each provided with a machinery by which, in dependence on God’s spirit, the blessings of religion can be diffused, and the aims of the Christian society can be realised” (*i.e.* the parochial system) is “indispensable” to “the social efficiency of the National Churches”.³³ But Lang had to be convinced that reform of the parochial system or the abolition of seat rents was necessary for what he called the “social efficiency” of the Church. In a sermon preached to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr in 1887, the year after Macleod had urged an overhaul of the parochial system, Marshall Lang said, with regard to combating the drift from the Church:

Proposals of one kind and another are mooted – the readjustment of our parochial system, the abolition of seat rents in our Churches, the increase of endowments, the origination of a Church army in the likeness of the English Church army. These are among the suggestions which have been made. With regard to them I shall only submit that, *before deciding on any plan involving departure from lines hitherto observed or the disturbance of parochial arrangements which have received the recent sanction of the*

²⁸ D MacLeod, “The Parochial System” in *The Church and the People, St Giles’ Lectures, Sixth Series*, (Edinburgh, 1886) 133,4

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 149

³¹ MacLeod, *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor* 14

³² *Ibid.*, 15

³³ LANG. *The Church and Social Mission*” p 108

Church, [my emphasis] it would be well that the General Assembly should appoint a Commission, including trusted clergy and laity, to inquire into the causes of the alienation of so many of her people, and to consider what, in connection with the territorial principle, the parochial economy of the Church, and the whole dispensation of the gospel in the land, might be done, or should be done, so as, by the blessing of God, to make the ministrations of religion more adequate to the want, more effectual for the good of the nation.³⁴

Just a few months before that sermon was preached, there was an incident in the Presbytery of Glasgow which illustrates well the caution of Marshall Lang as compared to a more radical approach by Donald Macleod. At its meeting in December 1886, Robert Thomson, Minister of Ladywell, proposed that there should be a collection in all the Churches in Glasgow and the neighbourhood to assist the unemployed. Donald Macleod seconded the motion but Marshall Lang, while confessing “tenderly sympathetic feeling for the unemployed” argued that “this motion might defeat the object it had in view” and instead he proposed that the Presbytery appoint a deputation to represent the condition of the unemployed to the Town Council.³⁵

Macleod and Marshall Lang had somewhat different expectations of what could be achieved through ecclesiastical effort or even reform. Lang was optimistic that social conditions would be improved through converting people by means of the parochial system. He wrote:

In aiming at the conversion of the individual soul, the Church is really aiming at and promoting social good; every one who welcomes Christ as the light of his seeing becomes necessarily a force economically and morally gainful to the world...A man may be improved through the improvement of his environment – assuredly, he will be deteriorated when he is left with a wretched environment, - but the improvement coming from without will be effectual only when there is an improvement coming from within....the social happiness desiderated is possible only through such a renewal of the will as shall deliver a true self-love, perfected in social fellowships and disciplines, from a love of self which separates from one’s neighbour. Permanently elevated life implies the moral dynamic that Christianity specially contemplates.³⁶

³⁴ J.M. Lang, *They need not Depart* (Glasgow, 1887) 4

³⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 December 1886

³⁶ Lang, *The Church and Social Mission* 315,6

That statement can be contrasted with what Donald Macleod said in his St Giles' Lecture on the Parochial System:

Let us make allowances for the agencies at work within and without the Church. Do not let us detract from the good which may be accomplished by city and other missionaries, Bible-women and visitors, many of whom are filled with a true enthusiasm. Do not let us depreciate the value of the volunteers, male and female, who go down to the poorest and to the worst with the loving message of Christ, declared in many ways besides that of dogma. We know how much the community is indebted to them, and a thousand other agencies, for daily ameliorations of the worst conditions of society. But we would be untrue to our convictions, if we did not proclaim our belief that, beneficial and numerous as these operations are, they do little more than *scratch the surface* of

Macleod goes on to contrast the voluntary efforts of those to whom he referred with an endowed territorial system “by which the services of the best clergy can be secured, and their energies fully devoted to a locality, into every moral crevice of which they can bring the saving influence of the gospel to bear”³⁷. He was indeed, like Marshall Lang, a defender of the territorial parochial system, and it would have been surprising at a time when talk of disestablishment was common and pressure on the national Church from United Presbyterians and the Free Church was considerable, had they not found it necessary to defend the system on which the national Church was based. But the difference in emphasis between the two is still remarkable.

The greatest difference in emphasis between Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod was in what they thought the aim of social reform was to achieve. In his sermon to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Marshall Lang made it clear in the text he chose: “they need not depart”, that his aim was to encourage a return to the Church. Speaking to the 1889 General Assembly he said that “he believed that the cause of non-Church-going was to be found as much in the Church as in the social surroundings. He believed that it was not so much the masses who had forsaken religion, as religion that had not gone to the masses”³⁸.

Again, there is a contrasting difference in emphasis with Macleod, who said at the same Assembly that “he would like to get the opinion of the people, of working men, on the subject of non-Church-going”³⁹. “If we are entering on this battle against the evils of society for the object merely of getting our Churches filled and our Church statistics run up; if in going to the people we give them the slightest suspicion that the chief end we have in view is to get them to go ‘to our Church’, we will fail and deservedly fail”. True: Macleod goes on to say that it should be irrelevant which Church people go to, but in his emphasis he envisages a wider social purpose: “that we, as a National Church, care

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 132

³⁸ *The Glasgow Herald*, 1 June 1889.

³⁹ *Ibid*

chiefly for the good of the nation; that we desire ‘not to be ministered unto but to minister’”.⁴⁰

The social theology embraced by Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang, expressed in terms of society’s progressing towards the realisation of the Christian vision of the Kingdom of God reflected was an ideal vehicle to reflect precisely the mood of confident optimism of the Glasgow of the late nineteenth century, whose growth, in T M Devine’s judgment “stood out in the colossal and continuous nature of its exuberant growth,”⁴¹ where “by 1913 Glasgow and its satellite towns in the surrounding region of intensive industrialisation produced one-half of British marine-engine horsepower, one third of the railways and rolling stock, one-third of the shipping tonnage and about a fifth of the steel”.⁴²

A Kingdom-based social theology was able to take and to give an account of both the positive contribution towards social improvement which growing municipalisation made, and also to describe and condemn the social conditions which were believed to be a denial of the anticipated progress towards the Kingdom of God.

Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang presented their support for improved social services and expressed their criticism of social conditions from the standpoint of this social theology, though both in the terms in which they outlined it and in the emphases they placed, there were differences between the two men’s views. They differed on their view of the Church, on specific social issues such as temperance and Sunday transport, , and on the class divisions in society.

The difference in emphasis in the two men’s ways of describing the Kingdom is also reflected in the way they write about it. Marshall Lang saw the Kingdom of God in wide, sweeping terms, and so his social theology is similarly inclusive and general, as well as being expressed in broad generalisations. Donald Macleod would have agreed with Blake that good must be done in minute particulars, and so the articles he commissioned for *Good Words*, and those he wrote himself, reflect a view of the Kingdom of God advancing slowly by the sort of small advances of which the material in *Good Words* is a practical example.

Both Macleod and Marshall Lang were strong supporters of the parochial system. In his address as Moderator of the 1893 General Assembly, Marshall Lang said “The Territorial or Parochial Economy, honestly, faithfully worked, is the best means of securing....warm, strengthening food for the masses. And of this economy the Church established and endowed is the safeguard”.⁴³ Two years later, in his closing address to the Assembly of which he was Moderator, Donald Macleod said “Our Endowed

⁴⁰ MacLeod, *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor*, p 17

⁴¹ T.M. Devine, C.H. Lee, and G.C. Peden, , *The Transformation of Scotland*, (Edinburgh 2005) 39

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35

⁴³ J.M. Lang, , *The Church and the People*,(Edinburgh 1893) 35

Territorial system.....has been the source of untold spiritual good to the country. We therefore hold and make plainly known that we would consider union too dearly purchased by the loss to our country and to religion of such potent factors for the evangelisation of the land and the security of the State”.⁴⁴

It is not clear why Macleod and Marshall Lang, who both insisted, following Robert Flint, that the Church and the Kingdom of God were not to be equated, and who both regarded artistic, literary and scientific movements as having a part to play in the advancement of the Kingdom God along with the Church, should regard the established Church of Scotland’s endowed parochial system as the strongest defence against the forces which would hinder the Kingdom’s advance. The arguments both of them advanced against the case being which was being made at the time for disestablishment and voluntaryism may or may not have been valid, but these arguments seem strangely inconsistent with their support for regarding the Kingdom of God as being brought closer by a wide spectrum of interests and institutions.

More pragmatically, however, Macleod and Marshall Lang continued to give their support to the parochial system while recognising it was failing to meet the needs of the age. In his Moderatorial address, Marshall Lang described the parochial ministry as “too wooden in present administration. It wants in the flexibility of life. It wants in adaptiveness to the complex civilisation which we have to consider. It does not make allowance for the wide breaking loose from traditional ways which characterises our generation”.⁴⁵ In other words, the ministry on the parochial model was out of date. And when Donald Macleod addressed the Assembly as Moderator he was highly critical of the gathered congregations which were undermining the parochial system which he supported, and argued for either the appointment of Superintendents, or for considerably more intervention by presbyteries, to counteract the inefficiencies of the parochial ministry.⁴⁶ Both men appear to have been wrestling with social problems, but determined to preserve the parochial system as the best way by which the Church could respond to them. If they relied on a (by then) questionable structure inherited from the Church’s past to deal with the housing problem, that problem itself, while for Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod a present reality, was one which was being replaced by other issues which a contemporary social theology had to face. And neither of them provides much evidence of addressing these newer issues. For example, during the 1880s, the “Woman Question” was emerging. Lesley Macdonald has written that “it did not occur to the great majority of Scottish Presbyterians, male or female, to challenge the paradigm of domination which shaped the official life of the Church”.⁴⁷ Neither Macleod nor

⁴⁴ MACLEOD, *Lines of Progress*, (Edinburgh 1895) 19

⁴⁵ LANG, *The Church and the People*, 2

⁴⁶ MACLEOD, *Lines of Progress* 13

⁴⁷ L.A.O. Macdonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland 1830-1930*, (Edinburgh 2000) 218-9

Marshall Lang were alive to that challenge. When Marshall Lang first raised the issue of the Church's response to the depression of 1879 in the Presbytery of Glasgow, his motion praised "the efforts of ministers and Kirk Sessions to meet the prevailing distress" but mentioned "the efforts of ladies in providing food and clothing".⁴⁸ When Donald Macleod preached on social inequality, there was no mention of the political inequality of women.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow, 5 November 1879

ST GILES CHRONICLE (December 2010)

I hated poetry at school: it had something to do with the fact that one evening (when I was in Primary School) my minister father borrowed my poetry book, did not return it to me, and so I did not have it in class the next morning. I explained my father had borrowed my book and not returned it. Three strokes of the belt were delivered to my innocent palms.

Later on, I wondered whether the teacher had refused to believe me because, as a minister's son, I was expected to be naturally wicked ("unholier than thou") or because she assumed my father, being a minister, could not have had any interest in poetry.

I paid little attention to poetry thereafter until, in the late 1960s I was joined as an assistant minister by David Ogston: not only a poet himself but someone who was steeped in poetry, particularly the poetry of the dark, craggy, half-believing, half doubting Welsh clergyman R S Thomas.

Some years later, in a sermon preached down the road in Old St Paul's Episcopal Church, Gilleasbuig Macmillan was to introduce me to a poem of R S Thomas I did not know (how many other sermons can I remember something from? I ask myself)

Some ask the world
and are diminished
in the receiving
of it. You gave me

only this small pool
that the more I drink
from, the more overflows
me with sourceless light.

Poets use words precisely, but the language of poetry is ambiguous. And in that sense the language of religion is the language of poetry. But so much of Christian faith today seems devoted to resolving the ambiguities and ironing out the paradoxes and reconciling the contradictions. But if the ambiguities and paradoxes and contradictions are of the very essence of the teaching of Jesus, who told stories which are capable of more than one, often contradictory interpretations, then to attempt to flatten them all is to falsify it.

The poet Emily Dickinson puts it like this:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant –
Success in circuit lies.

I once heard George Macleod, from the pulpit of St Giles' point out that in his translation of the Bible, Wycliff used the word "clarity" where we would be used to "glory": "We saw his *clarity*, full of grace and truth". But clarity is precisely what Jesus did not display or indeed leave with us. And I have always been attracted to the saying of a Russian novelist: "I know a man who saw Jesus so clearly that he lost his faith".

I have to say that Christian faith has been expressed and explored with greater clarity in the forty years since I was an assistant in St Giles' Cathedral, and at least in this country the churches are not noticeably more full, nor the tide of faith either.

But it isn't just Christians who refuse to recognise that faith and ambiguity go together. Not long ago I read a brilliant article on Richard Dawkins, the scientist who is the scourge of all religious belief. He was asked how he reacted to Stephen Hawkins writing in one of his books about "the mind of God". Dawkins replied that "it is a poetic, metaphorical way of talking".

Precisely, good Professor. That is what religious language is: a poetic, metaphorical way of talking.